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From Earnings to Iron Bars: Investigating the Impact of Living Wages on Jail and Incarceration Rates

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Author

Cairns, Hailey

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From Earnings to Iron Bars: Investigating the Impact of Living Wages on Jail and

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Professor Butters and Paige Pellaton

California is often celebrated for its progressive values, but a sobering truth remains hidden in the shadows: it is a prominent center of mass incarceration in the United States (Widra & Herring, 2021). On any given day, nearly 160,600 individuals find themselves confined within the walls of jails and prisons in California, grappling with the effects of California's deeply entrenched criminal legal system¹ (McCann, 2023). In 2011, the United States Supreme Court ordered California to reduce the unconstitutional overcrowding of its prisons, leading to a decrease in prison populations in 52 of California's 58 counties and a 16 percent reduction in jail populations. However, county spending on detention has increased by 20 percent in the same period (McCann, 2023), which raises questions about the efficacy and equity of California's approach to incarceration.

Amidst this complex landscape, this research explores the potential relationship between living wages and incarceration rates in California. The research question at the core of this research paper is: Is there a link between living wages and jail and prison incarceration rates in California? Through correlation analysis, I will delve into the relationship between living wages and jail and prison incarceration rates, examining whether increased access to adequate living wages can contribute to reducing economic disparities and structural inequalities, thereby leading to a potential decline in jail and prison incarceration. As a secondary analysis, I also test the confounding influence of race on living wages and incarceration rates in 2021.

By analyzing data from all 58 counties in 2021 in California, this study attempts to provide insights that can inform evidence-based policies, promote a more equitable criminal

¹ I use the term "criminal legal" system instead of "criminal justice" system to reflect historical and present reality more accurately. This terminology recognizes that the system has not consistently delivered justice and has, at times, perpetuated systemic injustices rooted in racism, inequality, and other biases. This choice in language is grounded in the historical context where, at the nation's inception in 1776, Black individuals were not regarded as fully human under the law (Bryant, 2021). This has shaped today's criminal legal system and continues to disproportionately affect Black and other people of color, as well as those living in poverty.

legal system, and contribute to the ongoing discourse on criminal legal system reform and social welfare policies.

Significance

Research exploring the potential link between living wages and the rates of jail and prison incarceration in California holds immense significance for the state's pursuit of justice within its criminal legal system and the well-being of its residents. High incarceration rates have far-reaching implications for the economic prosperity and political dynamics of California (Travis et al., 2014). Therefore, it has become crucial to delve into the underlying structural causes behind these high incarceration rates. Consequently, my research aims to investigate the impact of living wages on incarceration rates, as economic inequity may represent a systemic element contributing to incarceration patterns.

The impact of incarceration extends beyond the individuals directly affected, reverberating through families and communities. The strain of separation from loved ones disrupts social bonds and support systems, leading to adverse outcomes for children and dependents of incarcerated individuals (Weaver & Leeman, 2010). Furthermore, the consequences of incarceration extend beyond the duration of confinement, as formerly incarcerated individuals often encounter significant barriers to reintegration into society upon release, further decreasing their ability to obtain an adequate living wage (Lewis, 2021). Limited access to stable employment, housing, and social support contributes to a cycle of recidivism and poverty, where many individuals re-enter the criminal legal system after release (Travis, 2014; Lewis, 2021; Hipp et al., 2010).

Moreover, the economic ramifications of high incarceration rates are significant, exerting considerable financial strain on California's state budget. Gavin Newsom's budget of \$12.7

billion for state corrections alone in 2019–20 (Graves, 2021) demonstrates the enormous expenditure and diversion of funds from other key public services that are essential for the welfare and advancement of California residents. This diversion of resources forces policymakers to make a challenging trade-off decision: either fund the criminal legal system due to the belief that that will deter crime or fund social services that can address the root cause of crime, such as providing adequate living wages, providing support to vulnerable communities, and promoting crime prevention (DeFina & Hannon, 2013).

For these reasons, understanding the relationship between living wages and incarceration rates is essential to comprehending and mitigating these far-reaching effects. Recognizing this, my research on this potential relationship will allow policymakers and stakeholders to develop targeted interventions to address economic disparities and create a more equitable and supportive environment for Californians.

Background

While previous research has consistently demonstrated a link between poverty levels and heightened incarceration rates (DeFina & Hannon, 2013), the specific relationship between living wages and incarceration remains relatively underexplored.

A living wage signifies the minimum per-hour financial threshold necessary for individuals or families to maintain a satisfactory standard of living, encompassing essentials such as housing, food, local factors, transportation, healthcare, and other critical expenses (MIT Living Wage Calculator, 2021). Yet, existing studies have mostly employed poverty rate measures to gauge economic inequity (DeFina & Hannon, 2013; Gottlieb, 2017; Petach & Pena, 2020; Travis et al., 2014). The poverty rate of a community signifies the proportion of its population living below the federal poverty threshold established by the government (DeFina &

Hannon, 2013; Petach & Pena, 2020). Hence, since the poverty rate is a broader indicator of economic hardship, it might not necessarily reflect whether individuals earn sufficient income to meet their fundamental needs within a specific geographic area. Consequently, to start addressing this research gap, I will investigate whether living wages impact incarceration rates.

Prior research has offered evidence of a connection between neighborhoods facing elevated poverty rates and a subsequent rise in crime rates, leading to increased arrests and incarceration rates (DeFina & Hannon, 2013). Harold Stolper's perspective adds depth to this understanding by highlighting that impoverished communities have historically been communities of color, a consequence of de facto and de jure segregation (Stolper, 2019), emphasizing that this historical backdrop has given rise to unique challenges, leading to disparities in accessing quality education, healthcare, stable employment, and opportunities, which profoundly impacts economic stability. Due to the intersectionality of race and poverty, the impact the criminal legal system has on marginalized populations is amplified, thus resulting in disproportionately higher rates of incarceration (Stolper, 2019; Petach & Pena, 2020). While these findings highlight the broader dynamics at play, there is a need for further inquiry to ascertain whether living wages can influence these incarceration patterns.

Recognizing the complexity of the issue, I have incorporated a parallel analysis of race into my research design. This decision is rooted in the recognition that a single-dimensional approach to understanding the relationship between living wages and incarceration rates may fall short of capturing the nuanced realities of incarceration. Ignoring the racial dimension could not only limit understanding but also potentially mask a crucial aspect of the overarching problem. To examine this, I will control for race and assess whether living wages have the same

magnitude of influence on incarceration rates in counties with majority Black and Latinx populations as in predominantly white counties.

Within this framework, the evolving landscape of policies and legislative actions in California plays a pivotal role in shaping the relationship between living wages and incarceration rates. The state has witnessed the proposal and implementation of various policies that impact the relationship between living wages and incarceration rates. A notable example is the "Living Wage Act," introduced in the California state legislature in 2022, which aimed to establish a fair minimum wage to address economic disparities that can contribute to criminal involvement (Kuang, 2022). Although the bill ultimately failed, its proposal signifies the growing momentum in discussions about the role of living wages in shaping criminal legal system outcomes, crime prevention, and community well-being.

Previous researchers have also often overlooked the interconnectedness of jails and prisons, limiting their comprehensive understanding of factors driving high incarceration rates. The relationship between living wages and incarceration rates cannot be understood completely by focusing on just one context. My research seeks to fill this gap by exploring both jails and prisons.

Jails typically operate at the local level and house individuals serving shorter sentences for misdemeanor or low-level felony convictions (First Step Alliance, 2021). However, most individuals in jail are un-sentenced and awaiting resolution of their cases (Tafoya, 2015). A reason for this is that many of these individuals find themselves trapped due to financial constraints², as they cannot afford to pay bail, fines, or fees (Hon. Back et al., 2017).

²In California, in 2021, around 44,241 individuals, constituting three-quarters of all inmates, were held in county jails without a conviction or sentencing for a crime (Lewis, 2021).

Prisons are institutions where individuals convicted of their crimes serve sentences of imprisonment. These individuals have undergone the legal process that led to their conviction and sentencing (First Step Alliance, 2021).

By analyzing data from both jail and prison populations, I will have gained a more accurate understanding of how economic disparities impact individuals at different stages of the criminal legal process, allowing for a comprehensive approach to addressing the complexities of incarceration.

Theory and Argument

As the discourse surrounding California's criminal legal system evolves, an intriguing relationship between living wages and incarceration rates calls for examination. My inquiry embarks on a dual path: Does a relationship exist between living wages and jail and prison incarceration rates? And in tandem, how does race thread its way into this equation, potentially unveiling layers of disparity and social inequity?

For my central question about the impact living wages has on incarceration rates in California, my hypothesis posits that counties in California with higher living wages will demonstrate lower jail and prison incarceration rates compared to counties with lower living wages. The causal mechanism of this theorized relationship lies in the empowering effect higher living wages could have on vulnerable populations, providing them with financial stability and improved access to essential resources (Shaak & Chilton, 2021). As economic hardships and barriers are alleviated through higher living wages, individuals in these communities may be less prone to resort to criminal activities, potentially leading to lower incarceration rates.³

³ It is crucial to emphasize that this research aims to explore the relationship between living wages and prison and jail incarceration rates without attributing blame to impoverished communities for higher incarceration rates. Instead, my research acknowledges the influence of systemic factors and predatory practices in shaping incarceration patterns.

The independent variable of this research is living wages, measured using the 2021 MIT Living Wage Calculator to estimate the income required to meet basic needs in each county. The dependent variable encompasses prison and jail incarceration rates, derived from 2021 data provided by the Board of State and Community Corrections Jail Profile Survey (BSCC) for jail incarceration rates and the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) for prison incarceration rates. To ensure meaningful comparisons and account for population differences, incarceration rates were standardized by calculating them per 100,000 residents in each county.

In controlling for the role of race in shaping the relationship between living wages and incarceration rates, my study has two independent variables: 2020 demographic Census data⁴ for the racial composition of each county and the 2021 living wage required for a family of two working adults and one child; thus, allowing me to account for the racial composition of counties. The dependent variable focuses on the incarceration rates within the top 20 counties predominantly composed of Black and Latinx individuals, compared with the top 20 counties primarily characterized by a white population.

I hypothesize that counties with larger proportions of Black and Latinx individuals will exhibit higher incarceration rates in comparison to counties predominantly composed of a white population. Furthermore, I anticipate that the influence of living wages on reducing incarceration rates will be more pronounced in counties primarily composed of white individuals.

The foundation of my hypothesis concerning the intersectionality of race and incarceration rates and the impact living wages can have in mitigating incarceration recognizes the intricate relationship between socioeconomic disparities, systemic biases within the criminal

⁴ Census Data is only collected every ten years, so even though this research is 2021-specific, the most comprehensive source I could obtain for race was 2020 census data.

legal system, and the lived experiences of marginalized communities. The 2023 California Reparations Report resonates profoundly with this discourse. One reason highlighted by the report for the varying impact of many policies in communities of color is the extensive influence of law enforcement's discretionary authority (California Department of Justice, 2023; Alexander, 2012). Given the limitations of police resources, they often rely on discretionary assumptions to determine where criminal activity is most likely to occur.

Unfortunately, the discretion inherent in this process can inadvertently perpetuate racial biases within the criminal legal system, thus fostering a cultural regime of dehumanization where racial biases are propagated and ingrained (California Department of Justice, 2023; Alexander, 2012). Recognizing this, one could argue that even if two counties, one with a majority of white residents and the other with a majority of Black residents, have similar levels of poverty, the former may experience lower incarceration rates due to differences in law enforcement practices⁵. Thus, due to the criminalization of Black and Brown people by law enforcement and other systemic flaws, including generational poverty, structural discrimination, lack of access to opportunities, and the enduring legacy of mass incarceration (California Department of Justice, 2023; Stolper, 2019), an increase in living wages might not lead to as substantial a decrease in incarceration rates for predominantly Black and Latinx communities.

Methodology and Research Design

The methodology employed in this research is a quantitative approach to investigate the potential relationship between living wages and incarceration rates in California for the year 2021. This choice is due to the exclusive availability of 2021 MIT Living Wage Calculator data.

⁵ Due to time constraints, obtaining specific data on law enforcement practices and policies for each county would have been challenging, as it requires a Freedom of Information Act proposal, projected to take approximately 11 weeks. If I had more time, I would examine this data because I believe it is a large part of the puzzle and recognize that I spend considerable time in this paper referencing law enforcement.

The primary independent variable in this study is the living wage required in each California county to meet the basic needs of a family. Considering that the average family size in California is 2.92 individuals (US Census Bureau, 2020) and recent trends suggest that both parents are usually employed (Fry, 2023), I utilized the 2021 MIT Living Wage Calculator for a household consisting of two working adults with one child. The dependent variable involves prison and jail incarceration rates. These rates are calculated by dividing the incarcerated population in each county's prisons and jails by the county's total population and multiplying the result by 100,000. This approach ensures comparability among counties with varying population sizes. My data to calculate prison incarceration rates was gathered from the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR), while jail incarceration rate data was sourced from the Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC).

To explore the role race has on the relationship between living wages and incarceration rates, I gathered data from the 2020 US Census to identify the top 20 counties with substantial Latinx and Black populations. I then compared this data with the top 20 counties primarily populated by white individuals. This methodology allowed me to treat the living wage as an independent variable while controlling for race. Through the comparison of counties with distinct racial demographics, my analysis aimed to reveal potential disparities in the effects of living wages on incarceration rates. In other words, my examination illuminated the intersection between economic factors and race, offering insights into how these dynamics may influence the criminal legal system.

To supplement my findings for my racial parallel analysis, I utilized 2020 US Census data to discern the proportions of Black, Latinx, White, and Asian individuals residing in California's most populous counties. I then compared these proportions with the jail populations

in each county, as found from BSCC data. This involved examining the populous counties with predominantly white populations: Orange, San Diego, and Riverside, alongside those characterized by significant Black and Latinx communities: Sacramento, Alameda, and Los Angeles. The selection of these six counties was guided by strategic considerations, encompassing factors like their comparable sizes, relatively similar socioeconomic statuses, and similar urban-rural compositions. This county selection facilitates control over potential confounding factors, enabling me to focus on exploring the role of race in influencing jail incarceration.

Analysis and Results

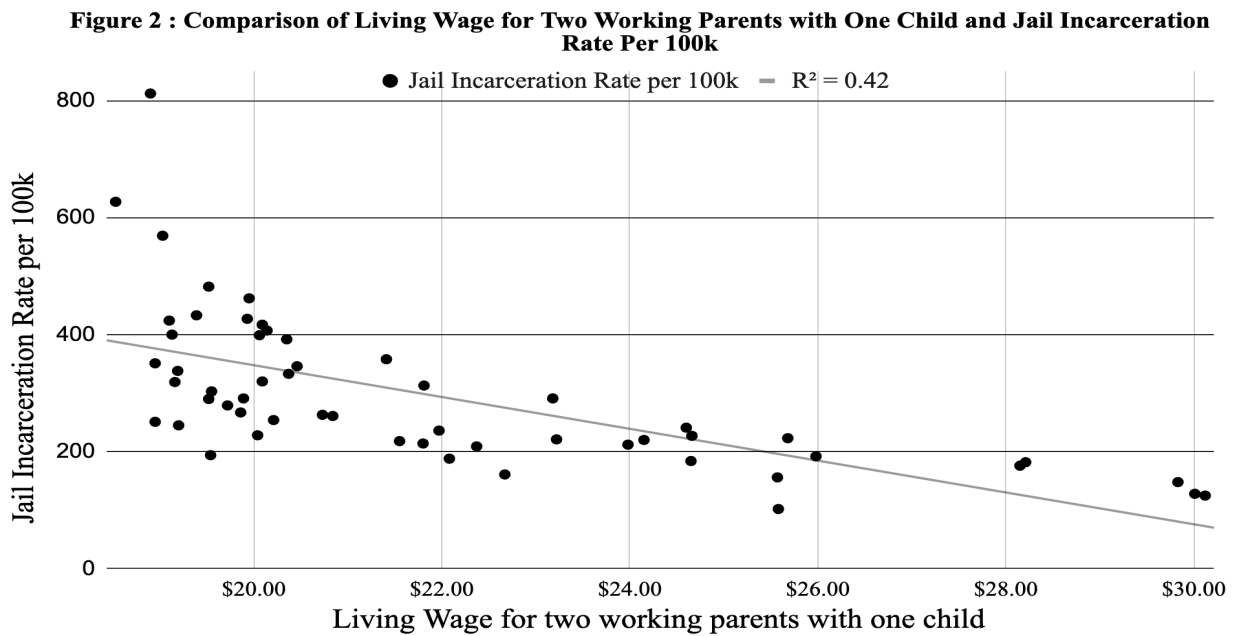
After conducting a quantitative analysis, my data revealed substantial variations in living wages across California's counties, ranging from \$18.53 per hour in Modoc County to \$30.12 per hour in Marin County (Figure 1). However, despite this wage diversity, my findings support my hypothesis positing a negative correlation between living wages and prison and jail incarceration rates in California.

Figure 1 : Mapping California's 2021 Living Wage and Incarceration Rates: Exploring County Disparities



Regarding jail incarceration rates, the correlation analysis indicated a distinct trend. Counties with higher living wages demonstrated noticeably lower incarceration rates, while those with lower living wages experienced elevated incarceration rates (Figure 2). The calculated

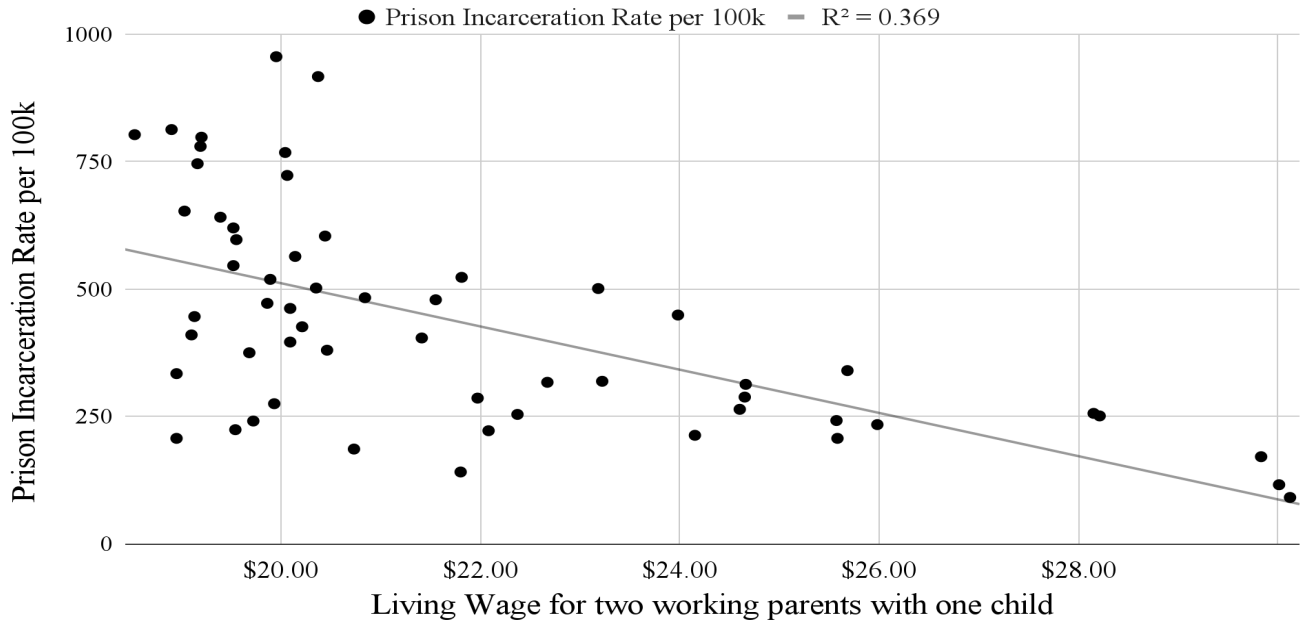
correlation coefficient (r) was $r^2 = 0.42$, signifying a moderate negative correlation between the independent variable of living wages and jail incarceration rates per 100,000 residents across counties. In practical terms, for every incremental dollar increase in the living wage, there was a corresponding reduction of 27.18 incarcerated individuals per 100,000 residents. Substantively, a county with the lowest living wage in California will have an estimated 315.04 more incarcerated individuals per 100,000 county residents than the county with the highest living wage in the state.



Similarly, the analysis of prison incarceration rates echoed a parallel pattern. Counties with higher living wages had lower prison incarceration rates, while counties with lower living wages had higher incarceration rates (Figure 3). The correlation coefficient (r) for this relationship was found to be $r^2 = 0.369$, indicating a moderate negative association between the independent variable of living wages and prison incarceration rates per 100,000 residents across counties. To illustrate, each incremental dollar increase in the living wage corresponded to a reduction of approximately 42.42 incarcerated individuals per 100,000 county residents. This

statistical insight corresponds to a substantial numerical difference of around 491.74 more incarcerated individuals per 100,000 county residents in the lowest living wage county compared to the highest living wage county.

Figure 3 : Comparison of Living Wage for Two Working Parents with One Child and Prison Incarceration Rate Per 100k



Regarding my second research question, my findings affirm the first part of my hypothesis: counties with larger Black and Latinx populations demonstrate higher incarceration rates in comparison to counties primarily composed of a white population (Figure 4). However, the second part of my hypothesis, which posited that increasing living wages would have more of an impact on predominantly white communities in mitigating incarceration rates, was not supported. Instead, my data revealed an unexpected reversal: the influence of living wages in reducing incarceration rates was more pronounced in counties with substantial Black and Latinx populations, as evidenced by a slope of -23.63, in contrast to a slope of -13.96 observed in counties with a higher proportion of white individuals (Figure 4). This suggests that improving economic stability through living wages may have a more pronounced effect on reducing

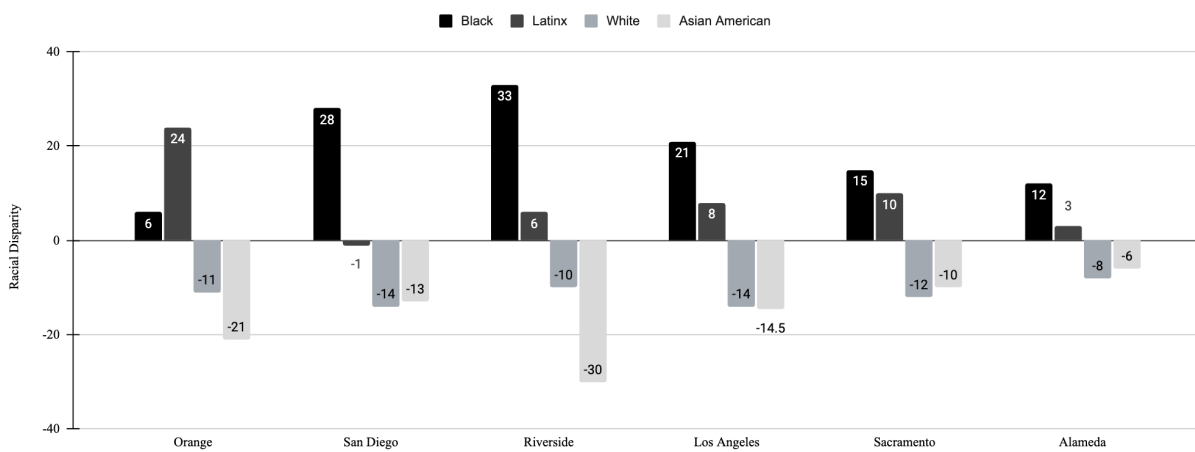
incarceration rates in Black and Latinx communities. These findings emphasize the pivotal intersection of race, economic stability, and criminal legal system outcomes. They underscore the importance of tackling systemic inequalities and offering economic opportunities to vulnerable populations, as a strategy to establish a more equitable and just society. Access to living wages holds the potential to disrupt the cycle of incarceration, contributing to lasting change.



Moreover, the data underscored a deeply concerning racial disparity within the demographic composition of California's prisons and jails (Figure 5). People of color were disproportionately represented in the incarcerated population, indicating the pervasive impact of systemic biases entrenched within the criminal legal system. Notably, Orange, San Diego, Riverside, Alameda, Los Angeles, and Sacramento counties had an overrepresentation of Black

and Latinx individuals relative to their respective population shares. Conversely, White and Asian individuals were notably underrepresented (Figure 5). For instance, in Los Angeles, despite comprising only 8% of the overall population, Black individuals constituted a significant 29% of the jail population—an overrepresentation of 21 percentage points. Conversely, White individuals constituted 26% of the total population but constituted just 12% of the jail population—an underrepresentation of 14 percentage points (Figure 5).

Figure 5 : Jail population vs resident population by race



In synthesis, these findings illuminate a nuanced relationship between living wages, incarceration rates, and the ongoing racial disparities evident across California. While living wages appear to influence incarceration rates, the persistence of racial imbalances within the criminal legal system underscores the importance of a nuanced and diversified approach to rectify systemic inequalities and promote a more equitable and just society. Addressing these disparities necessitates not only economic empowerment but also a potentially comprehensive reevaluation of criminal legal system practices.

Research Implications

The implications drawn from the findings of this research reverberate beyond the confines of statistical analysis, having ramifications for California, the United States, and the

broader discourse on social justice and criminal legal system reform. The demonstrated negative correlation between living wages and reduced incarceration rates offers a glimmer of hope in the daunting battle against mass incarceration. The fact that higher living wages were associated with lower incarceration rates highlights the importance of addressing economic factors as a means to combat mass incarceration. By addressing economic disparities, policymakers have the opportunity to not only reduce crime rates but also alleviate the heavy burden on Black and Latinx communities that have historically borne the brunt of the criminal legal system's flaws.

For California, a state heralded for its diversity yet riddled with inequality these findings present a call to action. The data presents the connection between economic hardship and incarceration, particularly for communities of color who have been systematically denied economic opportunities and access to living wages. The results underscore the importance of prioritizing policies that enhance living wages and foster economic stability. By ensuring that individuals can meet their fundamental needs through living wages at work, policymakers can create an environment where criminal activity may become less necessary for survival. By advocating for policies that bolster living wages, California can potentially begin to dismantle the structural barriers that have perpetuated racial disparities within the criminal legal system, which can potentially have a positive cascading effect, resulting in a reduction of crime rates and, consequently, incarceration rates. This not only contributes to safer communities but also paves the way for enhanced social cohesion by addressing the root economic causes that contribute to criminal behavior.

Nationally, the ramifications of this research reverberate through the corridors of power. The insight that living wages can serve as a countermeasure to incarceration rates lends support to the advocacy for comprehensive criminal legal system reform. The implications transcend

state lines, urging policymakers throughout the United States to reevaluate the workings and misworkings of the criminal legal system. Recognizing the potential of living wage policies to mitigate systemic inequalities and reduce incarceration rates could usher in policy changes that prioritize equity, justice, and the well-being of all citizens. Thus, this research amplifies the urgency of policies that uplift communities rather than criminalize them.

Furthermore, the glaring racial disparities etched into the prison and jail population demographics illuminate the harsh reality of systemic racism. This research reinforces the truth that communities of color have been systematically targeted, stripped of opportunity, and trapped within a cycle of incarceration that perpetuates inequality. The overrepresentation of people of color in incarcerated populations demonstrates that there are entrenched racial biases that plague law enforcement and the legal system (Figure 5). This research should serve as a call to confront these injustices, advocating for comprehensive reforms that dismantle systemic biases.

In light of the above, my proposed policy change involves implementing living wage laws that ensure a minimum income level for families. In terms of who the burden⁶ falls on for implementation, in my view, local and state governments, in collaboration with community organizations and economic experts, should be responsible for implementing and monitoring these laws. In recognizing the difficulty of integrating this policy, my proposed policy should be implemented gradually over the next few years, allowing for adaptation to changing economic conditions and evaluation. However, the initial implementation should target areas with high economic inequality and incarceration rates, prioritizing communities with substantial Black and Latinx populations. While I recognize the potential initial financial investments, the long-term benefits of reduced crime rates, lower incarceration costs, and enhanced community well-being

⁶ But also, rather than “burden,” the groups with the opportunity to implement living wage laws are local and state governments, in collaboration with community organizations and economic experts.

make this policy feasible. The success of this policy should be measured through longitudinal studies examining crime rates, recidivism rates, and community well-being metrics, with regular assessments to ensure ongoing effectiveness.

Furthermore, while the implications of this research hold promise in at least some degree of reliability and validity, they also underscore the need for continued inquiry and action. For example, the scope of my study is limited to the year 2021 and the state of California, thus limiting the generalizability of the results. To refine and extend this project, one should consider incorporating longitudinal data to explore the long-term effects of living wages on incarceration rates. Additionally, expanding the geographic scope beyond California would allow for broader policy discussions.

Furthermore, data collection challenges, such as discrepancies in reporting and the complexity of socioeconomic variables, may have affected the accuracy of the analysis. While efforts were made to account for confounding factors, the complexity of the criminal legal system and economic dynamics leaves room for unmeasured variables that could influence the relationship between living wages and incarceration rates. Future studies could employ more comprehensive data collection methods and should consider the 482 cities in California (Seeing California, n.d.). For example, it could be essential to consider the stark disparities in incarceration rates and living wages between Atherton, a city characterized by expensive multi-million-dollar homes with an average home value of \$7,500,000 (Zillow, 2023), and East Palo Alto, just minutes away, with poverty levels that are notably high and an average home cost of \$932,500 (Zillow, 2023), to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the forces driving the observed trends. Additionally, conducting qualitative research to complement quantitative

analysis, such as exploring the lived experiences of individuals impacted by the intersection of race, living wages, and incarceration, would add depth to the findings.

Conclusion

In closing, this study examined the relationship between living wages and incarceration rates while delving into the role of race in shaping this dynamic. The research question at the core of this research sought to understand whether living wages have a discernible impact on incarceration rates and whether this influence varies across counties with different racial compositions.

My research design spanned the year 2021 and encompassed all 58 counties in California, making use of the 2021 Living Wage Calculator necessary for a family of two working adults and one child. In addition, this research incorporated the 2020 US Census data to control for the racial composition of the counties, aiming to comprehend how living wages influenced incarceration rates within the distinct racial contexts of counties with a high Black and Latinx population versus predominantly white counties.

The key finding of this study offers moderate support for the hypothesis that increased living wages reduce incarceration rates. The data revealed that for each incremental dollar increase in the living wage, there was a corresponding reduction in the number of incarcerated individuals per 100,000 residents.

Additionally, the comparison between counties with varying racial compositions highlighted the role of race in shaping this relationship. Counties with higher proportions of Black and Latinx populations exhibited elevated incarceration rates compared to predominantly white counties. The data provided further evidence that alterations in living wages had a more potent effect on mitigating incarceration rates within counties primarily composed of Black and

Latinx individuals, in contrast to the observed impact of increasing the living wage in predominantly white counties. This emphasizes that individuals' economic situations can deeply impact their experiences with the criminal legal system, affecting everything from arrests to legal proceedings to reintegration into society after incarceration. In this way, adequate living wages are vital to not only addressing economic disparities but also fostering a more equitable criminal legal system.

By considering the influence of living wages on incarceration rates and accounting for the racial dimension, this research not only adds to the understanding of the criminal legal system but also offers a foundation for informed policy decisions. The implications underscore the potential of living wages as a tool for promoting social justice, reducing disparities, and fostering a fairer society.

Ultimately, this study serves as a rallying cry for policymakers, advocates, and the broader public to utilize these findings to fuel conversations and work towards a system that nurtures growth and builds bridges rather than walls. My hope is for a society where justice isn't a distant dream but a living, breathing reality. I envision a society where each individual can succeed, contribute, and prosper, free from the chains of incarceration, where living wages are not just a means to an end but a fundamental human right.

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