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## On the move: Incarceration, race, and residential mobility



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## ABSTRACT

The present study examines the relationship between incarceration and post-prison residential mobility. In spite of recent research examining the residential context following incarceration, we know little about if or how incarceration affects individual patterns of residential mobility. This study starts to fill this gap in knowledge by drawing on nationally representative data from the 1979 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY79). I find that individuals with a history of incarceration are more likely to move after prison than they are before prison. This relationship holds even after accounting for various time-varying and time-stable sources of spuriousness, including other known correlates of mobility. Additional analyses suggest that this effect is strongest early in the reentry period, and that there exists important racial variation in the relationship between incarceration and mobility. These results imply that, while housing stability is an important feature of successful prisoner reentry, incarceration contributes to larger patterns of residential instability.

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## 1. Introduction

Each year, 40 million Americans experience a change of address. Most moves are not random events, but rather the result of individual and household characteristics that change the definition of housing needs (Landale and Guest, 1985; Rossi, 1980; Speare et al., 1975). But not all moves are voluntary, and many perfectly satisfied households are forced or compelled to move each year. Disadvantaged and marginalized portions of the population are especially vulnerable to push factors (such as rent increases or evictions) that create unintended mobility (Lee, 1978). In this paper I examine how residential mobility is affected by an individual's membership in one of America's fastest growing marginalized subgroups: individuals with a history of incarceration, often referred to as the felon class (Uggen et al., 2006).<sup>1</sup>

In 2011, 1 of every 34 adults was under some form of correctional supervision (prisons, jails, and community corrections), and about 1 of every 200 adults was confined in a state or federal prison (Carson and Sabol, 2012; Glaze and Parks, 2012). Four decades of correctional growth have resulted in a prison population of nearly 1.5 million convicted citizens. After spending, on average, over 2 years incarcerated, around 700,000 individuals are released from prison each year (Carson and Golinelli, 2013). Social scientists interested in the later-life consequences of incarceration have linked the confinement experience to negative outcomes including increased unemployment, depressed wages, divorce, and decreased mental and physical health functioning (Lopoo and Western, 2005; Massoglia, 2008; Pager, 2003; Schnittker and John, 2007; Western, 2002). These collateral consequences spread through entire families as children and partners of incarcerated individuals

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<sup>1</sup> To the extent possible, in this study I avoid stigmatizing terminology like "felon class" and "ex-inmate." Rather, I use more neutral terminology such as "individuals with incarceration histories" or "returning citizens." I thank an anonymous reviewer for urging me to adopt such language.

suffer across a number of outcomes (Foster and Hagan, 2007; Geller et al., 2012, 2011; Turney, 2014; Wildeman et al., 2012; Wildeman, 2010).

Recent research has also focused on the relationship between incarceration and post-prison residential outcomes such as neighborhood quality (Hipp et al., 2010; Massoglia et al., 2013). While it is clear that individuals who go to prison tend to be drawn from disadvantaged neighborhoods (Visser and Farrell, 2005), Massoglia et al. (2013) demonstrated that individuals with a history of incarceration (and particularly non-Hispanic white ex-inmates) live in more disadvantaged neighborhoods after prison than they did before prison. Formerly incarcerated individuals are also known to experience homelessness and other indicators of housing instability at disproportionate rates (Geller and Curtis, 2011; Metraux and Culhane, 2006). But little is known about the impact of incarceration on the actual decision to stay or move, an important gap in the literature given the impact of residential characteristics, including residential instability, on recidivism (Hipp et al., 2010; Kubrin and Stewart, 2006; Steiner et al., 2011).

In this study I draw on longitudinal survey data to examine how incarceration impacts individual patterns of residential mobility across time. I start by briefly overviewing existing research that has examined mobility following incarceration. I then conceptualize the direct and indirect ways that incarceration, as a distinct life event, might impact residential mobility in both the short- and long-term. After an overview of the data and measures, I present results that suggest incarceration is associated with later residential instability. Key here is my use of fixed effects logistic regression models, which examine variation across time in an individual's likelihood to move or not move. I conclude by noting limitations of my approach as well as implications of my findings.

### 1.1. Incarceration and residential mobility

Although nearly all imprisoned offenders are eventually released, little is known about their pre- or post-prison residential mobility patterns. What we do know about mobility among returning citizens comes primarily from the Urban Institute's *Returning Home Project*, where select cohorts of released prisoners were tracked after prison. The findings from this project indicate that many parolees live in a different neighborhood after prison than they did before prison. For example, nearly half of the parolees followed in Chicago moved to a new neighborhood after release (La Vigne et al., 2004). A similar pattern of post-prison mobility was documented in Cleveland (54% moved) and Houston (34% moved) (La Vigne et al., 2009; Visser and Courtney, 2007). This mobility may extend beyond the release point, as over half of all the parolees followed in Ohio moved *two or more times* during their first year out of prison (Visser and Courtney, 2007). Conversely, following the initial period of instability, only 10% of those parolees in Chicago moved more than once (La Vigne and Parthasarathy, 2005). However, these descriptive studies provide limited information regarding incarceration as a distinct predictor of mobility.

But before outlining various direct and indirect pathways that might lead from incarceration to mobility, it is useful to first briefly overview why it is that individuals and households move. Residential mobility is most typically cast as a rational choice process driven by residential stress and dissatisfaction (Rossi, 1980; Speare et al., 1975). The process begins when something triggers an increase in housing dissatisfaction leading to a search for alternatives (Speare et al., 1975). If a more suitable household emerges, then a move is likely. Minus better alternatives the household may attempt to relieve the dissatisfaction in other ways, such as modifying the current household or revising the threshold of housing dissatisfaction (Speare, 1974). Individuals go through the life course on a given trajectory of mobility, typically moving most frequently during young adulthood and then establishing residential stability in adulthood. Rates of mobility are highest in the young adult years, and then decline in the early- and mid-30s, largely because the young adult years are typified by important life changes. Moves are more likely following such transitions because they change the definition of housing needs (Landale and Guest, 1985; Lee and Hall, 2009; Rossi, 1980; South and Deane, 1993; Speare et al., 1975). Some of the strongest predictors of mobility include the transition to homeownership, having children (especially a first child), completing an education, transitioning into full-time employment, and marital transitions (marriage and divorce) (Clark, 1986; Rossi, 1980; South and Deane, 1993; Speare, 1974). Residential stability is said to follow these moves because the dissatisfaction has been alleviated.

It is also important to note that individuals and households move for reasons outside of this choice-based process. Involuntary moves are often brought on by events that are unconnected with housing satisfaction, such as eviction or building destruction (Rossi, 1980). Such moves occur regardless of housing satisfaction. In addition, derivative, or adjustment, moves are driven by events (such as divorce or death of a partner) that, by definition, require moving (Sell, 1983). These cases are important exceptions to choice-based mobility explanations because the decision to move is made independent of the qualities of the existing household.<sup>2</sup> Moves that fall outside of the traditional choice framework are more common among individuals experiencing negative or disruptive events (such as unemployment or divorce) than they are among individuals experiencing normative or positive events (such as marriage or homeownership).

Drawing on previous work, incarceration can be similarly categorized as an important life event that may affect mobility decisions. After 40 years of steady growth, it is becoming common to treat criminal justice contact as a distinct turning point in the life course of crime involved individuals (Pettit and Western, 2004; Western, 2002). So how might we expect

<sup>2</sup> Speare et al. (1975) argued that these "deviant cases" do not necessarily negate the choice-based process. Rather, unexpected moves simply move people up in the process (that is, to searching for alternatives).

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