

## **Explaining Cross-National Variation in Poverty Rates: Do Incarceration Rates Play a Role?**

Comparative scholars have documented wide cross-country variation in poverty over time across advanced democracies. The literature emphasizing the prominent role of institutions has focused on institutions, such as the strength of the left and the generosity of the welfare state, that provide support to the disadvantaged. This research has ignored the role of the criminal justice system, a prominent institution that deals with the disadvantaged punitively (rather than generously), despite countries differing substantially in the degree to which they rely on incarceration and the ambiguous theoretical relationship between incarceration and poverty on the aggregate level. Using cross-national data from 1967-2010 from 15 advanced democracies and models with country and decade fixed effects, I find that there is no significant average association between a country's incarceration and poverty rates. However, in countries with weak welfare states and low rates of female employment, increases in incarceration are associated with higher poverty rates.