Testing Mechanisms: Carceral Contact and Political Participation

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Objectives. This article tests two of the mechanisms—civic duty and governmental trust—through which carceral contact is theorized to be affecting political participation. This article does not examine whether criminal justice contact affects participation, but rather tests the mechanisms through which carceral contact is theorized to be affecting participation. *Methods.* I employ the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 and the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (Wave III) and utilize four different statistical analysis methods. *Results.* I find that carceral contact has a significant direct effect and indirect effect on participation. Twenty-one and 24 percent of the negative effect on participation is an indirect effect of carceral contact on feelings of civic duty and governmental trust, respectively. *Conclusions.* My results strongly suggest that the causal arrow points in my hypothesized direction—carceral contact depresses levels of civic duty and governmental trust, which subsequently suppresses political participation.

The number of people who experience contact with the institution of criminal justice in the United States is currently unmatched in modern history, yet scholars have not fully explored the mechanisms through which this phenomenon spills over into the body politic. Scholars have found that even routine carceral contact, like being stopped or pulled over by police, can adversely affect political participation (Epp, Maynard-Moody, and Haider-Markel, 2014) and that people who live in high-imprisonment communities with high rates of police stops are less likely to participate in politics than those who do not (Lerman and Weaver, 2014a). In *Trading Democracy for Justice*, Burch states that "while [the] analysis cannot shed much light on the particular mechanisms by which [political] suppression occurs . . . the results at least provide compelling evidence that *something* is happening at the neighborhood level because of the criminal justice system" (2013:85).

Despite extensive scholarship detailing the expansion of the carceral state, the subsequent increase in carceral contact, and the negative political externalities of carceral contact, our understanding of the effects of carceral contact, as either simultaneous or path dependent, remains unknown. Specifically, does carceral contact decrease governmental trust, civic duty, and political participation at the same time? Or do the former—trust and civic duty (both highly positively correlated with political participation)—mediate the reductions in the latter? In this article I estimate how carceral contact directly affects the hypothesized mechanisms—civic duty and governmental trust—and, in turn, how it indirectly affects two separate measures of political participation mediated through these mechanisms. I use a longitudinal data set to reduce the effects of selection bias and measurement error and I use structural equation modeling to assess the direct and indirect effects of carceral contact on political participation.

I employ the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 (NLSY97) and the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health, Wave III (hereafter Add Health), and employ four different statistical analysis methods. Previous studies have included various measures of political participation and carceral contact, but they have not utilized structural equation modeling to assess the direct and indirect effects of carceral contact on the theorized mechanisms and measures of participation to determine whether the effects are simultaneous or path dependent. My contribution to the literature on the political consequences of the carceral state is a clearer understanding of the relationship between carceral contact and participation. This article does not examine whether criminal justice contact affects political participation, but rather tests the mechanisms through which carceral contact is theorized to be affecting political participation. This research moves the conversation from *what* is happening to *how* it is happening. I find that carceral contact has a significant direct effect and a significant indirect effect, mediated through feelings of civic duty and governmental trust, on political participation. Twenty-one and 24 percent of the negative effect on political participation is an indirect effect of carceral contact on feelings of civic duty and governmental trust, respectively. My results strongly suggest that the causal arrow points in my hypothesized direction—carceral contact depresses levels of civic duty and governmental trust, which subsequently suppresses political participation.

Carceral contact has become an important force shaping American mass politics. Scholars of American politics, public policy, criminology, race and ethnicity, and participation, along with affiliated disciplines, must consider governmental punitivity, either through the criminal justice system or another institution, as a new barrier to political engagement and participation—two fundamental pillars of American democracy. I begin with a review of the literature on the direct effects of carceral contact on political participation. Next, I make two theoretical arguments about the relationship among carceral contact, civic duty, and governmental trust. The analysis then proceeds in two parts. First, I estimate four random effects logistic regression models using the longitudinal data and one logit model and three OLS models using the Add Health data to establish a direct relationship between carceral contact and political participation. This demonstrates that the negative effect of contact on participation found by other scholars also appears in these data. I also calculate the marginal effects to estimate the magnitude of the effects. Second, I employ two structural equation models (SEMs) to estimate the direct effect of carceral contact on civic duty and governmental trust and its indirect effect on political participation, mediated through these mechanisms. I then discuss the serious implications of these findings and the consequences of the expansion of the criminal justice system on American democracy.

The Effects of Carceral Contact on Participation: Some Mechanisms

A third of America's adult population has passed through the criminal justice system (Lerman and Weaver, 2014b), and some 16 million people have a criminal record (Brame et al., 2012). The numbers are substantially higher than any other nation and are historically and comparatively unprecedented (Travis, Western, and Redburn, 2014). The growth of the criminal justice system represents an extraordinary expansion of punitive governmental power into the everyday lives of *some* Americans, with serious adverse political consequences for those who experience direct and network, or indirect, contact (Burch, 2013; Lerman and Weaver, 2014b).

Interestingly, criminality (criminal thinking and self-reported criminal activity) does not drive lower participation rates per se, but having direct contact with the criminal justice

system does (Weaver and Lerman, 2010). Weaver and Lerman find that "contact with the criminal justice system is associated with diluted political engagement" and that those contacted "are less likely to be politically active or engage in civic society and have less trust in government" (2010:824). Again, "routine" contact, such as being stopped, frisked, or pulled over by police, has been found to adversely affect political participation (Epp, Maynard-Moody, and Haider-Markel, 2014). Below the level of felony conviction, White (2019) found that first-time misdemeanor defendants voted at lower rates in the following election cycle. Even serving short sentences in prison/jail is negatively associated with voter registration and turnout (Bobo and Thompson, 2006). In addition, experiencing network contact, such as family member conviction or incarceration, similarly produces a demobilization effect (White, 2018).

Network mechanisms, such as the cultural, social disorganization, and demobilization hypotheses, suggest that lower participation rates within high-imprisonment communities are due to cultural transmission and direct observation (Hannerz, 1969). Cultural transmission (or socialization) refers to the idea that previously incarcerated individuals share their political opinions, beliefs, and attitudes with others in their social environment. Living in proximity to ex-convicts, for example, exposes community members to higher levels of apathy and perceptions of institutional discrimination (Abu-Jamal, 1996). Direct observation refers to the idea that living in proximity to ex-convicts allows residents to personally observe their neighbors having negative interactions with the criminal justice system.

Due to their social environments, some communities are unable to self-regulate and as a result some residents do not conform to formal and informal social control networks (Bursik and Grasmick, 1999). Formal social networks include political and organizational membership and informal social networks include nonbiological kinship bonds and peer networks (Sampson and Groves, 1989). Unable to teach community members civic skills and impart governmental trust through organizational membership and socialization, these communities experience lower levels of participation. In *Trading Democracy for Justice*, Burch (2013) found little support for the cultural hypothesis but suggests that the effects of imprisonment on political participation most likely operate through social disorganization and demobilization. What these theories have in common is twofold: (1) carceral contact adversely affects participation via direct and network contact and (2) carceral contact adversely affects civic duty and trust, thereby further impacting participatory behaviors.

However, other scholars have found that many of the factors positively associated with political participation are negatively associated with carceral contact (Fleisher, Decker, and Curry, 2001). Gerber et al. (2017) and Burch (2011) found that selection bias and measurement error inflated the effects of serving time in prison on voting, producing a negative association larger than the true effect. Scholars have also found that outreach to felons considerably decreased the negative effects associated with incarceration (Gerber et al., 2015). There are also limitations associated with utilizing self-reports of political participation. Civically engaged individuals have been found to overreport voting (Vavreck, 2007) and convicted criminals may inflate their rates of participation (Gerber et al., 2017).

In contrast, longitudinal data use a combination of past measures of behavior and measured covariates to account for the static differences between those who have and have not experienced carceral contact. Although the above arguments are valid and persuasive, they are focused on measuring the differences between those who have been incarcerated and those who have not. I accept the consensus that carceral contact has a negative effect on participation. Rather, I am concerned with the direct effects of carceral contact on feelings

of civic duty and governmental trust, and its indirect or subsequent effects on participatory behavior.

Civic Duty, Governmental Trust, and Political Participation

I argue that feelings of civic duty are produced through interactions with institutions and, most importantly, are learned from one's social environment. Scholars posit that citizens vote out of a sense of social obligation even if alternative outcomes yield identical benefits (Fowler, 2006). Some scholars have argued that civic duty is the key variable in explaining participation (Blais and Young, 1999). Blais, Young, and Lapp (2000) found that a sense of duty was the most compelling motivation to vote. Even economic incentives were found to be less effective than civic duty in inducing participation (Panagopoulos, 2013). Scholars argue that only when distinguishing between voters with high and low senses of duty do other factors become significant (Blais, Young, and Lapp, 2000). Feelings of civic duty are transmitted from one generation to another as a means of socialization (Plutzer, 2002). Socialization and the social environment are both correlated with variations in levels of civic duty and thus the likelihood of political participation (Klemmensen et al., 2012). The problem is that policing also has a direct role in socialization, as it establishes relationships between citizens and institutions (Justice and Meares, 2014).

I also further argue that governmental trust is produced through interactions with institutions and that these interactions affect one's level of trust. There is minimal consensus about the meaning of "trust" in political science. It is relational and involves one making oneself vulnerable to another person, a group, or an institution that has the capacity to harm others. The connection between trust and political participation has produced many theories and involves complex interactions and eventualities (Levi and Stoker, 2000). A study of presidential elections from 1968 to 1996 found that declining trust impacted voter choice and that distrustful voters viewed institutions with suspicion (Hetherington, 1999). However, Miller (1980) and Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993) found no causal link between trust and voting. In some cases distrust has been found to encourage various forms of participation. Yet an analysis of the National Election Survey found that in no election did the distrusting vote more than the trusting (Levi and Stoker, 2000). Distrust is a powerful source of governmental dissatisfaction and an impediment to political participation (Hetherington, 1998). Muller and Schrage (2014) found a positive correlation between areas with high levels of incarceration and governmental distrust; people even tangentially associated with incarceration are more likely to be distrustful of government (Lee, Porter, and Comfort, 2014). Scholars who study governmental trust and its connection to participation have not acknowledged the quotidian nature of institutional interactions. An incident of carceral contact could create distrust and increase participation in a specific election or over a specific time period (Walker, 2014), but years of negative contact produce institutional distrust, which becomes imbedded within the social environment and the socialization process.

Based on the above arguments I hypothesize that (1) carceral contact, both direct and network, has a negative effect on political participation; (2) carceral contact has a direct negative effect on feelings of civic duty and governmental trust; and (3) carceral contact has an indirect negative effect on political participation mediated through civic duty and governmental trust. Essentially, I posit that carceral contact adversely affects civic duty and governmental trust, and once compromised they are two mechanisms through which we are witnessing diminished political participation.

Data and Methods

I utilize data from two sources that include a large number of people who have experienced carceral contact, detailed measures of various degrees of carceral contact, and measures related to subsequent political behavior and governmental trust. This allows for the examination of two of the mechanisms (civic duty and trust) through which we observe the negative political consequences of carceral contact. To establish the direct effects I estimate four random effects logistic regression models using the longitudinal data and one logit model and three OLS models using the Add Health data. To examine the indirect effects, I estimate two SEMs. The descriptions of the control variables appear in the Supplementary Appendix.

The first data source is the NLSY97. It is a longitudinal study of American youth born between 1980 and 1984. To date, respondents have been surveyed 16 times. The survey includes a total of 8,984 respondents of which there are 4,599 men, 4,385 women, 4,665 whites, 2,335 blacks, 1,901 Hispanics, and 83 mixed-race respondents (NLSY97, 2015). When asked about voting, 62 percent of blacks and 57 percent of whites said they voted or usually voted. The results are consistent with previous literature finding that blacks overreport turnout (McKee, Hood, and Hill, 2012). When asked if they had been sentenced to spend time in a correctional institution, 7 percent of blacks answered yes, compared with 5 percent of whites. When respondents were asked if they had had a relative incarcerated in the past five years, 28 percent of whites and 50 percent of blacks replied in the affirmative. These descriptive statistics are representative of a national black-to-white incarceration rate of five-to-one (Travis, Western, and Redburn, 2014).

Dependent Variables (NLSY97)

Vote is a dichotomous variable measuring if the respondent voted (1) or not (0) in 2004, 2006, 2008, and 2010. The youngest respondents, born in 1984, would have been 20 years old in 2004. In 2004, 4,098 respondents reported voting; in 2006, 2,640 respondents reported voting; in 2008, 3,049 respondents reported voting; and in 2010, 3,041 respondents reported voting. In total, 1,112 respondents reported that they were ineligible to vote, of which 308 were black and 378 were white. I use vote with respect to participation. Voting is considered the definitive act of political participation but is not the only behavior that defines it. The voter registration question—another indicator of participation—asks if a respondent was registered to vote (1) or not (0) in 2004, 2006, 2008, and 2010.

The second data source is the Add Health survey, a longitudinal study of a nationally representative sample of U.S. adolescents. The cohort was first interviewed in Grades 7 through 12 during the 1994–1995 school year and then followed into young adulthood with four in-home interviews (Harris and Udry, 2016). The survey combines longitudinal survey questions on respondents' social, economic, psychological, and physical well-being with contextual information on the family, neighborhood, community, school, friendships, peer groups, and romantic relationships, providing a unique opportunity to study the linkage between network effects in adolescence and outcomes in adulthood.

The Add Health survey includes 4,882 respondents consisting of 2,253 men, 2,626 women, 1,213 blacks, 3,181 whites, 82 American Indians, and 205 Asian or Pacific Islanders. Wave III of the survey was collected through in-home interviews with Wave I respondents then 18–26 years old. Respondents were administered survey questions

designed to obtain information about family, relationships, education, employment, civic and political participation, and involvement with the institution of criminal justice (Harris and Udry, 2016). I utilized the Add Health survey because of the questions measuring governmental trust at all three levels of government and the question asking how many times a respondent had been stopped or pulled over by police.

Dependent Variables (Add Health)

Political participation is measured by asking if a respondent voted (1) or not (0) in the 2000 presidential election. The youngest respondents would have been 18 in the year 2000. Governmental trust is measured by three separate questions gauging respondents' levels of distrust in federal, state, and local government. On a scale of 1–5, respondents were asked how much they agree with the statement, "I trust the (federal/state/local) government." The possible responses were: strongly agree (1); agree (2); neither agree nor disagree (3); disagree (4); and strongly disagree (5).

Latent Variables

Latent variables are not directly observed but rather inferred from other items that are directly measured. The latent variables here are constructed utilizing confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). CFA is a multivariate analysis used to examine how well measured items represent a latent construct. CFA is advantageous because it allows for each of the observed items to have its own variance and corresponding error term. The error terms allow for unique variances in the responses to each question. The latent variable produced accounts for how people respond to the included questions, which is what the items share in common. Another major advantage of using CFA is that by isolating each item's unique variance I am able to obtain a better measurement of the latent variable. Utilizing latent variables as independent variables in SEMs removes measurement error, producing stronger results (Acock, 2013).

National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997. To produce the latent variable carceral contact I include four observed measures of criminal justice contact. Criminal justice variables measure institutional influences, including the respondents' social environment (Hajnal, Lajevardi, and Nielson, 2017). I control for whether a respondent has been arrested or been placed on probation in a given year (1) or not (0). The variable court measures whether a respondent attended court (and more specifically what type) in a given year: none (0); juvenile (1); adult (2); or both (3). All three variables are lagged four years. I lagged the variables to mirror the question on familial incarceration, which asked if any members of the respondent's family (including nonbiological members) had been incarcerated in the last five years. The family incarceration variable is a proxy for network effects. I used standard participatory independent variables, expanded upon in the Supplementary Appendix, to create the latent variable demographics. I created the latent variable civic duty using questions asking respondents how important voting, jury duty, reporting crime, and keeping informed are to our society. The possible responses were as follows: very important (1); somewhat important (2); or not at all important (3). A respondent with high levels of civic duty would feel that these activities are very important to society. The civic duty questions were not included in the direct effects longitudinal models because they were only asked in 2007.

National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health. I used five observed variables to create the latent variable carceral contact. The first carceral contact question measures the number of times a respondent has been stopped by police. The responses were never (0); one time (1); two or three times (2); four or five times (3); or six or more times (4). The variable arrested measures whether a respondent was ever arrested or taken into custody by police (1) or not (0). Consistent with current research, a higher percentage of blacks (21 percent) reported being stopped four or more times compared with whites (15 percent), and of those asked if they had been arrested or taken into custody by police, more blacks (60 percent) reported yes than whites (55 percent). The latent variable political identification was created using the observed variables ideology and party identification. Party identification is a strong predictor of political participation (Carmines, Ensley, and Wagner, 2012). Political parties are formal social control networks strongly associated with civic duty and trust. The latent variable distrust was created using the three questions assessing respondents' level of distrust of local, state, and federal government.

Structural Equation Modeling

SEMs are a multivariate statistical analysis technique. SEMs involve the combination of factor analysis and multiple regression analysis. They display interrelations among latent constructs (here carceral contact, demographics, civic duty, distrust, and political ID) and observed dependent variables (here vote and registration) as a succession of structural equations. The SEM command does not estimate a different trajectory for each individual, but it does estimate the variance of random effects (Acock, 2013). SEM is utilized by social science researchers because it estimates multiple and interrelated dependence in a single analysis (Hox and Bechger, 1998). SEMs are primarily driven by theory. They are confirmatory analyses and can be either consistent (and support the theory) or inconsistent (Schreiber et al., 2006).

Structural equation modeling is applicable here because it allows me to estimate the direct effect of carceral contact on hypothesized mechanisms and the indirect effect of carceral contact on subsequent participatory behavior mediated through these mechanisms. Mediator variables are of great theoretical importance. They provide the causal mechanism connecting the exogenous variable to the endogenous outcome variable (Acock, 2013).

I estimated both structural models as maximum likelihood with missing values. This method is appropriate in order to use all the available information in the presence of missing data on one or more variables. Scholars have critiqued the use of SEM to estimate causal mechanisms in that it "does not easily extend to nonlinear or nonparametric models" and because it "obscures the identification assumptions required to identify causal mechanisms" (Imai et al., 2011:772). Maydeu-Olivares (2017) finds that maximum likelihood estimation is the method of choice because employing robust standard errors and goodness-of-fit tests produces results with high empirical power. I employed several goodness-of-fit tests and estimated both structural models using robust standard errors to assess for serial correlation and the results remained unchanged. The coefficients presented in the SEMs are the standardized coefficients.

The results of an SEM should be discussed in terms of total, direct, and indirect effects, and not as cause. The direct effect represents the effect an independent variable has on a dependent variable and is depicted by the standardized path coefficients. The

indirect effect represents the effect of the independent variable (here carceral contact) on a dependent variable (here vote and registration) through a mediating variable (here civic duty and distrust). The total effect is the summation of the direct and indirect effects. I divide the indirect effect by the total effect to get the percentage of the effect that is indirect (Acock, 2013; Schreiber et al., 2006). The tables with the total and indirect effect coefficients for SEM 1 and 2 are located in the Supplementary Appendix. Tyler and other scholars (Mazerolle et al., 2013; Sunshine and Tyler, 2003; Tyler and Wakslak, 2004) have utilized structural equation and path models to estimate the role of criminal justice mechanisms.

Results

The results for the control variables, the tables for the direct effects models using the Add Heath data set, and the figures for the marginal effects appear in the Supplementary Appendix. The coefficients for the control variables are in their expected directions and are consistent with existing literature. Here, I highlight the primary variables of concern. I find that carceral contact has a large direct and negative effect on voting, voter registration, and governmental trust. Below I expand on these results.

Direct Effects: NLSY97

In the general vote model including all years I find that arrest (-0.401) and family member in jail (-0.59) are significant and negatively associated with voting. African Americans, as expected, report voting at higher rates than whites, and Hispanics are significantly less likely to vote than whites. Women, older respondents, and the more educated are more likely to vote. Income variables, household income and weeks worked, are significant and positively associated with voting. Excluding Hispanics (-0.11), education (0.08) has the largest marginal effect on voting followed by family member in jail (-0.075) and arrest (-0.051). I find that in presidential election cycles, network contact (-0.8) and education (0.9) continue to produce similar and opposite effects on the probability of voting. In the aggregate and in presidential cycles, having a family member incarcerated is as significant as the most reliable predictive variable for turnout: education. In midterm election years, experiencing direct and network contact reduced the likelihood of voting by 5 and 6 percent, respectively. Education remains consistent, increasing the probability of voting by 8 percent in midterm years. Excluding Hispanics and education, none of the other control variables had average marginal effects larger than those produced by having direct and network carceral contact (Table 1).

Furthermore, contact, both direct and network, has a negative effect on voter registration again similar to the effect of education. Experiencing arrest and familial incarceration reduce the likelihood of registering to vote by 4 percent each, compared to education, which increases the likelihood of voter registration by 5 percent. Consistent with my hypotheses, I find that carceral contact has a direct, adverse effect on political participation and that network contact has a marginal effect similar to that of education in the aggregate and in presidential election cycles. I also find that direct and network contact produce an effect as similarly significant as education on the likelihood of voter registration. These results are consistent with Weaver and Lerman (2010) and others' findings, and overall my results are largely consistent across all four longitudinal models.

TABLE 1

Multivariate Results for Voting and Registration Using NLYS97

Model	(1)	(2) Presidential	(3)	(4) Registered to
Variables	Vote in All Years	Vote	Midterm Vote	Vote
Arrest	−0.401***	−0.220***	−0.227***	−0.363***
	(0.0653)	(0.0636)	(0.0762)	(0.0705)
Family member in	−0.587***	−0.357***	−0.260**	−0.317**
jail	(0.130)	(0.102)	(0.122)	(0.143)
Black	0.668***	0.223***	0.224**	0.942***
	(0.0983)	(0.0822)	(0.0870)	(0.117)
Hispanic	−0.872***	−0.570***	−0.486***	−0.512***
	(0.103)	(0.0816)	(0.0952)	(0.112)
Mixed race	−0.455	−0.244	−0.203	−0.243
	(0.390)	(0.312)	(0.347)	(0.421)
Birth year	−0.120***	−0.0727***	−0.0668***	−0.0827***
	(0.0277)	(0.0224)	(0.0245)	(0.0318)
Men	−0.486***	−0.196***	−0.195***	−0.365***
	(0.0782)	(0.0635)	(0.0699)	(0.0897)
Weeks worked	0.00918***	0.00266*	0.00391**	0.00479***
	(0.00146)	(0.00155)	(0.00197)	(0.00174)
Household	1.87×10^{-6}***	1.21×10^{-6}***	2.84×10^{-7}	1.64×10^{-6}***
income	(4.64×10^{-7})	(4.37×10^{-7})	(5.60×10^{-7})	(5.97×10^{-7})
Education	0.653***	0.426***	0.361***	0.397***
	(0.0397)	(0.0327)	(0.0389)	(0.0401)
South	−0.230***	−0.155**	−0.163**	0.0564
	(0.0776)	(0.0672)	(0.0741)	(0.0899)
Urban	0.115	0.0700	0.111	0.120
	(0.0877)	(0.0888)	(0.0993)	(0.103)
MSA—not city	−0.0448	0.244	−0.102	−0.231
center	(0.163)	(0.170)	(0.175)	(0.195)
MSA—city center	0.0128	0.428**	−0.134	−0.167
	(0.171)	(0.178)	(0.184)	(0.203)
Constant	230.0***	139.4***	128.3***	160.3**
	(54.80)	(44.40)	(48.59)	(62.93)
Observations	15,161	4,745	3,656	11,928
Number of respondents	6,741	4,745	3,656	5,869

NOTE: Standard errors are in parentheses; ***$p < 0.01$; **$p < 0.05$; *$p < 0.1$.

Structural Equation Model 1: NLSY97

SEM 1, depicted in Figure 1, meets the standard of overall goodness of fit for a maximum likelihood with missing values model (Acock, 2013; Schreiber et al., 2006); $r^2 = 0.94$. Tables displaying the standardized and unstandardized coefficients and standard errors for SEM 1 and 2 are included in the Supplementary Appendix. The coefficients shown in Figures 1 and 2 are the standardized coefficients. All paths are positive and significant for the observed measures used to create the latent variable carceral contact. If a respondent is 1 standard deviation higher on carceral contact, she will respond 0.12 standard deviations higher on familial incarceration, 0.95 standard deviations higher on arrest, 0.87 standard deviations higher on court, and 0.41 standard deviations higher on probation.

The control variables used to create the latent variable demographics are education, race, weeks worked, household income, gender, birth year, metropolitan statistics area, urban,

FIGURE 1

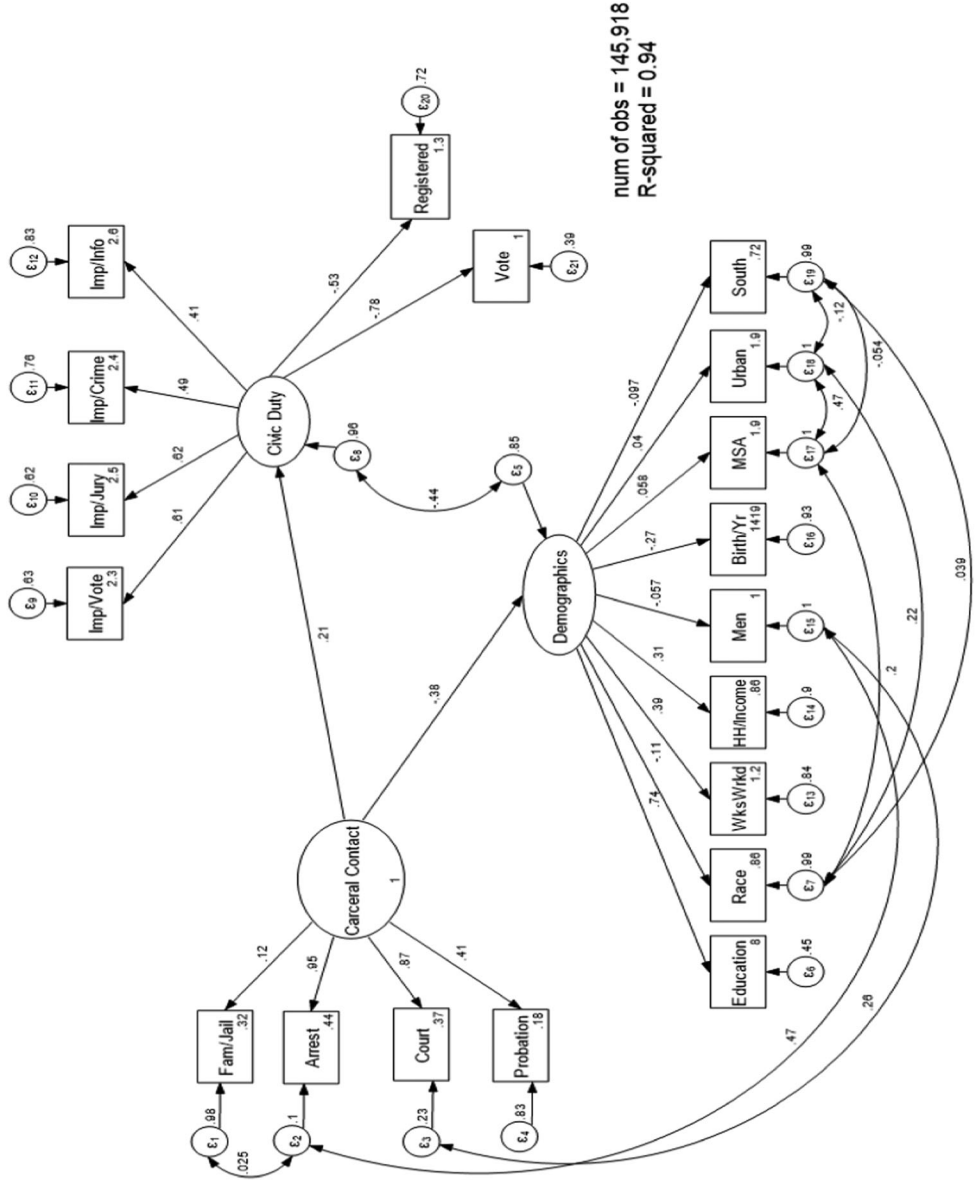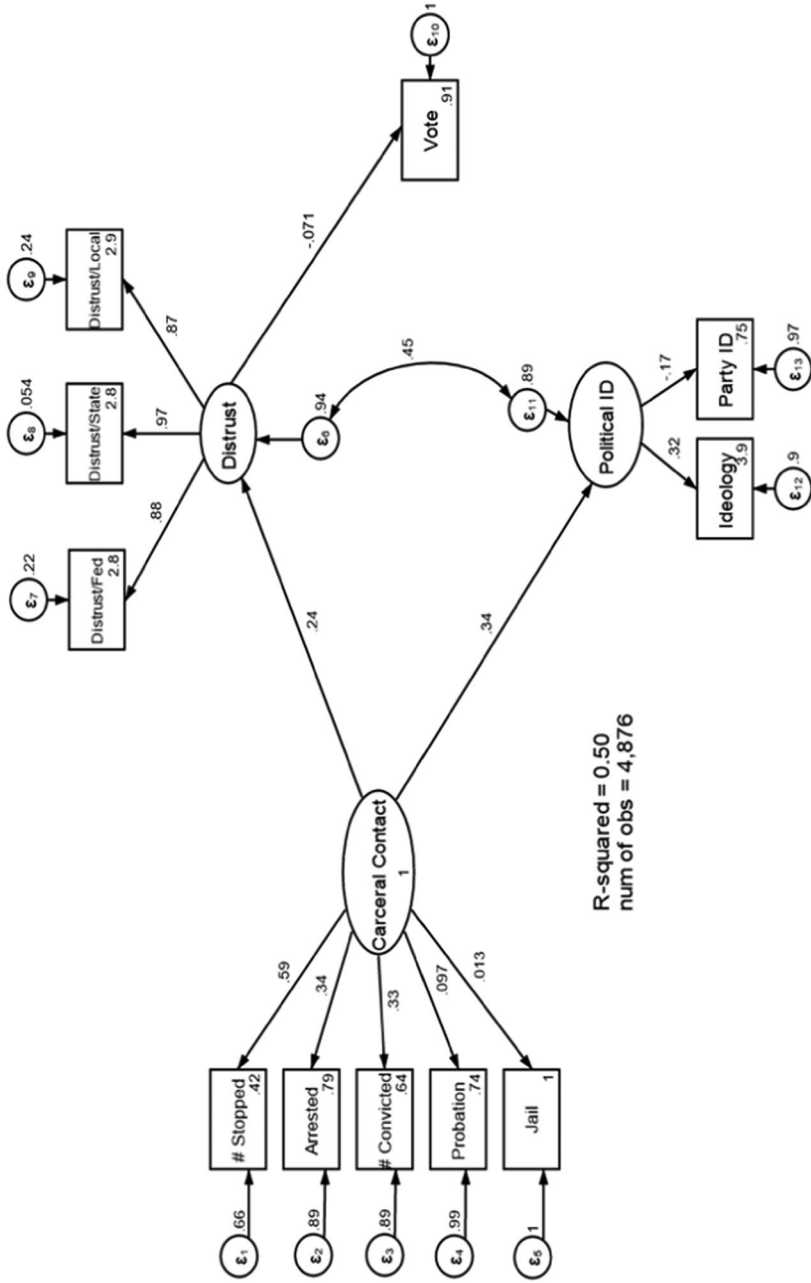Structural Equation Model 1 with Standardized Coefficients (NLSY97)

FIGURE 2

Structural Equation Model 2 with Standardized Coefficients (Add Health)

and South. All the observed measures are significant and their coefficients are in the expected directions. Consistent with current scholarship and demographics, I find that men are positivity correlated with measures of carceral contact and that one's race is positively correlated with geographic location. The latent variable demographics is negatively correlated with civic duty, suggesting an inverse relationship. The direct path coefficient from carceral contact to demographics is significant and negative (−0.38), signifying a negative relationship between carceral contact and demographic variables.

All paths are significant and positive for the latent variable civic duty. Positive coefficients on civic duty measures correspond with believing an activity is not at all important. If a respondent is 1 standard deviation higher on civic duty, she will respond 0.61 standard deviations higher on believing voting is not at all important, 0.62 standard deviations higher on believing jury duty is not at all important, 0.49 standard deviations higher on believing reporting crime is not at all important, and 0.41 standard deviations higher on believing staying informed is not at all important. The results also show that carceral contact has a significant positive direct effect on civic duty (0.21). The positive coefficient indicates that as carceral contact increases, so too does the belief that voting, jury duty, reporting crime, and staying informed are not at all important.

The direct standardized path coefficients from civic duty to vote (−0.78) and registered (−0.53) are both significant and negative. Feeling that voting, jury duty, reporting crime, and staying informed are unimportant has a direct negative effect on political participation. Parsing the indirect effects of carceral contact, I find 21 percent of the total negative effect on the likelihood of voting (−0.78) and registering to vote (−0.53) is an indirect effect of carceral contact mediated through civic duty.

In summation, the results are consistent with my hypotheses. First, I find that both direct and network contacts have direct negative effects on political participation. The effect of network contact equals that of education in the aggregate and in presidential election cycles and both direct and network contact produce an effect similar (but opposite) to that of education on voter registration. Second, the SEM provides straightforward and easily interpretable estimates of the direct and indirect effects of carceral contact on political participation mediated through measures of civic duty. Twenty-one percent of the reduction in the likelihood of participation is an indirect effect of carceral contact mediated through feelings of civic duty. This analysis strongly suggests that the causal arrow points in the hypothesized direction—carceral contact decreases levels of civic duty and thereby suppresses political participation.

Direct Effects: Add Health

I find that carceral contact is significant and negatively associated with voting. Being arrested has a larger marginal effect (−0.07) on the likelihood of voting than education (0.05). In all three OLS models estimating governmental trust, the number of times a respondent was stopped or detained by police has a significant adverse effect on governmental trust. Voting is found to be positively associated with trust at all three levels of government. The results show that distrust is associated with reduced political participation and that carceral contact increases distrust.

Structural Equation Model 2: Add Health

SEM 2, depicted in Figure 2, meets the standard of overall goodness of fit for a maximum likelihood with missing values model (Acock, 2013; Schreiber et al., 2006). The $r^2 = 0.50$.

For the latent variable carceral contact, the path coefficients for the number of months in jail and on probation are positive but not significant. The path coefficients for times stopped, convicted, and arrested are positive and significant. If a respondent is 1 standard deviation higher on carceral contact, she will respond 0.59 standard deviations higher on number of times stopped, 0.34 standard deviations higher on arrest, and 0.33 standard deviations higher on number of times convicted.

The path coefficients for the latent variable distrust are all positive and significant. If a respondent is 1 standard deviation higher on distrust, she will respond 0.88 standard deviations higher on distrust of federal government, 0.97 standard deviations higher on distrust of state government, and 0.87 standard deviations higher on distrust of local government. The path coefficients for political identification are significant but in opposing directions. If a respondent is 1 standard deviation higher on political identification, she will respond 0.32 standard deviations higher on ideology and −0.17 standard deviations lower on identifying with a political party. Carceral contact has a direct positive effect on political identification (0.34) and distrust (0.24).

My results show that as carceral contact increases, so too does identifying as liberal, not identifying with a specific political party, and distrusting all levels of government. The direct path coefficient from the latent variable distrust to vote is negative and significant (−.071). As governmental distrust increases, the likelihood of voting decreases. Examining the indirect effects of carceral contact, I find 24 percent of the total negative effect on the vote coefficient is an indirect effect of carceral contact mediated through governmental distrust.

For the second time, the results are consistent with the hypothesized effect of carceral contact. First, I find that carceral contact has a direct negative effect on voting and governmental trust. Second, the SEM again provides straightforward and easily interpretable estimates of the direct and indirect effects of carceral contact on political participation. My analysis strongly suggests that the causal arrow points in the hypothesized direction—carceral contact depresses levels of governmental trust and thereby suppresses political participation. I find consistent support for my hypothesis across all three levels of government, utilizing three different estimation methods.

Discussion

My findings have three important implications for the academic debates about participation, criminal justice policy, and institutions. My findings strongly suggest that direct and network contacts with the carceral state are significant threats to political participation. Carceral contact, or the level of carceral contact citizens find themselves under, has direct and indirect effects on participation mediated through complex factors. Scholarship on the political consequences of the carceral state should examine the theorized mechanisms through which carceral contact is suppressing political participation. The first step was confirming that political suppression exists; the next step is understanding the mechanisms through which it is happening. Understanding these mechanisms moves us toward the final step of addressing the phenomenon with public policy. My results suggest that carceral contact matters in ways we have not yet fully uncovered. I find consistent support for my hypotheses across two different national surveys utilizing multiple estimation methods.

My findings are particularly important due to the recent attention on the gendered, racial, spatial, and generational concentration of mass incarceration (Travis, Western, and Redburn, 2014). Carceral expansion is producing network effects that have major implications for representative democracy and issues of justice. The results presented here suggest

that overpoliced communities can be made to withdraw from political life, producing a de facto civic death. Looking at the institution of criminal justice specifically, there is ample research suggesting bias against racial minorities and the poor, thus producing major concerns for formal representation and equality. A recent example of how carceral contact adversely affects political participation is seen in the Department of Justice's report on the government of Ferguson, Missouri. In 2014, the population of Ferguson was 70 percent black and had been for over 15 years. Yet the mayor, the entire court system, 50 of the 54 police officers, and five of the six city council members were white (Department of Justice [DOJ], 2015). How is this possible? I offer carceral contact. The Department of Justice (2015) found evidence that the Ferguson government specifically targeted African Americans and the makeup of the government suggests that an externality of this targeting was political suppression. Unfortunately, Ferguson is not a special case—it is no different from many other American cities. The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (2017) found that raising revenue from fines and fees is common practice in many jurisdictions and that the poorest communities and communities of color bear the majority of this burden. The report stated that "the excessive imposition of fines and fees can damage judicial credibility and the relationships between law enforcement and residents" (2017:2). For some, the carceral state has become an institution of predation and predatory institutions create, maintain, and reproduce undeserved inequalities.

Finally, carceral contact is producing adverse political consequences detrimental to the development of politically engaged citizens. The ramifications of this are evident in the results presented above and the Department of Justice report. My results suggest in no uncertain terms that carceral contact has become an important and increasingly detrimental feature of American political development. It is critical for social scientists to examine the mechanisms through which governmental predation, exhibited through all social and political institutions, is affecting citizen engagement. In a society founded on petitioning government and participation, the study of the political consequences of carceral expansion has major implications for what it means to be an American citizen. My results demonstrate that carceral contact is negatively impacting citizen engagement, not just for those directly contacted but also for their family members and communities. Individuals who simply live in areas with high levels of carceral contact are likewise experiencing demobilization effects, amplifying the total effect. It is time scholars took notice of the ramifications of predacious institutional interactions. My research is a step toward understanding *how* this institution, the criminal justice system, is reshaping the American polis.

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of the article.