

Mass Incarceration and Inequality

COMPAS (Conversations on Morality, Politics, and Society)
Conference on Inequality

The Ohio State University

September 23, 2016

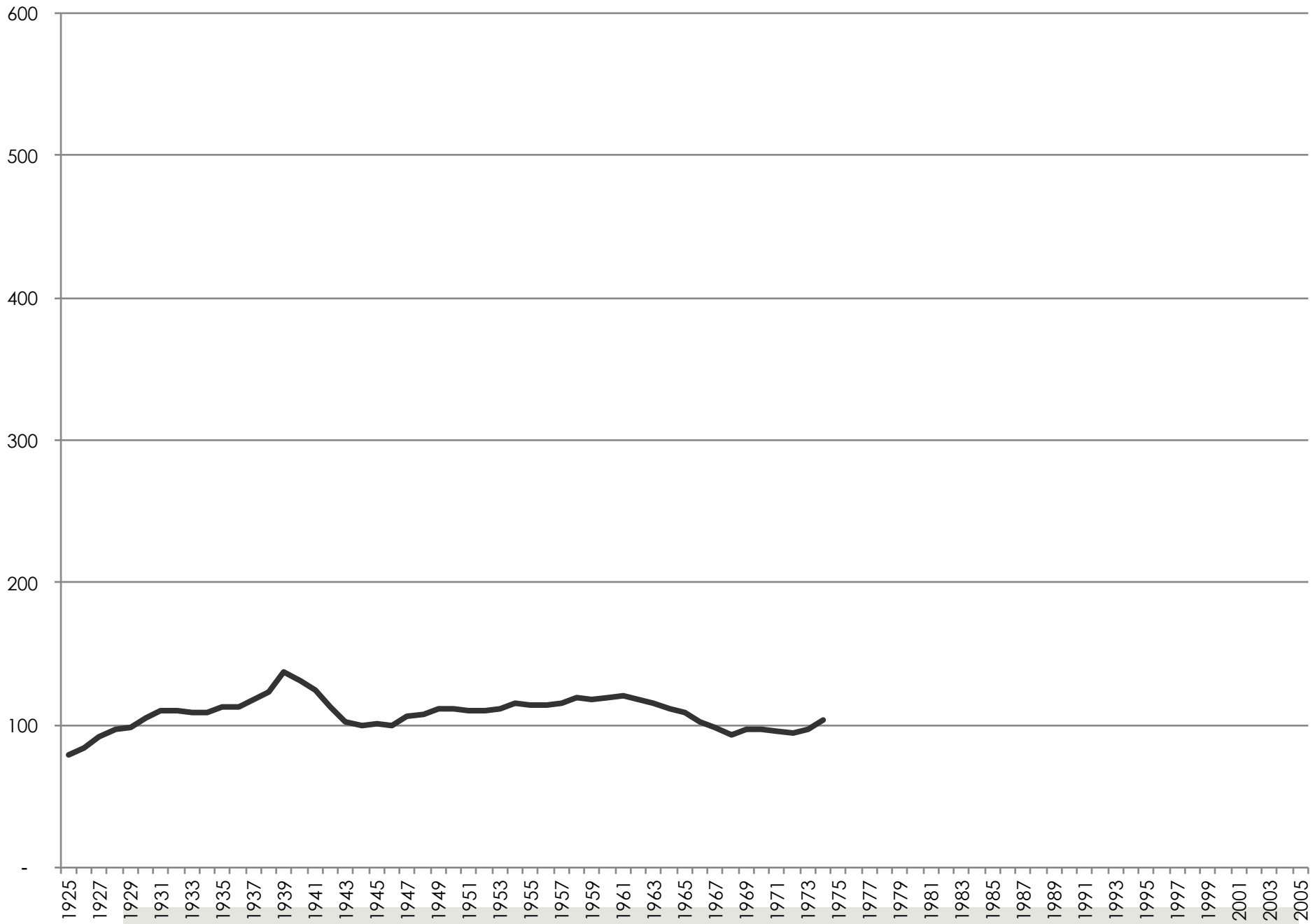
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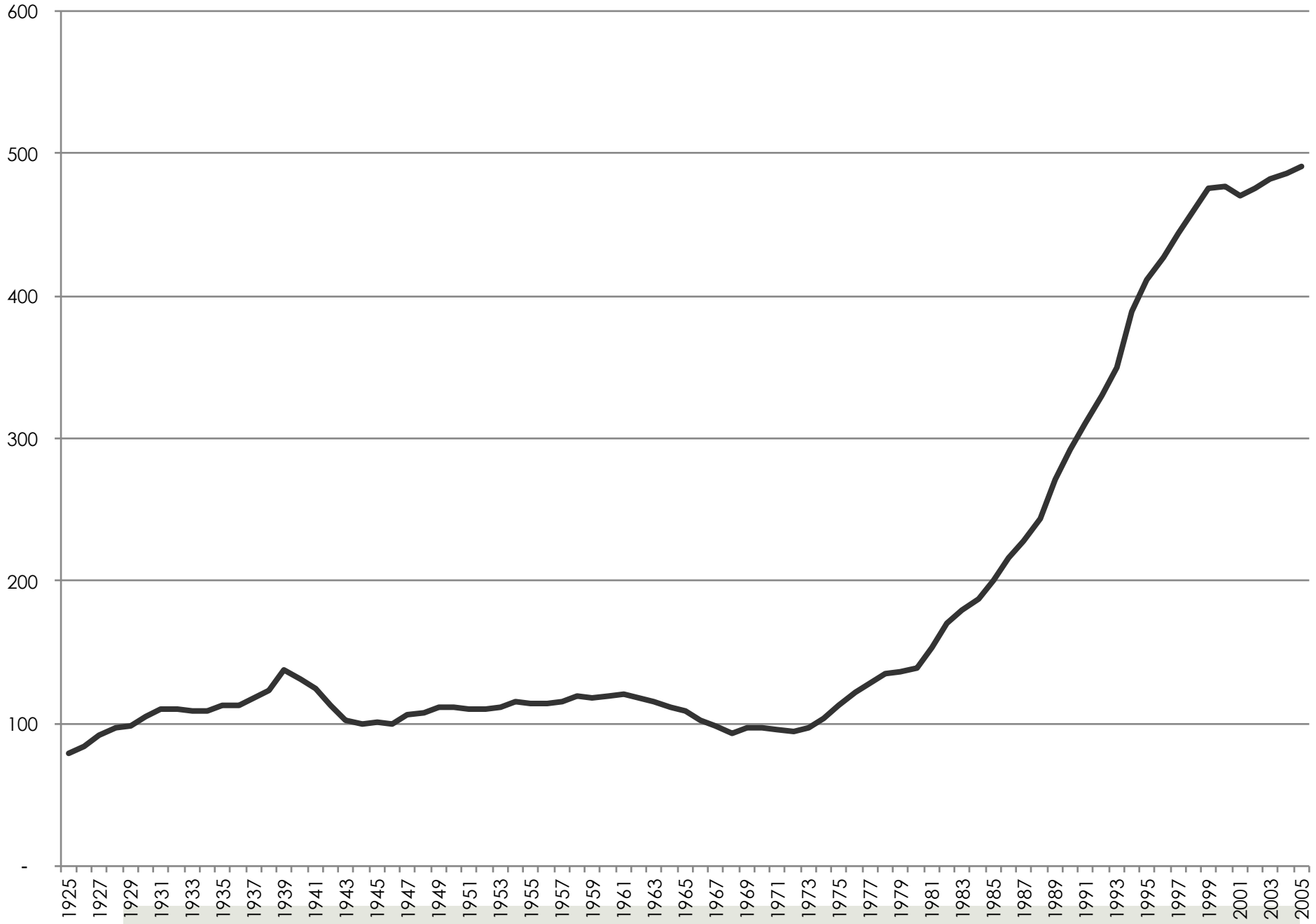
Brief Comments

- When Does Inequality Matter?
- How Mass Incarceration Reflects Inequality and How Mass Incarceration Creates Inequality

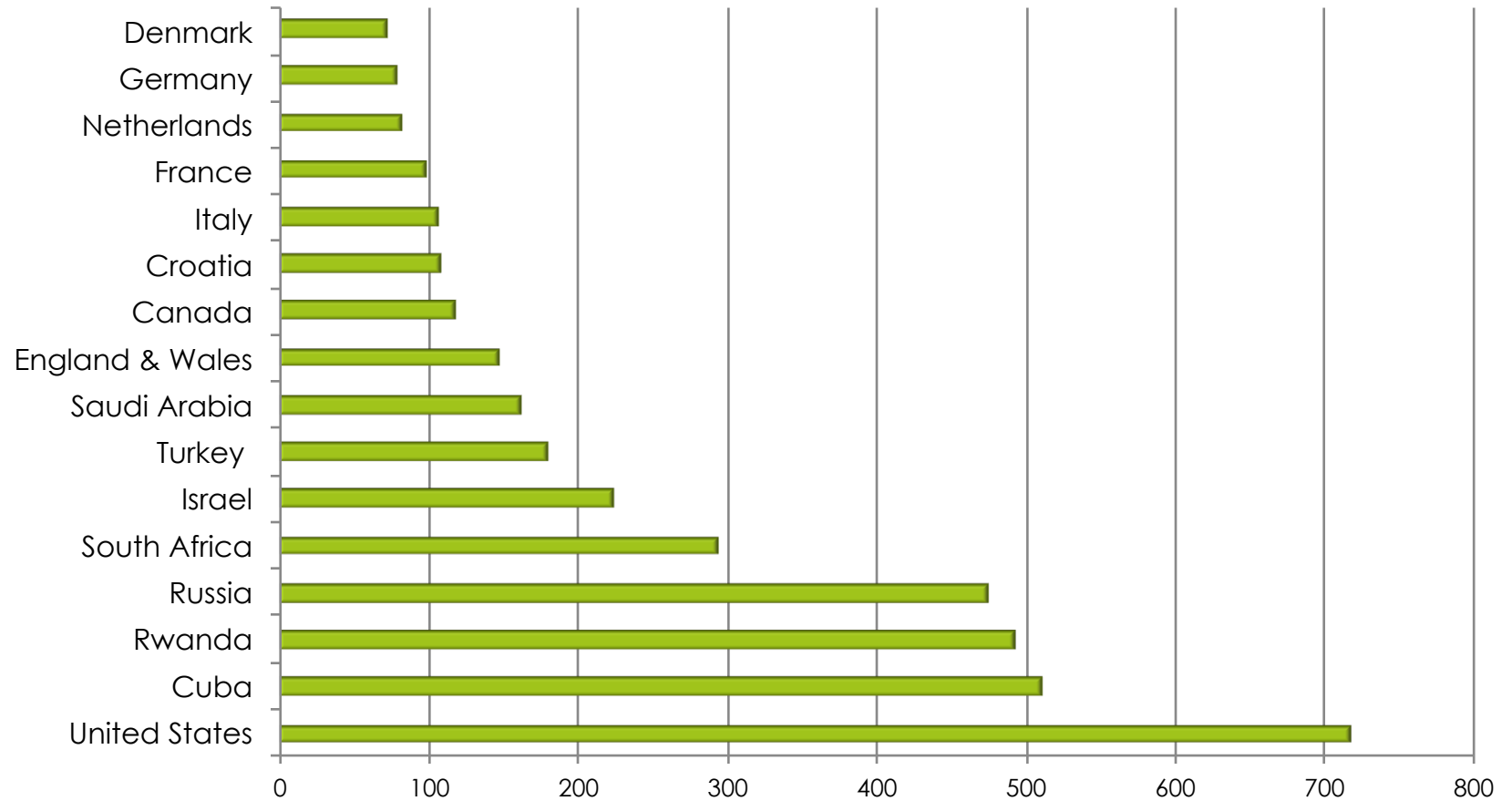
U.S. Incarceration Rate 1925-1974



U.S. Incarceration Rate 1925-2005

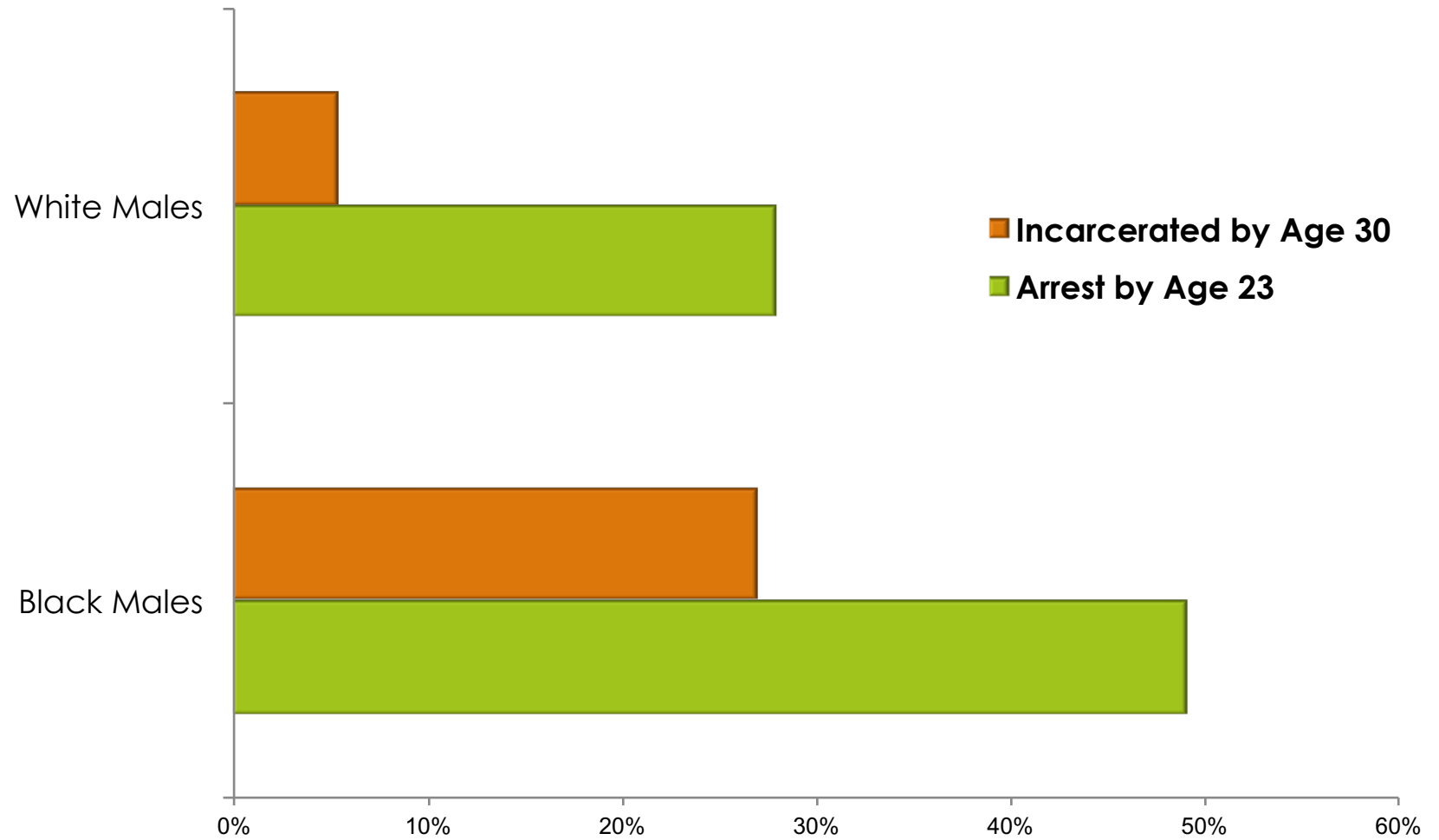


Incarceration Rate per 100,000 by Country, 2013



Context

Cross-National Comparison



Context

Massive Racial Disparity

Risk of imprisonment by age 30-34: Men Born 1945-49 & 1970-74

	Born 1945-49	Born 1970-74
All White Men	1.2	2.8
All Non-College	1.8	5.1
HS Dropout	4.2	14.8
HS Only	0.7	4.0
Some College	0.7	0.9
All Black Men	9.0	22.8
All Non-College	12.1	30.9
HS Dropout	14.7	62.5
HS Only	10.2	20.3
Some College	4.9	8.5

Mass Incarceration and Inequality

- Mass incarceration reflects and reinforces inequality
- The influence of mass incarceration in the direct *creation* of inequality is less clear for some outcomes

Three examples

- ▣ 1. Labor market outcomes and earnings
- ▣ 2. Marriage and divorce
- ▣ 3. Parental incarceration

Mass Incarceration and Inequality

- The lifetime risk of imprisonment is unequally distributed.
- The effects of imprisonment on individuals are often large.
- But the effects on inequality are often quite small.

1. Earnings, for example

- Black men are 8 times more likely to go to prison than white men.
- And it causes a 30 percent reduction in earnings.
- But it increases inequality between black men and white men by only 3 percent.

2. Marriage is similar

- ▣ Black men are 8 times more likely to go to prison than white men.
- ▣ And it causes a 20 reduction in the chance of marrying.
- ▣ But it increases marriage inequality by only 4 percent.

Why such small effects on inequality?

- Effects on inequality are constrained by the starting distribution.
- Men who go to prison are at the low end of the earnings distribution and have a low probability of marriage anyway.
- Under those conditions, **inequality** can only increase a small amount—even in the presence of very large differences in rates of imprisonment and large individual-level effects

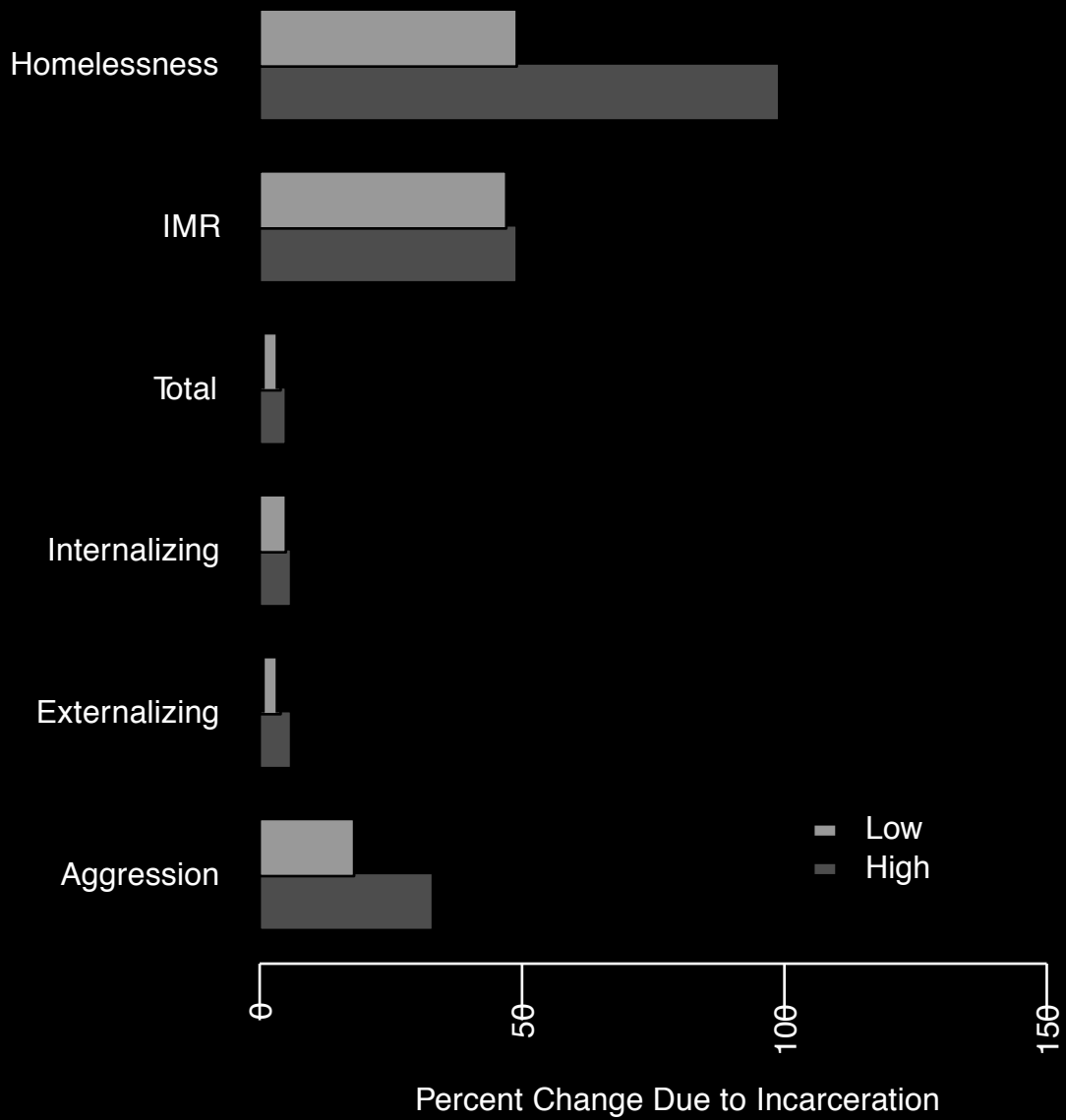
To be clear...

- ▣ This is not to say that incarceration doesn't matter for adult men.
- ▣ Of course it does.

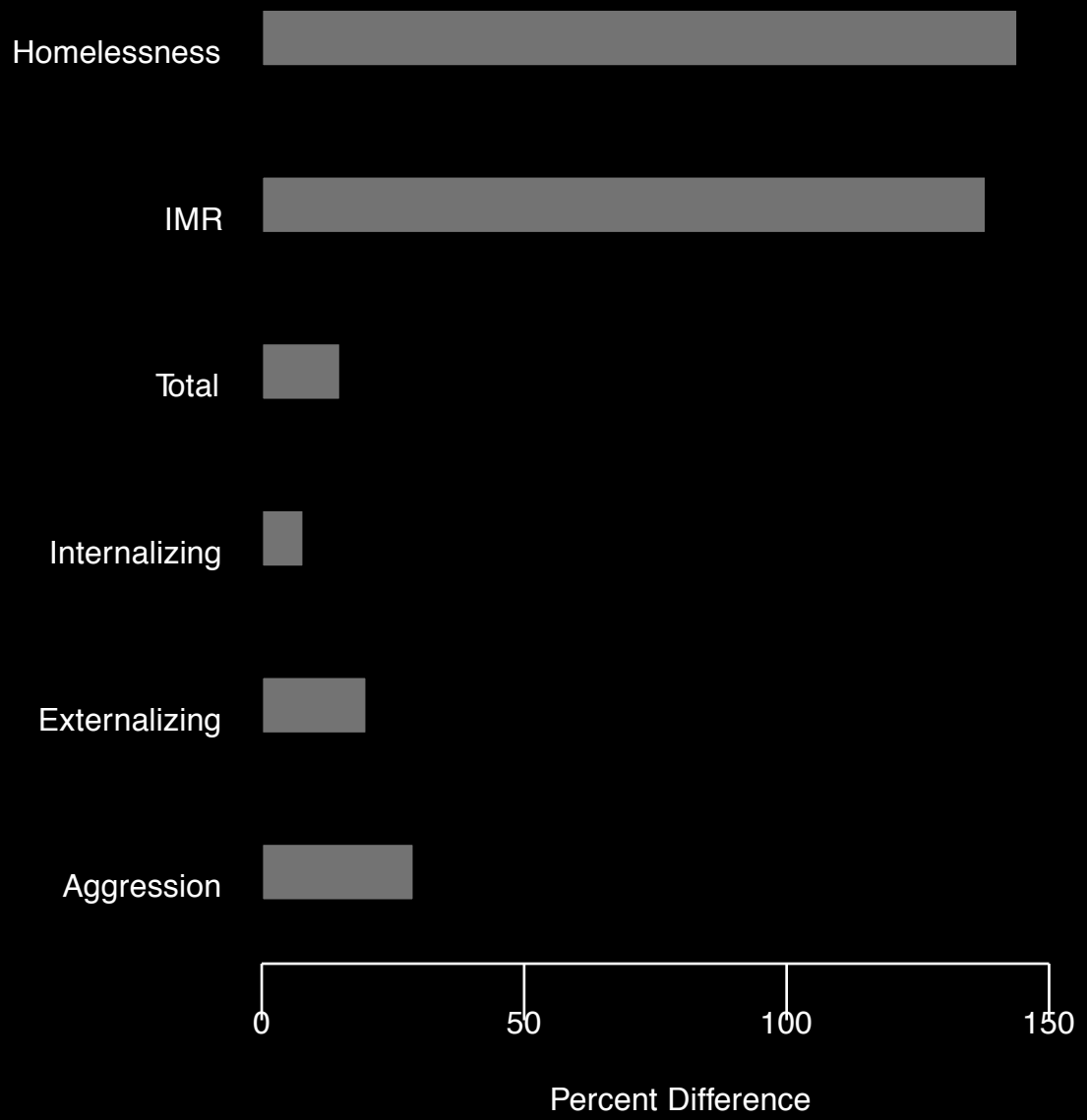
3. Parental Incarceration (here's where it matters a lot)

- ▣ Black children are 13 times more likely to experience the incarceration of a father.
- ▣ And it **causes**:
 - ▣ a 5% increase in behavioral problems,
 - ▣ a 25% increase in aggression,
 - ▣ a 97% increase in homelessness (for Black children),
 - ▣ and a 48% increase in infant mortality

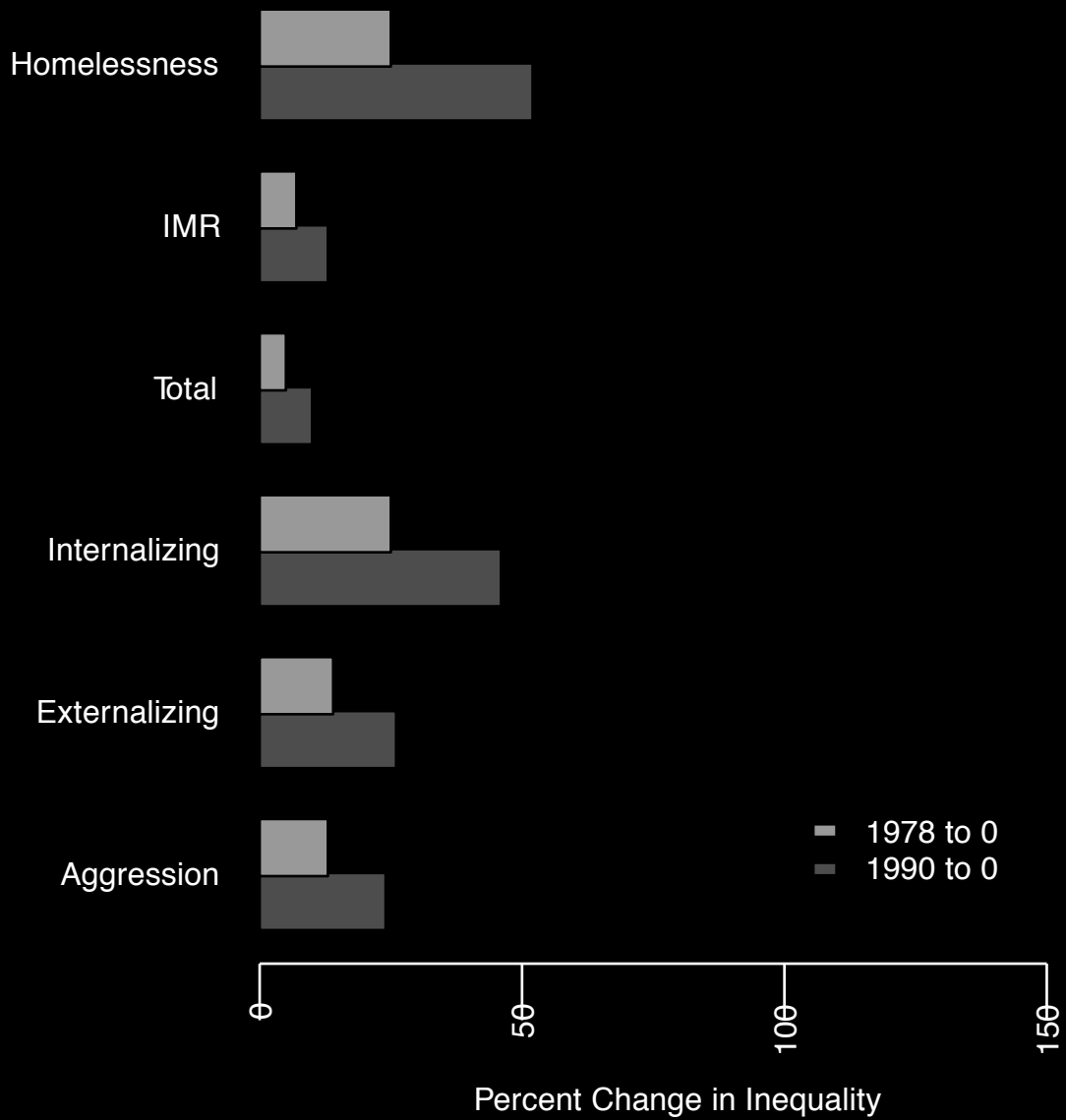
Percent Change Due to Incarceration



Black–White Gaps, No Incarceration



Percent Change in Inequality



The Children of the Prison Boom

- Mass incarceration has widened inequality in childhood wellbeing
- The consequences are particularly perverse as they fall on the most vulnerable of children
- Even if the imprisonment rate returned to 100 per 100,000 tomorrow, the ripple effects would continue for at least one more generation.

Challenges for Justice

The genius of the current caste system, and what most distinguishes it from its predecessors, is that it appears voluntary. People choose to commit crimes, and that's why they are locked up or locked out, we are told.

(Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*)

The degree of civilization in a society can be judged by entering its prisons.

(Fyodor Dostoyevsky)

Thanks!

For more information, sources, or questions:

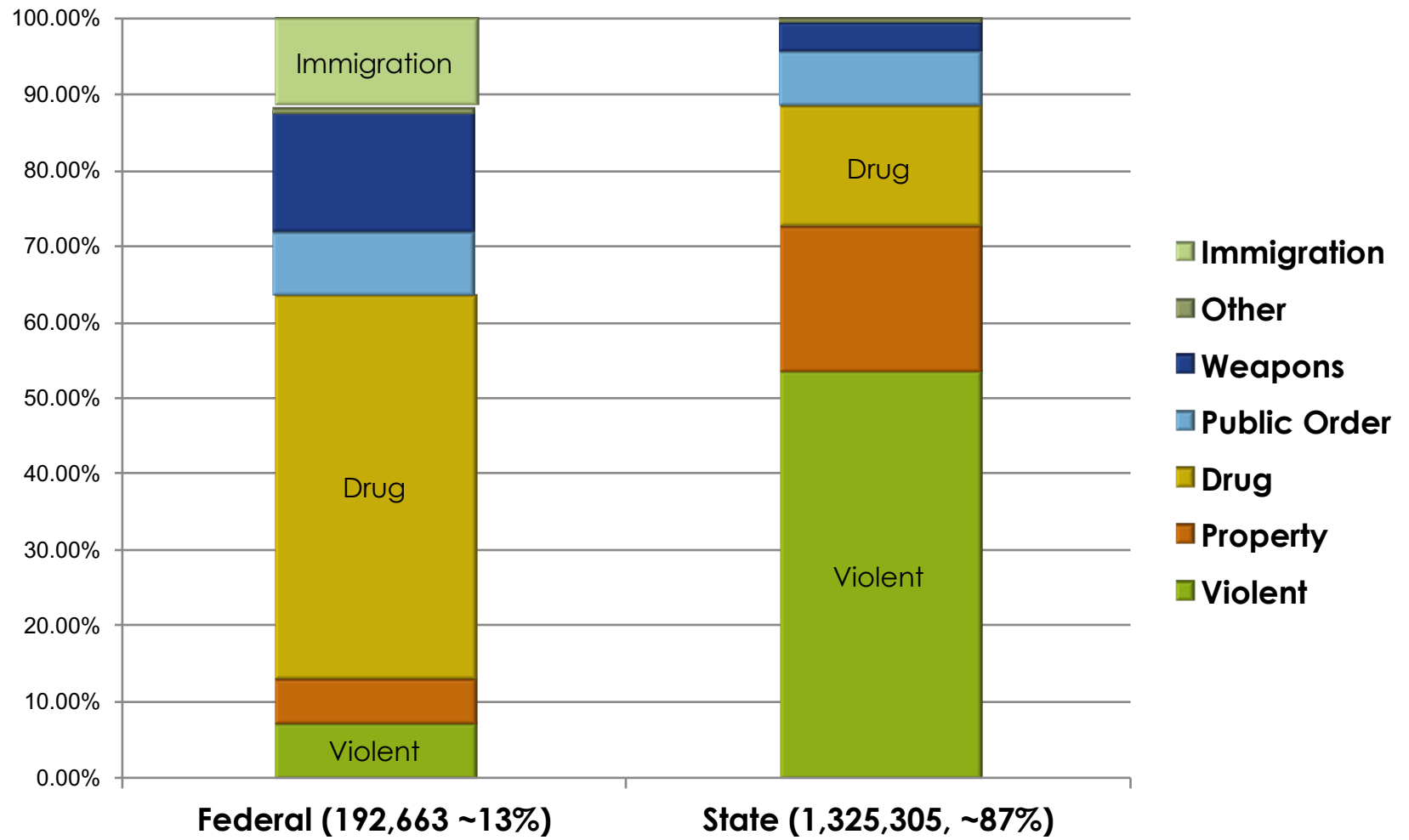
Sara Wakefield: sara.wakefield@rutgers.edu

For more research, resources, or 140 characters on soccer
and Manchester City:

sarawakefield.net

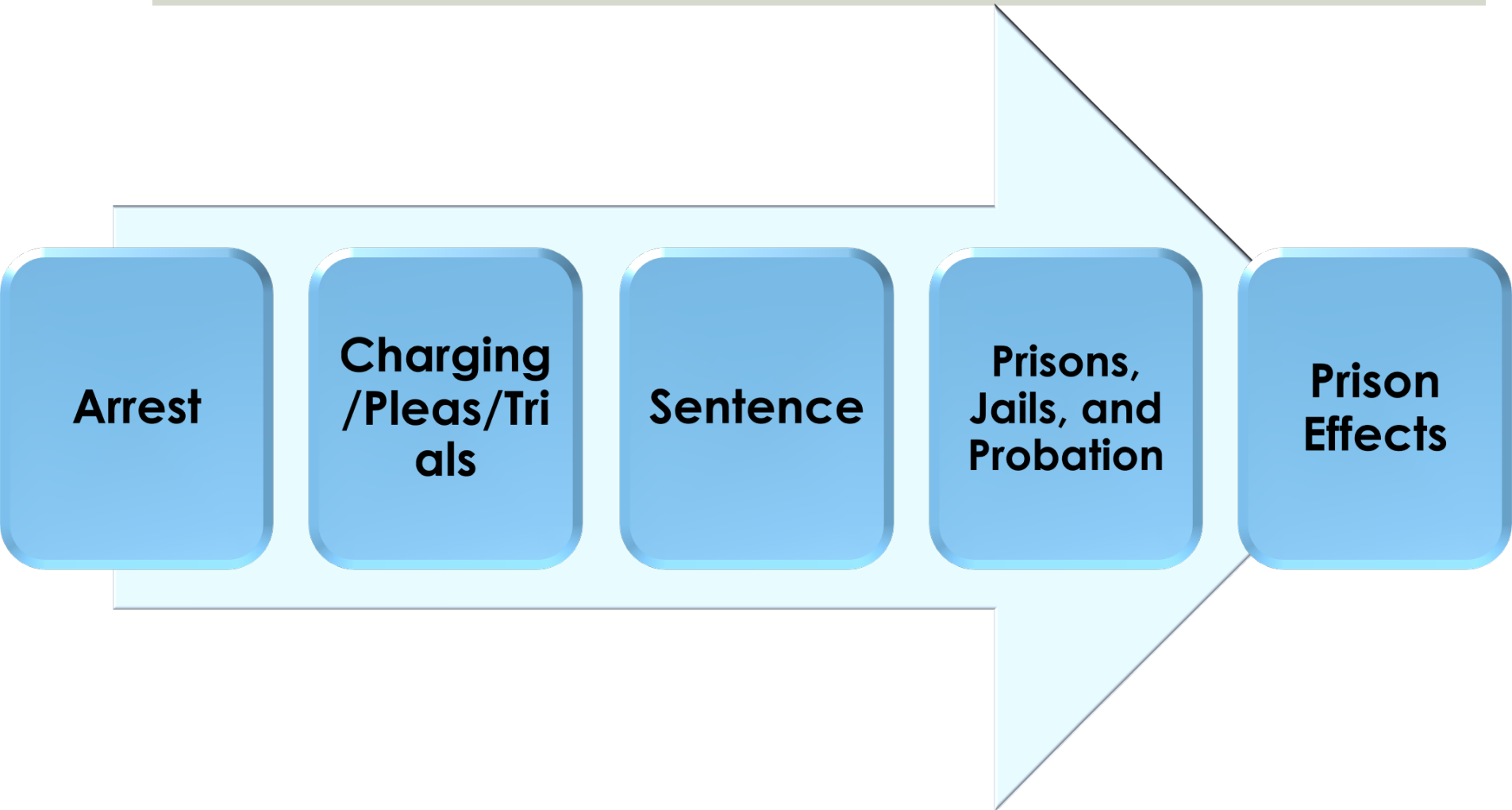
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Supplementary Slides



Context

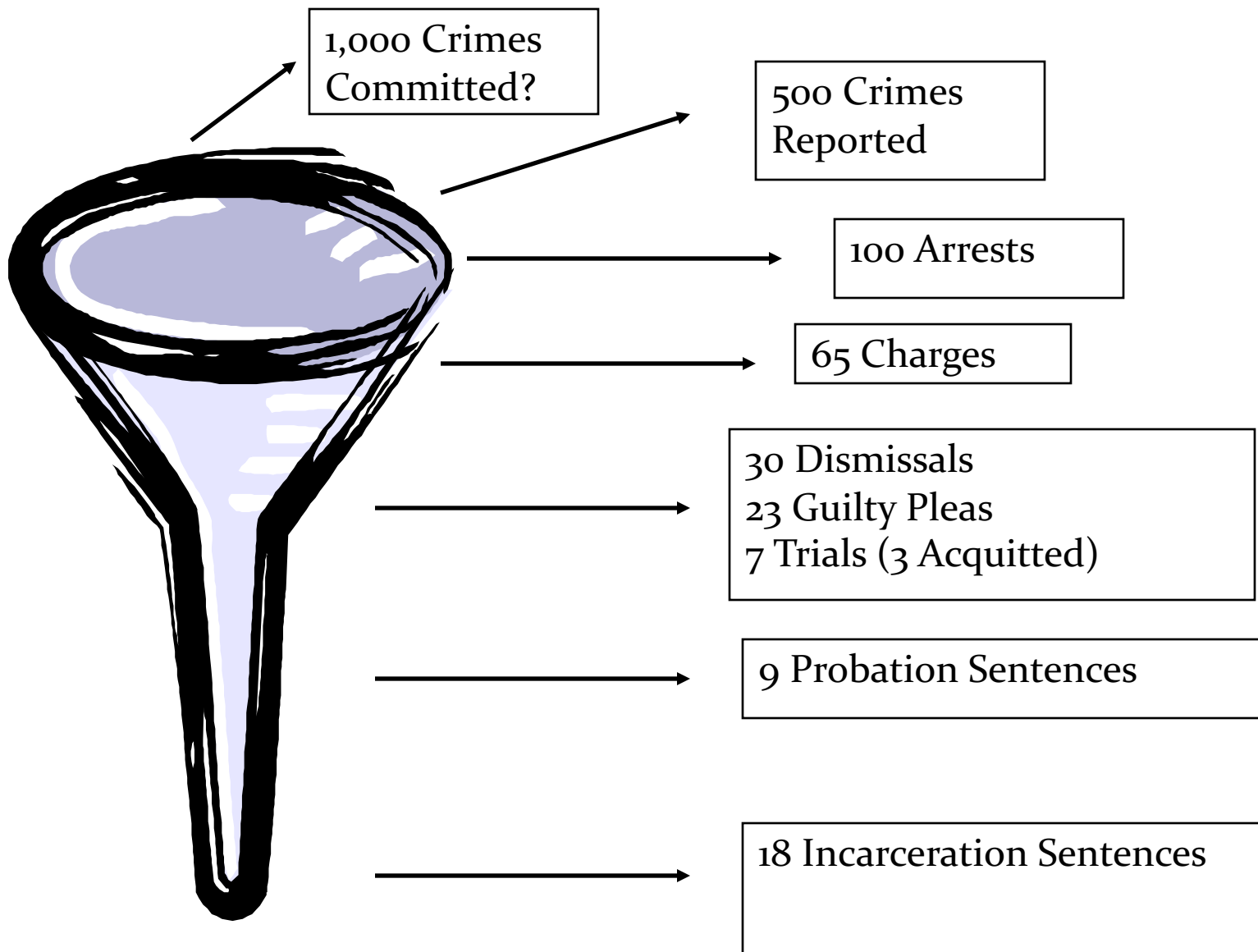
Federal system sets the tone but doesn't change the level

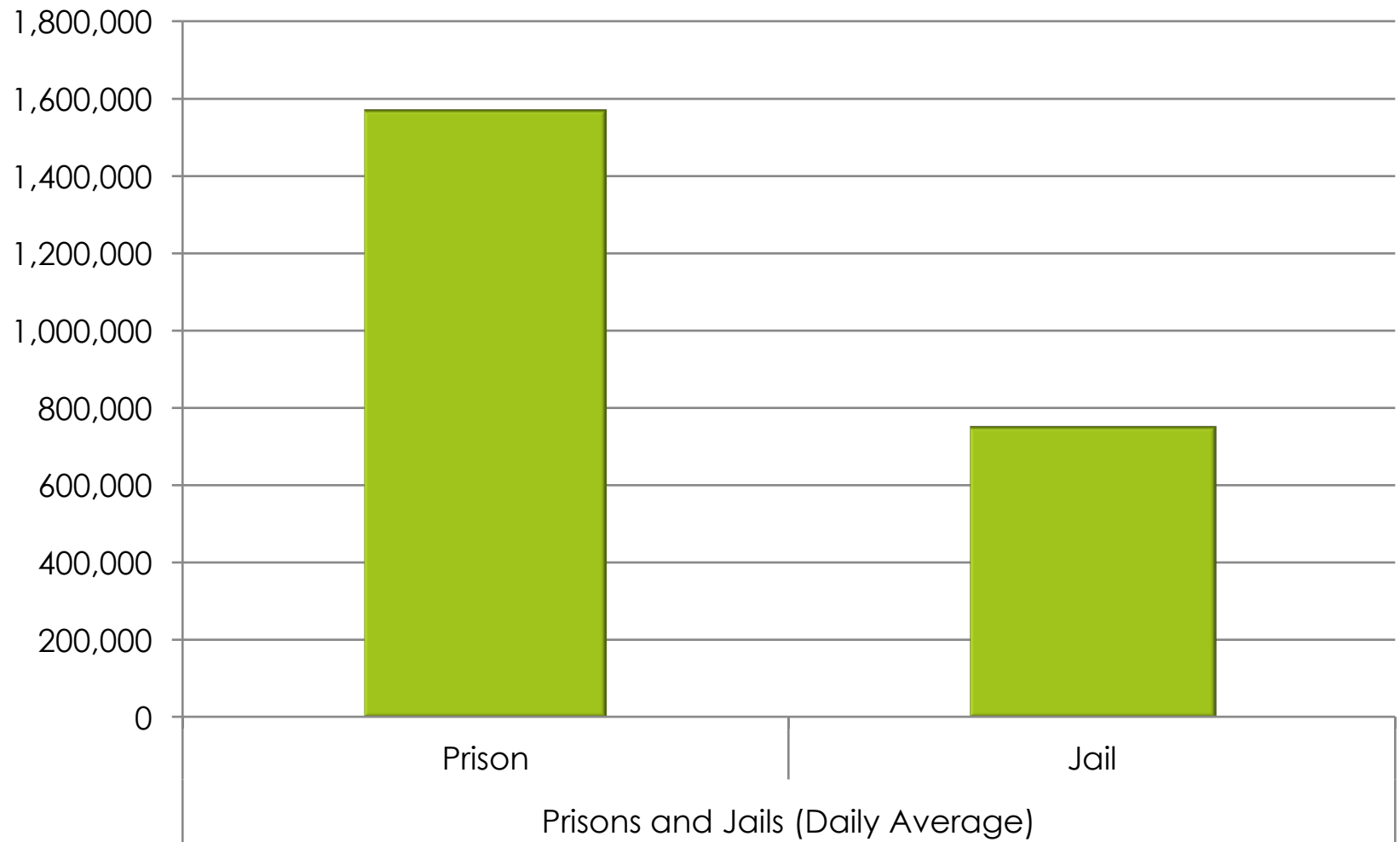


Context and Selection

Prisons and Processing as a Black Box

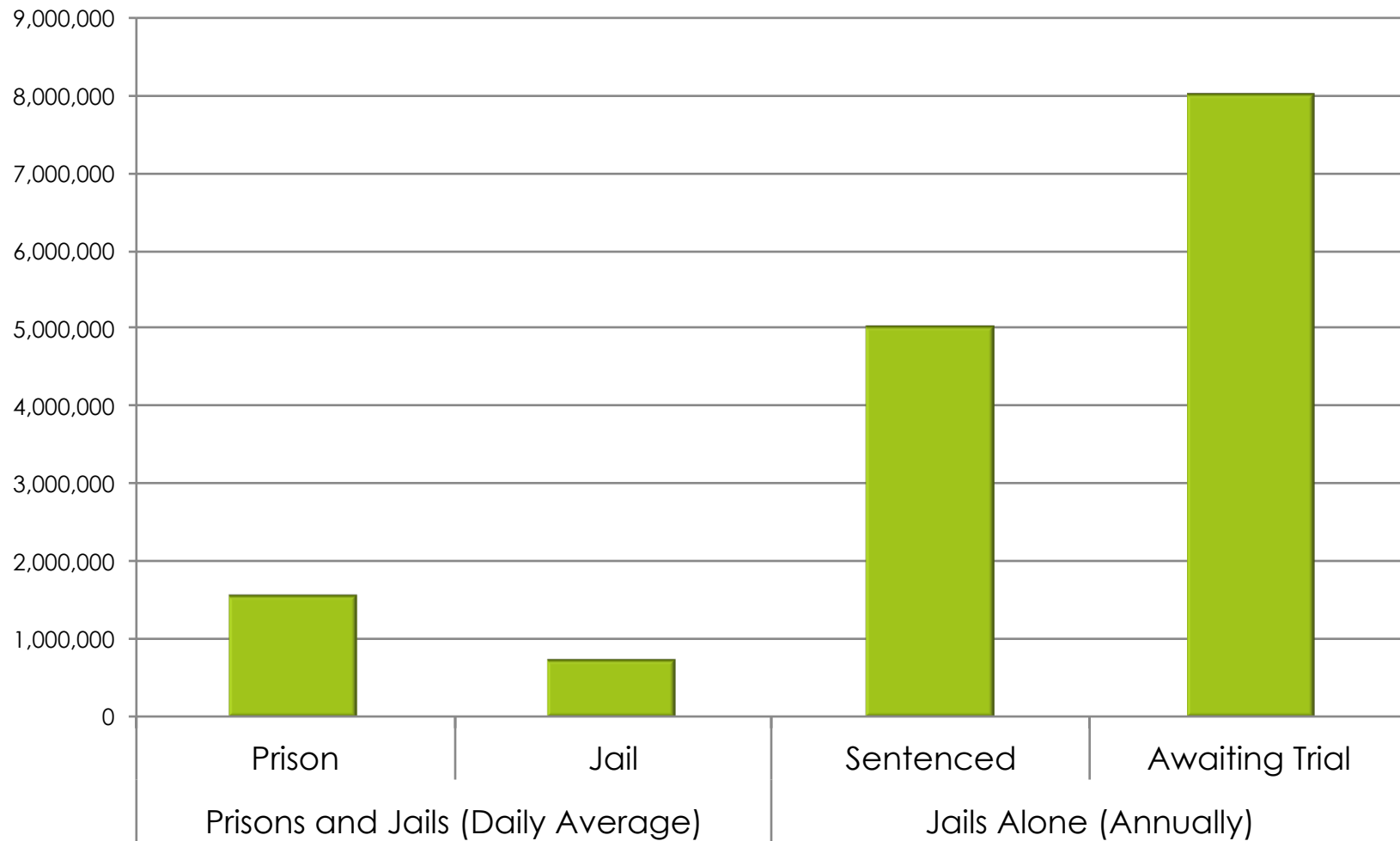
The Funnel Model of the Criminal Justice System





Context

Imprisonment Vs. Incarceration



Context

Jail Cycling

Implications

- It's time to move beyond never/ever comparisons
- Distinguishing parental criminality and parental punishment (handling selection)
- Tackling who is in prison and why and how this influences families
 - Uncomfortable but simultaneously true facts about justice, violence, and inequity
 - Legitimacy concerns

Thanks!

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1. Risk: we show disparities in the risk of paternal imprisonment.
2. Harm: we show the effect of paternal imprisonment on mental health and behavioral problems, homelessness, and infant mortality.
3. Baseline Inequality: we show what the gap is without paternal imprisonment.
4. Increase in Inequality: we show what happens to the existing gap when accounting for varying levels of imprisonment.

4: Aggregating up

- ▶ This is how we do it for externalizing behaviors.
- ▶ Zero incarceration: $\frac{\text{Black}}{\text{White}} = \frac{9.3}{7.4} = 1.26$.
- ▶ Absolute difference at zero incarceration is **1.9** ($9.3 - 7.4$).
- ▶ Average (of high and low estimates) change in externalizing behaviors associated with paternal incarceration is **1.97**.
- ▶ Risks in 1990: **25.1** for black children; **3.6** for white children.

Showing the calculations

Change in inequality:

$$\frac{\text{Black}_{1990} - \text{White}_{1990}}{\text{Black}_0 - \text{White}_0} .$$

$$\frac{(((9.3 * .749) + ((9.3 + 1.97) * .251))) - (((7.4 * .964) + ((7.4 + 1.97) * .036)))}{9.3 - 7.4} .$$

$$\frac{9.80 - 7.46}{9.3 - 7.4} = \frac{2.34}{1.9} = 1.24.$$

So it increased inequality about 24%.