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Do Frameworks Matter? Testing the Framing Effect on Public Support for Prison Pell Grants

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Do Frameworks Matter?

Testing the Framing Effect on Public Support for Prison Pell Grants

by

Natalie Miles Burke

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Science
in
Criminology and Criminal Justice

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Abstract

Postsecondary college education (PSCE) services are a rehabilitative program that offers adults in custody (AICs) the opportunity to earn a college degree while incarcerated. Research has shown that AICs participating in PSCE services reduce the likelihood of future incarceration as well as higher self-esteem and confidence levels. In 2015, President Obama's Second Chance Pell Pilot program reinstated federal financial aid for AICs to access PSCE services. Although the Second Chance Pell Pilot program has continued to grow since then, little research has been done on public perceptions toward prison Pell Grants.

This thesis studies how offender crime type and sentence length influence support for college education in prison. A public survey was posted on Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). Respondents (n=827) were randomly assigned to one of eight different vignettes that were designed by crime type (nonviolent, drug, violent, and released) and by sentence length (three years or fifteen years). Participants then ranked their level of agreeableness on a six-point Likert scale for five dependent variables: prison is effective at reducing crime in society, support for college education in prison, support for financial aid in prison, criminal history should determine college eligibility and college education should be accessible for anyone in prison.

A One-way ANOVA showed that participants who read the released vignette demonstrated more support for the dependent variables than participants who had received the nonviolent, drug, and violent crime vignette. Next, a Two-way ANOVA was run to see how crime type and sentence length impacted the level of support for the five

dependent variables. Four of the five models were statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), but crime type and sentence length did not co-influence the level of support for any of the models. Crime type was statistically significant for college education, federal aid, and anyone. Sentence length was only significant for college education and criminal history.

In conclusion, the crime type demonstrated a statistically significant support level for prison Pell Grants. The released vignette yielded more support for PSCE services and federal financial aid than the other three crime types. However, sentence length did not appear to impact the level of support. The message framework did appear to influence the person's level of support for prison Pell Grants. As research continues to understand public perceptions toward rehabilitative services, framework experiments are essential to understanding what justice policies are most palatable for the public.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Adults in custody (AIC) is one of the most vulnerable populations in the United States. Notably, the prison population is undereducated, with 37% of those housed in state prisons holding less than a high school degree compared to 19% of the general population (Davis et al., 2014; Mercer, 2009). Rehabilitative services in prisons are designed to improve the lives of AICs, and, upon release, reduce future recidivism. Education can be of those rehabilitative services for AICs. Postsecondary college education services (PSCE) provide college courses from accredited universities for AICs to participate in during imprisonment. The research found that participants in PSCE programs report an improved sense of self-esteem, improved prosocial skills, and lower recidivism rates than AIC who do not participate (Cantora et al., 2020; Davis et al., 2014; Chestnut et al., 2022; Kallman, 2020; Pelletier & Evans, 2019).

One way for AICs to pay for college services is through federal financial aid. However, this opportunity has not always been supported in society. Sociologist Joshua Page (2004) coined the term “legislative penal drama” to describe how politicians and the popular media created an us-vs.-them mentality to pit law-abiding civilians who were denied financial aid against AICs who received federal aid. This harsh attitude was especially prevalent in the 1980s and 1990s, and AICs were eventually banned from applying for financial aid. However, by the 21st century, there appeared to be a shift toward a more rehabilitative perspective. The Second Chance Pell Pilot Program and Restoring Education and Learning Act, established by President Obama in 2015, restored PSCE prison services. Specifically, the Second Chance Pell Pilot program connected

colleges and universities to prisons. Mirroring changing attitudes of the justice-involved individuals, the Second Chance Pell Pilot program received bipartisan support for PSCE education in prison (Davis, 2019; Robinson, 2022; Turner & Nadworny, 2020).

Despite the increased political support for rehabilitative services in the 21st century, there needs to be a stronger emphasis on the research on public attitudes toward prison Pell Grants. Public perceptions are crucial to legitimizing the justice system's effectiveness (Drakulich & Kirk, 2016; Wozniak, 2016). For instance, due to public backlash, former New York Governor Cuomo was forced to abandon the proposal to provide state funds for college classes for AICs (Kaplan, 2014). In contrast, later research was done at the national level by Johnston and Wozniak (2021), who concluded that people were indifferent to prison Pell Grants. Public perceptions of PSCE services in prison are crucial to understanding their beliefs about rehabilitative programs in the criminal justice system.

One way to study how a message impacts the public's opinion is through framing. Framing effects are a way to see if different wording of a similar message is more palatable for the public. If one type of argument is more appealing, scholars can further understand what motivates people to support policy in the justice system. Measuring the level of support for PSCE service can precisely capture how pervasive the education programs may be for AICs in upcoming years.

This research aims to study public attitudes regarding rehabilitative services. A survey was posted on Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) for interested participants. The survey used eight vignettes to understand how crime type and sentence length may

influence the public's support for PSCE service in prisons. Additionally, two open-ended questions were utilized to understand why they may or may not support the prison Pell Grants.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Impact of PSCE. Research has shown that PSCE services have promising implications for reducing recidivism rates. The RAND Corporation found that those who participated in the correctional education programs had a 43% lower recidivism rate than those who did not participate and had a 13% higher chance of obtaining employment upon release (Davis et al., 2013). Bozick et al. (2018) conducted a meta-analysis that concluded that those who participated in a correctional education program were 28% less likely to recidivate than nonparticipants. Participants in postsecondary education services were 48% less likely to recidivate (Bozick et al., 2018). The praised New York Bard Prison Initiative program (BPI) also reported low recidivism rates (8.3% for associate degree participants, 3.1% for Bachelor's degree participants), and only 1.4% of those who did recidivate received a new felony conviction (Denney & Tynes, 2021). Research studying the connection between incarcerated women and PSCE services is sparse. However, recidivism rates for participating women appear lower than those who do not (Sokoloff & Schenck-Fontaine, 2015).

Prison education may be a beneficial financial investment for states to consider. PSCE services have been shown to reduce recidivism, thus saving the states money to incarcerate individuals. In 2020, incarceration costs averaged \$39,158 per AIC (B.O.J, 2021; Turner & Nadworny, 2020). In contrast, educating an AIC costs \$1,400-\$1,744 annually (Davis et al., 2013). The Rand Corporation calculates that for every dollar spent on prison education, \$4-5 dollars are saved on future reincarceration, equivalent to saving states \$350 million annually (Davis et al., 2019). Reducing future recidivism and utilizing cost-saving solutions may appeal to policymakers and politicians. First, however, we

must learn about the priorities and interests of the public to see if they, too, believe that PSCE services in prison are a worthwhile investment.

Political Background. Federal programs that promoted education, poverty, and transportation were launched to address social issues. Through the 1960s and 1970s, President Lyndon Johnson promoted a “Greater Society” to address the war on poverty. The “Greater Society” rhetoric was based on the treatment/opportunity model, which argued that people commit crimes due to a lack of accumulation of legitimate avenues to crime (Page, 2004). This directly contradicts Robert Merton’s strain theory, where a lack of goals and opportunity conflicts. In 1965, President Lyndon Johnson signed the Higher Education Act to inspire a productive society and expand federal financial resources for postsecondary education. One of the financial resources was the Federal Pell Grant program. Pell Grants are a needs-based form of federal financial aid given to that does not need to be repaid. Students who display exceptional financial need and pursue an undergraduate degree can apply to see if they qualify to receive one (Federal Student Aid). The 1965 Higher Education Act also allowed AICs to be eligible to apply for Pell Grants. Thus, college education was a routine opportunity in prison (Denney & Tynes, 2021; Dillard & Nielsen, 2015; Ubah, 2004).

By the 1980s, the public’s heightened fear of crime and increasingly harsh perceptions toward AICs shifted American society from an opportunity model to a punitive attitude. Popular media captured the image where violent criminals received free Pell Grants, whereas hardworking, law-abiding citizens were denied financial aid. Punitive attitudes and public pressures compelled politicians to increase punitiveness

within the justice system. Furthermore, the intersection of the “Nothing Works” movement and the “tough on crime” mentality impacted PSCE within prisons (Conway, 2020). The 1994 Violent Crime Control & Law Enforcement Act, signed by President Bill Clinton, barred AICs from receiving federal financial aid to pay for college courses while serving their time. This “tough on crime” approach was arguably established to quell the public’s doubts about their government and to assert that the political and economic elites could maintain their legitimate authority (Page, 2004). Instead of federal financial aid, prison education programs had to rely on state-level accommodations or private funding to provide PSCE services (Cantora et al., 2020; Davis, 2019; Ubah, 2004). With severe cuts to federal funding, the number of AICs participating in PSCE service drastically decreased. In the 2000s, only 5-7% of AICs participated in PSCE programs, compared to 83% in the mid-1990s (Cantora et al., 2020; Davis, 2019). In New York, 1,078 AICs earned a college degree in 1991, but in 2011, only 141 did in 2011, translating to an 86.9% decrease in twenty years (Editorial Board, 2016). The reduction in PSCE services is disheartening, for research has shown that education can be a powerful tool to improve AICs’ lives upon release.

Then, after a twenty-one-year hiatus, President Obama signed the Restoring Education and Learning Act and the Second Chance Pell Pilot Program in 2015. The Second Chance Pell Pilot Program, also called the Second Chance Pell Experiment, connected 67 colleges and universities across 26 states to offer college courses to AICs (U.S., 2016). Since 2015, the number of colleges participating in the Second Chance Pell Pilot Program has accelerated to 130 colleges and universities across 42 states (Shoaib,

2023). The rapid growth of colleges connecting to prisons has also dramatically increased the number of AICs pursuing college degrees. Between 2016-2021, 28,911 enrolled in college through the Second Chance Pell Program (Chestnut et al., 2022). Even though colleges have been connected to prisons, there needs to be ongoing support from politicians and policymakers for prisons to sustain this opportunity for AICs.

There has been a new wave of bipartisan support for criminal justice reform in recent years, particularly for rehabilitative services within the criminal justice system (Dunbar, 2022; Johnston & Wozniak, 2021; Nadworny, 2022; Turner & Nadworny, 2020). Once President Obama left office, President Trump signed the First Step Act in December 2018, which was set to expand rehabilitative services in prisons, indicating bipartisan support for rehabilitative efforts. In addition, another twelve Republican governors supported Pell Grants for AICs serving short sentences (Fredman, 2019). Most recently, the U.S. Department of Education recently expanded the Second Chance Pell Pilot Program for AICs to participate throughout the 2022-2023 school year.

Public Attitudes. Assessing public attitudes toward Pell Grants in prison is crucial to evaluate the public's perception of the criminal justice system. It reveals how plausible PSCE programs are in the political and social climate. As seen in the 1980s and 90s, punitive attitudes and political pressures resulted in President Bill Clinton signing the 1994 Violent Crime Control & Law Enforcement Act. However, despite the increased support from both political parties in recent decades, current public attitudes toward prison Pell Grants have not been thoroughly examined.

One way to study public perceptions is through frameworks. The framework effect sees how different words, images, and phrases influence attitudes or elicit certain reactions (Dunbar, 2022). In other words, similar messages with subtle differences can influence one's perception of a policy. Frameworks are critical to understanding people's motivations to support or oppose reform in the criminal justice system. Opinion polls may also justify policy proposals (Drakulich & Kirk, 2016; Dunbar, 2022). Specifically, Dr. Kevin Wozniak's (2016) work argues that researchers should use framing experiments to test how political arguments affect public opinion about different aspects of the criminal justice system. For instance, some arguments may be more popularly palatable to gaining reform support (Drakulich & Kirk, 2016, p. 175). Scholars may rely on surveys to gauge public attitudes about adults in custody and use these results to assess policy implications.

Prior research has found that the public is generally supportive of educational services. For instance, Applegate (2001) conducted a public opinion survey about prison amenities, including educational services. His results found that out of the twenty-six amenities listed, only 14.5% of the sample supported eliminating GED services, and 36.5% supported eliminating college education/degree programs. Another study, conducted by Garland et al. (2013), used a mailed survey to assess public attitudes toward reentry programs for newly released individuals. Education programs initially received majority support for GED/high school diplomas (92.1%) and technical degrees (75.1%), but public support was significantly reduced for Bachelor's degrees (49.2%) (Garland et

al., 2013). However, both Applegate and Garland's conclusions may have limited generalizability due to using convenience samples.

Additionally, research has found that respondents are significantly less supportive of implementing criminal justice reforms for AICs convicted of violent offenses compared to AICs convicted of nonviolent offenses (Dunbar, 2022; Garland et al., 2013; Heilbrun et al., 2018; Socia, 2021). This indicates that the offense type elicits a more punitive response from the public if they believe the offender is less deserving of a particular service.

Regarding what reforms are supported by the public, Aaron Gottlieb (2017) used a survey on MTurk to test the effect of message frameworks towards criminal justice reform for nonviolent offenders. Three frameworks were used: self-interest (financial cost, recidivism rates); fairness (how justice is being implemented); and character of the offender (personal flaws of offenders or the structural inequalities). Participants were randomly assigned to one of six conditions regarding the three frameworks and then asked about their support for reform proposals. The results revealed that individuals exposed to the message explaining the financial cost of incarceration had 46% higher odds of strongly supporting reform proposals than other categories (Gottlieb, 2017). Those exposed to the message about recidivism rates had 27% higher odds of strongly supporting reform proposals (2017). Gottlieb's work showed how frameworks elicited different levels of support.

Although there is research studying public attitudes toward different rehabilitative services for AICs, only one study explored the relationship between public attitudes and

prison Pell Grants. Johnston and Wozniak (2021) used Cooperative Congressional Election Study data to explore how framing effects vary across political partisanship and racial resentment (n= 64,600). The respondents in the control group received the following question: “The Department of Education is piloting a program to offer financial aid to incarcerated individuals interested in attending college while incarcerated. Do you support this program?”. Participants in the first treatment condition, titled “Individuals,” were given the following statement to support the program: “Supporters argue that the program will benefit these individuals by providing them with new skills that will reduce incarceration.”. The second treatment condition, titled “Society,” gave participants the following statement: “Supporters argue that the program will benefit society by decreasing the costs associated with reincarceration.” Johnston and Wozniak (2021) found that both argument frames significantly increased public support compared to the control group. Democrat participants and those who ranked low in racial resentment expressed more support than Independents and Republicans (Johnston & Wozniak, 2021). However, Johnston and Wozniak (2021) failed to explain how the independent variable was measured and recorded (i.e., Likert-scale, yes/no). The current study aims to understand how frameworks may impact public support for Pell Grants in prisons.

Current Study

The purpose of this study is to ultimately build upon Johnston and Wozniak’s work on public attitudes toward Pell Grants. A vignette-styled survey, posted on MTurk, was utilized to study people’s attitudes toward education services based on fictitious AIC “Alex’s” offense type and prison sentence length. In total, eight vignettes were created.

The main research question asks how the offense type affects the level of support for PSCE services and Pell Grants for AICs. The second research question explores how sentence length affects the level of support for PSCE services and Pell Grants for AICs. The primary independent variables will be offender type and sentence length, and the primary dependent variable will be the level of support for Pell Grants in prisons.

Based on the prior literature, I hypothesize that participants who received the violent offense vignette have the least support for PSCE services and Pell Grants in prisons. In contrast, participants who read about a newly released Alex will show the highest level of support because an offense type was not mentioned. Additionally, I believe that those who receive a vignette with a short sentence length will indicate higher levels of support for Alex than those who received a long sentence length vignette.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Data and Methods. A survey was created using Qualtrics, then posted onto Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) in February 2023 and April 2023. Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) is an online public crowd-sourcing website for individuals (“workers”) to complete tasks such as surveys posted by social scientists for monetary compensation. The survey was only available to English-speaking U.S. residents, with a 90% HIT rate. A HIT rate is determined by the percentage of tasks a worker completes. Interested participants were first required to read a consent form summarizing the survey’s purpose and clearly explaining that all responses would be anonymous, confidential, and de-identified. Those who selected “Next” would begin taking the study, thus consenting. Upon completion, participants were compensated \$0.40 for their time. Participants who failed the attention check question or completed the survey too quickly (<60 seconds) were not compensated and dropped from the analysis. Observations that had numerous missing responses were also dropped. In total, 822 respondents completed the survey and were used in the data analysis.

Background. After agreeing to participate in the survey, participants read a brief piece defining PSCE services and federal financial aid. This piece ensured participants had common foundational knowledge as they progressed through the survey.

Postsecondary degrees refer to any education that follows high school (secondary) completion. This may look like college degrees. However, federal financial aid helps students pay for college. Pell Grants are money that the government gives to students who need help paying for college. Pell Grants do not need to be repaid.

Vignettes. Next, participants read a short vignette about “Alex.” Participants were then randomly assigned different treatment conditions in the vignette for sentence length (“three years” vs. “fifteen years”) and a criminal offense (“nonviolent offense” vs. “drug offense” vs. “violent offense” vs. “released”). The nonviolent offense was embezzlement, while the violent offense was aggravated assault (short sentence) or attempted murder and unlawful use of a weapon (long sentence). The drug offense was possession of an illegal substance (short sentence) or drug conspiracy (long sentence). The “newly released” vignette did not disclose Alex’s criminal offense. In total, there were eight vignettes.

Alex is serving a [sentence length] for [criminal offense]. They hope to apply for Pell Grants to pursue a college degree while serving their time to gain secure employment upon their release.

The “newly released” vignette read as follows:

Alex has been released after serving a [sentence length] sentence in prison. They hope to apply for Pell Grants to pursue a college degree to gain secure employment.

Dependent Variables. After reading the vignette, participants responded to five statements using a matrix format, a six-point Likert Scale with no neutral option (1=strongly disagree to 6= strongly agree). The first statement read, “Prisons are effective at reducing crime in society.” The following statement read, “Alex should have access to education while serving their sentence.” If a participant was assigned to the “newly released” vignette, the statement was altered slightly to read, “Alex should have access to

a college education.” The following statement read, “Alex should have access to financial aid to pay for college education while incarcerated.” Again, if a participant was assigned to the “newly released” vignette, the statement said, “Alex should have access to apply for federal financial aid to pay for college education upon release.” Next, all participants ranked their level of agreeableness to the statement, “Alex’s criminal history should influence whether or not they should receive education service.” Lastly, all participants responded to the statement, “I believe that anyone in prison should have the opportunity to pursue a college degree.”

Global Questions. The first question asked respondents to rate their level of agreement (“strongly disagree,” “disagree,” “neither agree nor disagree,” “agree,” or “strongly agree”) with the statement, “I believe that it is important for people to earn a college degree.” This question was used to gauge one’s general attitude toward college education without considering the prison population. The second set of global questions pertained to postsecondary education services in prison. Participants used a matrix-format, five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly oppose) to 5 (strongly agree) to rate their level of support for four education services for incarcerated people. The education services they rated were GED/high school diploma, associate degree, Bachelor’s degree, and vocational training. The follow-up question had participants use a five-point Likert scale to rate their level of support for financial aid for each of the four education services listed previously.

Next, participants were asked if they believe a person’s crime should determine whether they should be eligible for postsecondary education. This question was designed

as a closed-ended yes-no formatted question. If the participants said yes, a textbox was provided to list the types of crimes they thought should be excluded.

The following question asked participants if they believed that those serving life sentences should have access to earn a college degree while they are imprisoned. For the “I believe that it is important for people to earn a college degree,” participants had to select their level of agreeableness to the statement ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Lastly, one open-ended question was asked.

A new bill in Congress is being discussed to allow incarcerated people to use federal Pell Grants to pay for higher education. How do you feel about Pell Grants (federal financial aid) being available for incarcerated people pursuing postsecondary degrees? Please respond in 1-3 sentences.

Demographic Variables. Quick demographic questions asked participants to report their race/ethnicity, gender identity, U.S. state of residence, and education level. These questions were formatted as “select the one that best applies to you.” The first question asked participants to select the gender identity that best applied to them. The options were female, male, transgender, non-binary/gender nonconforming, and something else. In total, 474 as male, 351 identified as female, and two identified as something else. Next, participants had to select the racial or ethnic identity that best applied to them: White, Black, Hispanic/Latino, Asian/Pacific Islander, Native American/Indigenous, two or more, or Other. The majority of the participants identified

as White (n=676). However, 11 as Black, eight as Hispanic/Latino, 29 as Asian/Pacific Islander, and six as two or more.

Next, participants then selected their highest level of education. They could choose from less than high school, high school diploma/GED, some college/no degree, associate or technical degree, Bachelor's degree, graduate or professional degree, or other. Bachelor's degrees accounted for 600 respondents, followed by graduate or professional degrees (n=115). "Associate's or technical degree" was selected 26 times, and 28 respondents selected "Some college, no degree." Next, 36 participants reported earning a high school degree. Only three respondents reported having less than a high school degree—nineteen selected "other" for education.

The final sample consisted of 822 participants, with 474 identifying as male and 351 identifying as female. Two participants selected "something else" for gender, so the gender variable was recoded into a dichotomous variable as 0= male (n=474) and 1= not male (353). In addition, the variable "race" was recorded to be dichotomized as "0=white" (n=676) and "1=not white" (n=154). Education level was also recoded into a dichotomous variable: "less than four years" (n= 112) and "four years or more" (n= 715). Those who selected "other" were combined in the less than four-year degree category.

Finally, three of the global questions, "important," "crime-type," and "life sentence," were recorded from a Likert-scale response to a categorical variable. Respondents who selected "strongly disagree" and "disagree" were recoded as "no." Those who selected "strongly agree" or "agree" were recoded as "yes." "Neither agree nor disagree" was kept as its original name, as it would be presumptuous to determine

whether a participant agreed or disagreed. Table 3-2. summarizes the univariate analysis for the global questions asked in the survey.

Analytical Plan. The survey aimed to deploy an experimental study on the effect of framing effects. Therefore, even though eight vignettes were created, a participant was randomly assigned to one vignette with a listed crime type and sentence length.

For the bivariate analysis, two methods were used. First, for crime type, a One-way ANOVA was conducted. The One-way ANOVA will be used to compare the means of the four crime types against the dependent variables. In addition, the One-way ANOVA will also calculate a p-value to see if the means between crime types are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). Next, a One-way ANOVA Bonferroni test can analyze the differences between crime types for each dependent variable. The Bonferroni test is a post hoc test that can produce narrow confidence intervals, thus reducing the likelihood of detecting the actual mean difference. This is especially important because multiple statistical tests were done for the data analysis. Without the Bonferroni test, the possibility of a Type I error (false positive) increases because multiple pairwise comparisons are being made.

For sentence length, an independent t-test was performed. The t-test was better suited for this analysis because two means were compared (short vs. long sentences).

Finally, a Two-way ANOVA was run. The Two-way ANOVA would study the two fundamental (independent) variables: crime type and sentence length and can see if crime type and sentence length combined to influence the level of support for the five dependent variables. The Two-way ANOVA could also see if crime type and sentence

length combined (“Interacted”) influenced the level of support. A regression was not needed because the Two-way ANOVA already controls for the other variables, so a Two-way ANOVA was used.

Table 3-1. Univariate Analysis of Demographics (n=822)

Variable	<i>n</i>	% or mean	SD	Min.	Max.
Gender					
Male	469	57.41%			
Not Male	353	42.59%			
Race					
White	663	81.25%			
Non-white	153	18.75%			
Education					
<4-year degree	112	13.71%			
4-year degree or more	705	86.29%			
Know about Pell Grants prior.					
Yes	478	55.44%			
No	340	41.56%			

Table 3-2. Univariate Analysis of Support for Pell Grants Global Questions (n=822)

Variable	<i>n</i>	% or mean	SD	Min.	Max.
College is important					
Yes	676	86.01%			
No	35	4.45%			
Neither agree nor disagree	75	9.54%			
PSCE Services					
GED/High School	809	4.61	1.09	1	6
Vocational Training	804	4.96	1.04	1	6
Associate Degree	807	4.79	1.07	1	6
Bachelor's Degree	813	5.02	1.07	1	6
Pell Grants Scales					
GED/High School	812	4.59	1.11	1	6
Vocational Training	805	4.88	1.05	1	6
Associate Degree	807	4.79	1.06	1	6
Bachelor's Degree	811	4.91	1.05	1	6
Crime Type Matters					
Yes	250	31.0%			
No	557	69.0%			
Life Sentence should have access.					
Yes	647	79.88%			
No	64	7.90%			
Neither agree nor disagree	99	12.22%			

Chapter 4: Results

Bivariate Analysis. The mean and standard deviation were calculated for prison by the five dependent variables: prison is effective at reducing crime in society (prison), support for college education in prison (education), support for financial aid in prison (aid), criminal history should determine college eligibility (history), and college education should be accessible for anyone in prison (anyone). Table 4-1 shows that the level of support ranged from 4.50 to 4.84, meaning that each dependent variable had generally positive responses regardless of the vignette that a respondent was randomly assigned. It must also be acknowledged that at least one participant selected “1=strongly disagree” and at least one selected “6= strongly agree” within each statement (Table 4-1, see “Min” and “Max.”). This indicates that the level of support in the analysis was not homogenous amongst all participants. Each dependent variable was further analyzed with statistical models to see if the differences were statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). The statistical models can further calculate where the difference occurred amongst the vignettes.

Table 4-1. Bivariate Analysis of Level of Support by Framework Questions (n=817)

<i>Variable</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min.</i>	<i>Max.</i>
Prison	817	4.50	1.12	1	6
Education	817	4.82	1.02	1	6
Aid	817	4.73	1.02	1	6
History	817	4.62	1.21	1	6
Anyone	817	4.84	1.03	1	6

Mean=average; SD= standard deviation

Prison. For the statement “Prison is effective at reducing crime in society,” the level of support averaged 4.50 with a standard deviation of 1.12. A One-way ANOVA

test was used to see if crime types produced any statistically significant mean differences for the level of support for the five dependent variables (prison, college education, federal aid, criminal history, and anyone). The results would be statistically significant if $p < 0.05$ between the crime type. After the initial survey was completed on the three in-custody vignettes, the released vignette was added in the second round. Except for the prison question, the mean average for the released vignette drew more robust support for PSCE services than the three crime types.

For “prison,” the One-way ANOVA revealed that the means between crime types was statistically significant, with a p-value of 0.038. This indicates that crime type significantly influenced the level of support for the prison statement because $p\text{-value } 0.05 > p\text{-value } 0.038$.

Thirdly, a post-hoc Bonferroni test was conducted. This model would demonstrate a statistically significant mean difference in the level of support for some of the dependent variables across crime types utilizing a post-hoc multiple comparisons Bonferroni test of mean differences. The post-hoc test shows where precisely the mean differences exist between crime types. The p-values could further be examined to see the mean differences between each crime type. As provided in Table 4-2, there appears to be a statistically significant mean difference between the drug vignette and the released vignette for “prison” ($p < 0.10$) and the violent drug vignette and the released vignette ($p < 0.10$). However, these are not statistically significant at the $p < 0.05$ level.

To see if the sentence length variable affected the level of support for the “prison” statement, a t-test was conducted. Table 4-2 shows that the mean average for the short

sentence length was 4.49 and the mean average for the long sentence length was 4.50. With a p-value of 0.860, the sentence length variable did not impact how supportive respondents were to “prison.”

Finally, a two-way ANOVA was run. A Two-way ANOVA was used to test the simultaneous impact of the two independent variables (crime type and sentence length) on each dependent variable. A Two-way ANOVA controls the impact of each independent variable in the model, accounting for any moderating effect each variable has on the other. The model can also assess if crime type and sentence length co-impact (e.g., are interacting) the level of support for each framework question. For prison, the model had a p-value of 0.175, indicating that the level of support for “Prison is effective at reducing crime in society” is not statistically significant. Therefore, it would be inconclusive to say that crime type and sentence length impacted the level of support amongst the respondents.

Table 4-2. “Prison is effective at reducing crime in society.”

Oneway ANOVA by Crime Type

	<u>Nonviolent</u> (n=202)		<u>Drug (=223)</u>		<u>Violent</u> (n=221)		<u>Released (n=</u> <u>183)</u>		<i>p-value</i>
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Prison	4.45	1.10	4.60	1.06	4.60	1.01	4.32	1.28	0.038**

Mean=average; SD= standard deviation

*=p<0.10; **=p<0.05; ***=p<0.01

*Post- Hoc Bonferroni Test of Mean Differences
by Crime Type*

	Nonviolent	Drug	Violent
Violent	1.00		
Drug	1.00	1.00	
Released	1.00	0.092*	0.092*

*=p<0.10; **=p<0.05; ***=p<0.01

T-test for Sentence Length.

	<u>Short (n=390)</u>		<u>Long (n=427)</u>		<i>t-test</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Prison	4.49	1.07	4.50	1.16	-0.18	0.860

Mean=average; SD= standard deviation

*=p<0.10; **=p<0.05; ***=p<0.01 (two-tailed)

Two-way ANOVA (prison by crime and sentence)

Source	<i>Means Squared</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p-value</i>
Full Model	1.84	1.48	0.175
Crime	3.60	2.89	0.034**
Sentence	0.02	0.02	0.896
Interaction	0.80	0.64	0.588

*=p<0.10; **=p<0.05; ***=p<0.01

Education. For “Alex should have access to a college education,” the mean level of support was 4.82, and the standard deviation was 1.02. The One-way ANOVA showed that crime type was statistically significant (p<0.05), indicating that crime type did appear to affect the level of support. With the One-way Bonferroni, the mean difference between

crime types was statistically significant for the nonviolent vignette and the released vignette ($p < 0.05$) and the violent vignette and the released vignette ($p < 0.10$). However, there did not appear to be a statistically significant mean difference between the drug vignette against the other three.

Sentence length was then assessed with a t-test. As provided in the table below (Table 4-3), the level of support is statistically significant ($p > 0.05$) for “education.” The level of support when participants read the short sentence vignette was 4.91. In contrast, participants who received the long sentence vignette yielded a mean level of support of 4.73.

The Two-way ANOVA showed that the dependent variable, education, was statistically significant with a $p\text{-value} = 0.001$. Crime type had a $p\text{-value} < 0.01$. The participants who read the released vignette showed significantly more support for education than the other crime types. This conclusion could be made regarding the post-hoc Bonferroni (Table 4-3). Additionally, for the education variable, sentence length was also statistically significant ($p < 0.01$), indicating that participants who received the short sentence vignette were more supportive of college education in prisons than those who received a vignette with a long sentence. However, the interaction between crime type and sentence length was not statistically significant ($p = 0.251 > p = 0.05$). Although each independent variable was significant by itself, the two independent variables combined did not affect the support level ($p > 0.05$).

Table 4-3. “Alex should have access to a college education.”

Oneway ANOVA by Crime Type

	<u>Nonviolent</u> (n=202)		<u>Drug (=223)</u>		<u>Violent</u> (n=221)		<u>Released</u> (n= 183)		<i>p-value</i>
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Education	4.70	1.05	4.78	1.03	4.76	1.01	4.99	0.92	0.032**

Mean=average; SD= standard deviation

*=p<0.10; **=p<0.05; ***=p<0.01

Differences in the Level of Support for Education by Crime Type

	Nonviolent	Drug	Violent
Violent	1.00		
Drug	1.00	1.00	
Released	0.013**	0.166	0.072*

*=p<0.10; **=p<0.05; ***=p<0.01

T-test for Sentence Length.

	<u>Short (n=390)</u>		<u>Long (n=427)</u>		<i>t-test</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Education	4.73	0.99	4.73	1.07	2.60	0.009*

*p<0.05; **p<0.01 (two-tailed test)

Mean= Average, SD= standard deviation

Two-way ANOVA (education by crime and sentence)

Source	<i>Means Squared</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p-value</i>
Full Model	3.54	3.50	0.001***
Crime	4.34	4.28	0.005***
Sentence	6.85	6.77	0.001***
Interaction	1.39	1.37	0.251

*=p<0.10; **=p<0.05; ***=p<0.01

Federal Aid (Aid). The average level of support for the statement “Alex should have access to federal financial aid to pay for college education while incarcerated” was 4.73. The standard deviation for “aid” was 1.02. The One-way ANOVA showed that crime type did influence the level of support (p<0.01). In addition, the post-hoc Bonferroni test displayed some statistically significant differences in the level of support

for financial aid by crime type. For instance, the difference between the drug vignette and the released vignette was statistically significant at $p < 0.01$. There was also a statistically significant mean difference for federal financial aid between the violent and released vignettes ($p < 0.05$).

As Table 4-4 demonstrates, both short and long-sentence vignettes had identical means for the level of support (mean=4.73). Although the standard deviation for each differed slightly, sentence length was not statistically significant, with a p-value greater than $p > 0.05$.

The Two-ANOVA model was significant for federal aid at $p > 0.05$ with a p-value of 0.013. Crime type was statistically significant, but not sentence length. Similar to the education variable, only the released variable yielded significantly more support for federal financial aid than the other crime types ($p > 0.001$). The interaction between crime type and sentence length was not statistically significant ($p = 0.437$).

Table 4-4. “Alex should have access to federal financial aid to pay for a college education while incarcerated.”

One-way ANOVA by Crime Type

	<u>Nonviolent</u> (n=202)		<u>Drug (=223)</u>		<u>Violent</u> (n=221)		<u>Released (n=183)</u>		<i>p-value</i>
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Aid	4.73	1.05	4.59	1.11	4.59	1.11	4.99	0.87	0.007***

Mean=average; SD= standard deviation

*=p<0.10; **=p<0.05; ***=p<0.01

Differences in the level of support for Aid by Crime Type

	Nonviolent	Drug	Violent
Violent	0.903		
Drug	1.00	1.00	
Released	0.205	0.002***	0.034**

*=p<0.10; **=p<0.05; ***=p<0.01

T-test for Sentence Length

	<u>Short (n=390)</u>		<u>Long (n=427)</u>		<i>t-test</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Aid	4.73	0.99	4.73	1.04	0.07	0.944

*p<0.05; **p<0.01 (two-tailed test)

Mean= Average, SD= standard deviation

Two-way ANOVA (aid by crime and sentence)

Source	<i>Means Squared</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p-value</i>
Full Model	2.60	2.55	0.013**
Crime	5.87	5.76	0.001***
Sentence	0.04	0.04	0.845
Interaction	0.19	0.19	0.903

*=p<0.10; **=p<0.05; ***=p<0.01

History. The statement “Alex’s criminal history should influence whether or not they should receive education service” had a mean of 4.62 and a standard deviation of 1.21. Crime type was statistically significant at the p<0.10 level (p=0.095). However,

once the post-hoc Bonferroni test was conducted, there were no statistically significant mean differences for “history” ($p > 0.05$).

However, sentence length was statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). When looking at the means, participants who received the short-sentence vignette had an average of 4.72 for support compared to the long-sentence vignette, with an average of 4.52 (see Table 4-5).

With the Two-way ANOVA, “history” appeared statistically significant with a p -value < 0.05 . Crime type was statistically significant at the $p < 0.10$ level but not at the $p < 0.05$. However, sentence length was statistically significant at $p < 0.05$ with a p -value of 0.017. The model shows that participants who received the short sentence vignette demonstrated more support that one’s criminal history should determine their education eligibility than those who received the long sentence vignette.

Table 4-5. “Alex’s criminal history should influence whether or not they should receive education service.”

One-way ANOVA by Crime Type

	<u>Nonviolent</u> (n=202)		<u>Drug (=223)</u>		<u>Violent</u> (n=221)		<u>Released (n=183)</u>		<i>p-value</i>
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	
History	4.54	1.24	4.53	1.26	4.53	1.26	4.81	1.20	0.095*

Mean=average; SD= standard deviation

*=p<0.10; **=p<0.05; ***=p<0.01

Differences in the Level of Support for Criminal History by Crime Type

	Nonviolent	Drug	Violent
Violent	1.00		
Drug	1.00	1.00	
Released	1.00	0.256	1.00

*=p<0.10; **=p<0.05; ***=p<0.01

T-test for Sentence Length

	<u>Short (n=390)</u>		<u>Long (n=427)</u>		<i>t-test</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>		
History	4.72	1.13	4.52	1.21	2.34	0.0193*

*p<0.05; **p<0.01 (two-tailed test)

Mean= Average, SD= standard deviation

Two-way ANOVA (history by crime and sentence)

Source	<i>Means Squared</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p-value</i>
Full Model	3.09	2.12	0.04**
Crime	3.26	2.24	0.082*
Sentence	8.33	5.72	0.017**
Interaction	1.32	0.91	0.437

*=p<0.10; **=p<0.05; ***=p<0.01

Anyone. Finally, the four statistical models were run for “I believe that anyone in prison should have the opportunity to pursue a college degree.” The mean and standard deviation for “anyone” was 4.84 and 1.03. The model was significant when an ANOVA was run (p<0.05). The post-hoc Bonferroni results showed that the “anyone” statement

had statistically significant mean differences between the drug offense and the released vignette ($p < 0.05$), as well as the violent offense and the released vignette ($p < 0.05$). Like three of the other post-hoc tests (prison, education, and aid), the released vignette received significantly more support than the three in-custody vignettes. However, sentence length was not statistically significant ($p = 0.222 > p = 0.05$).

Table 4-6. “I believe that anyone in prison should have the opportunity to pursue a college degree.”

One-way ANOVA by Crime Type

	<u>Nonviolent</u> (n=202)		<u>Drug (=223)</u>		<u>Violent</u> (n=221)		<u>Released (n=</u> 183)		<i>p-value</i>
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Anyone	4.83	1.02	4.75	1.11	4.75	1.04	5.04	0.92	0.020**

Mean=average; SD= standard deviation

*= $p < 0.10$; **= $p < 0.05$; ***= $p < 0.01$

Differences in the Level of Support for Anyone by Crime Type

	Nonviolent	Drug	Violent
Violent	1.00		
Drug	1.00	1.00	
Released	0.194	0.028**	0.021**

*= $p < 0.10$; **= $p < 0.05$; ***= $p < 0.01$

T-test for Sentence Length

	<u>Short (n=390)</u>		<u>Long (n=427)</u>		<i>t-test</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Anyone	4.88	0.96	4.80	1.10	1.22	0.222

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed test)

Mean= Average, SD= standard deviation

Two-way ANOVA (anyone by crime and sentence)

Source	<i>Means Squared</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p-value</i>
Full Model	2.32	2.20	0.03**
Crime	3.52	3.34	0.019**
Sentence	1.43	1.36	0.244
Interaction	1.39	1.32	0.267

*= $p < 0.10$; **= $p < 0.05$; ***= $p < 0.01$

As shown in Table 4-6, the Two-way ANOVA model was statistically significant for “anyone” (p -value=0.03). Specifically, crime type was statistically significant, with a p -value= 0.019. Participants who received the released vignette displayed more support for the statement “anyone in prison should have the opportunity to pursue a college degree” than the other offense vignette. Sentence length had a p -value of 0.244, thus not statistically significant. There did not appear to be an interaction between crime type and sentence length ($p > 0.05$). It must be noted that none of the five “Interaction” models were statistically significant for the dependent variables.

Open-ended Question

Crime type. In response to the global question regarding crime type, thirty-one percent of the sample believed that the crime types a person commits should determine one’s eligibility to earn a college degree. Of the 121 responses in the textbox, 61 respondents (50.4%) stated that people who commit violent crimes should be excluded from earning a college degree. Specifically, homicide was the most frequent crime mentioned, listed forty-five times. Sex crimes appeared 28 times, making it the second most frequently recorded crime that should exclude a person from college eligibility. Theft-related was the most frequent nonviolent crime in the analysis, appearing 21 times. Another eight participants listed a different nonviolent crime. Only three participants wrote that a drug offense should make someone ineligible for a college education. In contrast, twenty-eight participants listed crimes they believed should exclude someone from college eligibility. The lists varied in length, but a violent crime was alluded to (“felonies”), or a violent crime was mentioned at least once in each response. These

findings align with the prior literature that violent offenses receive less public support than nonviolent crime types. However, responses added other suggestions, such as examining state policy or eligibility should be determined by the individual. These comments did not specifically list a crime type but offered valuable recommendations to consider in the analysis. Thus, they were kept.

Pell Grants. For the Pell Grant prompt, 343 responses were analyzed. Overall, 84.0% (n= 289) of the participants had a positive outlook for AICs receiving Pell Grants. The most frequent reason participants (n=99) supported the bill was that they believed prison Pell Grants would allow AICs to rehabilitate and improve their lives upon release. An additional fifteen participants responded that society would improve if AICs had the opportunity to pursue a college education. These participants looked at education's bigger impact on a community beyond the rehabilitative opportunities offered in prison. Lastly, thirty-seven participants believed anyone should have access to federal aid regardless of incarceration status.

Only 8.4% (n=29) felt pessimistic about Pell Grants for AICs. People who opposed Pell Grants felt that AICs were undeserving and were hesitant for taxpayers to financially support people who deserved to be punished. However, the remaining 25 participants, or 7.6%, expressed conditional support based primarily on the crime or sentence length of the AICs. Opinions were mainly based on who is deserving of Pell Grants.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The results showed how frameworks influenced the level of support for PCSE services. Although the support for each crime-type vignette was moderately positive, the mean differences between the three were minimal. Amongst the three in-custody vignettes, the level of support ranged from 4.45 to 4.83, between “slightly agree” and “agree” on the six-point Likert scale. Although the sample did have a positive outlook toward PSCE services, none of the three crime types received overwhelming support. If they had, the analysis would have seen more 5s and 6s. Therefore, I must reject my hypothesis that the nonviolent vignette would receive the most support and the violent vignette would receive the least support. The lack of variation between crime types also disputes prior literature in which nonviolent AICs received statistically significantly more support for reforms than violent AICs.

Respondents only demonstrated significantly more support once the released vignette was added to the study. In addition, the Two-way ANOVA results further upheld that the released vignette received the most support compared to the three in-custody vignettes. Particularly, there was a statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) increased level of support for “education,” “aid,” and “anyone” from respondents who received the released vignette compared to the other vignettes. These findings support my second hypothesis that the respondents who read the released vignette would show the highest level of support out of the four crime-type vignettes.

Although Johnston and Wozniak (2021) found ambivalent support among their three frameworks, their research had a couple of shortcomings. For instance, they did not

disclose their sample size, so readers must go to the original source (Cooperative Congressional Election Study) to learn that 64,600 people were in the dataset. Secondly, Johnston and Wozniak (2021) do not provide an analytical explanation. Researchers must clearly explain their statistical analysis to reference their results and legitimize their findings. This thesis sought to address the gap in Johnston and Wozniak's study with a strong justification of the statistical models to study framework effects towards prison Pell Grants.

Regarding sentence length frame, the sentence length only impacted two of the dependent variables ("education" and "history"). Therefore, it would be erroneous to conclude that a shorter sentence length would have a higher level of support for the five dependent variables. I must then reject my hypothesis that participants who received the short sentence length would indicate higher levels of support than those who received the long sentence vignette.

The responses to the open-ended questions also inform research why a person may or may not support prison Pell Grants. Of the 343 participants who responded to the question, 289 (84.0%) voiced support for the bill. Participants frequently expressed support for rehabilitation, improving one's life, and improving the community—participants who voiced opposition or exhibited conditional approval represented 16% of the responses. Resistance was primarily based mainly on reserving Pell Grants for law-abiding citizens or worrying about the financial strain prison Pell Grants would have on society. These reasons nodded to Joshua Page's legislative penal drama that feeds into an "us-vs.-them" mentality. Though most respondents felt positive, the hesitation from the

few who oppose prison Pell Grants was valuable to see why people may hold onto a more punitive outlook toward incarceration.

Limitations. There are a few limitations in the thesis. Eighty-six percent of the sample reported having a Bachelor's degree (86%). A third category, "Graduate or professional degree," could have been created to see if the education variable could be more balanced. Even with this alternative recommendation, the number of participants with a Bachelor's degree was still greater than half the sample. Another limitation was that the sample was primarily white (81.25%). Future research should see if their sample has a larger representation of people of color to see if racial identity impacts the level of support for PSCE services in prison. With the majority of the respondents being white and college-educated, the demographic variables did not affect the level of support amongst the dependent variables. Lastly, less than half the sample (41.4%) responded to the open-ended question that could be used in the analysis. A higher response rate could have enriched the data or given insight into different perspectives and arguments this thesis may not have considered otherwise.

Policy Implications. Truthfully, the Second Chance Pell Pilot Program was designed to serve AICs, not those released. The lack of support for incarcerated "Alex" may be disheartening. Nonetheless, I would argue that this further emphasizes the interest in rehabilitative services for people transitioning back into society. The Second Chance Pell Experiment is only eight years old, so, in time, policymakers need to consider how to make college accessible for more people in society.

As of now, research has demonstrated that college education in prisons has positively impacted the lives of AICs. It is inspiring to see that political action has continued the efforts from the Second Chance Pell Experiment. In April 2022, the U.S. Department of Education announced that an additional 73 colleges and universities would partner with prisons to provide college programs in prison. This translates to over 200 programs. Additionally, for the 2023-2024 Award Year, incarcerated students in federal and state prisons can apply for Pell Grants, thanks to the FAFSA Simplification Act (U.S. Department of Education; Martinez-Hill, 2021). The upcoming expansions prove that PSCE services are gaining momentum in prisons, and research should study the impacts these expansions will have on prisons and society.

Chapter 6: Conclusion.

Strong policy interventions must be implemented. As Pell Grants become accessible for AICs for the 2023-2024 academic year, there are still barriers for AICs to earn a college degree. For example, more than 70% of AICs in Pennsylvania would be ineligible for Pell Grants based on federal eligibility requirements (Tahamont et al., 2022, p.410). AICs should be informed about registering for the “Selective Service” option to ensure they are in good standing for federal aid. At the state level, policy should be re-evaluated to remove restrictions on access to Pell programming, such as removing the restriction on time to release. These two feasible solutions can empower more AICs to pursue educational opportunities.

Although the results demonstrate a moderately optimistic outlook toward prison Pell Grants, a policy can only thrive with strong pervasiveness and public support. As the past three decades have demonstrated, criminal justice policy is fickle. PSCE services are a transformative opportunity to improve one’s life, but the public must care for the policy to withstand over time. To do so, the interests of the public must be clearly understood. Even though prison Pell Grants have received bipartisan support in the political sphere, Wozniak (2016) further argues that scholars should expand experimental methods to learn how framing experiments can inform which arguments are more palatable for the public as Drakulich and Kirk put *framing matters*. Unfortunately, there is a lack of research surrounding criminal justice policy preferences from public opinion (Dunbar, 2022).

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