

Political Impacts of Parental Incarceration

Context

The late 20th century saw an unprecedented rise in incarceration in the United States. This affected:

- ▶ Political behavior of those locked up (Weaver & Lerman 2014).
- ▶ Their neighbors' behavior? (Burch 2013).
- ▶ Social and economic outcomes of their children, even later in life (Johnson 2009).

This project seeks to measure how parents' incarceration shapes their children's political behavior once they become adults.

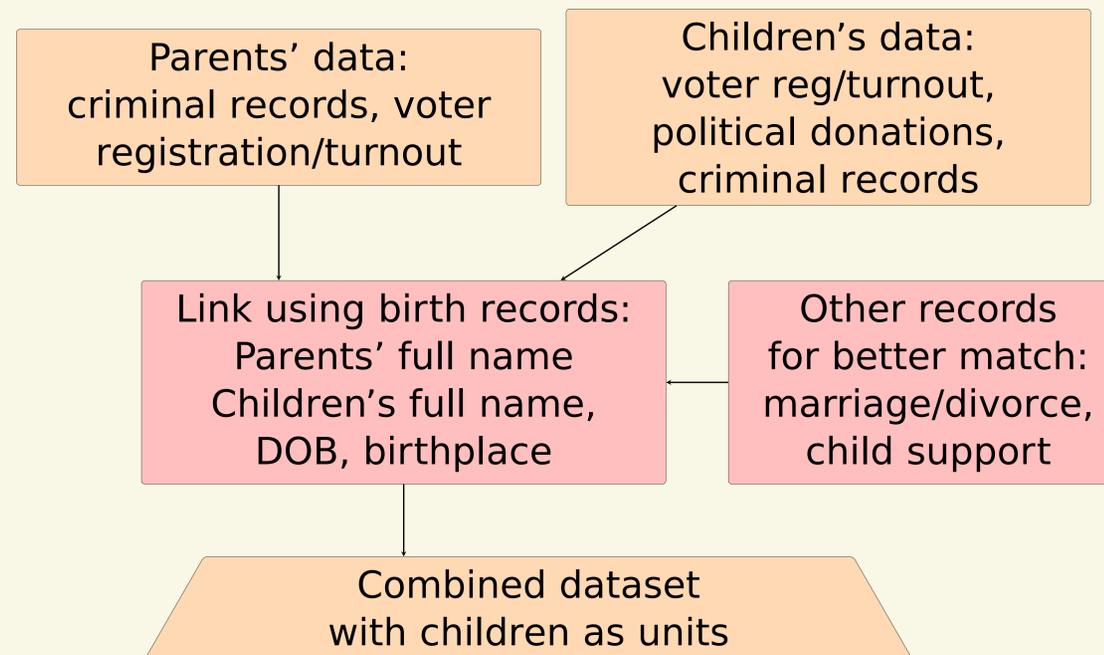
Approach

Use administrative data to link parents and children, and directly observe both parental sentencing outcomes and children's political participation

Data Sources

- ▶ Criminal court records from Harris County, TX, 1990-present
- ▶ Texas Birth Index from Ancestry, 1980-1995
- ▶ Recent Texas voter files, 2012-present
- ▶ National voter turnout records from Catalist, 2006-present
- ▶ Texas marriage/divorce records, 1960-present

Linking Administrative Datasets



Simplest Observational Approach

With this data, could just regress children's turnout behavior (as adults) onto their parents' criminal sentencing outcomes:

$$Vote_{2012, child} = \alpha + \beta ParentalIncarceration + \epsilon_i$$

But this is obviously confounded (and I have few covariates).

Using Random Judge Assignment

- ▶ First-time defendants in Harris County criminal courts are randomly assigned to courtrooms (some with harsher judges than others)
- ▶ Economists use similar systems to instrument for sentence length or conviction
- ▶ Different setup here: interested in children whose parents face criminal charges
- ▶ Ultimately, find a LATE for children whose parents face prospect of criminal sanctions during their childhood

Timeline

- Apply for permissions, gather datasets
- Link datasets
- Run analysis

Feedback

This project is in progress, so it's a good time to incorporate your thoughts!

- ▶ What other data should I collect?
- ▶ What are your concerns?
- ▶ Any particular thoughts on attrition?
- ▶ How to incorporate many judges into 2SLS?

References

Burch, T. (2013). Trading Democracy for Justice: Criminal Convictions and the Decline of Neighborhood Political Participation. University of Chicago Press.
Di Tella, R., & Schargrofsky, E. (2013). Criminal recidivism after prison and electronic monitoring. *Journal of Political Economy*, 121(1), 28-73.
Weaver, V. M., Lerman, A. E. (2014). Arresting Citizenship: The Democratic Consequences of American Crime Control. University of Chicago Press.

Thanks

This research is supported by the Multidisciplinary Program in Inequality Social Policy, the Center for American Political Studies, and the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences at Harvard University.