

**A Bigger Piece of the Pie?  
State Corrections Spending and  
the Politics of Social Order \***

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This is the author's manuscript of the article published in final edited form as:  
Stucky, T. D., Heimer, K., & Lang, J. B. (2007). A bigger piece of the pie? State corrections spending and the politics of social order. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 44(1), 91-123.. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0022427806295617>

## **A Bigger Piece of the Pie? State Corrections Spending and the Politics of Social Order**

The dramatic increase in American state prison populations over the last three decades has sparked considerable research interest. Empirical research has most often examined changes in prison admissions or populations. Few studies, however, have considered another important indicator of punishment—shifts over time in state corrections budgets. This study examines variation in annual, state-level corrections expenditures as a proportion of state total expenditures from 1980 to 1998. We draw together existing theoretical arguments about criminal punishment under a common rubric that we call a “politics of social order perspective” which focuses on state responsibility for the maintenance of social order and the need for state officials to maintain office through popular election. From this view, partisan politics, economic and racial threat, citizen preferences, fiscal considerations, policy priorities, and crime are important explanations of corrections spending because they affect strategies for maintaining social order, garnering votes and maintaining political office. Our findings generally support this perspective. Specifically, partisan politics, racial threat, state economic prosperity, and budgetary priorities all play a role in determining the proportion of state expenditures devoted to corrections over time.

**Keywords: corrections, politics, social order, racial threat**

## INTRODUCTION

The dramatic increase in imprisonment in the United States is now well-documented. Between 1980 and 1999, rates of imprisonment more than tripled from approximately 140 to 476 prisoners per 100,000 U.S. residents between 1980 and 1999 (Blumstein 2002:452). Corrections budgets also rose dramatically in the 1980s and 1990s. Adjusting for inflation, corrections spending in the United States increased by 350% from 1980 to 1999 (adapted from Maguire and Pastore 2002: Table 1.2). As a proportion of total state expenditures, corrections spending nearly doubled during this period, increasing from 1.6 to more than 3 percent on average.

The “prison boom” of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century has spawned a number of recent empirical studies (e.g. Beckett and Western 2001; Greenberg and West 2001; Jacobs and Helms 1996, 2001; Michalowski and Carlson 1999, 2000; Smith 2004; Stucky, Heimer, and Lang 2005). Although early research on punishment focused primarily on economic explanations (see Chiricos and Delone 1992 for a review), more recent research has focused on political explanations, generally focusing on prison populations rather than corrections expenditures. Yet as Jacobs and Helms (1999) argue, corrections expenditures are under more direct political control than the dependent measures typically used in punishment research – admissions and custody rates. Indeed, Caldeira and Cowart (1980:422) argue that the budget is “one of the most important mechanisms through which governments can seek to achieve policy goals of all sorts.” Thus, we can learn much about states’ responses to crime by examining their spending on corrections.<sup>1</sup>

To date, however, very few studies have examined corrections spending and most are dated and limited methodologically. One exception is a recent national-level study by Jacobs and Helms (1999) which examines the factors affecting variation in corrections expenditures from 1954 to 1990.

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<sup>1</sup> Taggart (1989a) notes that corrections expenditures are a good outcome to consider the effects of partisan politics on state spending because there are fewer autonomous programs engaged in resource competition than in arenas such as education, where K-12 and higher education compete for money (see also Taggart 1997).

Yet, *national-level* analyses are unable to address state-level corrections spending. This is an issue because: a) most inmates, probationers, and parolees are under state supervision, and state budgets for corrections are almost exclusively administered by the states; and b) there is great variability in spending within and across states over time, as illustrated in Figure 1. The figure shows corrections spending as a proportion of all state expenditures for selected states and the national average from 1980 to 1998. Although the national average steadily increased over the period, the timing and pattern of increases, and in some cases decreases, varied substantially across states. Ignoring this variability can be a source of aggregation bias in national-level studies.

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Figure 1 about here

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In the next section we describe extant studies of corrections spending that point to the importance of partisan politics. Next, we draw together research on criminal punishment and research on state spending and public policy under a common rubric that we call a “politics of social order” perspective. This perspective draws insights from recent research on punishment (e.g. Beckett and Western 2001; Jacobs and Carmichael 2001; Jacobs and Helms 1996, 1999) and suggests that variation in punishment will be driven by two concerns of modern, democratic states—social order and electoral politics.

#### EXTANT RESEARCH ON CORRECTIONS SPENDING

Despite the tremendous increase in corrections spending over the last 30 years, very few studies have examined this phenomenon.<sup>2</sup> Although there are few studies and most are now dated, they offer insights for the current study, particularly with respect to the role of partisan politics.

Several of these studies are at the national-level. In one early study, Caldeira and Cowart (1980) found that changes in the crime rate explained changes in the federal budget devoted to criminal justice agencies (including corrections) from 1935 to 1975, and expenditure increases were

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<sup>2</sup> The dearth of research on corrections expenditures is surprising given the attention to spending on other public policies, such as welfare provisions (e.g. Barrilleaux, et al. 2002; Dye 1984).

more likely under Republican Presidents. They also found that Republican Presidents were more likely to respond to increasing crime by increasing expenditures. Similarly, Caldeira (1983) argued that Presidents facing elections may increase criminal justice expenditures to take advantage of public fear of crime and garner votes. He found that Presidents were more likely to request higher criminal justice expenditures in election years irrespective of crime rates. These studies point to the role of politics for criminal justice expenditures but do not address other potentially important explanations. In addition, they examine *total* criminal justice expenditures rather than spending specific to corrections.

The only national-level research to focus exclusively on *corrections* expenditures is a recent study by Jacobs and Helms (1999), who examined per capita funding for corrections (federal, state and local combined) from 1954 to 1990. They reported that spending increased with the size of the nonwhite population, number of riots, crime rates, and previous (lagged 20 years) births out of wedlock.<sup>3</sup> In addition, they found that the strength of the Republican Party was associated with increases in corrections expenditures. Thus, one recent national-level study of corrections expenditures highlights the role of partisan politics, racial threat and crime. The question is whether state-level studies would reveal similar findings.

However, we could locate only two published state-level studies. The first, by Taggart (1989a), reported separate time series models for each of the 48 contiguous states for the period 1945 to 1984. This study found that correctional spending was explained by the state's total revenue base and overall state expenditures. Yet, this study did not include any variables one might use to evaluate political or threat explanations. In a second study, Taggart and Winn (1991) reported a cross-sectional analysis of corrections expenditures in the lower 48 states in 1984, finding that higher

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<sup>3</sup> We do not have annual state-level data on civil unrest for the period of the current study. Therefore, we cannot assess Jacobs and Helms' argument that riots are associated with corrections spending. Yet, unlike much of the period of their study, urban rioting was rare during the years of our study.

crime rates and percentages of non-white males were related to increased corrections spending; however, partisan political control was unrelated to spending. Both studies are dated, with 1984 being the last year studied. As a consequence, neither could take advantage of recent statistical developments and thus, are limited methodologically by today's standards. The first study conducted a separate time-series analysis for each state (rather than using a pooled model), which could have reduced the efficiency of the estimation. The second study relied on cross-sectional data, raising concerns over causal ordering and statistical power due to the small sample size (n=48).<sup>4</sup>

Our study goes beyond previous research on correctional spending by using more appropriate data and methods. We include data from 1980 through 1998 and thus speak to correctional spending through most of the 1990s, an important chunk of the prison boom period that has not been studied in previous research on spending.

### **THE POLITICS OF SOCIAL ORDER**

Because punishment, including spending on corrections, is inherently an exercise of state power (see Foucault 1977; Garland 1990, 1991), theoretical explanations of spending on criminal punishment must examine the role of the state. In this section, we show how existing arguments about criminal punishment can be recast in terms of a 'politics of social order' framework. Viewing existing approaches to criminal punishment from the politics of order perspective further clarifies the role of partisan politics as well as the potential connections between partisan politics and economic and racial threat. Existing research has treated political and non-political factors as more or less separate influences on punishment outcomes, without providing an underlying logic tying them together.

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<sup>4</sup> A few studies have also examined the impact of federal court decisions regarding prison reforms on corrections spending (e.g. Fliter 1996; Taggart 1989b). These studies suggest that, court orders increased some types of corrections spending in some states and but this effect declined in the 1980s as the courts limited the scope of prison reforms.

We argue that the connection lies in the basic concerns of modern governments. Punishment, as an exercise of state power, is motivated by two overriding concerns. First, as has long been recognized, one of the basic functions of states is to guarantee social order (for a discussion see Jacobs and Carmichael 2001: 61-62). Second, in democratic societies, elected officials must constantly engage in the calculus of reelection. Thus, all potential courses of action by state managers are considered through the lens of electoral politics because, unlike in authoritarian regimes, elected officials must satisfy voters to retain power. From this view, existing explanations of criminal punishment and state policies more generally – including partisan politics, citizen ideology, economic and racial threat, alternative policy priorities, fiscal realities, and crime control – are expected to be related to variation in punishment because they influence the maintenance of social order and/or the calculus of reelection.

Such a perspective assumes that the state is relatively (but not completely) autonomous. Thus, state managers are expected to respond to environmental cues in dealing with the twin concerns of maintaining social order and reelection, but they are not completely driven by them. This position represents a middle ground between neo-Marxian accounts that view the state as driven by capitalist interests and statist approaches that focus on the parochial concerns of state managers, such as reelection (see Evans, Rueschemeyer, and Skocpol 1984). The advantage of such an approach is that it makes sense of the somewhat disparate explanations offered by recent empirical research on punishment and public policy. In the remainder of this section we discuss prior explanations of punishment and public policy, in light of this politics of social order rubric.

#### Partisan Politics

A growing body of research suggests that partisan political considerations are likely to drive variations in criminal punishment. For example, studies of corrections spending at the national level (Caldeira 1983; Caldeira and Cowart 1980; Jacobs and Helms 1999) and studies of state level imprisonment trends both emphasize the importance of Republican power (e.g. Jacobs and

Carmichael 2001; Jacobs and Helms 1996, 1999; Beckett 1997; Stucky, et al. 2005). We argue that the relationship between politics and criminal punishment derives from the need for state managers to maintain power through popular election.

Prior research in political science suggests that partisan politics shape policy and spending through party *control* or party *competition*. Partisan control of government is expected to influence public policy because different parties exhibit different policy priorities. Therefore, one would expect to see differences in punishment practices based on the ideological preferences of the parties in power. The Republican Party has long been considered the “law and order” party and thus can be expected to increase crime control efforts (Jacobs and Helms 1996; Beckett 1997). Jacobs and Carmichael (2001) suggest that this law and order approach is calculated to increase votes among less affluent voters—who otherwise would be unlikely to vote for conservative candidates—by appealing to their fear of crime (see also Beckett 1997). Thus, partisan differences in criminal punishment are expected to be driven by the strategic choices of elected officials to improve the chances of election or reelection, consistent with the logic of the politics of social order.<sup>5</sup>

Others argue that competition between parties drives state policies rather than party control (see Key 1949). According to this view, in states where there is a balance of seats, legislators must be mindful of blocs of potential voters that could shift the balance of power in the legislature. Hence, legislatures are expected to be more responsive to minority groups when there is a slim majority of seats. The majority party will court these groups to retain control, whereas the minority party would court these groups in hopes of gaining control of the legislature. Here again, the logic of the party

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<sup>5</sup> Most research on the impact of partisan politics on state spending has focused on welfare expenditures. Because the poor are more likely to be Democratic, some argue the welfare expenditures should be higher in Democratically-controlled states (Key 1949, Barrilleaux, et al. 2002). Empirical support for this hypothesis is mixed (cf. Lewis-Beck 1977; Marquette and Hinckley 1981; Winters 1976).



competition model is consistent with a politics of social order perspective which suggests that public policy is driven partly by the calculus of electoral politics.

The competition thesis has been most often examined relative to state welfare spending and suggests that expenditures will be higher in relatively balanced states where legislators of both parties must be mindful of the potential swing vote of the poor. The evidence in favor of a party competition model is mixed (cf. Dawson and Robinson 1963; Dye 1966, 1984; Sharkansky and Hofferbert 1969). Consequently, several recent researchers have suggested that *statewide* party competition may be less important for state policies than *district-level* party competition (e.g. Barrilleaux 1997; Barrilleaux, Holbrook, and Langer 2002; Holbrook and Van Dunk 1993). Thus, public policy outcomes may be shaped more by the prospect of competition on election-day than the relative number of seats in the legislature. Consistent with this, Barrilleaux (1997) finds that states with closer district electoral competition have more liberal policies, independent of party strength in the state. Thus, district competition exerts a direct effect on state policy liberalism because legislators of both parties are cognizant of the swing vote of the poor. One might also expect that corrections spending would be lower in states with higher competition because more money might be directed at welfare spending. Regardless of whether competition is expected to operate at the macro or micro-level, it is consistent with the idea that state policies are driven (at least partly) by strategic choices of state officials to maximize the chances of maintaining power through election. To date, no studies have considered whether correctional spending is influenced by state or district-level political competition. However, Stucky, et al. (2005) reported that the effect of Republican strength in state legislatures on prison admissions was conditional on the relative degree of district competition, with the proportion of Republicans in the legislature having a trivial effect when competition was low and a significant effect when competition reached higher levels.

Another potential political influence on corrections spending is the racial composition of state elected officials. Research has shown that the race of officials can have an impact on other public

policies (e.g. Browning, Marshall, and Tabb 1984; Karnig and Welch 1980). Black elected officials may influence corrections policies in two ways. They may be more likely to vote against increasing corrections expenditures in favor of other social programs, either because they are more likely to be politically liberal or because of the disparate impact of additional corrections expenditures on their constituents. This has not yet been examined with regard to corrections spending.

In sum, existing research points to the influence of partisan control or competition on public policy, including criminal punishment and corrections spending, because state officials are expected to shape policies so as to maximize their chances of maintaining power through elections. Such arguments fit well with the logic of the politics of social order perspective, which suggests that state action will be driven by concerns over social order or the maintenance of power through popular elections.

#### Conservative Preferences of Citizens

Others argue that politicians' support for public policies reflects the preferences of their constituents (see Burstein 1998, 2003; Erikson, Wright and McIver 1989 with regard to other public policies). In a sense, the job of the politician is to say what the voters want to hear. Expansions in corrections spending therefore could be the result of pressure from conservative groups clamoring for harsher punishments in response to perceived increases in crime. This line of reasoning fits nicely with the politics of social order perspective. From this view, state officials of *either* party are apt to increase punishment if they believe that the best road to re-election lies with satisfying the desires of voters for harsher punishment. Indeed, Beckett and Sasson (2000) and Greenberg and West (2001) argue that partisan differences on punishment have declined in recent years as politicians of both parties tried to take advantage of conservative sentiments by being perceived as tough on crime.

It follows then that citizen ideology may have an effect on criminal punishment independent of the effects of partisan politics. Consistent with this, Jacobs and Helms (2001) used a measure of citizen ideology developed by Berry, Ringquist, Fording, and Hanson (1998) and found that, on

average, states with more conservative citizens had higher incarceration rates. Similarly, Greenberg and West (2001) report an effect on state-level incarceration of an alternative measure of citizen ideology, developed by Wright, Erikson, and McIver (1985).

### Economic and Racial Threat

The perspective we outlined above suggests that one major driver of public policy is the responsibility of states to maintain public order. Economic and racial threat arguments also suggest that state policies on punishment are driven by this concern. Research on imprisonment trends has long argued that fluctuations in punishment should coincide with business cycles and, more specifically level of labor market participation (see for review Chiricos and Delone 1992). The theoretical underpinnings of this research derive from Rusche and Kirschheimer's ([1939]1968) seminal political economy argument that labor surplus drives up criminal punishment as the state seeks to control potentially dangerous marginal populations who could threaten public order. Thus, states are expected to increase punishment at times when increases in the size of "idle" populations could threaten elite interests and the status quo. Such arguments comport well with the politics of social order perspective, which suggests that state actors will respond to elite perception of threats to social order by increasing criminal punishment. Thus, changes in the size of potentially threatening populations of idle workers are expected to increase the perceived threat to elite interests. This leads state managers to increase corrections expenditures in an attempt to garner votes by fostering the perception that they are working to maintain order.

Although there has been substantial research on the relationship between labor surplus and punishment, findings have been mixed (see Chiricos and Delone 1992 for review; also compare Jacobs and Carmichael 2001, Greenberg and West 2001, and Stucky, et al. 2005 for more recent evidence). The inconsistency in these findings may stem partly from the fact that most research has used official unemployment figures as an indicator of labor surplus. These "official" unemployment figures are based on the civilian labor force, which excludes "discouraged workers" who have

stopped looking for work (see Chiricos and Delone 1992:431-432). The empirical association between official unemployment figures and labor surplus may be weak, therefore. Others have argued that poverty measures are important indicators of the potentially threatening masses (see Piven and Cloward 1971 for a discussion of the effects of poverty on welfare spending). Despite some disagreement in the empirical literature, our view is that there is enough evidence to merit inclusion of a labor surplus argument in an analysis of corrections spending. Moreover, the argument is clearly consistent with the logic of our politics of social order rubric.

Much previous research and theorizing suggests that formal social control also will vary with the relative proportion of the population that is a racial or ethnic minority (e.g. Blalock 1967; Liska 1992; Behrens, Uggen, and Manza 2003). From this view, increases in the size of minority population could represent a threat to majority interests, prompting punitive state action. Moreover, some argue that where minority populations are small, relatively small increases in this population may be more likely to be perceived as “threatening” to the status quo than similar increases in areas with larger minority populations. Once the minority group attains sufficient numerical strength to become a political force, increases in this population have much less impact (Jackson and Carroll 1981). Such a curvilinear relationship makes sense from the politics of social order perspective: State managers may respond to elite interests to maintain social order when minority populations are small. However, when the minority population becomes larger the calculus of reelection would necessitate consideration of the potential swing vote of this bloc of voters. If minority voters are less inclined to desire increases in criminal punishment, then increases in correctional spending would be expected to flatten or decrease.

Some research reveals a positive relationship between the size of African American populations and punishment (Beckett and Western 2001; Greenberg and West 2001; Jacobs and Carmichael 2001; Jacobs and Helms 1999; Taggart and Winn 1991), whereas other research suggests the relationship is non-linear (e.g. Jackson and Carroll 1981; Jacobs, Carmichael, and Kent 2005;

Liska 1992). Research specifically focused on corrections spending reports that expenditures increase with increases in non-white population size, but it does not address potential curvilinear effects (Jacobs and Helms 1999). Yet, research does not find consistent evidence that increases in other minority populations, such as Latinos, are associated with increases in state punitive reactions (cf. Greenberg and West 2001; Jacobs and Carmichael 2001).

### Crime Control

Crime rates clearly are consequential for state officials' decisions about corrections expenditures. From a politics of order perspective, state managers may consider rising crime rates as an indicator of declining social order and thus press for increases in criminal punishment. Prior studies of correctional expenditures at the national level support this link (Caldeira 1983; Caldeira and Cowart 1980; Jacobs and Helms 1999). Yet, research on state-level imprisonment rates reveals an inconsistent association between crime rates and incarceration rates (compare Beckett and Western 2001; Greenberg and West 2001; Stucky, et al. 2005).

Despite the intuitive appeal of thinking that corrections expenditures naturally increase in response to increases in crime, the link may not be automatic. Expecting increases in corrections spending as a result of increases in crime is consistent with a rational choice view of crime, where increasing funds for punishment translates into more punishment, thus deterring individuals from crime (see Jacobs and Carmichael 2001: 65). But other models of crime causation focus less on individual choice and suggest that social conditions such as poverty or unemployment drive crime rates. A government subscribing to this view might increase social welfare or education expenditures, rather than correctional spending, in an effort to ameliorate social problems and prevent future crime.<sup>6</sup> It is by no means obvious, therefore, that there should be a direct positive

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<sup>6</sup> This is especially plausible in light of recent research from the institutional anomie perspective which shows that generous welfare spending is negatively related to crime (see Hannon and

relationship between crime rates and correctional spending. Yet, the intuitive appeal and the lack of clarity in existing research suggest that it is important to consider crime rates in an analysis of states' corrections budgets.

#### Fiscal Factors and Alternative Policy Priorities

Finally, from a practical standpoint, the ability of a state to pursue public policies depends on the availability of funds. Greenberg and West (2001) note that better funded state governments are better able to satisfy a wider range of public demands, including more spending on corrections. Indeed, existing research on corrections spending has generally found that fiscal health plays a role (e.g. Jacobs and Helms 1999; Taggart and Winn 1991).

Perhaps more interestingly, states' decisions about spending on social policies are not orthogonal. Because state budgets are essentially a zero-sum game, when states spend more on corrections programs they are left with fewer funds for other programs, and vice versa. Consistent with this, Lawrence (1995) notes that in the 1980s and early 1990s there was a general trend toward corrections spending and away from funding for education. Such a trend is consistent with more conservative approaches to crime control noted above and would be expected as state officials shift spending from education to corrections in an attempt to respond to increasingly conservative electorates in recent years. In addition, some scholars have argued that social control of marginal populations is accomplished formally by the corrections system and informally by the welfare system (e.g. Garland 1985; Inverarity and Grattet 1989; Piven and Cloward 1971). Thus, the need for state punitive responses to potential threats to the social order is reduced when informal social control, such as welfare, is increased (see Beckett and Western 2001; Greenberg and West 2001). This argument also is consistent with the politics of social order approach, which suggests that one of the basic goals of governments is to accomplish social control, albeit sometimes with the "carrot" of

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DeFronzo 1998; Maume and Lee 2003; Messner and Rosenfeld 1997; Pratt and Godsey 2003; Savolainen 2000).

welfare spending and other times with the “stick” of corrections spending. Because alternative policy priorities such as welfare or education may be seen as ways to strategically increase votes or maintain social control by state officials, a politics of order perspective suggests the importance of considering spending on welfare and education in any analysis of spending on correction.

### Summary

Although the U.S. prison boom has spurred recent research on imprisonment rates, few studies have examined a related outcome, spending on corrections. One recent study by Jacobs and Helms (1999) found that partisan politics and racial threat influenced national-level trends in corrections expenditures. But it does not address important variability at the state level. Our study fills this gap in the literature. In addition, we begin to push forward recent political and non-political explanations of punishment by tying them together under one rubric, which we label the politics of social order. This rubric argues that criminal punishment is driven by the twin considerations of maintaining public order and the need for state officials to maintain power through popular election. From this view, prior explanations of punishment such as partisan politics, citizen preferences, economic and racial threat, fiscal considerations, policy priorities, and crime, are important because they implicate strategies for maintaining social order, garnering votes, and maintaining political office.

### **DATA**

To test the arguments above, we collected and analyzed annual state level data on correctional expenditures and the factors discussed above from 1980 through 1998. These years were selected because U.S. corrections expenditures rose dramatically during this period, and it is the longest period for which all necessary variables were available annually at the state level. The sample includes data on the 49 states with bipartisan political systems over 19 years, 1980 through 1998. Nebraska’s state legislature is non-partisan and unicameral and is therefore excluded.

Approximately 3% (27 / 950) of the sample was lost due to missing data on some variables in particular state-years. Thus, the sample size is 923 state-years. The following section briefly describes the variables that we include in our analysis. Appendix A describes their sources.

### Corrections Spending

Our dependent variable is the natural logarithm of the proportion of total state expenditures devoted to corrections in each state-year. Given that state spending is essentially a zero sum game, we examine corrections spending relative to the total budget – the piece of the expenditures pie devoted to corrections.<sup>7</sup> This choice of dependent variable lends itself to a discussion of the impact of political considerations because it represents allocations to corrections versus other expenditures and thus conveys a sense of relative budgetary priorities.<sup>8</sup> Prior studies of corrections spending have often modeled the rate of expenditures per capita. We show in Appendix B that our model predicting proportion of total state expenditures allocated to corrections can be re-expressed algebraically as a model predicting corrections spending per capita. In a supplemental analysis, we estimate this alternative specification and obtain essentially identical results.

### Politics and Ideology

We include measures of both party power and competition in our model, consistent with the theoretical discussion above. In terms of party power, we consider both the legislative and executive branches of state government (both of whom influence state budgets). Specifically, *Republican legislative percent* is the percentage of state legislators in both houses of the legislature that are

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<sup>7</sup> Some states have balanced budget requirements that are constitutionally mandated. Although this may alter the total amount of spending in a state, this is unlikely to specifically influence the degree to which states choose to allocate spending for corrections as opposed to other types of expenditures. In other words, a balanced budget amendment would affect the size of the pie, not necessarily how it was sliced.

<sup>8</sup> Our dependent variable does not include expenditures for community corrections programs, which are primarily locally determined. It is plausible that states vary in the extent to which their budgets are devoted to corrections based on differences in their reliance on community-based corrections programs. Due to the difficulty of obtaining relevant data, investigation of this possibility is beyond the scope of the current project.



Republican in each state-year. To measure Republican control of the state executive branch, we include *Republican governor*, a binary variable with a value of 1 in years where the governor was Republican and 0 otherwise. We also capture the potential for the electoral cycle effects by including a binary measure with a value of 1 in *gubernatorial election* years and zero otherwise.

Our measure of *district legislative competition* follows the logic of Barrilleaux et al. (2002). This index is comprised of three key pieces of information from state legislative elections—margin of victory, safe seat percentage, and uncontested race percentage. Margin of victory refers to the difference between the winner and loser’s vote share, averaged across all contested races. The index also includes the percentage of ‘safe seats,’ which are those where the margin of victory was 20 points or greater. Finally, the index includes the percentage of possible races where candidates (usually incumbents) were unopposed at the polls.<sup>9</sup>

As noted previously, some would suggest that state policies simply reflect the ideological preferences of the state’s residents. Researchers have argued that states characterized by liberal ideology among their citizens have lower imprisonment rates. Following Jacobs and Carmichael (2001), we include in our model a measure of citizen political ideology originally developed by Berry and colleagues (1998). This index is an unweighted average across all Congressional districts and accounts for the ideology of both incumbents and challengers. The incumbent component is comprised of estimates of ideology for each member of Congress based on interest group ratings and weighted by the proportion of the electorate favoring them in their most recent election. The challenger component assumes that the ideology of challengers is the average of all incumbents of the same party in the state, which is then weighted by the proportion of the electorate voting for them

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<sup>9</sup> The index is 100 minus the simple average of the three components. The index was computed separately for the upper and lower houses and then averaged to yield the final value for each state-year. Values were repeated from each election year until the next election year. Because state legislative election information for 1990-1991 was unavailable, the midpoint between elections preceding and following this period were averaged for 1990 and then repeated in 1991. Thus, the 1990 and 1991 values were the simple average of the 1988 and 1992 election values in most states.

on election-day (see Berry et al. 1998: 330-31).<sup>10</sup> *Citizen ideology* ranges from 0 for the most conservative to 100 in the most liberal state-years.

We also include a measure of *black elected officials*, which is the proportion of all officials that are African American divided by the proportion of the state population that is black. This variable would be less than 1 if blacks are underrepresented in a state. Values greater than one would suggest that African Americans are more likely to be elected than one would expect based on their percentage of the state population.

### Economic and Racial Threat Variables

We include several variables to assess the importance of economic and racial threat for understanding corrections spending. First, we include a measure of *percent employed*, to capture the portion of the population that is connected to the legitimate labor market, and thus would be less likely to constitute a “threat” from a politics of social order perspective. This measure is based on annual averages of monthly estimates from the Current Population Survey and includes all persons officially listed as employed divided by the civilian non-institutionalized population, multiplied by 100. This measure addresses the chronic problem with unemployment figures – they do not include discouraged workers who have stopped looking for work. We expect percent employed to be negatively associated with corrections spending. We also include the state’s *poverty rate* in our models, as an alternative measure of the economically marginalized population.

Consistent with past research on criminal punishment, we measure racial threat by including in our model *percent Latino* in the state (total number of Latino or Hispanic residents divided by the state population and multiplied by 100) and *percent black* in the state (total number of black residents

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<sup>10</sup> The Berry et al. data are available through the ICPSR archive, study # 1208. In supplemental analyses, we also assess an alternative measure of the political conservatism of the populace – a measure developed by Wright et al. (1985). This measure uses pooled data from 51 CBS and New York Times citizen polls from 1974 to 1982 to create state-level ideology estimates.

divided by the state population and multiplied by 100). We include the quadratic form of percent black in our analysis, consistent with our discussion above. The percent Latino quadratic term was not associated with corrections spending; thus we include only the linear form in our reported analyses.

### Fiscal Variables

To capture the fiscal health of states, we include *gross state product* (GSP) measured in thousands of 1983 CPI adjusted dollars per capita. To address spending on alternative social programs, we include *public welfare expenditures* measured as the natural log of the proportion of all state spending on welfare.<sup>11</sup> We also include *education expenditures* measured as the natural log of the proportion of state spending on education programs. We use the logarithm of these variables because it is of most interest to examine the effect of multiplicative changes in these monetary variables. This allows us, for example, to assess changes in our outcome variable as a function of specified percent changes in public welfare expenditures.

### Crime Rates, Imprisonment Rates, and Demographic Control Variables

We measure state crime rates using data from the FBI's Uniform Crime Reports. Although the UCR is not without critics, we use these data for two reasons. First, they offer the only existing measure of state-level reported crime that is readily available for the time period under study. Second, and perhaps more importantly, this is the data source that is most likely to inform policy makers in the state government about crime in their area. *Index crime* includes rates of reported murder, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny, and auto theft. We use the natural log of the number of UCR crimes known to the police per 100 persons for each state-year.

We also expect that states with higher rates of incarceration would devote a greater portion of their spending pie to corrections, and thus include *state imprisonment rates* in our model. We also

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<sup>11</sup> Note that is category broader than the traditional "welfare" programs such as AFDC/ TANF and refers to states' larger social safety nets.

include the rate at which states *release* prisoners. It is well known that many prisons tend to operate near or above capacity (see Harrison and Beck 2003, Table 8).<sup>12</sup> Faced with this reality, state officials have two options—build more prisons or release more prisoners to make room for new arrivals. New building and thus space is captured by increases in the imprisonment rates, whereas the annual rate of *prisoner releases* for each state captures the “back door” approach to relieving overcrowding. Considering these factors allows us to control, albeit imperfectly, for states that are under court orders to reduce crowding.<sup>13</sup> We also control for whether or not states are operating under presumptive sentencing guidelines in the years covered, which could potentially affect corrections spending. States that implement presumptive sentencing policies may expect that these policies will influence the size of the prison population and alter spending accordingly (see Marvell 1995; Nicholson-Crotty 2004; Sorensen and Stemen 2002).

Finally, we control for variation in corrections spending due to demographic and other factors. It could be argued that larger urban states could be expected to devote more resources to formal social control because informal social control becomes more difficult with larger populations (Wirth 1938; see also Land, McCall, and Cohen 1990:925). Therefore, we include a measure of *state population*, which is the number of state residents in millions. One might also expect that the size of the state population in urban areas is related to spending on corrections. Thus, we include a measure of *metropolitan population*, which is the percentage of the state’s population living in counties defined by the U.S. Census Bureau to be metropolitan. Some have suggested that larger relative numbers of non-intact families could be associated with a loss of informal social control and lead to

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<sup>12</sup> In supplementary analyses, we assessed whether a measure of operating capacity of states’ prisons was associated with corrections spending in our models. There was no relationship. We do not include this variable in our reported model because missing data on this measure would substantially reduce the sample size.

<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately, direct measures of which state systems are under court orders to reduce crowding are unavailable for the nearly 20 years of our analysis. In addition, Fliter (1996) and Taggart (1989b) suggest that court orders had limited effects on correctional spending.

increases in the use of formal social control such as the corrections system (Jacobs and Helms 1996). We therefore include a measure of *marriage rates*, which is the number of marriages per 1000 persons. We also include *total expenditures*, measured as the natural log of all state spending in 1983 dollars, per capita. It seems logical that the average level of spending on states' citizens could be related to the piece of the budgetary pie spent on corrections.

### MODEL SPECIFICATION

The dependent variable in our analysis is  $Y_{it}$ , the logarithm of corrections spending as a fraction of total expenditures, for the  $i^{th}$  state and  $t^{th}$  year. One advantage of modeling the log of the proportion, rather than the proportion, is that the distribution will be less skewed because the expected proportion is relatively small in most states (approximately .01-.06). We model  $Y_{it}$  as approximately normal with constant variance. The homoskedasticity assumption is supported by an empirical investigation of residuals.<sup>14</sup> To accommodate unobserved heterogeneity across states in corrections spending, we include in our model a state-specific intercept (i.e. fixed state effect) and a state-specific linear time trend (i.e. state-by-time interaction effect). Sensitivity analyses indicated that including both state specific effects was necessary to account for state-to-state variability in corrections spending.

Because we use observations on each state for 19 consecutive years, we specify a model that accommodates series autocorrelation. Specifically, we use a first-order autoregressive error structure over time within states. Contemporaneous correlations (correlations within year, over states) are accommodated by including state-specific time trends in the mean structure. Net of these time trends, the error terms from distinct states are assumed to be independent.

We use the first-lag value for most of our substantive covariates because we assume that spending in a given year is a product of the previous year's politics, economics, demographics, and

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<sup>14</sup> For example, there was no evidence of a relationship between residual variance and key variables, such as total expenditures. A plot of residuals by predicted values exhibited no heteroskedasticity.

so on. Contemporaneous measures of total state expenditures and the proportion of the total state budget going to welfare and education, respectively, are included because these variables reflect decisions made contemporaneously with decisions about correctional spending. A second order lag is used for the district competition measure because legislators elected in one year do not take office until the following year. Hence the influence of competition for their seat on state spending decisions logically would not have an impact on our outcome variable for two years.

This model can be cast as a special-case general linear mixed model (Frees 2004). We fit the model using residual maximum likelihood (REML) in SAS PROC MIXED. Our modeling approach borrows strength across states for estimating within-state effects and, hence, is relatively efficient.

## RESULTS

Our model predicts the observed outcome of proportion of states' spending devoted to corrections reasonably well. The correlation between predicted and observed corrections expenditures was about 0.96. Of course, as is typical in this type of modeling, the state and time effects explain a large proportion of the variation in our outcome. Yet, for predicting the proportion of spending on corrections, the substantive covariates explain about 26% of the variation that was unexplained by the model that included only state and time covariates.<sup>15</sup> In addition, plots of the fit of models that include only state and time effects and exclude our substantive covariates (not shown) indicate that this reduced model does not track the data as closely as do our full models.

We conducted a thorough analysis of residuals, which supported our normality and constant-variance assumptions. Similarly, fitted value plots show no problems with lack of fit. To assess

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<sup>15</sup> We define total variation as  $T = \sum (y_i - \bar{y})^2$  and unexplained variation as  $U = \sum (y_i - \hat{y}_i)^2$ . Here,  $y_i$ ,  $\hat{y}_i$ , and  $\bar{y}$  are observed, fitted, and overall average of log of admission rates; sums and averages are taken over all states and times. The ratio  $U/T$  is the proportion of the total variation left unexplained. If  $U_R$  and  $U_F$  are the unexplained variations for the reduced and full model then  $100(U_R - U_F)/U_R$  gives the percent reduction in unexplained variation when going from the reduced model with only state and time effects to the full model, which includes all of our other covariates.

potential multicollinearity, we computed variance inflation factors. None of the VIFs exceeded 5, indicating that multicollinearity is not a problem in the model.

Table 1 gives the coefficient estimates and standard errors from our model predicting the proportion of states' spending on corrections. We find that the state-by-time interaction effect was significant at the  $p < .0001$  level, the residual variance was estimated to be 0.024, and the AR(1) correlation was estimated to be 0.67 (both significant at the  $p < .0001$  level). The significant state-by-time interaction means that there is evidence that the time trend in corrections spending varies across the states. Table 2 gives estimates of the statistically significant effects, which are arguably more meaningful than the regression parameter estimates alone. This table indicates the percentage change in correctional spending associated with specific unit increases (noted) in the independent variables.

Tables 1 and 2 show support for hypothesized relationship between Republican party control of state government and the proportion of spending devoted to corrections, net of other factors in the model. Specifically, Republican strength in the state legislature is significantly associated with the portion of the spending pie going to corrections. Table 2 shows that a standard deviation (10 percentage point) increase in the percent of Republican legislators in the statehouse is associated with a statistically significant 1.74% increase in the proportion of total expenditures that go toward corrections. Thus, these findings suggest that state legislative party strength is consequential for corrections spending. This is an important finding because it extends state-level research on the importance of partisan politics to the context of correctional spending, and lends further weight to the argument that partisan politics is an important factor for understanding corrections in the United States. Table 1 shows, however, that states with Republican governors are no more likely than other

states to increase the piece of the expenditures pie going to corrections. We speculate about the difference in the effects of the executive and legislative branches in our conclusions.<sup>16</sup>

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Tables 1 and 2 about here

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In addition, we find evidence of a marginally significant association between party competition for legislative seats at the district level and corrections spending. *District* level competition between the parties could lead to policy differences because of the concern that certain swing votes represent. Thus, one might expect that more competitive state legislative races would lead to policies that are more in line with the preferences of poor and marginalized groups, because of the potential swing vote these groups could represent for either party.<sup>17</sup> The evidence in Tables 1 and 2 is consistent with this argument. Table 2 shows that a one standard deviation unit increase in our district electoral competition measure is associated with a marginally significant 1.65% reduction in the proportion of the budget going to corrections.<sup>18</sup> In other words, we find some indication that when legislators of either party face greater competition at the polls on average, a smaller share of the budget is spent on corrections, net of other factors. This is consistent with the argument that politicians are mindful of the potential backlash among poor and minority voters, who tend to be opposed to increased corrections spending because they are disproportionately affected by such spending.

There is no evidence, however, that there are electoral cycles in corrections spending at the state level, once the other variables in our model are controlled (see Table 1). It could be that

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<sup>16</sup> In supplemental analyses, we found that party of the President and presidential electoral cycles had no effect our state-level outcome.

<sup>17</sup> Because state spending research has historically focused on political competition in terms of the relative number of seats in the state legislature for each party, we examined whether measures of macro-level competition drove corrections spending in some supplementary analyses. No evidence emerged to support the macro-level party competition model with respect to corrections spending.

<sup>18</sup> We also considered whether district competition might condition the influence of party politics, as Barrilleaux et al. (2002) suggest. We found no such interactions here, which is consistent with Barrilleaux's (1997) finding of a direct effect of district competition on state policy, but is inconsistent with research on prison admissions (Stucky, et al. 2005).



Caldeira's (1983) findings are specific to the federal budgetary cycle or are related to the time period under investigation (1935-1975), which was well before the prison boom of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Similarly, we do not find any evidence that a more liberal or conservative citizenry is associated with differences in corrections spending net of the other variables in our model. In fact the association is quite close to zero.<sup>19</sup> Although there is some evidence from other research that citizen ideology is associated with prison populations, our analysis shows that it is not statistically associated with corrections spending, net of partisan politics, fiscal considerations, and the other variables in our model.

We do find some evidence that racial threat plays an important role in corrections spending. Specifically, we find that as the percentage of blacks in the state's population increases, correctional spending increases, and then levels off (see Table 1). To illustrate this quadratic effect, Table 2 shows that for a state that is 0.5% black, a one standard deviation (0.4 percentage point) *increase* in percent black is associated with a statistically significant 18.32% increase in the fraction of the budget allocated to corrections spending. For a state that is 15% black, a one standard deviation increase in percent black translates into a just statistically significant 5.9% increase in corrections spending. Finally, for a state that is 25% black, a one standard deviation increase in percent black is associated with a statistically non-significant 1.9% *decrease* in the fraction of the budget allocated to corrections spending. Together these effects show that states that have relatively small black populations have the largest increases in correctional spending when their black populations increase – even by a very small amount (here we used four tenths of a percentage point). By contrast, states with the largest black populations see little change in their corrections spending when their black populations increase this small amount. These results underscore the importance of racial threat for understanding formal legal control in the United States. By contrast, we find that percent Latino and

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<sup>19</sup> We also performed separate analyses using Wright et al.'s (1985) measure of citizen ideology, and found no evidence of an association with the proportion of state spending on corrections.

relative number of black elected officials in a state are not associated with corrections spending, net of the other factors in the model.<sup>20</sup>

We also find that percent employed and poverty rates are not significantly associated with corrections spending, net of the other variables in our model (see Table 1). We note above that participation in the labor force, as measured by percent employed, may be a better measure of the extent of economically marginalized populations, because it is more sensitive to the absence from the labor market of discouraged workers and others who do not show up in unemployment figures. Nevertheless, we also assessed whether the percent of the state's population who officially report being unemployed is associated with correctional spending in the context of our model. This supplementary analysis similarly revealed a negligible association between percent unemployed and our outcome; the effects of other variables in our model remained very similar to those reported in Table 1.<sup>21</sup>

Turning to the purely fiscal factors, we find a strong association between allocations of the budget to corrections and GSP. Table 2 shows that a 10 percent increase in GSP is associated with a significant 5% increase in our outcome variable. It appears that states devote a bigger piece of the pie to corrections as they become wealthier. Perhaps as states become wealthier they become more conservative in ways not captured by our political and ideology variables, and thus become more likely to favor punitive responses to crime. This interpretation is generally consistent with the spirit of a politics of social order perspective.

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<sup>20</sup> One might expect interactions among the various forms of threat. For instance, the effect of the presence of a minority population on corrections spending could be enhanced in times of high crime or high unemployment. We found no evidence of such effects in a set of sensitivity analyses. We also found no evidence of interactions between the threat variables and any other variables in the model. We also did not find that the effect of black elected officials depended on percent black.

<sup>21</sup> We also examined whether income inequality (as measured by the Gini index) was associated with our outcome variable. It was not.

The proportion of total state spending on welfare is strongly negatively related to the proportion of state spending on corrections. Table 2 shows that a standard deviation unit increase in the proportion of state spending going to welfare translates into a significant 2.8% decrease in the share of spending going to corrections. Although corrections-welfare tradeoffs have not been studied at the state-level, some research has reported tradeoffs between states' welfare, education, highway, and health expenditures (Garand and Hendrick 1991). Moreover, our finding of a negative association between welfare and corrections spending is consistent with arguments about the penal-welfare complex, which propose that states must choose among a limited set of alternatives for controlling socially marginal populations (e.g. Garland 1985).

We also find evidence of tradeoffs between education and corrections spending. As the share of the budget spent on education increases, the share of the budget for corrections decreases ( $p = .033$ ). Table 2 shows that a 10 percent increase in education spending translates to a 2.1% reduction in the share of expenditures devoted to corrections. Apparently, there are policy tradeoffs between educational and correctional expenditures, as well.

There is no evidence, however, that crime rates, imprisonment admissions, and releases from prison are important for the proportion of the budget devoted to spending on corrections (see Table 1). This is the case even when crime and imprisonment rates are alternatively deleted from the model (i.e. when only crime or imprisonment is examined).<sup>22</sup> In addition, sensitivity analyses showed that the null finding holds whether crime rates were represented as overall rates of index crime, property, or violent crime rates, and whether we included a first, second or third order lagged effect of crime rates. These findings refute the notion that crime is the driving force behind changes in corrections spending and are more consistent with the arguments of Beckett (1997) and others that

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<sup>22</sup> Based on Caldeira's (1983) study of federal criminal justice expenditures, one might expect that the influence of crime would depend on the electoral cycles or partisan control of state government. Preliminary sensitivity analyses and found no evidence of such an effect.

the perception of crime or its use as a political issue is more important than the reality of crime. In addition, Table 1 shows that state spending on corrections is unrelated to whether states are operating under presumptive sentencing guidelines. This parallels some other research on the effects of determinate sentencing on correctional populations (e.g. Marvel and Moody 1995; Sorensen and Stemen 2002).

We also find that the chunk of state spending going to corrections is unrelated to state population size, proportion metropolitan, or marriage rates. Yet, total state spending per capita is significantly associated with our outcome – a standard deviation unit increase in the total budget per capita produces more than a 4.3% decrease in the share of the budget going to corrections (Table 2). So, states that spend more on their citizens devote less of the budget to corrections. Perhaps states that are more generous focus less on punitive outcomes and more on remedying social problems.

## CONCLUSIONS

Recent research on imprisonment rates in the United States has focused on the role of partisan politics. Yet, few studies have examined the aspect of corrections most directly under political control – corrections expenditures. The current study adds to the literature on trends in criminal punishment by analyzing annual state-level data on corrections expenditures across nineteen years, extending to the late 1990s. In addition, we draw together insights from previous research on criminal punishment under the rubric of the “politics of social order” which highlights potential links between partisan politics, racial and economic threat, and state fiscal concerns. This framework is premised on the argument that state policies on punishment are based on the twin concerns of maintaining social order and maintaining power through democratic elections. State theorists have long recognized that one of the major functions of states is to maintain social order, and punishment plays a key role in this endeavor. Thus, state managers must always be concerned with maintaining social order and responding to perceived threats to social order. Yet, democratically elected state

officials must also be concerned with obtaining and maintaining office by satisfying the voting public.

This logic helps us to tie together previous findings and arguments in the literature under a single conceptual umbrella. Specifically, partisan control and competition, citizen preferences, economic and racial threat, alternative policy priorities, and crime control, are linked because they have important consequences for social order or the maintenance of political office. For example, partisan control of state government is consequential for correctional spending because Republican officials are likely to highlight crime as an election issue to garner votes from lower income voters who would otherwise be unlikely to subscribe to conservative political agendas. Our results are consistent with this argument. We find that as the proportion of Republicans in the state legislature increases, so does the fraction of a states' budget spent on corrections. Our results, however, highlight the importance of considering the effects of the legislative and executive branch separately, as we find that party of the governor does not affect corrections spending. One explanation could lie in differences between the executive and the legislative branches in the nature of electoral politics. King (1989) argues that gubernatorial politics are more dependent on personality and incumbency, whereas partisanship drives legislative elections outcomes to a much greater degree.<sup>23</sup>

Similarly – although not considered in previous studies of corrections expenditures and addressed in only one recent empirical study of imprisonment trends (Stucky, et al. 2005) – the politics of social order perspective suggests that party competition can lead politicians to enact policies to influence potential swing voters, especially when legislators face meaningful competition on election-day. Consistent with this argument, we find that district level competition is marginally related ( $p = .058$ ) to the proportion of expenditures devoted to corrections. Thus, competition for

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<sup>23</sup> Perhaps another explanation for the lack of a relationship between governor's party and correctional expenditures lies in variation across states in the role that governors play in determining state budgets. Some states allow governors line item veto power, whereas other states do not. This would be an interesting issue for further research.

one's seat *on election day* matters whereas competition in the form of a *balance of seats in the assembly* does not. There may be practical reasons for the greater impact of micro-level competition effects. On the one hand, real competition at the polls is likely to force one candidate to differentiate herself from challengers. On the other hand, a balance of power in the legislature may mean gridlock or more stochastic outcomes rather than consistent policy outcomes in either direction.

We did not find that citizens' liberal versus conservative ideological preferences affect corrections spending. It may be, however, that the ideology of the electorate is captured by our partisan political variables because states with more conservative citizens tend to elect more Republican legislators. Or, perhaps ideology operates through the fiscal variables we included in the analysis. Our analyses show that states with larger gross state products devote larger shares of their budgets to corrections, which parallels the findings of some research on imprisonment trends. Perhaps richer states have more conservative electorates that favor more spending on corrections relative to other programs. This is especially interesting because of the opposite effects of gross state product and welfare and education spending per capita. Richer states had higher relative corrections expenditures but states that spent more money on their citizens, in terms of education and public welfare had lower state corrections expenditures. Such a finding is consistent with arguments about the penal-welfare complex, which maintain that states achieve social control formally and informally. But, it is also consistent with the politics of social order perspective because it illustrates the calculus of electoral politics. Savvy politicians in richer, more conservative states appear to increase expenditures for corrections consistent with the desires of likely voters and campaign contributors to increase reelection chances. Yet, states that spend more on average on their citizens likely have more liberal electorates and political officials therefore, are better served by favoring education and social welfare spending over correctional spending.

Moreover, our findings show that the proportion of minorities in a state is associated fairly strongly with correctional spending and this effect is non-linear. Increases to relatively small African

American populations are linked to more substantial increases in corrections spending, while increases to larger African American populations translate into much smaller changes in state budgetary commitments to corrections. This finding is consistent with research on racial threat and other criminal justice outcomes, including imprisonment rates, capital punishment rates, and police strength (e.g. Greenberg and West 2001; Jackson and Carroll 1981; Jacobs, Carmichael, and Kent 2005; Stucky 2005). It also makes sense in terms of our thinking about the politics of social order. Growth in relatively small minority populations represents a threat to elite interests, translating into higher correctional expenditures, because politicians will attempt to allay the fears of elites. By contrast, once the percent of African Americans in a state is substantial, they become a swing vote and politicians must now consider the preferences of this part of the electorate, as well.

As with all research, our study has some limitations. First, we do not measure variation in jail expenditures (see Duncombe and Straussman 1993, 1994). Such data are not available annually for the state-years included in the current study. Second, we are unable to capture the nuances of the ways that parties vary across the states. Recent research suggests that variation in punishment across states is related to partisan differences but also differences in the degree of centralization of state power and the degree of citizen participation. For example, Barker's (2006) account of variation in punishment in three states relies on in-depth comparative historical analysis. This work suggests that the influence of crime, racial threat and politics all dynamically interacted with the structure of the states. Such work is beyond the scope of the current study empirically but is likely necessary to fully illuminate the operation of the politics of social order.

In sum, our study contributes to the literature by directing attention to an important indicator of criminal punishment that has been overlooked by most research on the prison boom in the United States – the piece of the spending pie devoted to corrections by states. Our finding of the importance of partisan politics for corrections budgets offers evidence in the continuing battle over the relationship between politics and public policy. Some have recently suggested that partisan

differences in positions on law and order have declined over time (Beckett and Sasson 2000; Greenberg and West 2001). Similarly, political scientists have long argued that the median voter model would suggest minimal distinctions between the parties in order to capture the most votes from the electorate which is bunched in the center on most issues (Downs 1957). Yet, the current study suggests the continuing utility of considering partisan politics in relation to punishment policies, and public policies more generally. Moreover, we push forward theorizing on the role of politics in punishment by explicating the underlying logic linking the effects of party politics, racial threat and state fiscal concerns. Because punishment is an exercise of state power, explanations for variation in punishment are all filtered through the lens of state action, which are driven by the basic need for social order, but in modern democracies the calculus of electoral politics also appears to drive state policy.



**Table 1. Regression Parameter Estimates for Model of Proportion of State Expenditures on Corrections, 1980-1998 (N= 923).**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Estimate</b>	<b>Std. Error</b>	<b>P-value</b>
<b>Partisan Politics</b>			
Republican Legislative Pct.	.002	.001	.022
Republican Governor	.022	.015	.147
Gubernatorial Election Year	.004	.007	.557
District Legislative Competition	-.002	.001	.058
<b>Ideology</b>			
Citizen Ideology	-.001	.001	.449
<b>Social Threat</b>			
Poverty Rate	.002	.002	.293
Percent Employed	-.007	.004	.122
Percent Black	.434	.136	.002
Percent Black Squared	-.010	.004	.009
Percent Latino	-.073	.074	.327
Black Elected Official Ratio	-.004	.176	.981
<b>Fiscal Health and Alternative Policy Priorities</b>			
Gross State Product	.509	.125	.0001
Public Welfare Expend Pct.	-.293	.056	<.0001
Education Expenditure Pct.	-.227	.106	.033
<b>Crime</b>			
Index Crime Rate	-.003	.015	.869
<b>Controls</b>			
State Population	.105	.094	.264
Metropolitan Population	.004	.003	.140
Total Expend per Capita	-.462	.106	<.0001
Marriage Rate	.006	.004	.126
Sentencing Guidelines	-.012	.033	.715
Imprisonment Rate	-.204	.299	.496
Prisoner Release Rate	-.001	.001	.216

Note: Fixed state effects estimates are suppressed. The time effect is not reported because it varies significantly across the 49 states, as noted in the text.

**Table 2. Effect Estimates: Percent Change in the Proportion of Expenditures Spent on Corrections Associated with a One Standard Deviation\* Increase in the Effect Variable.**

<u>EFFECT</u> [increment]	Estimate	95% Confidence Interval		Test of Signif
	<u>Percent Change</u>	<u>Lower</u>	<u>Upper</u>	<u>P-value</u>
Republican Legislative Pct. [10]	<b>1.74</b>	0.25	3.25	.0222
District Legis. Competition [10]	<b>-1.65</b>	-3.32	0.06	.0582
Gross State Product [10%]*	<b>4.95</b>	2.54	7.42	.0001
Public Welfare Expend Pct. [10%]*	<b>-2.75</b>	-3.75	-1.73	<.0001
Education Expenditure Pct. [10%]*	<b>-2.13</b>	-4.04	-0.18	.0328
Total Expend per Capita [10%]*	<b>-4.30</b>	-6.17	-2.39	<.0001
Percent Black** [0.4]				
...when percent black = 0.5%	<b>18.32</b>	6.69	31.20	.0015
...when percent black = 15%	<b>5.90</b>	0.42	11.67	.0349
...when percent black = 25%	<b>-1.90</b>	-8.89	5.63	.6118

\*Increments around one within-state standard deviation were used for all the effects other than the four that are marked with asterisks. For these log-transformed variables, we used an increment that corresponds to a 10% increase.

\*\*There is a quadratic effect of percent black. From the table we see that for a state that is 0.5% black, a 0.4 percentage point increase in percent black is associated with an 18.32% increase [95% confidence interval: 6.69%, 31.20%] in the fraction of the budget allocated to corrections spending. When a state is 25% black, a 0.4 percentage point increase in percent black is associated with a statistically non-significant 1.9% *decrease* in the fraction of the budget allocated to corrections spending.

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## Appendix A: Variable Sources

### **State Expenditures (corrections, total, public welfare, and education)**

Source: U.S. Census Bureau's *State Government Finances* (Series GF No.3). Tables electronically retrieved for 1994-1999 (<http://www.census.gov/govs/www/state.html>).

### **Republican Governor, Gubernatorial Election Years**

Source: *The Book of the States*.

### **Percent of Legislature that is Republican**

Source: Originally collected by Carl Klarner, University of California, Davis and electronically available [[www.unl.edu/SPPQ/journal\\_datasets/klarner\\_data/1959\\_2000Short.xls](http://www.unl.edu/SPPQ/journal_datasets/klarner_data/1959_2000Short.xls)].

### **District Competition Index**

Source: Election data through 1989 originally collected by the ICPSR (Study # 8907), were updated by Mark A. Smith, University of Washington, who generously shared the data with us. The 1992-1996 data were computed from Barone, Michael, William Lilley, and Laurence J. DeFranco (1998) "State Legislative Elections: Voting Patterns and Demographics" Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly.

### **Citizen Ideology**

Source: ICPSR Study #1208: "Measuring Citizen and Government Ideology in the United States" Principal Investigators: Berry, William D., Evan J. Ringquist, Richard C. Fording, Russell L. Hanson.

### **Black Elected Official Ratio**

Source: Unpublished data originally collected by the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. David Greenberg was kind enough to share the data with us.

### **Crime Rates, Marriage Rates**

Source: *Statistical Abstract of the United States*.

### **Imprisonment Rates and Release Rates**

Source: *Correctional Populations in the United States* (various years).

### **Sentencing Guidelines**

Source: Rottman, et al. (2000) *State Court Organization 1998*. U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, Table 48. Available at <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/>

### **Gross State Product**

Source: <http://www.bea.doc.gov/bea/regional/gsp/current.htm>

### **Percent Employed**

Source: Unpublished data provided by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

### **State Population, Percent Black, Percent Hispanic, Metropolitan Population, Poverty Rates**

Source: Data for 1977 to 1989 are unpublished data furnished by the U.S. Census Bureau. Data from 1990 onward were downloaded from website [[http://eire.census.gov/popest/archives/county/co\\_casrh.php](http://eire.census.gov/popest/archives/county/co_casrh.php)] "1990 to 1999 Annual Time Series of County Population Estimates by Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin."



## Appendix B. Comparison of Proportion of the Budget to Spending Per Capita

As mentioned above, our model with dependent variable  $Y$  (the logarithm of corrections spending as a fraction of total expenditures) can be re-expressed as an equally reasonable model for the dependent variable  $Y^*$ , the logarithm of corrections spending per capita. The equivalence is relatively simple to see. Let  $E$ ,  $W$ , and  $C$ , represent education, welfare, and corrections expenditures. Let  $T$  be the total expenditures and let  $P$  be the population size. In symbols, the dependent variable  $Y = \log(C/T)$  and the dependent variable  $Y^* = \log(C/P)$ . Our model for  $Y$  has the form  $Y = \log(C/T) = a + b \log(E/T) + c \log(W/T) + d \log(T/P) + [\text{other effects and error}]$ , where  $a$ ,  $b$ ,  $c$ , and  $d$  are coefficients. Adding and subtracting terms, we have that  $\log(C/T) + \log(T/P) = a + b [\log(E/T) + \log(T/P)] + c[\log(W/T) + \log(T/P)] + (d+1-b-c) \log(T/P) + [\text{other effects and error}]$ . That is,  $Y^* = \log(C/P) = a + b \log(E/P) + c \log(W/P) + d' \log(T/P) + [\text{other effects and error}]$ . Thus, our model for  $Y$  is equivalent to a model for  $Y^*$  that includes all the same covariates except that education and welfare spending are measured per capita rather than as a fraction of the total budget. We fit this model for corrections spending per capita in 1983 dollars ( $Y^*$ ) using SAS PROC MIXED. As expected, all effect coefficients, except total state expenditures, are numerically identical to those reported in Table 1. This indicates that our findings are relevant for both the piece of the budgetary pie devoted to corrections as well as state spending on corrections per capita.

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