

12-2018

# Prison Release, Religious and Civic Contexts, and Recidivism

Samuel Carlson Thomas IV  
*University of Arkansas, Fayetteville*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uark.edu/etd>

 Part of the [Criminology and Criminal Justice Commons](#), and the [Social Control, Law, Crime, and Deviance Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Thomas, Samuel Carlson IV, "Prison Release, Religious and Civic Contexts, and Recidivism" (2018). *Theses and Dissertations*. 3033.  
<https://scholarworks.uark.edu/etd/3033>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@UARK. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UARK. For more information, please contact [scholar@uark.edu](mailto:scholar@uark.edu), [ccmiddle@uark.edu](mailto:ccmiddle@uark.edu).

Prison Release, Religious and Civic Contexts, and Recidivism

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Sociology

by

Samuel Thomas  
University of Arkansas  
Bachelor of Arts in Criminal Justice, and Sociology, 2014

December 2018  
University of Arkansas

This thesis is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

---

Casey Harris, Ph.D  
Thesis Director

---

Shaun Thomas, Ph.D  
Committee Member

---

Rodney Engen, Ph.D  
Committee Member

## **Abstract**

Under the veil of mass incarceration many of the prisoners will be released, then later readmitted for another crime or parole/probation violations, which falls under the definition of recidivism. Criminologists have attempted to shed light on indicators that explain why some individual prisoners have higher likelihoods than others. I attempt to understand the specific context (at the county level) in which prisoners are released in one point in time and see if the context in which they are released can help explain their likelihoods of recidivating, specifically in the context of religious and civic organizations. I use data from the American Community Survey for key contextual level variables, InfoGroup for religious and civic organizational density, and National Corrections Reporting Program for individual level characteristics (and to track prisoner reentry). The results indicate that there is a relationship between religious organizational density and a decreased likelihood of recidivating.

## Table of Contents

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>LITERATURE REVIEW</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Individual Factors</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Contextual Factors</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Gaps in Research</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Corroborating Evidence: Civic and Religious Organizations and Crime</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS: WHY CIVIC AND RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS [SHOULD] MATTER</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Social Disorganization Theory</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Institutional Anomie Theory</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>THE CURRENT STUDY</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Data</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Unit of Analysis</b>	<b>19</b>
<i>Dependent Variable</i>	<b>21</b>
<i>Independent Variables</i>	<b>22</b>
<b>Analytic Technique</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>RESULTS</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Model 1. Results</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Model 2. Results</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Model 3. Results</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Model 4. &amp; 5. Results</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Robustness Check</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Future Research</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>38</b>

## **INTRODUCTION**

Amidst the backdrop of mass incarceration, the United States now has one of the largest correctional populations in the industrialized world with nearly 7 million individuals under some form of correctional supervision (Garland, 2013) and 1 in every 138 United States residents in prison with a sentence of one year or more (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2008). At the same time, around 1,600 adults are released daily from state and federal prisons back into their communities of origin (Petersilia 1999, 2003). Many of those who are released face barriers to successful reintegration (e.g., finding gainful employment, receiving treatment for substance abuse or mental health issues, enrolling in continuing education, etc.), while the likelihood of reoffending among these released inmates remains a concern among the general public (Greenfield, Beck, and Gilliard, 1996; Kubrin and Stewart, 2006).

In turn, criminologists have, broadly, examined two issues associated with release from correctional institutions. On the one hand, a growing body of empirical literature explores the milieu effects of the released population on rates of crime and violence at the macro-level. The focus here is on whether the relative size of the released population is associated with higher rates of crime and violence in the communities into which they are released (Hipp and Yates, 2009) or, in turn, whether specific community characteristics condition that relationship. For example, Kubrin and Stewart (2006) explored the degree to which a large released population was more criminogenic in places with greater structural disadvantage or socioeconomic hardship. Overall, most research finds that prisoners released into areas with fewer resources for integration (e.g., halfway houses, etc.) or communities with higher degrees of unemployment and poverty tend to have higher rates of crime (Mears et al., 2008).

On the other hand, and central to the current study, another body of empirical research focuses at the individual-level on relative rates of recidivism and the factors most associated with success or failure (Kubrin and Stewart, 2006; La Vigne and Parthasarathy, 2005). Indeed, the Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report for the years 2005-2010 finds that 43% of offenders are re-arrested (Markman et al., 2016). Factors such as familial support (Evans et al., 1995), educational attainment (Mears et al., 2008), institutional support (Maume and Lee, 2003), and mental health or substance abuse problems (Hipp and Yates, 2009) all have been shown to significantly impact the likelihood of an individual reoffending.

Unfortunately, insights from these two strands of recidivism research have yet to be fully integrated. Central to the current study, the context into which prisoners are released shapes both patterns of crime at the aggregate level, as well as the likelihood of recidivism among individual released prisoners. Yet, gaps in knowledge remain. First, few studies have explicitly examined the importance of *civic and religious organizations* as macro-level contextual features impacting the likelihood of recidivism, an individual-level outcome. While studies from Johnson et al. (1997) and Dodson et al. (2011) looked within prison settings at religious participation to predict if individuals would be more likely to recidivate after release, research examining religion or religious organizations at the contextual level remains scarce. Likewise, only a handful of studies have examined civic organizational strength as it bears on crime at the contextual level (e.g., Hipp and Yates, 2000), but no studies that I could identify examine both civic and religious organizations within communities in regard to an individual prisoner's likelihood of recidivating.

Second, those few studies that explore the role of religious organizations on recidivism tend to be geographically limited. For example, some limit their analysis to a single city (Hipp and Yates, 2009) or to a single state (Chiricos et al., 2007). Thus, there is the need to expand the

geographic scope of analysis in exploring how civic and religious organizations impact the likelihood of recidivism.

Third, existing research also tends to be more dated (older). As such, our ability to understand the importance of civic and religious organizations in today's prison release environment is limited. The last several decades include an influx of new immigrants and their geographic diversification (Singer, 2004), changes in low skill labor markets (Shihadeh and Barranco, 2010), and a slowing in prison population growth (Morenoff and Harding, 2014) that may impact released prisoners in unique ways not observed in prior research.

Fourth, there is little empirical research exploring how religious and civic organizations mitigate the release of individuals into disadvantaged contexts. That is, how organizations and their participants might "soften the landing" of prison releases in more deleterious communities is empirically unsettled. To my knowledge, the only study to-date illustrating this in any way is now nearly a decade old and restricted to a single city (Hipp and Yates, 2009).

Building on these gaps, the goal of this paper is to examine how key macro-level structural characteristics, including the relative presence of civic and religious organizations, impact the likelihood of individual recidivism amongst released prisoners. In particular, I ask: *(1) Which community contextual and individual factors are associated with the likelihood of recidivism? And (2) Does the strength of the civic and religious context into which an individual is released condition (moderate) the criminogenic effects of disadvantaged communities?*

In exploring these questions, my aim is to advance empirical inquiry directed at the types of pro-social organizations that might aid prisoners returning to communities throughout the United States. While rates of adherence to religious organizations correlate with lower community rates of homicide, robbery, and assault rates (Harris et al., 2015; Ulmer and Harris,

2013; Lee 2006), religious organizations have also been proven to increase civic engagement in ways that might prove advantageous for former inmates (Beyerlin and Hipp, 2006). Likewise, where communities have higher participation in both religious and civic organizations there tends to be less crime (Lee and Bartkowski, 2004; Lee and Thomas, 2009), particularly because such organizations (and their members) help identify breakdowns that lead to crime and promote outreach and engagement to solve problems as expected within many sociological theories.

This study unfolds as follows. First, I describe and summarize the existing empirical literature, including both (a) how recidivism upon release is driven by various individual and contextual factors and (b) how the presence of civic and religious organizations link with recidivism and (more broadly) aggregate rates of crime. Second, I elaborate on the gaps in these empirical literatures, focusing especially on how the proposed study here addresses these gaps. Third, I describe the theoretical expectations regarding why civic and religious contextual features – especially the relative density of civic and religious organizations/institutions within communities – should decrease the likelihood of recidivating for individual released prisoners, especially when they are released into more disadvantaged communities. Fourth, I describe the data and methodology to address my research questions. Fifth, I describe the results of my analysis and, finally, conclude by discussing how my findings intersect with prior research on recidivism and prisoner release, as well as suggest areas for future research.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The release and recidivism literatures broadly fall into two categories. The first focuses on specific characteristics of released prisoners – including race, age, and gender – as they are associated with a greater or lower likelihood of recidivism. The second examines the role of contextual (macro-level) features of the communities into which prisoners are released as they



relate to the likelihood of recidivism or the rate of crime in places with fewer/more released prisoners. I focus first on the individual-level studies followed by the purely macro-level (contextual) research. To aid in the discussion of these findings, Table 1 provides an overview of the key studies described below.

**Table 1: Literature Review**

Literature Review Table										
Year Published	Author(s)	Years studied	Unit(s) of Analysis	Sample Size(s)	Data Sources	Model Strategy	Dependent Variable	Key Independent Variable(s)	Central Finding(s)	Other Findings
<b>Key Studies:</b>										
2008	Mearns, Daniel P., Xia Wang, Carter Hay, and William D. Bales	1998-2001	Multi-Level, Individuals Within Counties	49,420 individuals within 67 counties	(1) Dept. of Corrections Offender-based Information System, (2) US Census Bureau 2000, (3) Pop. Study at U. of Mich, (4) Florida Department of Law Enforcement, (5) Bureau of Economic and Business Research at U of Florida	Hierarchical generalized linear modeling (HGLM)	<u>Recidivism (rearrests within 2 years for a new felony):</u> (1) violent reconviction, (2) drug reconviction, (3) property reconviction	<u>Individual-Level:</u> (1) Age, (2) Race, (3) Offense, (4) Supervision. <u>Macro-Level:</u> (1) Disadvantage, (2) Racial segregation, (3) Justice system spending.	(1) Prisoners released into disadvantaged area are more likely to be reconvicted of violent crimes (highest among young non-whites). (2) Age, race, and segregation interact when predicting recidivism.	(1) Being young, nonwhite, having less educ., or having a serious prior conviction increase recidivism. (2) Property reconviction is highest among young whites.

**Table 1. (Cont.)**

<b>Literature Review Table</b>										
<b>Year Published</b>	<b>Author(s)</b>	<b>Years studied</b>	<b>Unit(s) of Analysis</b>	<b>Sample Size(s)</b>	<b>Data Sources</b>	<b>Model Strategy</b>	<b>Dependent Variable</b>	<b>Key Independent Variable(s)</b>	<b>Central Finding(s)</b>	<b>Other Findings</b>
2006	Kubrin, Charis E. and Eric A. Stewart	2000	Multi-Level, Individuals Within Tracts	4,630 individuals within 156 tracts	(1) Multnomah County Dept. of C.J., (2) Decision Support System, (3) DOC Tracking Database, (4) U.S. Census	Hierarchical logistic regression	Recidivism: rearrests within 12-month period	<u>Individual-Level</u> : (1) Age, (2) Race, (3) Gender, (4) Offense, (5) Supervision. <u>Macro-Level</u> : (1) Disadvantage, (2) Affluence.	(1) Prisoners released into disadvantaged area more likely to be rearrested.	
2007	Chiricos, Ted, Kelle Barrick, William Bales, and Stephanie Bontrager.	2000-2002	Multilevel, Individuals Within Counties	95,919 individuals within 67 counties	(1) Florida Sentencing Guidelines, (2) Florida Department of Law Enforcement, (3) Census Bureau, 2000	Hierarchical generalized linear modeling (HGLM)	Recidivism (rearrest within 2 years for a new felony)	<u>Individual-Level</u> : (1) Race, (2) Age, (3) Prior Record <u>Macro-Level</u> : (1) ICE Score, (2) Concentrated Disadvantage	(1) The labeling effects of adjudication increases likelihood of recidivism. (2) Effect of being adjudicated better predictor for recidivism for females, whites, and those 30 and above who had not previously been adjudicated	(1) Examined no relationship between macro-level factors and recidivism

**Table 1. (Cont.)**

Literature Review Table										
Year Published	Author(s)	Years studied	Unit(s) of Analysis	Sample Size(s)	Data Sources	Model Strategy	Dependent Variable	Key Independent Variable(s)	Central Finding(s)	Other Findings
2009	Hipp, John R. and Danie I K Yates	2003-2006	Macro-Level, Tracts	152 census tracts in Sacramento over 48 months (monthly)	(1) California Dept. of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR), (2) Sacramento Police Department, (3) National Center for Charitable Statistics, (4) U.S. Census	Fixed-effects negative binomial regression	<u>Neighborhood Crime Rate</u> : (1) aggravated assault, (2) robbery, (3) burglary, (4) homicide	<u>Voluntary Organizations</u> : (1) Economic org, (2) Youth org, (3) Disorder org, (4) Family org, (5) Crime org, (6) Social org.	(1) Prison release rates are positively associated with aggregate crime rates. (2) Voluntary org. density and residential stability moderate (dampen) the criminogenic effect of large prison release populations.	(1) Organizations that focus on youth moderate most strongly. (2) Reunited families also reduces crime rates by diminishing the effect of single-parent households.

**Individual Factors**

Broadly, most studies examining recidivism include some focus on how the individual prisoner is situated with regards to race, gender, age, education, levels of familial support, mobility, and prior record as each of these characteristics either increase or decrease that individual’s likelihood of recidivating, either via technical violation or reoffending (Mears et al., 2008; La Vigne and Parthasarathy, 2005; Langan and Levin, 2002).

**Race.** Race as an individual level measure is among the most common correlates examined in prior recidivism and crime literature (Chiricos et al., 2007; Kubrin and Stewart, 2006), particularly within research exploring race specific differences in policy impact (Bradley

and Engen, 2016; Mears et al., 2008). Overall, minorities are over-represented in prisons and, in turn, among released prisoners (Greenfield, Beck, and Gilliard, 1996). Not surprisingly, minority status (that is, individuals who are Black or Hispanic) is correlated with a greater likelihood of being readmitted for new offenses (Langan and Levin, 1994; Mears et al., 2008). In particular, race is often viewed as creating “labeling effects” that undermine the ability of minorities to reintegrate upon release (Chiricos et al., 2007; Pager, 2003), thus increasing their likelihood of recidivating.

**Age.** Similar to race, age is a robust predictor of recidivism, generally showing a negative relationship. That is, as age increases, so too does recidivism (Petersilia, 2003), though it is non-linear in ways similar to the age-crime curve more broadly (Steffensmeier et al., 1989). For example, Mears et al. (2008) find that the highest rates of reoffending occur among younger adults (18-30 years old), while Langan and Levin (2002) observe younger released prisoners are much more likely to recidivate than older individuals (e.g., those 45 years and older recidivate at a rate of 45.3% compared to those under 18 who are rearrested at a rate of 80%). At least some of the age effects on recidivism have been linked to prior record or age at first incarceration. For example, Chiricos et al. (2007) find that if an individual has been previously adjudicated before they turned thirty they are more likely to endure the labeling effects that lead to recidivism.

**Gender.** Males make up the large majority of those who population prisons in the United States (Greenfield, Beck, and Gilliard, 1996), the release population (Markman et al., 2016), and they have been shown to recidivate at higher rates than females, too (Langan and Levin, 2002). Indeed, the most recent Bureau of Justice Statistics special report shows that the female recidivism rate for state prisoners (44.9%) was significantly lower than for males (56.4%)

(Markman et al., 2016). Such observations are also consistent with the fact that female offending rates generally are much smaller than those of males (Steffensmeier et al., 2005).

***Education.*** Though limited to a handful of studies, inmates with lower educational attainment levels (e.g., less than a high school degree) tend to have higher rates of recidivism than those with greater levels of educational attainment. For example, Mears et al. (2008) finds education in years to be inversely related to violent, drug, and property reconvictions among released inmates. For this particular study, education is among the most robust predictors across models. More broadly, similar education effects are found in studies predicting criminality, whereby individuals with fewer years of education are more likely to commit a wide range of offenses (Jang and Franzen, 2013; Beyerlein and Hipp, 2006).

***Familial Support.*** Among pro-social measures, having familial support – defined broadly as having family contacts with some emotional or physical assistance– reduces the risk of recidivism among individual released inmates (La Vigne and Parthasarathy, 2005). Because inmates released from correctional facilities often struggle with reintegrating structurally by finding employment, housing, or mental and physical healthcare, having immediate or secondary family to assist in the transition back to the community provides a “leg up” in overcoming those barriers or providing emotional support. For example, La Vigne and Parthasarathy (2005) find that released prisoners who have family members nearby are more likely to successfully find their own homes upon release.

***Mobility.*** Most released prisoners remain in the communities or counties into which they are released to (La Vigne and Parthasarathy 2005). Surprisingly, and in contrast to general criminological research and theory in which greater mobility is thought to undermine social cohesion and control (Shaw and McKay, 1954), the recidivism literature suggests that residential

*immobility* may be problematic (see discussion in Mears et al., 2008). That is, released prisoners who are able and do move, reoffend and are reconvicted at lower rates than those who stay in their original communities. Though empirically untested, one reason may be that few inmates are released into a place that they feel they could (or actually do) find a job (La Vigne and Parthasarathy, 2005).

***Prior Record.*** Just as prior crime or delinquency predicts future crime or delinquency (Lipsey and Derzon, 1998), the severity and length of an inmate's prior record are positively associated with the likelihood of recidivism. Indeed, Langan and Levin (2002) find that released offenders with a single prior offense will recidivate at a rate of 40.6% within three years compared with 47.5% for those with two priors and 55.2% among those with three or more. Likewise, Mears et al. (2008) note that having a serious prior conviction is also a strong predictor for recidivism, a finding that Chiricos et al. (2007) attribute to both greater constraints for integration and heightened stigma/labeling.

### **Contextual Factors**

Overall then, a host of individual factors predict the likelihood of any individual prisoner to recidivate. Many of these factors are linked to individual likelihood of committing crime more broadly. However, as I turn to now, prisoners are (nearly always) released into the communities in which they were convicted (Petersilia, 1999). As a result, released inmates differ greatly in terms of the contexts into which they are to be reintegrated. Not surprisingly, the type of community (context) and the resources available – for example, the relative disadvantage/affluence and civic organizational strength – are important features shaping the success or failure of released individuals (Chiricos et al., 2007; Hipp and Yates, 2009; Kubrin and Stewart, 2006; Mears et al., 2008).

***Resource disadvantage.*** Several recent studies illustrate the importance of community resources in shaping recidivism outcomes. For example, Kubrin and Stewart (2006) find that inmates released to neighborhoods that were better off in levels of disadvantage had lower rates of recidivism. Likewise, Mears et al.'s (2008) cross-sectional study of 49,420 released individuals observes that individuals released into areas of high resource deprivation (i.e., those with lower median family income, more single parent households, a larger percent in poverty, etc.) had a higher likelihood of being reconvicted for drug, violent, and property crime than individuals released into more affluent or advantaged contexts (but see Chiricos et al. [2007] for somewhat contradictory findings).

***Civic and Religious Organizational Strength.*** Other scholarship finds that the strength of civic and religious organizations can help reduce recidivism by (a) helping individual inmates reintegrate or (b) mitigating (moderating) the criminogenic impact of large numbers of prisoner releases into specific communities. For example, using data drawn from a 48-month period in Sacramento, Hipp and Yates (2009) find that more released prisoners within the community is associated with higher rates of crime, but that civic organizations moderated that relationship. That is, communities with more civic organizations see smaller crime rate increases as inmates are released into them.

At the same time – and though no study to date has directly addressed it as it regards recidivism – there is some indication that religious organizations impact crime in similar ways to civic ones. In general, where there are more religious organizations, crime rates are lower (Beyerlein and Hipp, 2005; Harris and Ulmer, 2017). For example, Beyerlein and Hipp (2005) find that the number of congregations is inversely associated with robbery and assault rates, just

as Harris and Ulmer (2017) find that the permeation of Black churches in Black communities reduces Black violence, particularly in more disadvantaged contexts.

### **Gaps in Research**

In summary, extant research reveals that individual-level features of released inmates, as well as the characteristics of the communities into which they are released, impact recidivism among prisoners leaving correctional facilities (as well as the crime rates in those communities into which they are released). Four gaps remain, however. First, there is limited information on how civic and religious organizations impact individual-level recidivism. To my knowledge, there is no study that looks at religious organizations within communities into which inmates are released, and only a single study by Hipp and Yates (2009) that examines civic institutions (which, as a study, has a number of other drawbacks).

Second, extant research is limited by the geographic scope of data. For example, Mears et al. (2008) examine only the state of Florida, while Kubrin and Stewart (2006) explore only Multnomah County, Oregon. These exploratory studies are insightful, but there remains a need to capture a wider swathe of the United States that goes beyond a single state or county. This may be especially important because (a) the context of release for individual prisoners differs greatly across states (and even counties) and (b) the presence of key contextual factors, like civic and religious organizations, might differ more across counties and states than within cities.

Moreover, third, most empirical research is more than ten years old (see Table 1). Indeed, the most recent study uses information drawn from 2003 to 2006 (Hipp and Yates, 2009). Unfortunately, this period of time may not be reflective of today's social climate, thus necessitating a more contemporaneous analysis. Thus, the aim of this study is to examine how civic and religious organizations, as well as other individual and contextual features, impact



recidivism amidst a newer social, political, and economic context into which prisoners are released.

Finally, fourth, few studies look at both civic and religious organizations to see their moderating effects on the relationship between community resource disadvantage and individual recidivism (the latter reviewed above). That is, we still do not know to what extent organizations matter more/less in more disadvantaged communities. As I describe below, there are good reasons to suspect such moderating effects given prominent sociological/criminological theorizing and prior research.

### **Corroborating Evidence: Civic and Religious Organizations and Crime**

Beyerlein and Hipp (2006:79) state, “American citizens spend more time in religious congregations than any other type of voluntary organization.” In turn, there is a general consensus within criminology that religious involvement and religious contexts are negatively associated with crime (Jang and Franzen, 2013; Evans et al., 1995). That is, with some exceptions (Beyerlein and Hipp, 2006; Harris et al., 2015; Shihadeh and Winters, 2010), religious organizations and their members (adherents) shape community contexts into places less likely to foster crime and violence. By extension, religious organizations may do the same for recidivism when individual inmates are released into specific communities. Religious organizations have long been used as platforms for promoting both religious and secular activities centered on social justice initiatives, political activism, and correctional reform. For example, Todd and Allen (2010) find that most religious congregations provide resources for social justice, particularly among more liberal congregations. Often times religious organizations provide an outlet of resources for released prisoners, including job placement, navigation of release supervision, housing assistance, and skills training.

Indeed, within religious organizations, many practices are used to reinforce standards of pro-social behavior that are then justified by the religion itself. For example, Reisig, Wolfe, and Pratt (2012) find that religiosity and self-control have significant negative relationships with criminal offending. In particular, they argue that social control organizations, including religious and civic ones, can be used to help increase self-control by regulating and reinforcing standards of normative or pro-social behavior for that community. Similarly, Beyerlein and Hipp (2005) find that rates of aggravated assaults and robbery decline significantly with greater prevalence of Catholic and mainline Protestant congregations within communities. They argue that these two denominational groups encourage the formation of “bridging” social capital in communities that encourage interaction between members of religious groups and non-members alike, all in ways that foster informal control and encourage normative behavior. In short, a growing body of literature demonstrates religious organizations buffer against crime across places, a pattern that may also hold in regard to individual recidivism.

While the literature on religious organizations and crime has seen a recent resurgence (Harris and Ulmer, 2017; Shihadeh and Winters, 2010), how civic engagement and civic organizations intersect with crime remains comparatively underdeveloped. Generally, however, where the density of civic organizations increases, crime decreases. For example, Lee and Thomas (2009) find that more civically engaged middle class people in a community is associated with a lower violent crime rate. Likewise, Maume and Lee (2003) observe that noneconomic institutions – including civic outreach ones – are associated with lower homicide rates (see also Ulmer and Harris 2013).

If individuals within communities, whether by choice or by release, are able to leverage religious and civic organizations, then the corroborating evidence provided by the research above

suggests there should be greater resource availability and social control for those individuals. In contrast, places that lack of such organizations tend to have higher rates of crime (as shown in prior research), but may also provide a less helpful milieu for prisoner reentry and reintegration, especially in those places with rampant disadvantage. Indeed, civic and religious organizations might be more important in buffering against the types of community disadvantages that countless studies have established as leading to higher rates of crime more broadly (for reviews, see Ousey 1999; Pratt and Cullen 2005; Steffensmeier et al. 2010) and that might be especially problematic for released prisoners. For example, Mears et al. (2008) find that prisoners released into areas with resource deprivation are more likely to recidivate, suggesting that religious and civic organizations may be especially valuable in such locales.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS: WHY CIVIC AND RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS [SHOULD] MATTER**

That community contextual features, especially civic and religious organizations, should impact recidivism among prisoners released from correctional facilities is consistent with a number of prominent sociological and criminological theories. The emphasis across these theories is that contexts, including organizations operating within them, impact individual trajectories of success or failure upon release by shaping opportunities, social capital, social control, and norms of expected behavior. I turn to a review of these theories now.

### **Social Disorganization Theory**

Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay (2014[1942]) laid the theoretical foundation for social disorganization theory when they discussed the differences across communities that are more or less crime-prone. Rather than focusing on individual propensities toward crime, the key is that communities and the crime within them are shaped by the milieu of social controls produced by

structural conditions. Environments with more social disorganization have weakened institutions of social control. Shaw and McKay's original works focuses on three main elements – or precursors – of that disorganization and breakdown of institutions: racial and ethnic heterogeneity (diversity), residential mobility, and poverty or related socio-economic disadvantages (Steenbeek and Hipp, 2011). In places where these elements coalesce and disorganization occurs, social trust and collaboration diminish (Sampson 1991) and parochial control is lost (Bursik and Grasmick, 1993).

Given the disproportionate arrest of individuals from impoverished communities (Steffensmeier et al. 2010), it is unsurprising that they are often released back into the same kinds of contexts (Rose and Clear, 1998). In turn, these released prisoners fail to move from where they are released (La Vigne and Parthasarathy 2005), increasing their exposure to the sorts of deleterious contexts social disorganization theory implies should increase their likelihood of crime (recidivism). Research using this theoretical framework largely finds socio-economic disadvantage and disorganization to be criminogenic and to increase the likelihood of recidivism (Kubrin and Stewart, 2006).

In contrast, civic and religious organizations provide crucial social control in the face of disadvantage. Indeed, many studies find that the social capital (Putnam, 2004), structural resources, and social control (Shihadeh and Winters 2010) these institutions provide can offset the criminogenic effects of poverty, mobility, and heterogeneity (Harris and Ulmer, 2017; Ulmer and Harris, 2013). Indeed, civic and religious organizations are institutions of parochial control at their core (Bursik and Grasmick, 1993) and, consistent with social disorganization theory, should work to promote social cohesion, trust, and networks of collaboration and control that

work to reduce crime broadly, as well as recidivism among released prisoners living in their communities.

### **Institutional Anomie Theory**

Robert Merton (1938) laid the foundational work on anomie that would lead to Steven Messner and Richard Rosenfeld's (2013) extension to institutional anomie. Merton focuses on the idea of economic/monetary goal attainment being central for most Americans, though class lines that make it more difficult for some individuals to "transcend" because of a lack of accessibility for the means of attainment relative to expectations of success (Merton, 1938:680). For Merton, the anomie produced by this goals-means disconnect can lead to adaptations favorable to crime (i.e., innovation).

In turn, Messner and Rosenfeld's institutional anomie theory (IAT) focuses Merton's ideas back on the different types of social institutions driving American social, political, and economic life. Specifically, Messner and Rosenfeld (1997) argue that economic institutions dominate American life, whereas noneconomic institutions including political, educational, and familial ones, play secondary roles at best. The result is that a sense of normlessness pervades American culture for two reasons: (a) acquisitive norms encourage a "get it at any cost" mentality that pushes individuals toward the benefits of crime and (b) social institutions that should promote social control (e.g., families, churches, civic organizations) are undermined by economic institutions. The result is that places with fewer civic and/or religious organizations have fewer resources to fight against the acquisitive and crime-generating nature of pervasive economic institutions (Ulmer and Harris 2013).

For released prisoners, institutional anomie theory predicts that some places may undermine reintegration upon release, reducing social control by fostering widespread anomie.

In contrast, the presence of civic and religious organizations should work to aid prisoners in the communities into which they are released by buffering against the dominance of economic institutions. Prisoners tend to have difficulties with labels such as “ex-con” or “felon,” especially in regard to finding employment, education, and other legitimate means of achievement (Pager, 2003). As such, the kinds of organizations examined in the current study may work to mitigate these barriers in ways that decrease the likelihood of recidivism amidst the “get it at any cost” dominance of economic institutions and norms.

## **THE CURRENT STUDY**

### **Data**

To reiterate, the focus of the current study is on examining (1) how both individual and contextual level factors are related to individual recidivism. In turn, I focus especially on (2) how civic and religious organizational presence is associated with individual recidivism. To do so, I collected data from three sources. First, data on individual released prisoners is drawn from the National Corrections Reporting Program (NCRP) database for the years 2010 through 2014. The NCRP collects offender-level administrative data annually on prison admissions and releases, yearend custody populations, parole entries and discharges in participating jurisdictions, and includes demographic and offense information (e.g., conviction offenses, sentence length, minimum time to be served, credited jail time, type of admission, type of release, and time served) for individual prisoners. The number of states submitting data to NCRP has varied over time, but at least 38 states have provided some data since 2000 and over 40 states provided data for the years under study here.

For the current study, only states that had complete reporting from 2010-2014 are used to provide information on each individual prisoner released from state facilities yearly. Given prior

research, the NCRP is especially valuable because it provides specific information on such things as their race, age, gender, release type, and length of time served (among other characteristics). Critically for my purposes, these data also identify the county into which each prisoner is admitted and I use the assumption that they are subsequently released in the same county, allowing for the NCRP data to be paired with other databases capturing characteristics of those counties.

Second, I draw information on civic and religious organizations from the InfoGroup business registry for the year 2010. InfoGroup provides up-to-date yearly location and contact data for nearly all organizations and institutions (e.g., businesses, social service providers, non-profits, churches, schools, etc.), including their physical addresses and their economic sectors (e.g., corporate, industrial, governmental, religious, etc.). For my purposes, both civic and religious organizations are delineated separately and are able to be geo-located in various units of analysis (i.e., cities, counties, states).

Third, information on community structural characteristics is drawn from the United States Census Bureau using the standard summary files and the American Community Survey (ACS). In particular, the summary files provide estimates of population sizes, social characteristics, and other essential demographics that are used within the analysis outlined below.

### **Unit of Analysis**

The unit of analysis is the individual released prisoner. Because the NCRP databases provide records for each individual prisoner released yearly, these data allow me to examine how both individual-level characteristics (race, age, gender, etc.) impact the likelihood of recidivating, while also accounting for characteristics of the places into which they are released.

For the latter, I use data for each county. There are several reasons for this. First, and most practically, the NCRP database tracks released prisoners only into the county in which they were arrested (the vast majority of which are their residential counties), which is the smallest macro level unit able to be captured. Second, counties allow me to examine recidivism in more rural locales that might otherwise be missing if I restricted my analysis only to metropolitan units of analysis (e.g., cities, census tracts, etc.). Finally, third, the other databases used in the current study are easily merged at the county-level, making it a convenient unit of context for the current study.

For my sample, I gathered NCRP data from the years 2010 through 2014, though I focus on the cohort of individuals released during 2010. This removed all prisoners that were released in 2011 and onward, that may also meet the definition of a recidivist. My initial sample size was 590,834 individuals that were released in 2010, but I subsequently dropped 154,386 cases as a result of missing data on gender, missing or unspecified offense types, or that were not explicitly conditional or unconditional releases (e.g., individuals that had missing release types, death as their release, transfer, escape, or other). In order to remain representative of the prison populations across each state, I also removed any individuals that were under the age of 18 when released (460 total individuals) to remove the possibility of individuals being released and put into a youth corrections center that would not be representative of the broader release population.

Finally, upon merging the contextual and individual level datasets, there were individuals that had no county level data reported for them for key variables, especially religious and civic organizational measures. Additionally, a number of individuals did not have county codes (FIPS) recorded, which led to removal of 79,775 individuals, as well as another 763 that were in any



county that had less than 10 individuals released in it. My final sample size is 355,450 individuals across 24 states and 1,422 counties.

***Dependent variable:***

The focal dependent variable for the current study captures recidivism. Unfortunately, recidivism as a dependent variable is imperfect because the NCRP does not provide a yearly tally (or even a simple identification) of those who commit crime upon release. Thus, I rely on a measure of recidivism that reflect readmission to a correctional facility. To create my sample, I began by (a) selecting out only prisoners that were released in 2010, and then (b) included all inmates yearly through 2014 to create a 5-year period within which recidivism could occur (2010-2014). Subsequently, I used the repetition of the inmate ID numbers (which stay with an inmate even when they are released and are readmitted) as the core identifier of recidivists in order to (c) create a dummy variable to flag and identify all inmate ID numbers that appear more than once (e.g., a recidivist in that they were released and then readmitted). Subsequently, (d) after flagging each individual, I narrowed the sample to the release year 2010 cohort. Finally, (e) I dropped all duplicates for inmates who were released and readmitted more than once (multiple recidivists<sup>1</sup>) so that my final sample includes only prisoners released in 2010 who either recidivated (i.e., were readmitted) at least once or who were released in 2010 and had not recidivated during this time period.

A few important caveats are worth noting. First, my recidivism variable reflects only whether a person was readmitted to prison at least once. I do not distinguish between the number

---

<sup>1</sup> For example, a multiple recidivist could be an individual who was released in January 2010, then readmitted in February 2010, then released again in March 2010, then admitted in April 2010 and so on. To simplify the analysis for the current study, I examine the individual and contextual factors associated with ever recidivating rather than the number of times an individual has recidivated (though I return to that issue in the conclusion).

of recidivism events, just whether there are any or not. Second, this measure does not capture whether they were returned on a technical violation or whether they committed a new offense, something that future research should seek to untangle (especially in regards to the types of places where individuals are more or less successful upon release). I return to this latter point in my conclusion.

***Independent variables:***

*Individual level measures.* Utilizing the NCRP data, I control for a number of individual characteristics or factors that may impact recidivism, as reviewed above. Specifically, I account for the *race* (Black and Hispanic with White as the reference)<sup>2</sup> of each released prisoner (Markman et. al, 2016), as well as their *age upon release*, a widely used factor in recidivism studies (alternative models including a non-linear age term did not show any substantive difference for other variables and was not statistically significant itself). For example, Langan and Levin (2002) and Mears et al (2008) find that younger individuals are most likely to recidivate, and as they grow older their likelihood diminishes. I created a dummy variable for *male* given prior research showing that females are incarcerated, released, and recidivate at lower rates as compared to males (Greenfeld, Beck, and Gilliard, 1996; Markman et al., 2016).

Additionally, I control for the *offense type* for which they were admitted prior to their 2010 release (person offense and drug offense with property offense as the reference), as well as the *length of stay* in years (additional models removing those with stays longer than 15 years did not change the substantive conclusions drawn from the primary models).

---

<sup>2</sup> I created this variable by coding *Hispanic* as 1, which would subsequently take the place of any individual who was simultaneously coded white and Hispanic or black and Hispanic (that is, I combine race and Hispanic ethnicity into a single variable). As such, I the Black and White dummy variables are non-Hispanic.

Though I see this study as making an important advance beyond prior research, I have two major limitations worth noting. First, I could not include a measure of an inmate's education or amount of familial support, both of which have been shown to be important predictors of recidivism. For example, La Vigne and Parthasarathy (2005) find that familial support helps inmates transition back into the communities in which they are released by providing them with assistance in securing housing, employment, and generally managing the day-to-day changes in their routines. Yet, such a variable is difficult (and expensive) to include in large databases like the NCRP. Regarding education, Mears et al (2008) explains, having a higher level of education reduces inmate's likelihood of recidivism significantly. Unfortunately, some states provide basic information (no high school degree, high school degree, etc.), but there was a lack of consistency overall across states making it unusable for the primary analysis.

*Contextual level measures.* Regarding the contextual variables, I include measures of *poverty* (% below the poverty line), *female headed households* (% of all households headed solely by a female without a male present but with children under 18), *food stamps* (% of the population using Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits), and *low education* (% of the population ages 25 and over who are without a high school degree). Consistent with prior research in macro-structural criminology (Land, McCall, and Cohen 1990; Steffensmeier et al. 2010), I combine these together into an index of disadvantage using standard principal component analysis to find the best configuration of variables using eigenvalue thresholds, the proportion of variance shared across measures, and Cronbach's alpha. Alternative configurations

using measures from other prior studies did not load as strongly on a single index (though they produced substantively similar results when used).<sup>3</sup>

Additionally, I control for basic demographic conditions, including *racial/ethnic composition* percent Black and percent Hispanic. I account for *residential mobility* by examining the percent who moved in the past 1 years. I include two state variables, *Texas* and *California*, in the contextual level variables. Texas and California comprise around 40 percent of the sample population, so these controls allow me to examine the contextual effects of key variables net of “swamping” effect of these two large states that contribute disproportionately to my data.

Finally, and central to the current study, my key independent variables are *civic and religious organizational strength*. These are measured separately as the number of civic organizations per capita and the number of religious organizations per capita, respectively. The measures are the total type of the organization (religious or civic) divided by the total population, and multiplied that by 100,000 ( $\text{relorg}/\text{totpop} * 100000$ ). Given the high degree of skew, I standardize these variables by logging them.

### **Analytic Technique**

The analysis unfolds in three steps. First, I provide some basic estimates showing the contributions of different states to the NCRP data sample (the 2010 released prisoner cohort), as well as means and standard deviations for all variables. Second, I estimate a series of logistic

---

<sup>3</sup> For example, I examined indices following Kubrin and Stewart’s (2006), who used median household income, the percent of families on food stamps, percent below the poverty level, and percent unemployed as components for their own index, as well as an index following Mears et al. (2008), who employed median household income, percent female headed households, percent in poverty, percent unemployed, and percent receiving assistance. In contrast, Chirico’s et al. (2007) used percent black, percent receiving public assistance, percent below the poverty level, and female headed households. In all cases, eigenvalues for these other principal component factors were weaker, Cronbach’s alphas were smaller, and the overall proportion of shared variance was lower than the index used in the main analysis.

regression models predicting whether an individual was readmitted (recidivated) as a function of the individual- and contextual-level variables above. This includes models examining both the main effects of individual and macro-level predictors, as well as the interaction effects of civic and religious organizational density with the disadvantage index (see Table 5 below). Finally, I provide key coefficients for civic and religious organizational density from one supplemental models removing females from the data.

## RESULTS

<i>State</i>	Non-recidivist	Recidivist	Total
Alabama	4,459	3,021	7,480
Alaska	1,562	1,878	3,440
Arizona	6,974	5,129	12,103
California	39,490	44,344	83,834
Colorado	3,461	3,111	6,572
Florida	17,271	8,687	25,958
Georgia	11,228	2,844	14,072
Illinois	9,776	10,787	20,563
Indiana	7,104	3,544	10,648
Iowa	1,193	685	1,878
Kentucky	5,893	4,960	10,853
Massachusetts	1,874	489	2,363
Michigan	6,993	3,717	10,710
Minnesota	2,149	2,506	4,655
Missouri	5,674	6,303	11,977
Montana	394	361	755
Nevada	2,890	1,375	4,265
New Jersey	5,881	2,188	8,069
New York	10,557	10,158	20,715
North Carolina	11,670	7,239	18,909
North Dakota	426	317	743
Tennessee	5,853	5,797	11,650
Texas	31,744	29,031	60,775
Utah	1,128	1,335	2,463
Total	195,644	159,806	355,450

In Table 2., the number of prisoners from each state is represented broken down by the classification of a recidivist or non-recidivist and totaled in the far right column. California and Texas are expected to be among the highest of prisoner release populations, and this remains true for this study. California accounts for one fifth of this study and Texas not far behind. Altogether, California and Texas make up about 40% of the total studied. The lowest of released

populations come from states like Montana and North Dakota, where the general population is already lower than most other states.

<b>Table 3. Means and Standard Deviations for Key Variables (N=355,450)</b>		
Variables	Mean	Std. Dev.
<i>Dependent Variable</i>		
recidivist	0.450	0.497
<i>Individual Independent Variables</i>		
black	0.385	0.487
Hispanic	0.204	0.403
Male	0.875	0.331
Conditional Release	0.726	0.446
length of stay (in years)	1.420	3.075
age at release	35.291	10.690
drug offense	0.343	0.475
person offense	0.296	0.456
<i>Contextual independent Variables</i>		
Texas	0.128	0.334
California	0.036	0.186
Concentrated Disadvantage	-0.002	1.279
Percent Black	0.087	0.129
Percent Hispanic	0.094	0.141
Percent moved in past year	0.133	0.037
Ln Religious Organization Density	5.229	0.511
Ln Civic Organization Density	3.084	0.682

Table 3. lists each variable used in the models with their means and standard deviations. Eighty-eight percent of released prisoners in the 2010 cohort are male, with nearly 40 percent Black and almost 20 percent Hispanic. Age at release is in years and the mean age for this sample is 35 years old. The overwhelming majority (over 72 percent) of the released prisoners are released on a conditional release. This indicates that just over a quarter of the released population are released without any parole or probation. Roughly equal proportions of prisoners were admitted on drug (34 percent) and person-related (29 percent), while the remainder were admitted from property offense (since I dropped all unknown or other offense types due to ambiguity). On average, each prisoner released had a mean stay of 1.4 years, or 17 months.

Regarding context, the average county into which prisoners were released was about 9 percent Black and 9 percent Hispanic in terms of population. Roughly 13 percent of the

population had moved in the past year in the average county. Key here, the typical county has 3.1 logged civic organizations per 1,000 people and 5.2 logged religious organizations per 1,000.

Turning to the multivariate analysis, Table 4. provides 3 different models. Model 1 includes only the individual-level covariates, while Model 2 includes only the contextual-level variables predicting the likelihood of recidivism by a released inmate. Model 3 incorporates both contextual and individual level variables in fully saturated models. Again, the overall goal is to see how each individual and contextual variable impacts the likelihood of recidivism with specific emphasis on how the confluence of civic and religious organizations influence an individual’s likelihood of recidivating. It is important to note that the variance inflation factor scores are all below 4.23 for the combined models, suggesting there is little issue with multicollinearity.

<b>Table 4. Logistic Regression (N=355,450)</b>									
	Model 1. Individual Level			Model 2. Contextual Level			Model 3. Combined		
Variables	Odds Ratio	Std. Error	Coefficient	Odds Ratio	Std. Error	Coefficient	Odds Ratio	Std. Error	Coefficient
<i>Dependent Variable</i>									
recidivist	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Individual Independent Variables</i>									
black	1.146***	0.009	0.136	-	-	-	1.254***	0.011	0.226
Hispanic	0.837***	0.008	-0.178	-	-	-	0.744***	0.008	-0.296
Male	1.851***	0.020	0.616	-	-	-	1.891***	0.021	0.637
Conditional Release	1.916***	0.015	0.650	-	-	-	1.760***	0.015	0.565
length of stay (in years)	0.933***	0.001	-0.070	-	-	-	0.940***	0.001	-0.062
age at release	0.981***	0.000	-0.019	-	-	-	0.980***	0.000	-0.021
drug offense	0.680***	0.006	-0.386	-	-	-	0.679***	0.006	-0.387
person offense	0.755***	0.007	-0.280	-	-	-	0.763***	0.007	-0.271
<i>Contextual independent Variables</i>									
Texas	-	-	-	1.376***	0.016	0.319	1.433***	0.018	0.360
California	-	-	-	1.699***	0.020	0.530	1.436***	0.017	0.362
Concentrated Disadvantage	-	-	-	1.059***	0.004	1.505	1.059***	0.004	1.821
Percent Black	-	-	-	0.396***	0.014	-0.927	0.300***	0.012	-1.203
Percent Hispanic	-	-	-	0.554***	0.000	-0.590	0.753***	0.000	-0.283
Percent moved in past year	-	-	-	4.502***	0.001	0.057	6.177***	0.001	0.057
Ln Religious Organization Density	-	-	-	0.939***	0.011	-0.063	0.963***	0.011	-0.038
Ln Civic Organization Density	-	-	-	1.007	0.008	0.007	0.996	0.008	-0.004
Constant	0.768***	0.013	-0.264	0.913	0.054	-0.091	0.813***	0.052	-0.207
Max VIF	1.48			3.96			4.23		
Pseudo R2	0.039			0.010			0.047		
GOF	19106			12910			228768		
p>.001***									

## **Model 1. Results**

In Model 1, we see that each odds ratio is significant at the  $p < .001$  level for every variable. The first two variables covering an inmate's race show that being black would increase an individual's likelihood of recidivating, net of other individual characteristics (but without adding in the contextual level variables). However, if an individual is Hispanic, the likelihood of recidivating is lower than net of all individual level variables. This is consistent for blacks, but not necessarily for Hispanics in prior research (Langan and Levin, 1994; Mears et al., 2008). Being male has a significantly higher likelihood of recidivating than being female. Adding age to the model helps explain some of the variation in recidivism, although it has lower predicting power than gender and race. The age variable did stay consistent with prior literature in that as an individual gets older, the less likely they are to recidivate.

There are two types of releases represented in this sample: those who are conditionally released and those who are unconditionally released. Conditional released make up the majority of the sample population and can be seen to increase an individual's likelihood of recidivating dramatically when compared to those unconditionally released. Therefore, the reference group, would have less likely chances of recidivating. This can be seen in the relationship of offense type as well.

Property offenses are referenced against the two offense types (drug and person) in each model. In Model 1, we can see that both drug and person offense types are less likely to recidivate when compared to property offense types. Individuals with drug offense types are slightly less likely to recidivate than individuals with person offense types when compared against property offenses.



Lastly, the length of stay variable shows that the longer an individual is in prison, the less likely they are to return. In each of these variables the decrease in the likelihood of recidivism is significant.

## **Model 2. Results**

In Model 2., I am only viewing contextual level variables on the dependent variable. Overall, Model 2. has less a much smaller impact on recidivism than Model 1. The pseudo R<sup>2</sup> for Model 2. is four times lower than for Model 1. The goodness of fit (GOF) test shows a large difference as well, suggesting a weaker overall model.

The first two variables are state control variables for the states Texas and California. Both states combined make up about 40 percent of the total sample population. I account for each of these in both the contextual and combined models. The relationship observed is that individuals from California have a higher likelihood of recidivating compared to individuals from other states, as do those from Texas (note that each becomes more similar when adding individual level variables in Model 3.). Both of the largely populated states have the same direction when it comes to individuals who recidivate. When individuals are from either of these two states, they are more likely to recidivate than all of the other states.

The next variable is the *Concentrated Disadvantage* variable (combining % in poverty, % on food stamps, low education, and % female headed households). Variables similar to this have been studied multiple times when looking at recidivism and crime rates (Kubrin and Stewart, 2006; Chirico's et al., 2007; Mears et al., 2008; Hipp and Yates, 2009). The contribution to recidivism at the contextual level is very minimal, but the direction is in alignment with previous studies – individuals released into more disadvantaged places have a higher likelihood of recidivism. Being released into a county with high concentrated disadvantage only explains 5.9%

of the likelihood of recidivism. This could be due to the geographic size of the unit of analysis being larger than census tracts that have been used in prior studies (Kubrin and Stewart, 2006; Hipp and Yates, 2009).

The influence of the racial compositions of each county explains little about the likelihood of recidivating. With a greater Hispanic and black populations, less likelihoods of recidivating. Comparing each of these, if an individual is released into a community with a larger black population, they would have slightly lower likelihood of recidivating than if they were released into a county with a larger Hispanic population. One thing to note is that the majority of the population in most counties is white. Since white is the reference category, we are comparing each of these two to percent white in the county.

I hoped to measure the influence of residential mobility at the individual level, but due to limitations with the NCRP database I could only measure mobility at the contextual level. In Model 2., there is evidence that the greater mobility does increase the likelihood for recidivism for inmates released into those counties. That is, inmates released into places with more population turnover in housing tend to have a higher likelihood of recidivating. This influence stands out compared to the other contextual variables, but still the effects of the model are much smaller than the individual level model.

Surprisingly, civic organizations are not statistically significant in this model. Religious organizations on the other hand, do provide statistically significant results: where there is more religious organizational density, there is less recidivism. Just by looking at the contextual level measures, I cannot explain much of recidivism, but it is important to my research questions to know that on the contextual level religious organizations do have influence in reducing an individual's likelihood of recidivism.

### **Model 3. Results**

The full model, Model 3., incorporates all of the variables from Models 1 and 2. At this point several things happen. Most significantly, the civic organization density measure still does not become significant, while each other variables remain significant. Combining the models provides a clearer picture of the relationship between the effects of individual level variables and contextual level variables. The goodness of fit is also increased with the combination of the two models. Similarly, the Pseudo  $R^2$  increased from .039 with Model 1. and .010 with Model 2. to .047 with Model. 3.

Key findings are as follows. First, race, age, gender, and admission/offense variables behave as they did in model 1, but with a few changes to their associations with the likelihood of recidivating (i.e., larger effects). For example, being Black was associated with about a 15 percent increase in the odds of recidivism when controlling only for individual characteristics (model 1), but is associated with about a 25 percent increase in the odds of recidivism after accounting for both other individual characteristics and contextual factors. Similarly, we this relationship with the race Hispanic, gender, percent black within a county, and residential mobility. Oppositely, we see that with release type, person offense, percent Hispanic within a county, and religious organization density that with the combination of both contextual and individual level variables there is decrease in likelihoods of recidivating. Each other variable remains the same. Unfortunately, at this level, we are not able to determine a relationship between civic organization density and recidivism.

Texas and California are nearly identical in their association to the likelihoods of recidivating once the individual level data was combined. Both states compared to the rest of the nation show an increase in likelihood of recidivating for individuals released in to either.

Overall, we see that individual level factors play a larger role in the determining the likelihood of an inmate recidivating than contextual (though both are part of the recidivism story). Central to the current study's contribution relative to prior research, religious organizations do help explain recidivism in a way that is expected. As religious organizational density increases, inmates have a lower likelihood of recidivating.

#### Model 4. & 5. Results

Models 4 and 5 in Table 5 include interaction terms separately between disadvantage and civic (Model 4) and religious (Model 5) organizations. The goal in these last two models is to explore whether pro-social institutions matter more or less in the most disadvantaged places.

<b>Table 5. Logistic Regression (N=355,450)</b>						
	Model 2. Contextual Level			Model 3. Combined		
Variables	Odds Ratio	Std. Error	Coefficient	Odds Ratio	Std. Error	Coefficient
<i>Dependent Variable</i>						
recidivist	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Individual Independent Variables</i>						
black	1.254***	0.011	0.226	1.254***	0.011	0.226
Hispanic	0.744***	0.008	-0.296	0.744***	0.008	-0.296
Male	1.891***	0.021	0.637	1.891***	0.021	0.637
Conditional Release	1.760***	0.015	0.565	1.760***	0.015	0.565
length of stay (in years)	0.940***	0.001	-0.062	0.940***	0.001	-0.062
age at release	0.979***	0.000	-0.021	0.979***	0.000	-0.021
drug offense	0.679***	0.006	-0.387	0.679***	0.006	-0.387
person offense	0.763***	0.007	-0.271	0.763***	0.007	-0.271
<i>Contextual independent Variables</i>						
Texas	1.431***	0.018	0.358	1.433***	0.018	0.360
California	1.430***	0.018	0.358	1.436***	0.018	0.362
Concentrated Disadvantage	6.215	0.697	1.827	6.205***	0.701	1.825
Percent Black	0.297***	0.012	-1.211	0.301***	0.012	-1.202
Percent Hispanic	0.764***	0.032	-0.269	0.753***	0.030	-0.284
Percent moved in past year	1.028***	0.024	0.028	1.063***	0.013	0.061
Ln Religious Organization	0.962***	0.011	-0.039	0.963***	0.011	-0.038
Density						
Ln Civic Organization Density	0.996	0.008	-0.004	0.996	0.008	-0.004
Religious/Disadvantage	1.006	0.005	0.006	-	-	-
Interaction						
Civic/Disadvantage	-	-	-	0.999	0.004	-0.001
Interaction						
Constant	0.811	0.052	-0.209	0.811**	0.053	-0.210
Max VIF			87.41			24.64
Pseudo R2			0.047			0.047
GOF			228766			228766
p>.001***						

Models 4. and 5. test the interaction effects between disadvantage and civic and religious organizations. Given the inclusion of these interaction terms, I focus only on those rather than the discrete effects of each interacted variable or other controls. In Model 4. the interaction effect for religious organizations and disadvantage is not significant. The same is true of civic organizations. Thus, the results displayed in Table 5 indicate that there is not an interaction effect between religious and civic organizations with disadvantage.

<b>Table 6. Robustness Check -- Removing Females (dropping 44,421)</b>		
	With Females	Without Females
Ln Religious Organization Density	0.963***	0.948***
Ln Civic Organization Density	0.996	1.002

### **Robustness Check**

The robustness checks in Table 6. displays the results of models with females and without females for comparison purposes. In short, the goal here is to see if there is an impact on the religious or civic organizations measures, or other control variables at either the individual or contextual levels, by removing females. Since my research questions surrounds these two variables and prison populations are majority male, it is important to see if the likelihoods changes for males alone. Moreover, there are only about 44,000 females in the 2010 cohort, representing only about 12 percent of the overall sample size. The concern here is that the females might skew the effects of other key variables and that, by removing them from the analysis, I might find a different pattern of associations. However, as is clear in Table 5, even without females, the predictive strength and direction of the relationships for civic and religious organizations remains the same (though not shown, other variables had nearly identical associations).

## CONCLUSION

The goals of this study were twofold. First, my aim was to examine which individual and contextual level factors are associated with the likelihood of recidivism, especially the density of civic and religious organizations at the community-level. Second, I sought to determine if the strength of civic and religious organizations moderate the criminogenic effects of disadvantaged communities. Under the veil of mass incarceration in the United States, prison populations are have grown steadily for decades, touching millions of individuals and communities across the United States. In turn, social scientists have been trying to understand the causes and consequences of mass incarceration, of which recidivism among released prisoners remains a central issue. Indeed, one out of every two individuals released from prison is likely to return, and my two research questions address which type of individuals – and in which types of places – released inmates are most successful at reintegrating.

Much previous research has examined the individual characteristics that lead to recidivism, including studies explore how an individual's race, age, gender, education, prior record, length of stay, and familial support all impact their likelihood of reoffending. This study revealed, *first*, that many of these foundational individual-level predictors were associated with recidivism in a similar manner as found in prior research. For example, Black men were more likely to recidivate than non-black men (and women in general). Likewise, my data revealed that as individuals grow older, their likelihood of recidivating decreases similarly.

Separately, another body of prior research has examined the types of places in which released inmates are more or less successful at avoiding recidivating. Unfortunately, this literature is often geographically limited and dated. To my knowledge most studies are over a decade old. They tend to be limited to census tracts within a large city or counties within a single

state. Thus, a goal of this study was to expand this scope by capturing 24 states and 1,422 counties. Compounding these issues, prior research has yet to fully examine several key pro-social institutions at the contextual-level and how they might reduce the likelihood of individual recidivism.

My aim was to bridge the gap by examining the effects of two pro-social institutions—civic and religious organizations and their relative presence in communities into which prisoners are released. Theory and related research on religious contexts and crime suggested that areas with high concentrations of civic and religious organizations would not only help reintegrate released inmates directly, but also help mitigate the criminogenic effects of disadvantage. I found, *second*, that religious organizations had statistically significant associations with recidivism in the manner previously studied, but civic organizations did not prove to be statistically significant at all. Where greater religious organizational density reduced the likelihood of recidivism (net of all other individual and contextual factors), I am not able at this time to speculate if civic organizations do as well. Finally, *third*, I found that the interaction effects of civic organizations and religious organizations were neither statistically significant, indicating that there is no conditional relationship between religious and civic organizations and the measure of disadvantage in this sample.

These findings have important implications for both prior (and future) research, as well as sociological/criminological theory. Perhaps most importantly, my results reveal that while religious organizations are universally beneficial (or “pro-social”) in the ways suggested by Social Disorganization or institutional anomie theories, we cannot speak of the effects of civic organizations. Where religious institutions seem to reduce the likelihood of recidivism as expected, environments of dense civic organizations do not seem to have an impact.

Where some prior research has found religious adherence to reduce crime more acutely in disadvantaged places (Harris and Ulmer, 2017; Ulmer and Harris, 2013), my findings suggest that the relationship is no apparent in this sample. Disadvantage is measured in several different ways varying from study to study, but I universal elements from each that are both statistically and theoretically sound. However, the explanatory power of this measure is very minimal in this study.

### **Future Research**

My study also suggests a number of avenues for future research that can build upon the findings presented here. First, a key to replicating and enhancing the current research would be to employ multi-level models to account for the shared variance of individuals nested within the same counties. For simplicity sake, I ran simple logistic regression models in which all individuals were assumed independent of each other. Future research would do well to add the dependence associated with individuals from the same contexts in order to full estimate the impact of civic and religious organizational density on recidivism.

Second, adding additional control variables could also provide key insight as to the relationships estimated here. In particular, having a better knowledge of the individual's prior record would enhance the study tremendously, especially if we were able to see how many times an individual had previously recidivated. Relatedly, third, future research could build upon the dichotomous recidivism variable used here to explore the individual and contextual predictors of recidivism frequency (i.e., how often they are readmitted or reoffend).

Finally, fourth, narrowing down the impacts of religious and civic organizations to geographic units other than counties (e.g., cities, census tracts) would be advantageous, as well. Counties vary tremendously in size, population, and the number of released inmates. Yet,



especially in the largest counties, some civic and religious organizations may be hundreds of miles from the location into which an inmate is released. Having smaller units would allow for the estimation of more local effects.

This study aimed to see if there is a relationship between pro-social organizations and the released prisoner population's chances of being readmitted. I was able to for the first time at a national level determine that there is a relationship between religious organizations and recidivism, which follows the theoretical understanding of the relationship between religious organizations and crime. When combined with disadvantage I was not able to prove a moderating effect, but I have highlighted several key areas that could be examine further to enhance this research. Overall, prisoners released in areas with dense religious organizations are have lower chance of being readmitted net of all other factors.

## REFERENCES

- Baumer, Eric P. and Regan Gustafson. 2007. "Social Organization and Instrumental Crime: Assessing The Empirical Validity of Classic and Contemporary Anomie Theories." *Criminology* 45(3):617–63.
- Beyerlein, Kraig and John R. Hipp. 2005. "Social Capital, Too Much of a Good Thing? American Religious Traditions and Community Crime." *Social Forces* 84(2):995–1013.
- Beyerlein, Kraig and John R. Hipp. 2006. "From Pews to Participation: The Effect of Congregation Activity and Context on Bridging Civic Engagement." *Social Problems* 53(1):97–117.
- Bradley, Mindy S. and Rodney L. Engen. 2016. "Leaving Prison/ a Multilevel Investigation of Racial, Ethnic, and Gender Disproportionality in Correctional Release." *Crime & Delinquency* 62(2):253–79.
- Bursik, Robert J. 1986. "Ecological Stability and the Dynamics of Delinquency." *Crime and Justice* 8:35–66.
- Bursik, Robert J., Jr., and Harold G. Grasmick. 1993. *Neighborhoods and Crime: The Dimensions of Effective Community Control*. New York: Lexington.
- Chesney-Lind, Meda. 1989. "Girl's Crime and Women's Place: Toward a Feminist Model of Female Delinquency." *Crime and Delinquency* 35(1):5-29.
- Chiricos, Ted, Kelle Barrick, William Bales, and Stephanie Bontrager. 2007. "The Labeling of Convicted Felons and Its Consequences for Recidivism." *Criminology*, 45:547-581.
- Cullen, Francis T., Robert Agnew and Pamela Wilcox. 2014. *Criminological Theory Past to Present: essential readings*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Dodson, Kimberly D., Leann N. Cabage, and Paul M. Klenowski. 2011. "An Evidence-Based Assessment of Faith-Based Programs\_ Do Faith-Based Programs "Work" to Reduce Recidivism\_" *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation* 50(6): 367–83.
- Evans, T. David, Francis T. Cullen, R. Gregory Dunaway, and Velmer S. Burton. 1995. "Religion and Crime Reexamined: The Impact of Religion, Secular Controls, And Social Ecology On Adult Criminality\*." *Criminology* 33(2):195–224.
- Garland, David. 2013. "Penalty and the Penal State," *Criminology* 51(3): 475-517.
- Gottfredson, M. R., & Hirschi, T. 1990. *A General Theory of Crime*. Stanford University Press.

- Grasmick, Harold G., John K. Cochran, Robert J. Bursik, and M. lou Kimpel. 1993. "Religion, punitive justice, and support for the death penalty." *Justice Quarterly* 10(2):289–314.
- Greenfeld, Lawrence A., Allen Beck, and Darrel Gilliard. 1996. "Prisons: Population Trends and Key Issues for Management." *Criminal Justice Review* 21(1):4-20.
- Hannon, Lance and Robert Defina. 2010. "The state of the Economy and the Relationship Between Prisoner Reentry and Crime." *Social Problems* 57(4):611–29.
- Harris, Casey T. and Ben Feldmeyer. 2015. "A Shot of Morality? Hispanic Immigration, Religious Contextual Characteristics, and Violence." *Sociological Spectrum* 35(3):229–53.
- Harris, Casey T., Mindy Bradley, Megan Handley, and Steven Worden. 2015. "Religion, Age, and Crime: Do Religious Traditions Differentially Impact Juvenile Versus Adult Violence?" *Sociological Spectrum* 35(4):372–91.
- Harris, Casey T. and Jeffrey T. Ulmer. 2017. "'Mighty Like a River': The Black Protestant Church and Violence in Black Communities." *Sociological Quarterly* 58(2): 295–314.
- Hipp, John R. and Daniel K. Yates. 2009. "Do Returning Parolees Affect Neighborhood Crime? A Case Study of Sacramento." *Criminology* 47(3):619–56.19–56.
- Hirschi, Travis. 1969. *Causes of Delinquency*. Berkley: University of California Press.
- Jang, Sung Joon and Aaron B. Franzen. 2013. "Is Being "Spiritual" Enough Without Being Religious? A Study of Violent And Property Crimes Among Emerging Adults." *Criminology* 51(3):595–627.
- Johnson, Byron R., David B. Larson, and Timothy C. Pitts. 1997. "Religious programs, institutional adjustment, and recidivism among former inmates in prison fellowship programs." *Justice Quarterly* 14(1):145–66.
- Kubrin, Charis E. and Eric A. Stewart. 2006. "Predicting Who Reoffends: The Neglected Role of Neighborhood Context in Recidivism Studies\*." *Criminology* 44(1):165–97.
- La Vigne, Nancy, and Barbara Parthasarathy. 2005. *Returning Home Illinois Policy Brief: Prisoner Reentry and Residential Mobility*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute, Justice Policy Center.
- Langan, Patrick A. and David J. Levin. 2002. "Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 1994." *Federal Sentencing Reporter* 15(1): 58-65.
- Lee, Matthew R. 2008. "Civic Community in The Hinterland: Toward a Theory of Rural Social Structure and Violence\*." *Criminology* 46(2):447–78.

- Lee, Matthew R. and Shaun A. Thomas. 2009. "Civic Community, Population Change, and Violent Crime in Rural Communities." *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 47(1):118–47.
- Lipsey, Mark W. and James H. Derzon. 1998. "Predictors of violent or serious delinquency in adolescence and early adulthood: A synthesis of longitudinal research." In R. Loeber & D. P. Farrington (Eds.), *Serious & violent juvenile offenders: Risk factors and successful interventions* (pp. 86-105). Thousand Oaks, CA, US: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Markman, Joshua A., Matthew R. Durose, Ramona R. Rantala, and Andrew D. Tiedt. 2016. "Recidivism of Offenders Placed on Federal Community Supervision in 2005: Patterns from 2005 to 2010." *Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS)*.
- Maume, Michael O. and Matthew R. Lee. 2003. "Social Institutions and Violence: A Sub-National Test of Institutional Anomie Theory\*." *Criminology* 41(4):1137–72.
- Mears, Daniel P., Xia Wang, Carter Hay, and William D. Bales. 2008. "Social Ecology and Recidivism: Implications for Prisoner Reentry." *Criminology* 46(2):301–40.
- Merton, Robert K. 1938. "Social Structure and Anomie." *American Sociological Review* 3(5):672–82.
- Messner, Steven F. and Richard Rosenfeld. 1997. "Political Restraint of the Market and Levels of Criminal Homicide: A Cross-National Application of Institutional-Anomie Theory." *Social Forces* 75(4):1393.
- Messner, Steven F. and Richard Rosenfeld. 2013. *Crime and the American dream*. S.I.: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning.
- Morenoff, Jeffery D. and David J. Harding. 2014. "Incarceration, Prison Reentry, and Communities." *Annual Review of Sociology* 40: 411-429.
- Osgood, D. Wayne and Jeff M. Chambers. 2000. "Social Disorganization Outside the Metropolis: An Analysis of Rural Youth Violence\*." *Criminology* 38(1):81–116.
- Ousey, Graham C. 1999. "Homicide, Structural Factors, and the Racial Invariance Assumption." *Criminology* 37(2):405–426.
- Pager, Devah. 2003. "The Mark of a Criminal Record." *American Journal of Sociology* 108(5):937–75.
- Petersilia, Joan. 1999. "Parole and Prisoner Reentry in the United States." *Crime and Justice: A Review of Research* 26: 479-530.
- Petersilia, Joan. 2003. *When Prisoners Come Home: Parole and Prison Reentry*. Oxford University Press.

- Pratt, Travis C., and Francis T. Cullen. 2005. Assessing Macro-level Predictors and Theories of Crime: A Meta-analysis. *Crime and Justice* 32:373–450.
- Raphael, Steven. 2011. “Incarceration and Prisoner Reentry in the United States.” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 635(1):192–215.
- Reisig, Michael D., Scott E. Wolfe, and Travis C. Pratt. 2012. “Low Self-Control and the Religiosity-Crime Relationship.” *Criminal Justice and Behavior* 39(9):1172–91.
- Rose, Dina R. and Todd R. Clear. 1998. “Incarceration, Social Capital, And Crime: Implications for Social Disorganization Theory\*.” *Criminology* 36(3):441–80.
- Rountree, Pamela Wilcox and Barbara D. Warner. 1999. “Social Ties And Crime: Is The Relationship Gendered?.” *Criminology* 37(4):789–814.
- Sampson, Robert J. 1991. “Linking the Micro- and Macrolevel Dimensions of Community Social Organization.” *Social Forces* 70(1):43-64.
- Sampson, Robert J. and John H. Laub. 1990. “Crime and Deviance over the Life Course: The Salience of Adult Social Bonds.” *American Sociological Review* 55(5):609-627.
- Sampson, Robert J., Jeffrey D. Morenoff, and Felton Earls. 1999. “Beyond Social Capital: Spatial Dynamics of Collective Efficacy for Children.” *American Sociological Review* 64(5):633-660.
- Sampson, Robert J., Stephen W. Raudenbush, and Felton Earls. 1997. “Neighborhoods and Violent Crime: A Multilevel Study of Collective Efficacy.” *Science* 277(5328):918–24.
- Singer, Audrey. 2004. “The Rise of New Immigrant Gateways: Living Cities Census Series.” *The Brookings Institution* 1-35.
- Shihadeh, Edward S. and Raymond Barranco. 2010. “Latino Employment and Black Violence: The Unintended Consequence of U.S. Immigration Policy.” *Social Forces* 88: 1393-1420.
- Shihadeh, Edward S. and Lisa Winters. 2010. “Church, Place, and Crime: Latinos and Homicide in New Destinations\*.” *Sociological Inquiry* 80(4):628-649.
- Silver, Eric and Lisa L. Miller. 2004. “Sources of Informal Social Control in Chicago Neighborhoods\*.” *Criminology* 42(3):551–84.
- Steenbeek, Wouter and John R. Hipp. 2011. “A Longitudinal Test of Social Disorganization Theory: Feedback Effects Among Cohesion, Social Control, And Disorder\*.” *Criminology* 49(3):833–71.
- Steffensmeier, Darrel J., Emilie A. Allan, Miles D. Harer, and Cathy Steifel. 1989. “Age and the Distribution of Crime.” *American Journal of Sociology* 94(4): 803-831.

- Todd, Nathan R. and Nicole E. Allen. 2010. "Religious Congregations as Mediating Structures for Social Justice: a Multilevel Examination." *American Journal of Community Psychology* 48(3-4):222–37.
- Uggen, Christopher. 2000. "Work as a Turning Point in the Life Course of Criminals: A Duration Model of Age, Employment, and Recidivism." *American Sociological Review* 65(4):529.
- Ulmer, Jeffery T. and Casey T. Harris. 2013. "Race and the Religious Contexts of Violence: Linking Religion and White, Black, and Latino Violent Crime." *The Sociological Quarterly* 54(4):610–46.
- Zhao, Ruohoi and Liqun Cao. 2010. "Social Change and Anomie: A Cross-National Study." *Social Forces* 88(3):1209–29.