

State correctional policy survey: what state correctional departments say they do

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Contemporary discussions of correctional systems have been based on an assumption concerning the goals of those systems. These assumptions, which have been drawn from philosophical perspectives and unstructured observations of correctional practices, suggest that correctional practices follow specific policy goals such as protecting the public. Actual state correctional policies related to correctional goals have not, surprisingly, been assessed to ascertain the validity of these theoretical assumptions about correctional policy. This research investigates correctional goals' alignment with accepted penal philosophies by examining the mission statements of each US department of corrections. Using qualitative content analysis key words and phrases were extracted from each mission statement ($N = 50$) and categorized to provide a count of correctional goals and an examination of patterns across state correctional systems and across various missions. Results indicate 16 different correctional goals identified by states' departments of corrections. Not surprisingly, the most frequently cited correctional goals include: protecting the public, providing the secure confinement of offenders, and offering opportunities for rehabilitation. Findings further describe missions that are the least cited by states as well as clusters of missions that frequently co-occur. Implications and opportunities for future research are also discussed.

Keywords: state correctional department survey; correctional system missions; correctional goals; correctional policy survey

Criminologists have long pondered the question: what influences the scope, design, size and punitive options of a correctional system? This question has primarily been discussed with respect to philosophies of punishment. In this view, the general philosophical orientation toward punishment taken by a correctional system, that is whether correctional practices are based in retribution, utilitarian (e.g. rehabilitation, deterrence) or social defense philosophies, ought to have a strong influence on penal practices (Newman 1985). The assumption in this line of research is that the philosophical basis of penal practices is a driving force behind penal systems, the types of punishments they employ, the amount of punishment meted out, and even the growth and size of penal systems.

To explore this issue further, criminologists have also examined the relationship between correctional practices and attitudes toward crime and punishment. On the

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one hand, attitudes of legislators are believed to play an important role in affecting penal practices since legislators craft the laws that directly impact penal practices including the length and type of sentencing, minimum sentences, and the structure of criminal law itself (i.e., the kinds of behaviors that can be penalized through correctional responses; Flanagan *et al.* 1989). Legislator attitudes may also affect penal practices through legislative initiatives that create new penal responses and through the funding of penal initiatives and practices (Cook and Lane 2009). On the other hand, many studies of correctional policies are undertaken in nations with representative democracies. In representative democracies, law makers are, in theory, representatives of the general public and therefore rules created about correctional practices ought to be consistent with public attitudes, opinions and values. Thus, correctional policy research has also examined public attitudes toward correctional philosophies, practices, punishment, crimes and criminals (Cullen *et al.* 2000; on the drug war–correctional policy link, see Pallone and Hennessey 2003). The literature on public attitudes tends to show that the public supports rehabilitation, while at the same time a significant portion of the public also expresses support for punishment (Cullen *et al.* 2000). Some research suggests, however, that legislators tend to ignore changes in public attitudes that include, for example, a decline in the fear of crime (Cook and Lane 2009). Much research notes that public officials over-estimate punitiveness among the general public (Roberts and Stalans 1997, Cullen *et al.* 2002) and that these officials also tend to engage in ‘populist punitiveness’ (Roberts *et al.* 2003) – that is, promoting punitive penal policies by taking advantage of public anxiety about crime. Moreover, as Maruna and King (2004) observed, public opinion concerning criminal penalties is not unidimensional, and when depicted in this way represent ‘methodological artifacts’ rather than ‘real’ opinions, especially since public opinions on punishment can be situational. Given conflicting findings, changes in penal attitudes across time and space, and misrepresentation of public opinions, Cullen *et al.* (2000) refer to our knowledge of public opinion and its content as ‘mushy’

Other approaches (see below) have also been employed to examine correctional policy issues, and a significant body of research has been produced. At the same time we know of no research examining *correctional missions* as stated by departments of corrections and whether *correctional mission statements* may contain information useful for examining penal practices in different jurisdictions. In order to facilitate research into this question, this article examines correctional department mission statements for the 50 US states. These mission statements were subjected to content analysis to derive the key issues, concerns, and practices identified by each state’s correctional agency. We describe these missions and concerns, their distribution across the 50 US states, and discuss their fit with existing correctional research and practice. In addition, we describe further studies that address the relevance of correctional mission statements on penal practices, or how, once the content of correctional mission statements are uncovered, this information can be employed to facilitate further research and knowledge of criminal justice practices.

Prior research

Extant research has examined penal practices in relation to a number of different explanations. These explanations include examinations of the effects of philosophies of punishment on penal practice, the link between penal practices and social,

political and economic forces, and the effect of legislative mandates on penal practice.

The philosophy of punishment

In the traditional view, penal practices are described as being strongly influenced by the overarching penal philosophy adopted within a society (Newman 1985). Philosophically, there are three primary penal strategies: (1) retribution or using penal practices in ways that balance criminal harms with equivalent punishments; (2) utilitarian approaches which seek to reduce crime through strategic interventions such as preventing crime by deterring criminal offenders and seeking punishment that affect criminal cost calculations or impact rational decision making, as well as rehabilitative and reform strategies that reduce the likelihood of future criminal behavior; and (3) social defense approaches which depend on incapacitating criminal offenders especially during the most crime-prone years of their criminal careers. Much penological literature examines these philosophies and their impact on penal responses, and discussions of penal philosophies and their implications are standard materials in corrections textbooks.

To be sure, penal philosophies or philosophies of punishment are important influences to the extent that they contain the guiding rational behind penal motives, and lay bare the source of penal approaches and rules to which not only social scientists and philosophers appeal, but which also appear in penal policy rationale. In the contemporary world, however, these philosophies are more like 'ideal' guides to penal principles than actual descriptions of penal practices. Contemporary penal systems tend to blend various philosophies and penal practices, and while philosophies of punishment can serve as a beginning point from which penal practices can be addressed, it is rare that penal systems reflect one coherent philosophical position.

Social, economic, cultural and political forces and structures

Penal practices have also been explored in relationship to social, economic, and political forces, as well as through research on attitudes toward punishment. A broad array of factors can be gathered under social approaches, some of which overlap with other explanations. In his classic analysis of punishment Durkheim (1968) argued that punishment was employed to reinforce social boundaries, but that in healthy, well-integrated and balanced societies where crime was minimized so too would be the need for punishment. In the Durkheimian view, crime is a behavior that 'shocks' the collective conscience, and punishment is the expression of society's unified moral outrage. In this sense, crime calls forth punishment, which in turn expresses a public sentiment. This explanation has given rise to various examinations of punishment including, for example, research on the stability of punishment (Blumstein and Cohen 1973, Blumstein *et al.* 1976, Blumstein and Moitra 1979, Berk *et al.* 1981, 1983, Tremblay 1986, Fiselier 1992, Hale 1992, Ruddell and Fearn 2005, Cooney and Harbin Burt 2008).

Penal practices have also long been examined in relation to economic conditions within society. Beginning with the work of Rusche and Kirchheimer (1968 [1939]) there has been an interest in various interpretations of Marxian explanations of penal practices. This literature builds on Rusche and Kirchheimer's hypothesis that

every system of production tends to discover punishments consistent with its economic goals (1968 [1939], p. 5). Of particular interest has been Rusche and Kirchheimer's thesis of least eligibility which has been translated into analyses of the association between economic marginalization and penal trends, and tested empirically with respect to structural unemployment (Greenberg 1977, 1980), labor market conditions (Jankovic 1977), prison funding and income (Barnes and Teeters 1945), and social histories of punishment and penal practices relative to power structures (Sellin 1976, Foucault 1979, Melossi and Pavarini 1981). In more recent years, Marxian analysis has also given rise to empirical assessments of the effects of long cycles and social structures of accumulation on imprisonment trends (Michalowski and Carlson 1999, 2000), the relationship between rates of surplus value and imprisonment trends (Lynch 1988, 2010), new interpretations of penal practices related to post-Fordist economies (Di Giorgio 2007a, 2007b), and in relation to the economic marginalization of the population during the decline of manufacturing and in relation to cultural phenomenon such as conspicuous consumption (Lynch 2007).

In the USA, there has long been an interest in the relationship between racial conflict or disparity and the use of punishment. For example, the racial threat argument suggests that the size of the minority population impacts the amount of punishment and may contribute to disproportionate racially linked confinement (Jacobs and Carmichael 2001, Ruddell 2005, Ruddell and Urbina 2005, 2007). Changing gender roles and structures have also been examined as a source of variation in patterns of penal responses to offenders of different genders (McCorkle 2004).

Politics and punishment

Much has also been written relating political structures and punishment (e.g., Savelsberg 1994, 1999, Jacobs and Carmichael 2001, Barker 2006). In this view, political organization and decision-making processes are seen as central determinants of penal policy. There is obvious logical appeal to this form of explanation since penal processes are clearly and directly determined by state actors and decision makers. What this view fails to explain, however, is why decision makers select specific choices, or the factors that impact how decision makers choose from among an array of options (e.g., what role does, for example, economic influence play in the political decision-making process?). Here, politics is viewed as a structure which defines the limits of decision making, and tends to be viewed as an autonomous social force, while political action is a form of agency.

Despite the significant effect political analysis models have had in the past two decades on examinations of punishment (e.g., Garland 1990), this approach has, with few exceptions (e.g., Ryan and Ward 1992, Barker 2006), been applied in abstract rather than in concrete empirical terms to describe the general effects of political systems and interests on correctional policy, producing little empirical evidence. This is surprising to the extent that in the contemporary era, corporations have played an increasingly large role in influencing penal practices, especially with respect to providing campaign financing to legislators in states with private correctional systems and expansion legislation (Lilly and Knepper 1993, Chang and Thompson 2002). Though not widely examined, research on this issue has primarily focused on the expansion of the private prison sector, omitting other

important political lobby groups. For example, in California, the union representing prison guards has long been recognized as an influential political lobby group (Lilly and Knepper 1993, Schiraldi 1994). Correctional system workers have a vested interest in maintaining prison system growth (Duffee 1990) and lobby state officials on this issue (e.g., see on Hawaii, Mendoza 2010). In a 2002 study by the National Institute on Money in State Politics (Bender 2002), it was noted that private correctional firms contributed more than \$1.125 million to 830 political candidates in 14 southern US states for the 2000 elections. The majority of those funds (90%) were donated to incumbents or those who won their election. Of the more than 2400 campaign contribution checks written by private correctional contributors, nearly 58% went to candidates in three states – Texas, Florida and North Carolina – or to office seekers in states with significant private prison interests. Lobbying, in other words, may have a dramatic but relatively unexamined effect on penal practices.

Cultural explanations

A cultural explanation of punishment also appears in the literature. For example, Garland (1990) has suggested that social theories of punishment must address the cultural dimensions behind penalty as a causal process, and the cultural meaning and ramifications of punishment. Elsewhere, Garland (2001) argues that contemporary social organization promotes a new control culture and a new perception of or experience of crime expressed in the actions of state and non-state actors. Building on this argument, Garland observed that

in the sociology of punishment, the study of ‘the cultural’ and of ‘meaning’ should not, and ultimately cannot, be separated from the hardedged, ‘material’, aspects of penal practice, such as penal technologies, penal economics, penal politics and penal violence. Paying attention to culture, using the tools of cultural analysis (close reading, discourse analysis, hermeneutics, iconography, ritual analysis, etc.), focusing on meaning and sensibility, thinking about audience and interpretation – these should enhance our understanding of penal power, penal violence, penal techniques and penal resources, not inhibit or displace it. (2006, p. 428)

Garland (2006), however, cautions against taking the idea of culture too far, noting that theoretical descriptions of punishment based solely in cultural analysis presents an artificial analysis that may be useful for theoretical purposes, but which may also misrepresent cultural impacts. In offering this caution, Garland suggests that

The intensified interest in culture and cultural analysis is also liable to promote analyses that regard culture as an independent analytical domain rather than an integral aspect of social relations and to privilege description and explication as the primary purposes of research, thereby diverting the sociology of punishment away from the more ambitious project of social explanation. (2006, p. 420)

Legal influences

Little research has directly examined the effect of legal statutes or statutorily mandated penal policy and practices on actual correctional practice. Burton *et al.* (1993) found that while the majority of state legislatures had passed legal mandates requiring rehabilitation, many also required that attention be paid to other correctional goals including secure custody conditions, deterrence and punishment.

Thus, while rehabilitation was the primary goal identified in legal statutes, significant attention was directed to other concerns as well. In their study of community correctional practices, Johnson *et al.* (1994) found that rehabilitation was the primary legislatively mandated focus in legislation describing the purpose of community corrections. In a more recent study of correctional legislation, the results of Kelley *et al.* (2004) provide support for the earlier work of Burton *et al.* – that the primary goal of much contemporary correctional legislation remains rehabilitation. Kelley *et al.* note that correctional legislation that supports rehabilitation may also contain ‘competing goals’ that focused on public safety and retribution rather than rehabilitation.

To be sure, a variety of strategies have been employed in the penological literature in an effort to describe, explain and understand punishment, and penal policy, practices and trends. Much prior research tends to focus on a specific form of explanation such as economic, political or cultural. But, as Gatrell noted, ‘Only rash historians would privilege material or political or cultural causes without interrelating all three’ (1994, p. 25).

Correctional policy

Above, a general overview of the variety of perspectives that have been employed to assess and understand penal policy was presented. One of the limitations of these research strategies is that they are, to extend Garland’s (2006) observations, theoretical abstractions. As abstractions, these approaches call attention to a myriad of possible social, economic, political and cultural forces that may influence correctional practices, policy and penalty. And, as abstractions, these approaches are useful in dissecting a host of potential factors that influence penal practices. Yet, because of the abstract position developed in these analyses – for example, describing how culture or economic arrangements may operate to affect punishment – some very concrete potential determinants of punishment have been neglected. At times, specific policies have been of interest in the study of penal practices and, for instance, much has been written on the effects of ‘three strikes’ policies on penal practices, or on a variety of other sentencing policy statutes such as those affecting drug sentencing. Correctional policy research, however, has neglected the analysis of other concrete policy-related matters such as the mission statements of correctional systems.

Correctional mission statements are important to the extent that they specify, at least in principle, the general penal strategy of a correctional system. In the USA, each state department of corrections has a clearly identified mission statement that specifies the goals of each particular state’s correctional system. To date, we are unaware of any research that has examined the content of these policies for clues about what US states claim to be their correctional and/or penal goals. Below, we describe these goals by analyzing the mission statements provided by each of the 50 US states’ correctional systems. From these mission statements we extract similar patterns of correctional policy, count each of the goals specified by state correctional systems, and examine patterns of overlap across correctional systems and across various missions.

Methodology

Qualitative content analysis was used to examine the mission statements of each of the 50 US states’ department of corrections. Content analysis uses analytical

categories to cluster data and explore patterns and overarching themes within a larger text or set of texts (Weber 1990). In the present research, analytical categories were derived inductively – that is, obtained gradually from the data by employing the method of grounded theory. Grounded theory refers to the technique of identifying explanations of phenomena from the data itself as opposed to *a priori* (Glaser and Strauss 1967). In other words, there are no *a priori* decisions made to search for specific key words or phrases. Rather, the key words and phrases are extracted from the analysis of mission statements.

The sample for this study consists of the mission statement of each of the 50 US state departments of corrections as published by those departments on their official websites. The mission statements of all but one state's department of corrections were obtained by this method (Utah). Utah's correctional mission statement was available through a more general government website focused on state agency missions and objectives. The mission statements coded for this study were those available to the general public on a state department of corrections website as of January 2010.

Analytic procedures

Content analysis was conducted utilizing Atlas.ti V5.0 (Muhr 2004), a widely used qualitative data management package. Each mission statement was uploaded to the Atlas.ti database and then electronically coded.

Initially, each mission statement was independently read to identify and index the dominant themes included in each department of corrections' mission. Phrases were identified and examined using a constant comparison method, in which each construct was systematically checked and compared to the previous and subsequent mission statements. New categories were added to reflect as many of the nuances in the data as possible. Using this procedure we identify 16 fairly independent correctional policy mission themes. These themes, along with the percentage of states identifying each mission, are displayed in Table 1. The complete distribution of missions across state departments of corrections can be found in the Appendix.

Findings

As noted, employing the wording provided on state department of corrections websites, 16 correctional missions were identified. These missions can be divided into clusters which form four sets of missions based on prevalence of identification.

- *Cluster one* (public safety, rehabilitation): Among all stated missions, the most prevalent was to protect the public and provide safe community environments. This mission was identified by 47 of 50 states. The second most prominent mission ($N = 28$) was to provide offender rehabilitation and reform. The third most common mission ($N = 27$) was to provide secure conditions for inmate confinement. The first and third mission statements in this cluster both emphasize public safety. Taken together, at least one of the three missions found in cluster one was identified by 48 of the 50 states. Only Colorado and Maine failed to identify one of these three missions as among their priorities.
- *Cluster two* (reintegration, safe environments for inmates): A second set of two missions was identified by 19 states. These two missions include supporting

Table 1. Frequency of correctional policy missions.

	<i>N</i> (%)
Correctional policy missions	
Protect inmates' constitutional rights	3 (6)
Hold offenders accountable	8 (16)
Promote safe communities/protect the public	47 (94)
Provide secure inmate confinement	27 (54)
Provide rehabilitative/reformative treatment programs/opportunities	28 (56)
Provide safe environment for staff	12 (24)
Reduce recidivism	7 (14)
Support reintegration/reentry	19 (38)
Provide humane environment/proper care of inmates	14 (28)
Provide safe environment for inmates	19 (38)
Provide appropriate community-based supervision	9 (18)
Support/assist victims	10 (20)
Respect victims	2 (4)
Promote relationships/credibility with community	4 (8)
Provide professional environment for staff	2 (4)
Adhere to regulations	3 (6)
Descriptives	
Average number of missions	4.28
Minimum	1
Maximum	9

reintegration and reentry into the community and the provision of safe environments for inmates. Taken together, 29 states identified at least one of these two missions. These missions form a cluster with respect to frequency of appearance, but not with respect to mission themes.

- *Cluster three:* Among the remaining 11 missions, six missions were identified by between 7 and 14 states. These missions include: to provide humane environment/proper care of inmates ($N = 14$), to provide a safe environment for staff ($N = 12$), to support and assist victims ($N = 10$), to provide appropriate community-based supervision ($N = 9$), to hold offenders accountable ($N = 8$) and to reduce recidivism ($N = 7$). While each of these missions was identified by at most 14 states (28%), 33 states identified at least one of these six missions.
- *Cluster four:* The final cluster was comprised of five missions that appear very infrequently in department of corrections mission statements. No single mission in this group was identified by more than four states. These missions include: promote relationships and credibility with the community ($N = 4$); protect inmates' constitutional rights ($N = 3$); adhere to regulations ($N = 3$); provide a professional environment for staff ($N = 2$); and respect crime victims ($N = 2$).

Overall, 10 states referred to at least one of these missions, indicating that there was low overlap among missions in this group.

Considering the above, cluster one missions stand out not only because these include the most frequently cited missions, but also because they identify three missions – security, safety, and rehabilitation and reform – widely regarded as ‘the most appropriate purposes’ of imprisonment in academic literature, in the news

media, and in public opinion surveys. In this sense, then, the primary missions identified by state correctional systems are consistent with popular explanations of penal strategies. In other words, the missions identified by state correctional systems are consistent with several different theoretical explanations reviewed earlier, and it is not possible given these data to determine which explanation is the most useful for explaining the observed patterns.

Above, we analyzed the distribution of state correctional missions as reported on state correctional websites and presented these as a 16 category classification involving four clusters. The overlapping missions expressed in the original 16 categories can, however, be collapsed to create a seven-category classification. From the original 16 missions, three were maintained as unique and non-overlapping (hold offenders accountable; providing a professional staff environment for staff; and promoting community relationships). The remaining 12 missions were collapsed into the following four categories:

- (1) *inmates' rights/care* (protect inmate constitutional rights; provide humane environment/proper care of inmates);
- (2) *safety/security* (promote safe communities/protect the public; provide secure inmate confinement; provide safe environment for staff; provide safe environment for inmates; provide supervised community-based supervision; adhere to regulations);
- (3) *reform/rehabilitation/crime reduction* (provide rehabilitative/reformative treatment programs/opportunities; reduce recidivism; support reintegration/reentry); and
- (4) *victims* (support victims; respect victims).

The result of collapsing the mission statements into the seven categories is displayed in Table 2. Collapsing the data in this way does not alter the results. The collapsed data continue to indicate that the primary missions of state departments of correction revolve around safety, security and reform, rehabilitation and crime reduction.

Tables 1 and 2 examine correctional missions as defined by an analysis of mission statements that identified key concerns set out in those statements. In these tables, the data are presented based solely on an emerging view of correctional missions extracted from mission statements. It is possible, however, to collapse these missions into groups that reflect theoretical concerns related to correctional missions. Theoretically derived categories are quite similar to those extracted from mission statements directly and without any pre-formed theoretical justification. Based on

Table 2. Distribution of collapsed mission statements across states, 2010.

Mission	<i>N</i> (%) of states
Safety/security	48 (96)
Reform/rehabilitation/crime reductions	38 (76)
Inmate rights/care	16 (32)
Victims	11 (22)
Hold offenders accountable	8 (16)
Promote community relationships	4 (8)
Provide professional staff environment	2 (4)

the correctional literature, four key categories can be formed to represent theoretically based missions: (1) safety (public, staff and inmates); (2) crime reduction (strategies recognized as potentially reducing crime); (3) victim services and orientation; and (4) organizational concerns and issues. A fifth theme is possible: punishment. None of the state correctional mission statements directly refer to punishment, and this category may be captured by the use of other phrases such as 'establishing inmates' responsibility for their acts.' In some views, responsibility could be considered a key aspect of retribution (Newman 1985), but it may also reflect views related to rehabilitation (i.e., inmates must take responsibility to provide evidence of their rehabilitation or to engage in effective rehabilitation), or even social defense. Because of the overlap between these theoretical/philosophical views, we eliminated these theories as useful means for describing correctional missions.

Table 3 presents the results of the theoretical analysis based on our four-category description. These results do not differ substantially from those in Table 2, indicating that whether mission statements are identified theoretically or based on content analysis that extracts themes from the mission statements themselves, the outcomes do not differ substantially. One of the limitations of this comparison, however, is our inability to define correctional mission statements as reflecting major philosophies of punishment (e.g., retribution, etc.) due to the lack of specificity in these statements and the overlap between these penal philosophies. In other words, mission statements do not appear to align neatly with the theories or philosophies of punishment criminologists normally described or which are ordinarily employed by criminologists to explain penal practices or as the basis for correctional research.

Co-occurring missions

We also examined the data to determine if any of the identified missions tend to co-occur. Co-occurring missions were identified using a correlation matrix, and figures reported below represent Pearson's *R*.

Though not widely distributed, the most highly correlated co-occurring missions across states were the protection of inmates' constitutional rights and adherence to regulations ($r = 0.65$). This association is logical to the extent that it reflects two dimensions of correctional organizational concerns and charges, both with legal origins. The second most highly correlated mission statements were holding offenders accountable and reducing recidivism ($r = 0.61$). This relationship makes sense to the extent that those constructing these mission statements believe that the

Table 3. Theoretically derived mission statement focuses.

Area (N^a)	Number of states						Total (N states) ^b
	0	1	2	3	4	5	
Safety (5)	2	10	15	17	6	0	50 (48)
Crime reduction (3)	14	20	15	1	NA	NA	50 (36)
Victim focus (2)	39	10	1	NA	NA	NA	50 (11)
Organizational (5)	30	16	3	1	0	0	50 (20)

^aNumber of constructs in each area.

^bTotal must equal 50 in each case to represent all states; N states indicates the number of states that include at least one of the constructs in each area.

most effective mechanisms for reducing recidivism include the need for offenders to take responsibility for their actions.

Several other mission pairings occur less frequently. First, states that seek to promote safe staff environments also include mission statements concerning professional environments ($r = 0.36$), perhaps indicating a belief that acting professionally and following procedures promotes staff safety. Second, states with mission statements promoting reentry and reintegration are more likely to have statements concerning victim support services ($r = 0.33$). Reintegration and reentry programs obviously are designed to improve the inmate's opportunity for success upon release. For these programs to be successful, they must include offender services. At the same time, a similar assumption applies to victims – for victims to feel satisfied with the penal response and successfully recover from their victimization, it is often important to offer victim services. It is possible that in states with this dual focus, there may be some effort to integrate these two kinds of services, and future research could address this issue. Third, mission statements seeking to promote relationships with communities co-occur more often with mission statements concerning the development of a professional correctional environment ($r = 0.32$). This relationship may reflect an assumption that professional behavior is key to promoting community relationships. Fourth, states that focus on reintegration and reentry also tend to emphasize secure inmate confinement missions ($r = 0.31$). The co-occurrence of these mission statements may indicate that while states recognize the importance of reintegration and reentry, they are also concerned that those kinds of programs occur in safe and secure environments that do not threaten public safety.

Among all frequently co-occurring missions, only reintegration/reentry and professional correctional environment missions co-occur with more than one other mission (reintegration co-occurs with both secure inmate confinement and victim support; professional correctional environment co-occurs with both safe staff environment and promoting community relationships). The co-occurrence of these themes emphasizes that correctional policies are designed to pay close attention to security issues, regardless of other mission concerns.

Among all missions, only the most frequently cited mission – protecting the public – is negatively correlated with other correctional missions. Protecting the public is negatively correlated with both missions emphasizing community-based supervision ($r = -0.32$) and respect for victims ($r = -0.38$). That is, the more community-based supervision or respect for victims is emphasized, the less mission statements focus on protecting the public. This is an interesting result. One obvious interpretation is that states indicating concern for victims and community supervision programs are less concerned with protecting the public. However, community supervision often involves reintegrating inmates with the intent of decreasing offending and thereby protecting the public. Thus, it is possible that states that focus on community supervision and victims are simply overlooking how those missions overlap with public protection goals. Further research is needed to untangle this relationship.

Discussion and conclusion

The purpose of this article was to investigate the missions of US departments of corrections and examine their alignment with accepted penal philosophies. Not

surprisingly, the findings indicated that the most prominent correctional mission was to provide protection and safety to the community. Only three states – Colorado, New Mexico, and Maine – failed to identify public safety as a correctional goal in their department of corrections mission statement.

It is interesting to note that in contrast to other states, the three states that did not identify public safety as a primary mission identified missions that tended not to overlap. For example, New Mexico and Maine's missions were 'offender centered,' described goals that focused on offenders' needs such as secure confinement, holding offenders accountable, and supporting reintegration. At the other end of the spectrum, Colorado's mission statement was 'victim centered' and included both supporting and respecting victims.

The results also indicated an emphasis on secure confinement and offender rehabilitation as correctional goals. The prevalence of these missions as well as their secondary prioritization behind public safety is in line with much of the existing literature on legally mandated penal philosophy (see Burton *et al.* 1993, Johnson *et al.* 1994, Kelley *et al.* 2004).

As noted, most discussions of correctional missions and practices frame the analysis around philosophical orientations. The results from our study indicate that, indeed, the majority of state department of corrections' missions centered on concerns most widely associated with the social defense philosophy, specifically protecting the public, a mission identified by 47 states. The second most dominant mission was to provide for offender rehabilitation and reform, or outcomes associated with utilitarian philosophies of punishment, which were expressed by 28 states. In contrast to these two philosophies, retributive goals were infrequently addressed as a primary mission of state departments of correction, with only eight states identifying this mission (i.e., hold offenders accountable).

The remaining missions were not directly driven by philosophical concerns. Many of the remaining missions have a practical orientation such as providing secure detention, and safe correctional environments for the benefit of correctional employees and inmate safety. Few departments of correction missions appear, on their face, to be influenced by alternative explanations such as those grounded in economic, political or cultural explanations. Yet, as noted in the review of those theories, it would be a mistake to dismiss these concerns as non-influential based on the type of analysis we have undertaken here. It may be plausible, for instance, that the philosophical mission stated in social defense philosophy and expressed by many modern US states in their missions as 'protect the public,' is a manifestation of the influence of economic conditions on penal policy and practice. As a philosophy and penal practice, social defense emerged during the early twentieth century, a period marked by extensive worker rebellion, low wages and other effects of economic marginalization that relate to economic markets (see Rusche and Kirchheimer 1968 [1939], Di Giorgio 2007a, 2007b, Lynch 2007).

Perhaps more interesting than the missions indicated as priorities by the majority of states, are those goals that were rarely identified as foci for departments of correction. Many of these 'lesser' goals represent contemporary social movements that have been relegated to the periphery of the modern criminal justice system. These goals are most likely driven by strong ties to political and cultural philosophies on the role of both state (i.e. the departments of corrections) and non-state (i.e. advocates, social workers) actors in the correctional practices of certain states. For example, though community policing models have been well established as the

method of choice in many states' police departments, only four states identified establishing or strengthening ties to the community as correctional missions. In addition, while the victim's rights movement has been well under way for over three decades, only 10 states indicated that they supported victims, while only two states identified respecting victims as a department of corrections mission. Indeed, it is routine for the criminal justice system to regard individual victims of crime as only minor actors in the prosecutorial process, as a piece of physical evidence or as a witness against the accused, while propagating the State as the true victim (Weed 2005). Furthermore, even though prisoners' rights have been redefined over the past 30 years, only three states identified the protection of prisoners' constitutional rights as a departmental mission.

In sum, our findings are, in many ways, rather straightforward, and fit with what is already known about penal practices from prior research. Perhaps more important than the specific findings of our research is the potential uses of this data in future research. Of particular interest is the question of whether department of correction missions have any relationship to other correctional and crime outcomes. For example, are crime rates lower in states with a particular constellation of missions? Do states that emphasize rehabilitation and reform have lower crime rates and/or lower recidivism rates? Or are these mission statements related or unrelated to crime and recidivism across states? Is there a reduced level of fear of crime in states that promote victim-centered missions? Answers to these unaddressed questions have important policy implications that may affect the missions correctional departments ought to select.

As a preliminary effort to illustrate the future uses of our mission statement data, we examined several basic relationships which require further exploration. To begin, we should note that we found that state incarceration rates and violent crimes rates¹ were positively correlated, so that states with high incarceration rates also had high rates of violent crime ($r = 0.52$, $p < 0.01$). There are a number of additional questions that can be asked about this relationship. Given the preliminary nature of this investigation, we limit our analysis to the following research question: are there any particular missions that are more likely to occur in states with high crime and/or incarceration rates?

To examine these questions, we grouped states into incarceration quintiles, since our mission statement data are discrete rather than continuous data. Grouped state incarceration rates were positively correlated with the following clustered missions (cluster two identified in the earlier analysis): reform/rehabilitation/crime reduction ($r = 0.23$, $p < 0.05$). In short, states with high incarceration rates are more likely to have missions that seek to reduce crime whether through reform/rehabilitation or other pathways (i.e., incapacitation, deterrence). In line with this finding, a state's violent crime rate was also positively associated with reform/rehabilitation/crime reduction missions ($r = 0.29$, $p < 0.05$). Thus, states that promote crime reduction strategies in various forms tend not only to have high crime rates, but high violent crime rates in particular. At the same time, state incarceration rate quintiles and holding offenders accountable were negatively correlated ($r = -0.38$, $p < 0.01$). This is an interesting result, which perhaps indicates that states which seek crime reduction as a mission do not see that outcome as dependent on holding offenders accountable for their crimes, or more specifically, on obtaining crime reductions through offender recognition of their behavioral intentions. Finally, states with high rates of violence were less likely to have mission statements focused on promoting

credibility/relationships with the community ($r = -0.28$, $p < 0.05$) or reducing recidivism ($r = -0.41$, $p > 0.01$). These particular relationships are difficult to explain. One of the immediate observations that can be made here is that the negative relationship between the violent crime rate and missions focused on reducing recidivism is that this relationship appears to contradict the positive relationship noted between violent crime rates and missions focused on crime reduction. These opposing relationships would appear to suggest that state departments of corrections either ignore or overlook the connection between efforts to reduce recidivism and those aimed at reducing crime. These empirical results seem incongruous and require further analysis. Moreover, it might be expected that in states with elevated rates of violence, departments of corrections would seek to enhance community relations in an effort to promote a positive public image and to demonstrate their commitment to the public and its safety. Likewise, one might hypothesize that states with high levels of violent crime would be more likely to focus on missions that seek to reduce recidivism. Rather, it seems that in states with high rates of violent crime, departments of corrections have either not had a strong history of promoting the reduction of recidivism, or have given up on this mission. In either case, this result is interesting and helps identify the need for further research into this particular crime–correctional mission relationship.

Questions can also be raised about the social, economic and political conditions within states that might lead them to select a specific array of missions. Are states with particular political leadership affiliations (e.g., Democrat, Republican) more or less likely to have particular mission configurations? Do the economic conditions within a state impact correctional missions? For example, drawing upon economic or materialist explanations, it could be hypothesized that states with higher levels of economic equality or higher average incomes or less extensive economic marginalization are more likely to select missions focused on the humane treatment of inmates or safe correctional environments compared to a focus on holding offenders accountable or administrative tasks such as adherence to regulations.

In short, the identification of correctional mission statements opens the door for a wide variety of research that can test hypotheses related to producing knowledge about the factors that influence selection of the content of correctional mission statements and the potential effect of correctional mission statements on crime and recidivism across states. Currently, much of what we believe we know about penal practices is derived from various explanations of how penal systems ought to work. Much less, however, is known about whether these theoretical specifications have real-world importance or effects. Further research into the potential connection between correctional mission statements, crime and recidivism and other factors believed to influence these associations can, therefore, answer issues criminologists have long examined.

Note

1. Data concerning state incarceration rates and violent crime rates was identified using Bureau of Justice statistics, 2008.

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Appendix. Correctional policy missions by state

	AL	AK	AR	AZ	CA	CO	CT	DE	FL	GA	HI	IA	ID	IL	IN	KS	KY
Protect inmates' constitutional rights														X			
Hold offenders accountable																	
Promote safe communities/protect the public	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Provide secure inmate confinement	X	X		X	X		X	X	X	X				X		X	X
Provide rehabilitative/reformative treatment programs/opportunities	X	X	X		X								X	X			X
Provide safe environment for staff			X				X		X			X			X		X
Reduce recidivism															X		
Support re-integration/re-entry	X	X			X		X		X			X		X	X	X	X
Provide humane environment/proper care of inmates	X		X				X	X	X			X					
Provide safe environment for inmates			X		X		X	X				X				X	
Provide appropriate community-based supervision				X	X							X					
Support/assist victims																	X
Respect victims						X											
Promote relationships/credibility with community						X											
Provide professional environment for staff						X											
Adhere to regulations																	

(continued)

Appendix. (Continued).

	LA	MA	MD	ME	MI	MN	MO	MS	MT	NC	ND	NE	NH	NJ	NM	NV
Protect inmates' constitutional rights								X								
Hold offenders accountable				X	X	X			X		X					
Promote safe communities/protect the public	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Provide secure inmate confinement	X				X			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Provide rehabilitative/reformative treatment programs/opportunities						X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Provide safe environment for staff		X	X						X							X
Reduce recidivism				X					X		X					
Support re-integration/re-entry	X								X			X	X	X	X	
Provide humane environment/proper care of inmates		X							X	X		X	X			X
Provide safe environment for inmates	X		X							X		X	X			
Provide appropriate community-based supervision	X						X								X	
Support/assist victims					X				X							
Respect victims	X					X							X			
Promote relationships/credibility with community									X							
Provide professional environment for staff									X							
Adhere to regulations		X						X								

(continued)

Appendix. (Continued).

	NY	OH	OK	OR	PA	RI	SC	SD	TN	TX	UT	VA	VT	WA	WI	WV	WY
Protect inmates' constitutional rights												X					
Hold offenders accountable	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X		X	X	X
Promote safe communities/protect the public	X	X			X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Provide secure inmate confinement	X	X			X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
Provide rehabilitative/reformative treatment programs/opportunities	X	X			X		X	X	X	X	X	X					X
Provide safe environment for staff			X				X						X				
Reduce recidivism				X						X						X	
Support re-integration/re-entry	X	X											X			X	
Provide humane environment/proper care of inmates		X								X		X				X	X
Provide safe environment for inmates	X	X	X		X		X	X	X		X					X	X
Provide appropriate community-based supervision								X					X			X	
Support/assist victims		X								X						X	
Respect victims					X												
Promote relationships/credibility with community		X									X						
Provide professional environment for staff							X										
Adhere to regulations												X					