

Schematic overview of 'the rise of the penal state'

[Politics](#)



The rise of the penal state, neo-liberalization or new political culture' by Koster, Van der Waal, Achterberg and Houtman address the rising of imprisonment rates in the ' west' (Western Europe, North America and Australia). Their central question assesses whether economic changes (such as declining welfare benefits, increase in insecure/ inflexible jobs and neoliberal legislation), and their development, or the progress of new political culture (new-rightist movements) are related to the significant imprisonment rates in the West. Prominent scholars are publishing a lot of recent works on this topic, such as Wacquant with ' Punishing the poor' (2008). Garland, Hudson and Waquant state that this possible trend is occurring in an age of stable or declining crime rate, making no clear relation between crime and imprisonment rates. This is also acknowledged by series of prominent authors within criminal sociology, such as Wilkins and Pease, Garland, Von hofer, Cavadino and Dignan. Two theories written by such authors carry an explanation for this abnormal trend, this article explores and tests both theories with relevant data collected. The first theory carries an economic approach and is written by Waquant (2004). Waquant believes that governments and judicial systems use imprisonment as an instrument for managing social insecurity (Waquant 1999, Hudson 2002). Before this insecurity developed in states, the Keynesian policies were prominent, based on the principle of solidarity in the economic market. Social insecurity came with the moving towards a Darwinist state, through free- and neo-liberal market legislation creating more competition and personal responsibility (Waquant 2001, 2006). Advantages of a Darwinist state include a polarized labor market with increasing employment

opportunities, increase in insecure individual flexible labor contracts that discontinue or splinter career paths.

A Darwinist state holds an individual completely responsible for its own choices and life path: social insecurity. Moving from Keynesian generous welfare benefits to a less comprehensive Darwinist benefit system, is an important factor of increased penalization (Wacquant 1999, Beckett and Western 2001, Cavadino and Dignan 2006, Dowes and Hansen 2006, Greenberg 2001). Handling marginal poor populations was firstly done by giving them relatively good welfare benefits and is now handled by locking them up. Additionally, the current climate of instable employment and income, leads to 'petty' and 'survival' crime to cope with the economic climate. These criminal actions result in incarceration. Wacquant however has not put his propositions to an empirical test, Cavadino and Dignan (2006) do but do not find test support to their theory for 12 OECD countries.

Beckett and Western (2001) find partial support for the thesis in the United States, but Dowes and Hansen (2006) do find data to support the thesis from 19 OECD countries, but use repeated observations over a short period of time. Dowes and Hansen (2006) believe further research is needed as they zoomed in on the relationship considering only two points in time. The Keynesian perspective looks at the Darwinian policies as a state full of competition where marginalized people actively get imprisoned.

Incarceration is thus actively pursued as a result of social insecurity.

Wacquant is uses the United States recent figures to prove the correlation between decrease in welfare benefits and the expenditure on imprisonment increases. The second theory pertains to a political cultural reasoning,

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stating that that the amplification of the quest for national unity and national identity has been the decisive factor of increased rates of incarceration.

During the 1960 and 1970s there was a noticeably large group of middle-class youth protesting against 'the system' of bureaucracy, capitalism and technocrats. They felt their freedom being diminished, threatening the goal of individual self-attainment. (Roszak 1969). Inglehart (1977) believes that the morals of these individualists have not disappeared and only have become more wide-spread, like a 'silent-revolution' or 'post modernization', moving from authoritarian values to libertarian ones (Flanagan 1979; 1982; 1987; Kitschelt and McGann 1995; Middendorp 1991; Houtman 2003).

Additionally to this, there has been a creating of a new political culture around the values discussed since the 1980's. Driven by cultural conservative rightist circles to maintain national unity, obstructing immigration and repressing non-national ethnic groups, reaffirming traditional values. This has suggested that not the shift in Darwinist economic policies, such as Wacquant describes is the reason for increased incarceration rates. Instead is the political culture response to authoritarian government measures who try to stabilize their nation. Hypothesis 1 states that incarceration rates did rise in North America, Western Europe and Australia. Hypothesis 2 conditions low welfare generosity and low expenditures on welfare benefits are positively related to imprisonment rates.

Hypothesis 3 positions flexible labor is positively associated with imprisonment rates. Hypothesis 4 situates support for neo-liberal policies is positively correlation with imprisonment rates. Hypothesis 5 regards that the

highest incarceration rates are found within countries and their time periods where the backlash to the government was the strongest. Hypothesis 6 handles the support for new-rightist policies cannot be explained by low welfare generosity, low expenditures on welfare benefits, flexibilization of labor, or by support for neo-liberal policies. Koster and Van der Waal found their own data, using various sources from as many different countries and time periods as possible (up to March 2007). To measure imprisonment statistics, the database of the International Centre of Prison Studies was accessed. Gathering data on expenditure on welfare benefits was done as a percentage on the gross domestic product spend on welfare benefits, from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Developments. Welfare generosity was measured using data from Scruggs (2004) and his 'generosity index', based on individual rights to social security. Also, from the online database of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Developments their flexible labor statistics were taken. To measure support for neo-liberal policies, Budge's (2001) data was used. Budge got political party manifestos and calculated the amount of phrases mentioned in the manifesto in regards to leftist policies and ideals, such as 'Controlled economy' and 'Economic planning'.

The amount of these phrases was weighted against the amount of neo-liberal policy mentions. Additionally, an indicator for the overall election year was created showing the general level of support for neo-liberal policies. Support for new-rightist policies was measured by Achterberg (2006) following a nearly identical formula like Budge (2001), but focusing on left-wing phrases and weighting the amount of them against right-wing policy references like '

traditional morality positive'. Regarding hypothesis 1, stating that incarceration rates did rise in North America, Western Europe and Australia, is false. There is no characteristic trend of penalization for the West, some countries (Denmark) declined, whilst others rose (US, Australia). Therefore hypothesis 1 could be argued to be partially true.

Further hypothesis 2, conditions low welfare generosity and low expenditures on welfare benefits are positively related to imprisonment rates, is false. From the same data research comes hypothesis 3, positions flexible labor is positively associated with imprisonment rates, is also false. None of the indicators of economic neo-liberalization had any significant effect on imprisonment rates. Hypothesis 4 situates support for neo-liberal policies is positively correlation with imprisonment rates, this is false. Since the policies has neither significant effect on incarceration rates nor the annual levels. Hypothesis 5 regards that the highest incarceration rates are found within countries and their time periods where the backlash to the government was the strongest and is true. The rise in new-rightist policies not only has positive effect on imprisonment rates but explains the increase in incarceration rates.

Hypothesis 6 handles the support for new-rightist policies cannot be explained by low welfare generosity, low expenditures on welfare benefits, flexibilization of labour, or by support for neo-liberal policies, and is false. Even with the most lenient data analysis does the data not hold, no significant relationship is found. It can be concluded, that there is no uniform western trend of increased penalization, however in various countries incarceration rates have risen since 1990. Waquants materialist theory was <https://assignbuster.com/schematic-overview-of-the-rise-of-the-penal-state/>

questioned by Koster and Van der Waal, the data collected proves Waquant incorrect. All neo-liberal indications of Wacquant's theory fail to show correlation and variation in the imprisonment rates. Making Wacquant theory invalid and unattainable. Interestingly the neo-liberal indicators showed a positive trend, for example, expenditure on welfare benefits did not decline, neither did the process of flexibilization of labor nor did the support for neo-liberal economic policies increase. In contrast, the political cultural theory, was questioned aswell and proven correct.

The rising of neo-rightist political culture provides an explanation for penalization. Penalization can be explained by new-rightist political culture, and economic neo-liberalization had no relation to this. The process is not driven by economic insecurity rather than cultural insecurity. However, the conclusion should be taken in perspective with the limitations that came along with the report. The data they had access too didn't cover the spectrum they wished, some sources only cover a limited amount of countries or years. Due to this restraint the focus of the work lies on 16 OECD countries between 1992-2001. This does overlap with Wacquants timeline, even though his lasts 15 years. Downes and Hansen (2006), who support Waquants theory believe further research is needed on their theory. They state to only have zoomed in on the relationship considering only two points in time, and that new evidence can be brought to light. In regard to the conclusion of the report, further studies could focus on welfare state retrenchment and imprisonment within specific countries. This could provide further insights into the tenability of the materialist theories put forward by Waquant and others.