

Public policy and prison populations:

Greater awareness of the views and goals of the public—

which is less punitive than generally assumed—

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The national criminal justice community is increasingly concerned with what has been called a "crisis in corrections." For many, the "crisis" is synonymous with overcrowding in prisons and jails.¹ Others insist that this equation is too simple, and stress that the "crisis" involves confusion and disagreement over the objectives and effectiveness of correctional treatment as well as crowding.²

That crowding of correctional institutions is a national problem of major importance cannot be disputed. Further, prison populations are increasing,³ although there is a good

deal of fluctuation in yearly⁴ and state-by-state incarceration rates.⁵ Projections of future prison population sizes have varied, as have procedures for developing these projections.⁶ The problem of predicting prison population sizes is a difficult one both practically and methodologically, and it is the unfortunate case that current prison populations exceed both capacity and projections in the majority of states in this country. Finally, in addition to severe crowding in existing prison facilities, the age and physical condition of those facilities, and limitations of staff and other resources amply attest to a national problem of epi-

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1. See, for example, 36 M. L. REV. 182 (1976); New York City Board of Correction, *CRISIS IN PRISONS: NEW YORK CITY RESPONDS* (New York, N.Y., 1972); Flanagan, *Imminent crisis in prison populations*, 37 AM. J. OF CORRECTION 20 (1975); Council on State Governments, Task Force on Correctional Problems, *SEMINAR ON THE CRISIS IN CORRECTIONS* (Atlanta, GA., 1976).

2. Morris and Jacobs, *PROPOSALS FOR PRISON REFORM* (New York: Public Affairs Committee, June, 1974); Carlson, *Future of prisons*, 12 TRIAL 27 (1976).

3. Gettinger, *U.S. prison population hits all-time high*, 2 CORRECTIONS MAGAZINE 9 (1976); Wilson, *U.S. prison population again hits new high*, 3 CORRECTIONS MAGAZINE 12 (1977).

4. Blumstein and Cohen, *A theory of the stability of punishment*, 64 J. OF CRIM. L. AND CRIMINOLOGY 198 (1973).

5. Mullen, Carlson, and Smith, *AMERICAN PRISONS AND JAILS, VOLUME 1: SUMMARY FINDINGS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS OF A NATIONAL SURVEY* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1980).

6. Compare, for example, Burke and Cushman, *JAIL POPULATION MANAGEMENT: DIAGNOSING AND PREDICTING CHANGES IN OCCUPANCY LEVELS* (Sacramento, Ca.: American Justice Institute, 1973); Flanagan, *supra* n. 1; Ruther-

measuring opinions about reform

could enable correctional system policymakers to achieve desired reforms.

demic proportion; and little relief appears to be in sight.⁷

The past decade has seen rising concern over the objectives of our correctional systems as well. At issue here are the very foundations of correctional treatment; the relative merits of rehabilitation, deterrence, punishment, and incapacitation are now under reconsideration in the criminal justice community.

In part, concern over goals and objectives arises from debate over the effectiveness of correctional treatment. Although the problem of assessing the effectiveness of correctional treatment is difficult indeed, and major debates

concerning this issue are intensifying, many have not found the available evidence encouraging.⁸ Thus, concern over the objectives of incarceration, and success in meeting those objectives, lends a second dimension to the "crisis in corrections."

Recently, a third and immediate dimension to the crisis has come to the fore: in July of 1977, 29 states and territories were either under court order concerning the totality of conditions of confinement or for prison crowding, or were involved in litigation likely to result in court orders. By February of 1980, this figure had risen to 32 states and territories. By the

ford, Evans, Flanagan, Fogel, Greenberg, and Ku, *PRISON POPULATION AND POLICY CHOICES (VOLUMES I AND II)* (Cambridge, Ma.: Abt Assoc., 1977); U.S. Department of Justice, *CORRECTIONS, REPORT OF THE NATIONAL ADVISORY COMMISSION ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE STANDARDS AND GOALS* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1973).

7. Despite the magnitude of the prison crowding problem, few researchers have focused on its consequences. An increase in the incidence of violence with increasing density within the institution has been reported. That is, as space per person decreases, the frequency of violent incidents increases (Megargee, *Population density and disruptive behavior in a prison setting*, in Cohen, Coal, and Bailey, eds., *PRISON VIOLENCE* (Lexington, Ma.: Heath Lexington, 1976)). See also, Farrington and Nuttall, *Prison size, overcrowding, prison violence, and recidivism*, 8 *J. OF CRIM. JUST.* 221 (1980)).

Also reported are increases in illness complaints with increasing density, and an increase in death rates as prison population levels exceed capacity. Further, increasing the number of persons per cell or cubicle appears to be more stressful than is simple density (Paulus, Cox, McCain, and Chandler, *Some effects of crowding in a prison environment*, 5 *J. OF APPLIED SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY* 86 (1975)).

8. Martinson, *What works?: Questions and answers about prison reform*, *PUBLIC INTEREST* 22 (1974); Lipton, Martinson, and Wilks, *THE EFFECTIVENESS OF CORRECTIONAL TREATMENT* (New York: N.Y.: Praeger, 1975); National Research Council, *DETERRENCE AND INCAPACITATION: ESTIMATING THE EFFECTS OF SANCTIONS ON CRIME RATES* (Washington, D.C.: National Academy of Sciences, 1978); Gottfredson, *Treatment destruction techniques*, 2 *J. OF RESEARCH IN CRIME AND DELINQUENCY* 39 (1979).

end of 1981, 40 states and territories were either under court order or were involved in litigation—and in only four of these states was the issue of crowding not central to the suit.⁹ Court decisions have mandated changes in correctional conditions and procedures ranging from the alleviation of crowding to the modification of inmate classification procedures.¹⁰ At present then, correctional administrators in the majority of states are faced with the prospect of developing immediate solutions to the “crisis.”

This article will discuss some dimensions of the “correctional crisis” and report some results from opinion surveys of correctional policymakers, the general public, and criminal justice system personnel such as judges, police officers, probation and parole staff, prosecutors, legislators, and others. The study was part of a larger research project concerned with correctional reform efforts in Maryland.

Surveying correctional policymakers

Our initial step was to interview those who would be instrumental in defining the directions which correctional policy in Maryland would take. Eighty-eight persons who have been instrumental in correctional policy decisionmaking—or who could be expected to be dramatically affected in their administrative roles by proposed policy changes—were asked to participate in the survey. Eighty (91 per cent) did so. The sample was chosen to reflect the major components of the criminal justice system, and included: correctional administrators, planners, and other officials (both elected and appointed) representing the state (16); correctional administrators, planners, and other officials representing local jurisdictions (13); local-level elected officials (mayors, county executives, state legislators) (14); supervision officials (wardens, superintendents, etc.) (15); law enforcement officials (sheriffs, chiefs of police) (11); and representatives of the legal system (judges, prosecuting and defense officials) (11).

The interview schedule was designed for in-person administration, and contained both open and structured questions. These concerned the problems and assets of Maryland's correctional system; perceptions of a “crisis”

in corrections, and the reasons underlying it; short- and long-term solutions to prison crowding problems in both state and local facilities; attitudes toward proposed policy changes; assessments of the attitudes of others concerning proposed policy changes; and goals and philosophies for corrections. The interviews were conducted in June and July of 1980.

Survey of the general public

Findings from our survey of corrections policymakers suggested the importance of their perceptions of public opinion regarding corrections and correctional issues. Results showed that policymakers differed considerably among themselves with respect to perceived public opinion, and that while they felt that they knew what the public wanted corrections to do, they generally disagreed with those goals for the correctional system. Public opinion concerning correctional issues was so salient to the crisis in corrections as to merit special attention. Accordingly, we conducted a sample survey of Maryland residents to address this concern, using a random digit dialing telephone interviewing method.¹¹

The sample was limited to the 13 jurisdictions from which we had interviewed local and elected officials about correctional issues. The sample could therefore be considered to

9. National Association of Attorneys General, *IMPLEMENTATION OF REMEDIES IN PRISON CONDITION SUITS* (Raleigh, N.C.: Committee on the Office of the Attorney General, 1980); Rutherford et al., *supra* n. 6; Thornberry, Call, Swanson, Shedd, and Mitchell, *OVERCROWDING IN AMERICAN PRISONS: POLICY IMPLICATIONS OF DOUBLE-BUNKING IN SINGLE CELLS* (Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Corrections, July, 1982).

10. For reviews, see McAninch, *PENAL INCARCERATION AND CRUEL AND UNUSUAL PUNISHMENT* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina School of Law, 1973); M. L. REV., *supra* n. 1; 23 HASTINGS L. J. 1111 (1972); Singer, *Presentence studies done in the overcrowded District of Columbia Jail*, 41 U. CIN. L. REV. 716 (1972); Alpert, ed., *LEGAL RIGHTS OF PRISONERS* (Beverly Hills, Ca.: Sage, 1980).

11. Recent studies have demonstrated that many biases common to early telephone survey research efforts are minimally problematic given present practice. See, for example, Klecka, *Reducing the cost of victim surveys*, in Skogan, ed., *SAMPLE SURVEYS OF THE VICTIMS OF CRIME* (New York, N.Y.: Ballinger, 1976); Quinn, Gutek, and Walsh, *Telephone interviewing: a reappraisal and a field experiment*, 1(2) BASIC AND APPLIED SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY 127 (1980).

represent the constituency of the officials whom we had interviewed earlier. Together, these jurisdictions account for 87.3 per cent of the state's 1980 population.¹² Unsampled counties are all predominantly rural.

Interviewing began on December 12, 1980, and ended on January 5, 1981. The method used ensured adequate representation of adult respondents of both sexes. A total of 601 completed interviews were obtained, and the response rate for the survey was 64 per cent. Demographic characteristics of survey respondents closely resemble those for the state adult population at large.

The criminal justice system survey

These surveys were designed to assess, on a system-wide basis: respondents' understanding of correctional problems and issues; respondents' attitudes toward proposed policies and policy changes; respondents' opinions of the efficacy (or likely efficacy) of various policy changes; and changes in attitude, opinion, or understanding as a function of time.

Corrections systems are only one part of that larger system which we call the criminal justice system. Although we often tend to regard the corrections subsystem as separate and distinct from the parent system, and although this simplification is helpful in some respects, it also ignores the true context of, and constraints upon, that subsystem. To ignore this context is to develop a potentially misleading and erroneous assessment of correctional functioning. Accordingly, we sampled from among the various criminal justice subsystems known to have an impact on corrections. These included police officers, parole/probation officers, judges, prosecutors, public defenders, state legislators, and correctional classification officers.

Since in most cases we were able to define the population of such persons in the state, these were randomly assigned to three samples, each of which was surveyed by mail at three different times. The three waves of this system-wide survey were conducted every two months beginning February 9, 1981. Although

¹² Goodman and Talalay, *CENSUS NOTE 1* (Baltimore, Md.: Center for Metropolitan Planning and Research, The Johns Hopkins University, 1981).

a longer period between survey waves was originally planned, we shortened the lag period in an attempt to capture changes which occurred as a result of the unexpected resignations of the Secretary of Public Safety and the Commissioner of Corrections—whose policies were those under study.

A total of 2,207 persons were surveyed. Usable questionnaires were returned by 1,138 persons, for a response rate of 52 per cent. Response rates varied across subsample groups (legislators, judges, etc.), but did not vary substantially across survey waves. Since variation in response rates did exist across subsample groups, subsamples were re-weighted to adjust for this variation for each survey wave.

The dimensions of the crisis

When surveyed in 1980, our sample of policymakers reported that Maryland's correctional system was facing a great many complex and interrelated problems. Crowding was reported to be the most pervasive and pressing of these, but was also reported to be merely symptomatic of more fundamental issues. Based on the policymakers' statements, we developed a list of the most commonly-mentioned problems facing the correctional system, and used this information in our surveys of persons working in a wide variety of criminal justice system settings.

Through the use of factor-analytic methods, we sought to further our understanding of the crisis in corrections. No single factor was felt responsible for Maryland's correctional crisis: rather, a complex set of issues appeared to underlie the dissatisfaction so unanimously reported by all whom we sampled. The six factors which we identified reflected concern over a lack of alternatives to traditional incarceration and crowding; dissatisfaction with correctional administration; factors affecting the corrections systems such as the poor condition of existing facilities, a lack of manpower, and insufficient funding; poor relations between corrections staff and corrections leadership; the impact (on corrections) of other criminal justice subsystems; and a lack of coordination in the criminal justice system, poor planning, and sentencing practices.

To simply demonstrate that difficult problems are complex is hardly worth the effort. What is more interesting, and what our analyses demonstrated, is the nature of the complexity. Although crowding is confirmed as the most visible and salient of the problems facing the corrections system, the preponderance of the remaining factors essentially address issues which the corrections subsystem cannot, by itself, resolve.

It seems clear to us that little change is likely to occur if we continue to view prison crowding and related correctional problems as a "crisis in corrections." It is not; it is a crisis in the criminal justice system. Because the most visible, salient, and immediate component of the crisis—prison crowding—so clearly involves corrections and correctional facilities, corrections often becomes the scapegoat for the entire system.

Generally speaking, the corrections subsystem has little control over its "inputs" (offenders remanded to the custody of the subsystem) and in most cases, it has little control over the "outputs" as well (offenders released from such custody). It has been noted that "the correctional . . . administrator must run a distinctive type of hotel facility without benefit of a reservation service. Typically, the jail or prison administrator has little to say about who comes to stay or for how long."¹³ A business run on such a basis would soon founder on problems similar to those which our corrections systems are now encountering.

Reports that the criminal justice system does not appear to function as a true system are now so commonplace that to repeat that claim seems trite. Yet many feel that we do not have a criminal justice "system" in the sense of a cohesive, interactive and interdependent set of functional entities. Rather, they insist, we have a disparate set of agencies and peoples which occasionally interact through their concern with criminal offenders. These sentiments appear to us to be true.

It is also clear to us that the current crisis in criminal justice—and its most pressing symptom, prison crowding—is unlikely to be resolved without the active, aggressive, and *coordinated* involvement of the entire system. This will not happen quickly, nor will it be

achieved easily; but it is a goal toward which we must work.

This call—for greater coherence and coordination among the various components of the criminal justice system—is a recurring theme throughout the justice system literature. Critics typically cite the fragmented and conflicting goals and policies of judges, parole boards, prison administrators, police and others as a major cause of the quagmire in which criminal justice finds itself today. Despite some dissent,¹⁴ most commentators have advocated greater cooperation between the components of the criminal justice system as a crucial element to the resolution of one of our largest social problems.

One certain prerequisite to a coordinated effort is a correct understanding of the goals, attitudes, and opinions of actors in the various components of the criminal justice system, and of the constituency which that system is to serve. Only with such understanding is it possible to assess consensus or controversy regarding critical problems and their resolution. And only through such understanding may groups be targeted for special attention in order to coordinate them to a unified approach.

Pluralistic ignorance

Throughout our research, we sought to include the views of persons who deal with corrections and correctional issues from a wide variety of criminal justice system perspectives. With a few exceptions, a common finding has been a remarkable concordance of opinion about what in fact ought to be done to help alleviate the problem of prison crowding. The persons we sampled and surveyed generally agreed that community based alternatives to traditional incarceration were needed, and that these would help to alleviate prison crowding not only in the short run, but in the long run as well.

Since, in many respects, the development of community-based alternatives was a principal

13. Gottfredson and Gottfredson, *DECISIONMAKING IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE: TOWARD THE RATIONAL EXERCISE OF DISCRETION* (Cambridge, Ma.: Ballinger, 1980).

14. Wright, *The desirability of goal conflict within the criminal justice system*, 9 J. OF CRIM. JUST. 209 (1981).

thrust of the reform efforts which we initially set out to study, it may seem surprising that despite this demonstrable consensus concerning the value of the reform, the state completely retreated from the reform. To what might we attribute this remarkable occurrence? In part, we believe that the answer lies in the phenomenon of "pluralistic ignorance."

For a social system to be coordinated, it is necessary that the principal actors—not unlike the policymakers we have studied here—be especially aware of the opinions of groups which interact with and which compose the system itself, even if they do not necessarily agree with those groups. Further, in a representative democracy such as ours, many would argue that the goals and policies of the system should reflect public sentiment (within the limits of constitutional imperatives governing the rights of individuals).

There is a large and controversial literature on the goals and proper purposes for the sentencing and correctional treatment of criminal offenders.¹⁵ Four traditional goals have been central to this debate: rehabilitation or treatment, desert or retributive punishment, deterrence (general or specific), and incapacitation. Each has a long history in practice, in moral philosophy, and in legal discussion and debate. In our study, we provided survey respondents with the following definitions of these four traditional goals for correctional practice:¹⁶

- Incapacitation: "Protecting the public by removing offenders from the community where they might commit additional crimes."
- Rehabilitation: "Rehabilitating offend-

15. Compare, for example, Hart, *PUNISHMENT AND RESPONSIBILITY: ESSAYS IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF LAW* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968); Kleinig, *PUNISHMENT AND DESERT* (The Hague: Martinus-Nijhoff, 1973); Morris, *THE FUTURE OF IMPRISONMENT* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974); Dershowitz, *Background paper*, in *FAIR AND CERTAIN PUNISHMENT, REPORT OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY FUND TASK FORCE ON CRIMINAL SENTENCING* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1976); von Hirsch, *DOING JUSTICE: THE CHOICE OF PUNISHMENTS* (New York: Hill-Wang, 1976); Mueller, *SENTENCING: PROCESS AND PURPOSE* (Springfield, Illinois: Charles C. Thomas, 1977); Grossman, ed., *NEW DIRECTIONS IN SENTENCING* (Toronto, Canada: Butterworth, 1980).

16. These definitions originally were used in an earlier study. See Berk and Rossi, *PRISON REFORM AND STATE ELITES* (Cambridge, Mass.: Ballinger, 1977).

The reform strategies which received the most support stressed rehabilitation.

ers so that they might pursue non-criminal lives."

- Punishment: "Administering punishment to offenders as retribution to society for the crime they have committed."
- Deterrence: "Deterring crime by showing potential offenders the serious consequences for them of committing a criminal offense."

We conducted our sample survey of the Maryland general public in December of 1980, a time in which debate over correctional reform strategies in the state were at a high. Contrary to general belief, we found the general public not to be especially punitive; rather, they also appeared to stress more utilitarian goals, such as rehabilitation, deterrence, and incapacitation. These attitudes about the proper intents or goals for correctional systems are reflected in the public's views of various proposals for correctional reform. The reform strategies which received the most support stressed rehabilitation and increasing localization of correctional programs and facilities.

Almost without exception, these attitudes are echoed by our sample of policymakers. In no important respect did the attitudes of the policy sample and the attitudes of the general public differ. Where correspondence was lacking, the views of the policy sample appeared to be more liberal and reform-oriented.

Our initial survey of Maryland's correctional policymakers suggested that the perceptions of the public will held by those men and women were important to the correctional

There is agreement that punishment is the least proper of the correctional goals.

reform strategies that would actually be pursued—irrespective of their own personal opinions. This is comforting, for this is what is required for a representative democracy to function appropriately. What is not comforting, however, is the extent to which our sample of policymakers *misperceive* the public will. Although the attitudes of both the public and the policy group can be characterized as rather liberal, non-punitive, utilitarian, and reform-oriented, the policy sample attributed almost the reverse to the public. Several studies concerned with different policy arenas have observed this same phenomenon,¹⁷ and the only other study concerned with correctional policy that we know about confirms this finding.¹⁸ We therefore feel it is unlikely that our results are spurious or in error. It appears, then, that we are observing the phenomenon of “pluralistic ignorance,” a term used in the sociological literature to describe situations in which persons underestimate the extent to which others share the beliefs and sentiments which they themselves hold.¹⁹

Survey data

First, let us examine the question of correspondence between members of the policymaking sample, the general public, and persons sampled to reflect the opinions of those working in a wide variety of criminal justice settings.

Figure 1 concerns the extent of agreement about the priorities assigned the goals of retributive punishment, incapacitation, rehabilitation, and deterrence. As a rough measure of this agreement, the Spearman rank-order

correlation coefficient was computed between the mean ranks given the goals for each group.²⁰ We used this index to measure two things: how much agreement exists concerning what the goals of the system *should be*, and the congruence between the policymakers' and the criminal justice system samples' assessments of what the goals are *in fact*, and what the *public* believes they should be.

As Figure 1 illustrates, there is complete agreement among these samples that punishment is the least proper of the correctional goals studied. Further, the policymakers and the system-wide sample are in good agreement ($\rho = .8$), both ranking incapacitation as highest priority, and differing only in a reversal of the goals of deterrence and rehabilitation. Modest but apparent agreement also exists between the policymakers and the general public, and between the system-wide sample and the general public (ρ in both cases = $.32$). For the general public, simple incapacitation ranked third, while both the policymakers and the system-wide sample ranked this goal as first.

It may seem surprising that the general public did not also rank incapacitation as the first priority goal. In this light, however, it is also interesting to note that in a study of 982 actual sentencing decisions of adult offenders, the goal of incapacitation was given as the prin-

17. Miller and Stokes, *Constituency influence in Congress*, 57 AM. POL. SCI. REV. 46 (1963); Hedlund and Friesma, *Representative perceptions of constituency opinion*, 34 J. OF POLITICS 730 (1972); O'Gorman, *Pluralistic ignorance and white estimates of white support for racial segregation*, 39 PUBLIC OPINION Q. 313 (1975).

18. Riley and Rose, *Public opinion vs. elite opinion on correctional reform*, 8 J. OF CRIM. JUST. 345 (1980).

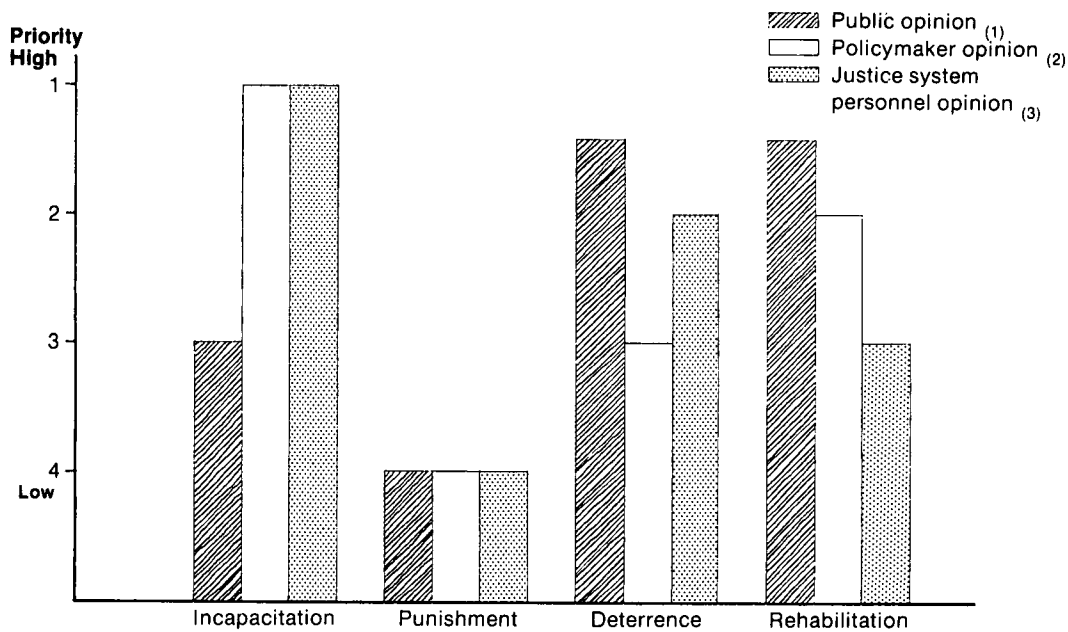
19. Merton, *SOCIAL THEORY AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE* (New York, N.Y.: Free Press, 1968); O'Gorman, *supra* n. 17; O'Gorman and Garry, *Pluralistic ignorance: a replication and extension*, 40 PUBLIC OPINION Q. 449 (1976).

20. With only four ranks, one must obtain a value of ρ equal to 1.00 to achieve traditional levels of statistical significance. It should be pointed out, however, that the data discussed here represent mean ranks, and are based on large numbers of cases. Accordingly, the ranks discussed may be considered to be quite stable. Where differences between mean ranks did not exceed at least one standard error in magnitude, ranks are represented as tied. Our use of ρ is intended simply as an aid to interpretation.

21. Gottfredson and Stecher, *SENTENCING POLICY MODELS* (Newark, N.J.: School of Criminal Justice, Rutgers University, 1979).

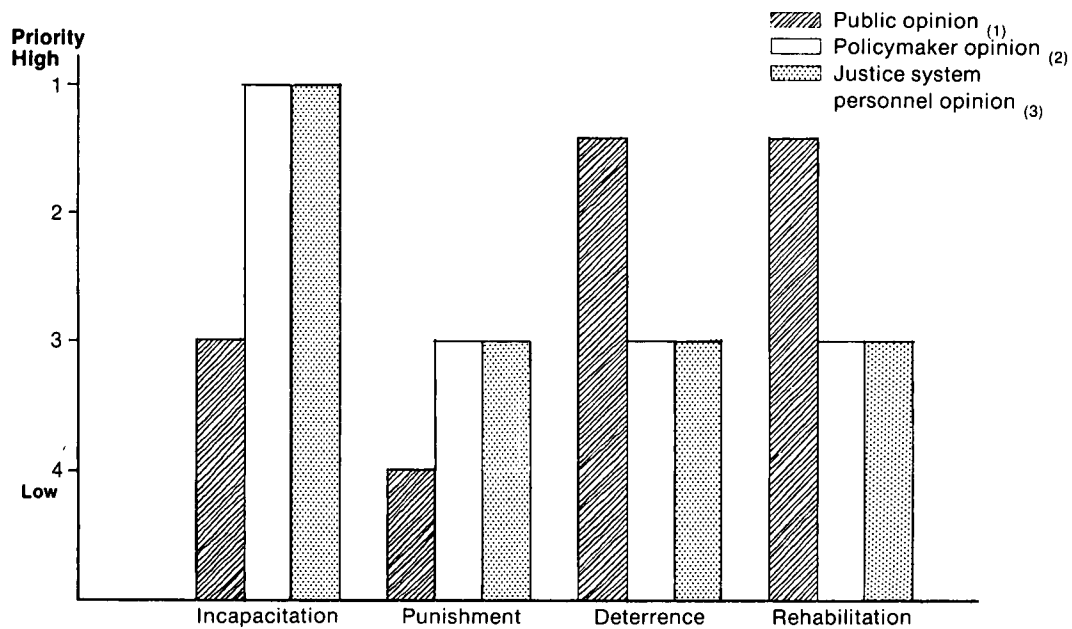
Figure 1: Comparison of opinion concerning what the goals of the correctional system should be with perceptions of what the goals are in fact

Comparison of opinion concerning what the goals should be



Notes: $\rho_{(1,2)} = .32$; $\rho_{(1,3)} = .32$; $\rho_{(2,3)} = .80$

Comparison of policymaker and justice system personnel perceptions of goals in fact with public opinion of what goals should be



Notes: $\rho_{(1,2)} = -.27$; $\rho_{(1,3)} = -.27$; $\rho_{(2,3)} = 1.00$

cial aim of the sanction, by the sentencing judge, in only 4 per cent of the cases.²¹ It should also be noted that the general public did feel that all four possible correctional goals were proper intents for Maryland's correctional system, and that in some cases differences were small.

The comparison of policymakers' and the criminal justice systems' perceptions of what the actual goals of the corrections system are in fact, with public opinion of what these goals should be, demonstrates less concordance. The system is perceived as more punishing and incapacitating, and less deterring and rehabilitating than the public would have it. In general, this appears to be because neither the policymaking sample nor the system-wide sample is able to distinguish present correctional system functions beyond that of simple incapacitation.

We observed that the correctional policy-

makers and those working in criminal justice system settings generally agree on the broad outlines of correctional priorities, but with differing emphases on the priority of rehabilitation. Further, both are in general agreement with the priorities assigned by the public, although the policymakers attribute very different positions to the general public than actually held. How do these positions translate into opinions concerning specific proposals for change in correctional policy? To get an indication of areas of agreement and significant disagreement on proposals for change, we divided each group into those who agreed and those who disagreed with four proposals for change. Two-by-two contingency tables then were built, contrasting the policymakers with each of the criminal justice groups sampled, and the general public, on each issue.

Table 1 displays a summary of these com-

Table 1: Opinions and estimated opinions of four proposed change strategies

Proposed change strategy	Policymakers N=80	General public N=601	Police officers N=92	State legislators N=30
Not building any large new facilities				
Actual opinion (% good/very good idea)	41.6%	37.1%	8.7%***	41.9%
Opinion as estimated by policymakers (% good/very good idea)	—	33.0	3.9	26.1
Abolishing parole				
Actual opinion (% good/very good idea)	23.1	28.6	57.8***	23.3
Opinion as estimated by policymakers (% good/very good idea)	—	62.7***	68.9	61.5**
Shifting some of the state burden to local jurisdictions				
Actual opinion (% good/very good idea)	73.7	67.0	34.8***	53.3
Opinion as estimated by policymakers (% good/very good idea)	—	33.8***	36.9	61.4
Establishing CARCs on a widespread basis				
Actual opinion (% good/very good idea)	93.4	73.2***	30.8***	70.0**
Opinion as estimated by policymakers (% good/very good idea)	—	39.4***	32.8	61.4

NOTE: Tests are Chi² comparisons with the policymaking sample. Samples sizes may vary slightly with the issue under consideration. Analysis based on First Wave of Three-Wave Survey. Substantive conclusions do not change if all three waves are considered.

***p<.001

**p<.01

*p<.05

^a sample not assessed

parisons. For each proposed change strategy listed in the table there are two headings: "Actual opinion," and "Opinion as estimated by policymakers." Consider just the former: by reading from left to right across columns of the table, we can see how much agreement or disagreement there is among the various samples for each change strategy. Thus (for example), while 42 per cent of the policymakers thought that "not building any large new facilities" would be a good or very good idea, only 37 per cent of the general public, and only 8.7 per cent of the police officers also thought that this strategy was a good/very good idea. The asterisks indicate comparisons which differed statistically. Thus, the opinions (on the strategy of large-scale construction) of the policymakers and the general public are not significantly different, while those of the policymakers and the police officers are significantly different.

Extensive misperception

Two things are readily apparent from these analyses. First, the group with which the policymakers have the greatest disagreement is the police: police officers differed dramatically from the policymakers on every single issue. Disagreement with prosecutors is almost as great, with substantial disagreement on each issue except the proposal to shift some of the burden of inmates to local jurisdictions. Second, the issue on which the policymakers are most out of step with other system groups is that of Community Adult Rehabilitation Centers (CARCs), a concept widely debated at the time. Every group polled showed less enthusiasm for the CARC idea than the 93 per cent positive endorsement that the policymakers gave the idea except for the public defenders, who also largely endorsed the idea of establishing CARCs on a widespread basis. The general public also

Judges N=32	Prosecutors N=52	Public defenders N=22	Classification officers N=15	Parole/ probation officers N=95
30.3%	12.0%	33.3%	20.0%	30.5%
23.3	— ^{a***}	— ^a	— ^a	— ^a
31.3	58.0 ^{***}	0.0 [*]	60.0 [*]	34.0
37.7	— ^a	— ^a	— ^a	— ^a
73.3	60.8	68.2	80.0	66.3
74.6	— ^a	— ^a	— ^a	— ^a
80.6	54.9 ^{***}	90.5	66.7 ^{**}	76.6 [*]
94.0	— ^a	— ^a	— ^a	— ^a

displayed less enthusiasm for CARCs than did the policymakers; *but the public did endorse the idea by almost a 3 to 1 margin.* Further, it should be noted that only one system-sample group, police officers, responded negatively to the CARC strategy. The majority of persons in each other sampled group endorsed the idea—just not as strongly as did the policymakers.

In the interviews with policymakers, we asked not only their own opinions of these proposals, but also for perceptions of the amount of support the ideas would receive among four groups; the general public, police officers, state legislators, and judges. By comparing the actual and estimated opinions of these groups, we can get an idea of how aware the policymakers were of disagreement or support for correctional policies among these groups. Table 1 also lists the results of this analysis. Here, we are interested in comparing table entries adjacent the heading "Opinion as estimated by policymakers" with the entries directly above them. It appears that the policymakers were accurate in estimating the police's disagreement with their own opinions concerning proposals for change. Some policymakers underestimated the support for CARCs among judges, however, and quite a number of policymakers incorrectly

thought that most state legislators felt that abolishing parole was a good idea.

Also important is the extensive misperception on the part of the policymakers of the opinions of the general public which we mentioned earlier. The general public's opinions are very similar to those of the policymakers, yet the policymakers thought that they were very different. They did correctly perceive that a majority of the public did not agree with the "no building" strategy. On the other issues they were very inaccurate, and failed to recognize that the public also disagreed with the idea of abolishing parole, thought that moving prisoners to local jurisdictions was a good idea, and widely supported the idea of CARCs.

These findings have significant implications. First, within the system the major conflict facing the correctional policymakers pitted them against two major groups: the police and prosecutors. These analyses suggest that the policymakers were well aware of the conflict. It is also apparent, however, that the policymakers were unaware that they were more accurate representatives of public opinion, at least on three of the four proposals studied, than were members of the police or prosecutor groups. This misperception may have caused them considerable difficulty in



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trying to form a consensus on correctional policy in Maryland. This is especially true on the CARCs issue, where the policymakers may well have felt besieged. Although no group endorsed CARCs as strongly as policymakers, the general public was much closer to the policymakers' position than were most other groups.

In summary

This article has focused attention on critical impediments to the implementation of correctional reform efforts undertaken in Maryland in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Examination of the dimensions of the "correctional crisis" demonstrated that although crowding is the most visible and salient of the problems facing the corrections system, many of the factors which people feel are causing the crisis are issues the corrections subsystem *alone* cannot resolve. Prison crowding is a crisis in the entire criminal justice system, and the active, aggressive, and coordinated efforts of the entire system are needed for its resolution.

Conflicts over philosophies of and goals for corrections are often cited as a principal cause of the lack of coordination commonly observed in criminal justice systems. In the course of this study, we observed this to be partly true, but partly false as well. Conflicts over goals and philosophies do clearly exist; and these conflicts are reflected in differing preferred reform strategies. We also observed, however, that the reform strategies pursued in Maryland in the late 1970s—and from which the system has retreated in the 1980s—had the support not only of the correctional system's policymakers, but of the general public and of the majority of persons working in the criminal justice system as well. Failure to perceive this support was probably responsible, in part, for the abandonment of the reform efforts.

It is clear that those concerned with correctional reform must have a more sophisticated understanding of the general public than they appear to have had in Maryland. Contrary to popularly accepted opinion, we found the general public to be very supportive of precisely the change strategies that the state was unable to implement. The question of

Maryland's policymakers underestimated the amount of support which existed for their reform strategies.

"what the public wants us to do" is paramount. Without good information, probably based on a periodic and rather sophisticated assessment, we are likely to remain in the grip of "pluralistic ignorance." Sample surveys of the general public are now routinely used in the conduct of political campaigns, by the media as well as by social scientists. We see no reason why corrections administrators and policymakers should not also benefit from accurate knowledge of the public will.

Similarly, it is important that correctional policymakers have a good assessment of the goals and preferred strategies of others working in the criminal justice system. Maryland's policymakers underestimated the amount of support which existed for their reform strategies, and they probably found it difficult to form effective coalitions since that support was divided among persons occupying a wide variety of criminal justice system roles. Not only would the simple strategy of asking these people what their opinions are serve to overcome the "lack of information" problem, but it would probably also help in the development of a system-wide attack on the problem of prison crowding. □

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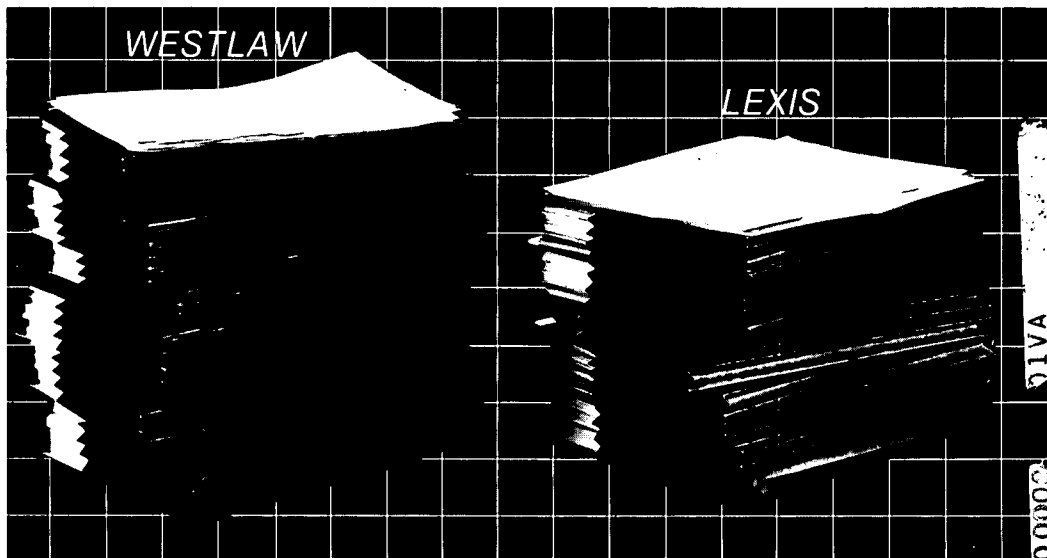
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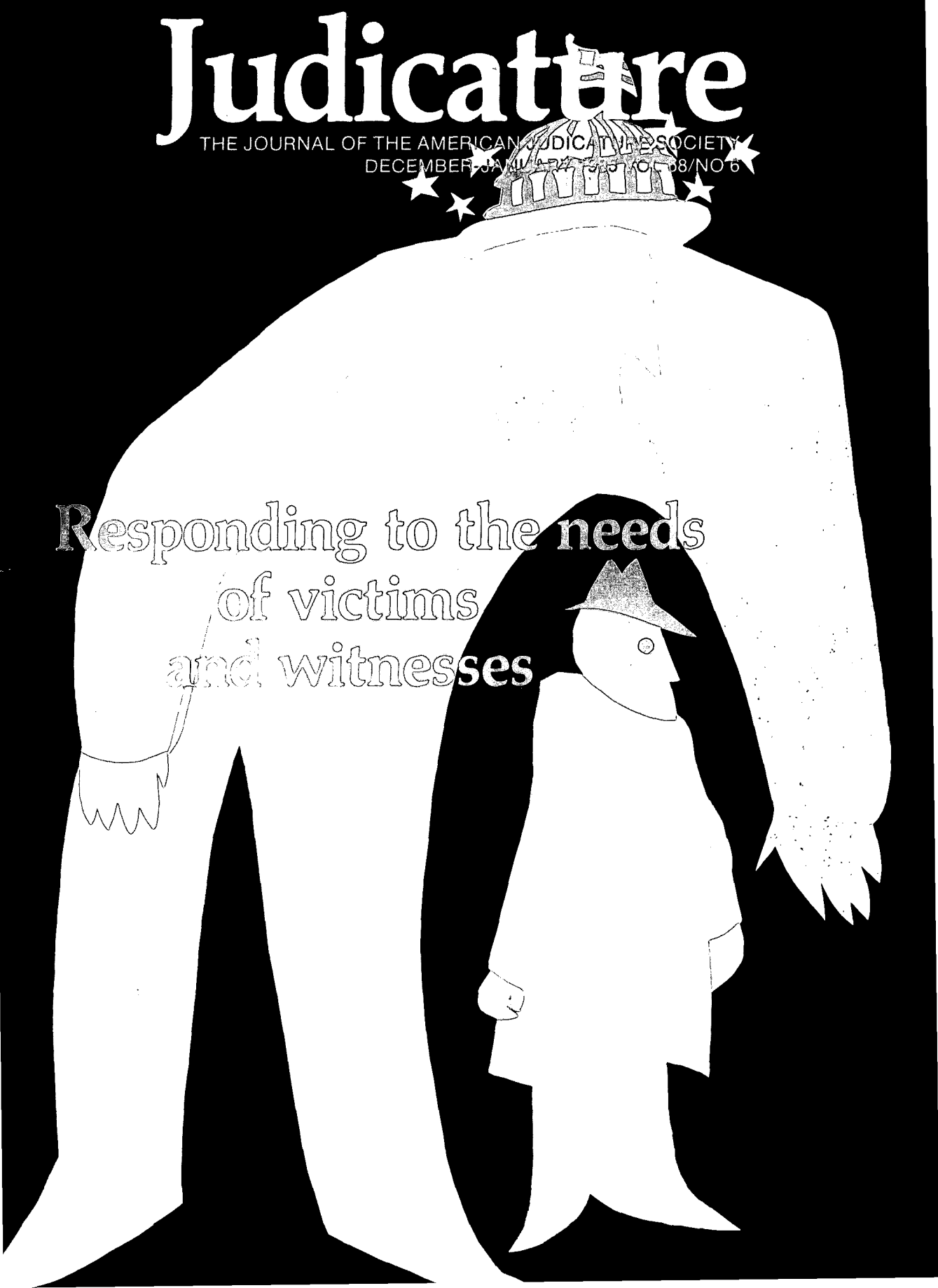
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