

## DO INTERACTIONS WITH THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM HAVE CIVIC EFFECTS?

CIRCLE focuses on the half of the youth population without college experience. For many youth in low-income communities, the criminal justice system has significant effects on everyday life. Because of a lack of data, it is difficult to understand the civic effects of interactions with the criminal justice system. This article, however, summarizes some existing published research.<sup>1</sup>

### INTERACTION WITH THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM NEGATIVELY IMPACTS CIVIC EFFICACY

In their analysis of youth in the *National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health* and the *Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study*, Vesla M. Weaver and Amy E. Lerman find that increasing contact with the criminal justice system decreases the likelihood of civic and political participation later in life. “Even a minor encounter with the police that did not result in arrest is associated with a reduced likelihood of turning out in an election.”<sup>2</sup> (*The Fragile Families* dataset includes a measure of ineligibility to vote.)

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In an analysis of *Black Youth Project Survey* data, Amir Fairdosi finds that “the act of being arrested has a negative and statistically significant impact on almost all indicators of political efficacy” regardless of race and ethnicity.<sup>3</sup> Christopher Uggen and Jeff Manza (2006) find a similar dynamic with respect to efficacy and trust in their analysis of longitudinal data from St. Paul, Minnesota.<sup>4</sup>

Uggen and Manza also find that youth who were incarcerated are less likely (when compared to their peers who have been arrested but not convicted or not arrested at all) to trust the government or believe in their own ability to affect the government (“efficacy”).<sup>5</sup>

Incarceration also has an indirect effect on a person’s civic propensities through long-term effects on wages and employment.<sup>6</sup> In contrast, according to literature on the “transition to adulthood,” work and the workplace expose young people to skills,

resources, people, and opportunities that provide a gateway to civic life.<sup>7</sup> Civic-related youth programs that provide work experiences can have a similar effect, such as Youth Corps<sup>8</sup> and AmeriCorps.<sup>9</sup>

### CIVIC PARTICIPATION CAN POTENTIALLY REDUCE RECIDIVISM

Christopher Uggen and Jennifer Janikula find that civic participation can be a preventive force against arrest and interaction with the criminal justice system. Their study examines the impact of volunteering on recidivism rates. The majority of volunteers in the study focus on what they call ‘secular-civic’ activities, or “activities [that] occur outside a religious, partisan, or private business setting.”<sup>10</sup> The results show that “only three percent of the volunteers were arrested in the four years following high school, compared to 11% of the non-volunteers.”<sup>11</sup> An evaluation of the National Guard Youth ChallenNGe program, which has a community service component, finds that the study’s control group is more likely to be arrested, convicted or incarcerated.<sup>12</sup> Other research finds similar results with juvenile offenders.<sup>13</sup> YouthBuild is a program focused on building low-income youth’s job skills, educational credentials and community-focused leadership. An evaluation of the YouthBuild Youth Offender grants (conducted between 2004-2006) finds that 75% of participants at the time of data collection (April and December 2007) had “no further conviction or revocation of probation/parole.”<sup>14</sup> Additionally, Mark Cohen and Alex Piquero analyzed a subset of this program data and also found that offending among YouthBuild graduates decreased and educational outcomes increased.<sup>15</sup>

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RESEARCH HAS ALSO FOCUSED ON RE-ENTRY INTO CIVIL SOCIETY AFTER INCARCERATION AS A PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT TIME WITH RESPECT TO WHAT CHRISTOPHER UGGEN AND COLLEAGUES CALL “CIVIC REINTEGRATION.”

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Research has also focused on re-entry into civil society after incarceration as a particularly important time with respect to what Christopher Uggen and colleagues call “civic reintegration.”<sup>16</sup> Gordon Bazemore and Carsten Erbe provide a theoretical background on this model.<sup>17</sup>

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## CIRCLE IN THE NEWS

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- "IN POLITICAL GAME, THEY'RE THE FARM TEAM," BY JENNIFER MYERS, *LOWELL SUN*, 2/7/2011
- "WHY MIAMI CIVIC HEALTH IS LOWEST IN NATION - AND THE TWIN CITIES IS TOPS," BY DOUG DOBSON, *WESTSIDE GAZETTE*, 2/2/2011
- "VOLUNTEERING SPIRIT CATCHES FIRE," BY LINDA MATCHAN, *BOSTON GLOBE*, 2/1/2011
- "MENTORING PROGRAM TURNS CAMERAS ON ITS YOUNG CLIENTS," *THE NEW YORK TIMES*, BY JANE L. LEVERE, 1/21/2011
- "GOV. CHRISTIE'S FIRST YEAR: IN PERSON OR ONLINE, CHRISTIE'S PERSONA IS 'ONE OF THE PEOPLE,'" BY JASON METHOD, *MYCENTRALJERSEY.COM*, 1/1/2011
- "IF WE REQUIRE DRIVER'S ED FOR TEENS, THEN WHY NOT VOTER'S ED?," BY ALEXANDER HEFFNER, *CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR*, 12/27/2010
- "DREAM'S ON THE RISE NOW, AND NOTHING CAN KILL IT," BY JESSICA RITTER, *OREGON LIVE*, 12/21/2010
- "REPORT SHOWS THAT OKLAHOMANS HAVE SOME GOOD TRAITS," *TULSA BEACON*, 12/9/2010
- "THE KIDS ARE ALRIGHT," BY KATIE ROHMAN, *NILES (MI) DAILY STAR*, 12/8/2010
- "PUBLIC SERVICE FOSTERS A STRONGER COMMUNITY," BY CAITLIN HUEY-BURNS, *CHICAGO TRIBUNE*, 11/25/2010

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These research studies provide helpful information for understanding the factors that influence the civic engagement of young people who have had interactions with the criminal justice system. In particular, it suggests that civic stratification - systems that provide more or less opportunities - are at work in young peoples' transition to adulthood. ★

### ENDNOTES

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- 1 Note that in the criminal justice field, "juveniles" are generally defined as people under eighteen years of age. CIRCLE, however, studies "youth," defined as people between the age of roughly 16 to 30. We are interested in the civic development of young people who have interacted with the justice system, because they are often believed to be marginalized.
- 2 Vesla M. Weaver & Amy E. Lerman, "Political Consequences of the Carceral State," *American Political Science Review*, 2010, volume 104 (4), 817-833.
- 3 Amir Fairdosi (n.d.), "Arrested Development," retrieved from <http://www.blackyouthproject.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/06/Arrested-Development-FINAL.pdf>
- 4 Christopher Uggen & Jeff Manza, *Locked Out: Felon Disenfranchisement and American Democracy*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).
- 5 *ibid*
- 6 Richard B. Freeman, "Crime and the Employment of Disadvantaged Youths," National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper Series: Working Paper No. 3875, 1991. Retrieved from <http://www.nber.org.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/papers/w3875>; Becky Pettit & Bruce Western, "Incarceration and Social Inequality," *Daedalus*, (2010), 139 (3), 8-19; Robert J. Sampson & John H. Laub, *Crime in the Making: Pathways and Turning Points Through Life*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).
- 7 Andrea Finlay, Constance Flanagan & Laura Wray-Lake, "Civic Engagement Patterns and Transitions Over Eight Years: The AmeriCorps National Study," Manuscript submitted for publication, 2011.
- 8 JoAnn Jastrzab, John Blomquist, Julie Masker & Larry Orr, "Youth Corps: Promising Strategies for Young People and Their Communities," 1997. Retrieved from <http://www.abtassoc.com/reports/Youth-Corps.pdf>
- 9 Andrea Finlay, Laura Wray-Lake & Constance Flanagan, "Civic Engagement During the Transition to Adulthood: Developmental Opportunities and Social Policies at a Critical Juncture." In L. Sherrod, J. Torney-Purta, & C. Flanagan, *Handbook of Research on Civic Engagement in Youth*, (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2010).
- 10 Christopher Uggen & Jennifer Janikula, "Volunteerism and Arrest in the Transition to Adulthood," *Social Forces*, 1999, 78 (1), 331-362.
- 11 *Ibid*
- 12 Dan Bloom, Alissa Gardenhire-Crooks & Conrad Mandsager, "Reengaging High School Dropouts: Early Results of the National Guard Youth Challenge Program Evaluation," 2009. Retrieved from <http://www.mdc.org/publications/512/overview.html>
- 13 Jeffrey A. Butts & Howard Snyder, "Restitution and Juvenile Recidivism," Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 1992.
- 14 Wally Abrazaldo, et al., "Evaluation of the YouthBuild Youth Offender Grants," 2009, retrieved from [http://wdr.doleta.gov/research/FullText\\_Documents/Evaluation%20of%20the%20YouthBuild%20Youth%20Offender%20Grants%20%2D%20Final%20Report%2Epdf](http://wdr.doleta.gov/research/FullText_Documents/Evaluation%20of%20the%20YouthBuild%20Youth%20Offender%20Grants%20%2D%20Final%20Report%2Epdf)
- 15 Mark A. Cohen & Alex R. Piquero, "An Outcome Evaluation of the YouthBuild USA Offender Project," *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice*, 2010, 8, 373-385.
- 16 Christopher Uggen, Jeff Manza & Angela Behrens, "Less Than the Average Citizen: Stigma, Role Transition and the Civic Reintegration of Convicted Felons," In S. Maruna & R. Immarigeon (Eds.), *After Crime and Punishment*, (Portland, OR: Willan Publishing, 2004), 258-290; Christopher Uggen, "Barriers to Democratic Participation. The Urban Institute: Prisoner Reentry and the Institutions of Civil Society: Bridges and Barriers to Successful Reintegration," 2002, retrieved from <http://www.urban.org/publications/410801.html>
- 17 Gordon Bazemore & Carsten Erbe, "Operationalizing the Community Variable in Offender Reintegration: Theory and Practice for Developing Intervention Social Capital," *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice*, 2003, 1, 246-275.

