



SCHOOL OF ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES

# GRADUATE EXIT SEMINAR

SARAH WALTON

## The Gateway to Mass Incarceration: A County-Level Analysis of Jails in the United States



Mass incarceration is one of the central social problems of the 20th and 21st centuries. Within the criminal justice system, jails and prisons are the two central institutions in which individuals are incarcerated. However, research on mass incarceration focuses on prisons. Jails, while neglected in the literature, are an important local institution with important implications for the rest of the criminal justice system. Despite downward trends in prison admission rates, jail rates and jail capacity in the U.S. are continuing to expand. This trend of expansion is particularly pronounced for rural counties, which have seen the most pronounced increase in their jail incarceration rates. Given the social relevance of the jail and the neglect of jails in the larger literature on mass incarceration, in my dissertation research, I take the jail as my empirical and theoretical focus. My objectives are: 1) to examine the extent to which county government characteristics and county politics are associated with county-level jail rates, 2) to examine which county-level economic, political/ideological, and demographic factors are associated with county jail privatization, 3) to examine which county-level institutional and social factors are associated with the use of jails as a punitive and economic institution. I find that county government social service programming and capacity and local politics and institutional contexts are important for understanding both jail incarceration and privatization. This research provides an important starting point for sociological analysis of the jail as both a punitive and economic institution with important implications for communities across the U.S.

Advisor: Dr. Linda Lobao

**MONDAY, JUNE 27, 2022**  
**2:00 P.M.**

**Join the seminar via Zoom:**

<https://osu.zoom.us/j/98441377829?pwd=OHNCTDZCSUFKODBpbU9pajZxQUIBQT09>

Meeting ID: 984 4137 7829 Password: 681864

[senr.osu.edu](http://senr.osu.edu)



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF FOOD, AGRICULTURAL,  
AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES

— We Sustain Life —

CFAES provides research and related educational programs to clientele on a nondiscriminatory basis. For more information, visit [cfaesdiversity.osu.edu](http://cfaesdiversity.osu.edu). For an accessible format of this publication, visit [cfaes.osu.edu/accessibility](http://cfaes.osu.edu/accessibility).