

A Critical Analysis of the American and Nordic Prison Systems

California State University Honors Program

INTRODUCTION

Criminal Justice Reform is a pressing and prevalent issue in America and like a steam pressure pot, the pressure continues to build in America as society presses the judicial system for relief from the severe overcrowding and inhumane treatment of offenders. Meanwhile, the countries comprising the Nordic prison system, (Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Denmark) are consistently maintaining lower prison populations and recidivism rates and much to the American public's surprise, the Nordic prisons have produced these astonishing results by maintaining humane rehabilitative penal systems. This research project will compare and contrast the operational differences between the two penal systems and the successes or failures of each system.

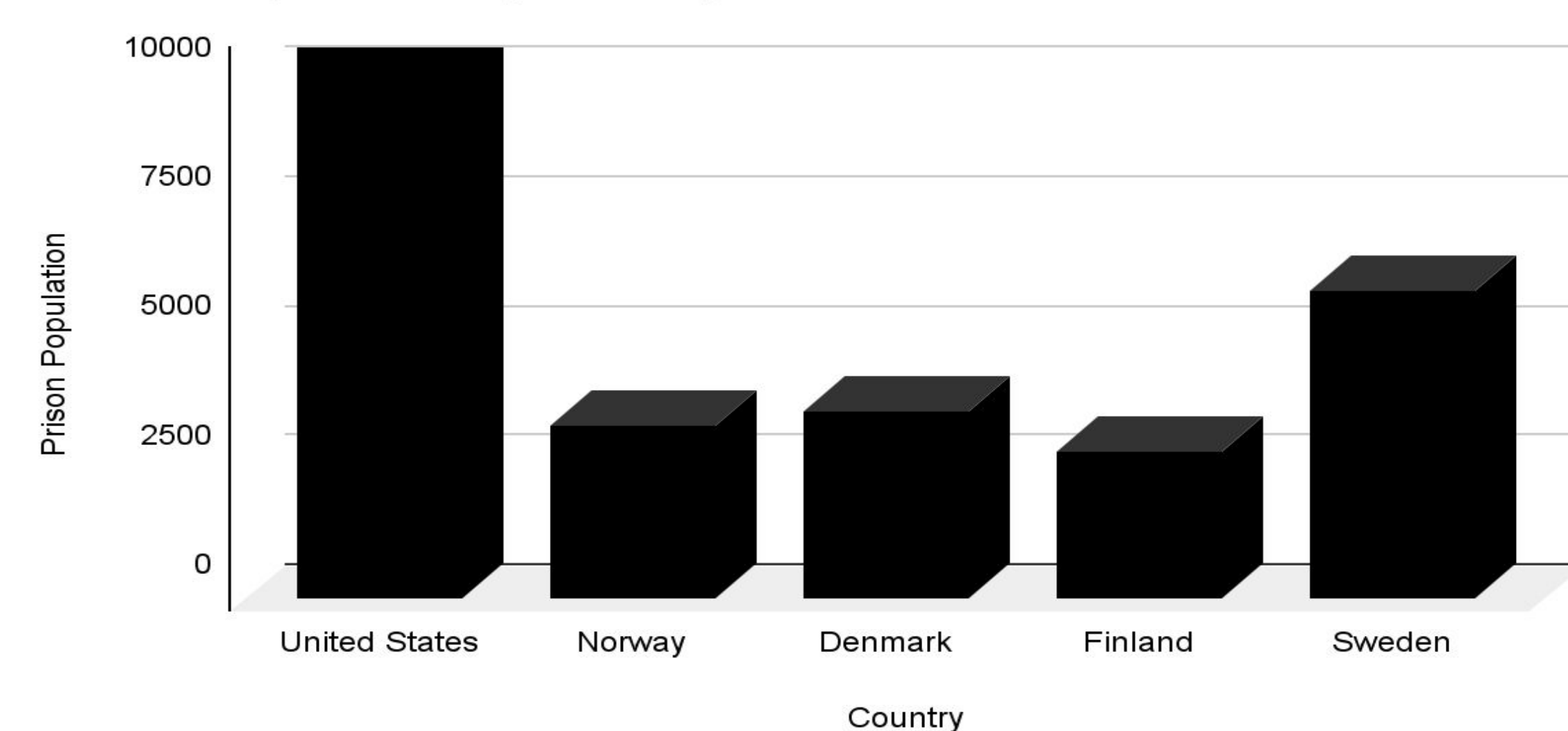
RESEARCH QUESTION

The American prison system currently holds the record for the highest prison population in the world with 2,094,000 million citizens residing in the American penal system in 2018, (World Prison Brief, 2018). While the countries composing the Nordic prison system, in total, have a population of 16,521 citizens (World Prison Brief, 2018) in their prison systems, leaving a difference of 2,077,479 more citizens in the American prisons. **What are the fundamental and operational differences in the American and Nordic prison systems and what are the results of each system?**

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Prison Population by Country 2018



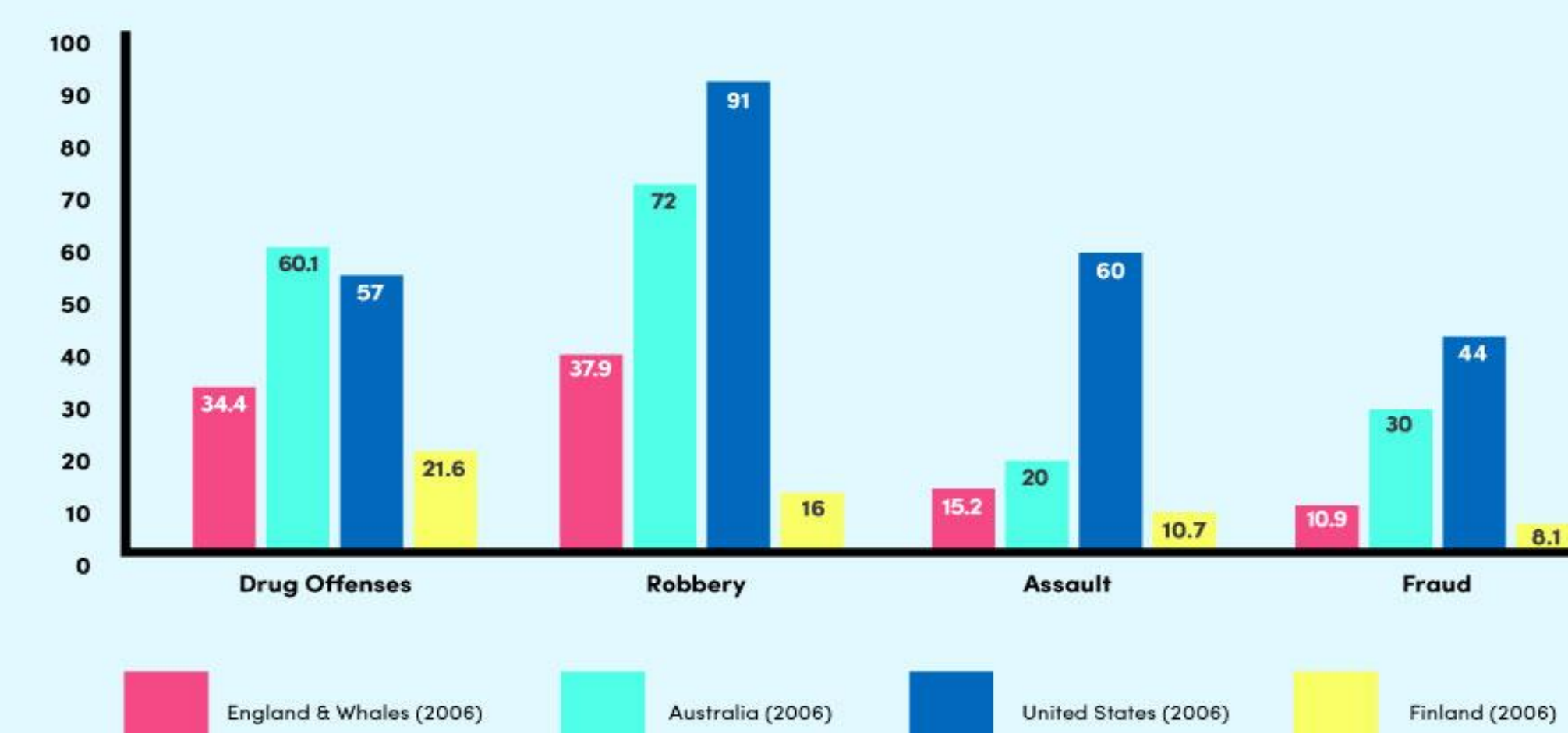
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BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

- ★ If the American prison system continues to operate within the same parameters as it always has, the cost of running the system will outweigh the cost to remodel the system as a whole, (DeLuca & Miller et al., 1991).
- ★ The American punishment-minded approach ultimately has 4 major goals: retribution, incapacitation, deterrence, and rehabilitation. According to Liane Jackson, "U.S. prisons pass the first two with flying colors, but they fail abysmally on deterrence and rehabilitation," (Jackson, 2020).
- ★ Nordic countries maintain less severe sentencing policies by creating substitutes for incarceration. In turn, crime rates have run consistently parallel for approximately 60 years, (Lappi-Seppala, Koskeniemi, et al., 2017).

THE U.S. SENTENCES PEOPLE TO PRISON FOR LONGER THAN OTHER COUNTRIES



SIGNIFICANCE

Americans have been conditioned to believe that punishment needs to be severe and lengthy incarceration is mandatory but "too many Americans are willing spectators to horrifying acts, as long as we're assured they're in the interest of maintaining order," (Stevenson, 2019). America's severe prison overcrowding has resulted in a ruling by the United States Supreme Court in 2011 in *Brown V. Plata* that "overcrowding violates inmates Eighth Amendment rights, specifically that they are denied adequate medical and mental health care," (Horne & Newman, 2015).

METHOD

Design

- ★ To examine the correlation between American and Nordic prison systems, meta-analytical and interpretative methods of qualitative secondary data analysis will be used. A special focus will be paid on the topics of recidivism, prison violence, and the differences in the punishment-minded approach versus the rehabilitative approach.

Materials

- ★ Archival resources include published textual materials, governmental official records, and depositories of data intended for public use in further research.

Procedure

- ★ I will proceed with a basic background search of both the Stanislaus State Library website and any other peer-reviewed sources available. I will then narrow my search down to specific terms and begin to evaluate and compile a list of sources and information that will prove valuable for my research topic. After careful analysis, I will begin to compile a list of comparative differences and explore the history, results, and methods behind each difference.

RESOURCES

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