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Online Perceptions of Panamanian Prisons and Incarcerated persons: An analysis of YouTube user comments

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Online Perceptions of Panamanian Prisons and Incarcerated Persons: An Analysis of YouTube User Comments

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts Department of Criminology College of Behavioral and Community Sciences University of South Florida

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore and understand the frameworks in which prisons and incarcerated persons are discussed amongst commenters under YouTube videos displaying media on Panamanian prisons. The study incorporates a mixed methods approach by conducting a general content analysis of YouTuber comments to address themes within the discussion. Additionally, these themes were quantified and modeled using predictive variables collected such as number of comment likes, number of comment dislikes, and number of comment replies, alias type (screen name or name-like), presence of profile picture, and profile picture type. The themes found were 1) punitive, 2) justifying 3) neutral 4) sympathetic 5) rehabilitative. The themes had relatively similar distributions with the exception of rehabilitative which had the least prevalence of initial postings and overall engagement through likes and replies. Males were more likely to engage within the discussion and more likely to use punitive themes while less likely to be sympathetic relative to females. Users with a screen name were more likely to use sympathetic themes rather than exhibit aggressive or punitive commentary. The findings suggest commenters legitimize punitive ideals while holding a loss of faith in rehabilitation. This finding is contrary to the Panamanian constitution which supports rehabilitative efforts within the prison system. Additionally, the use of anonymity regarding the sympathetic theme, reveals that showing sympathy towards incarcerated persons may be less socially acceptable.
CHAPTER ONE:
INTRODUCTION

There are over 10.35 million incarcerated persons around the world (Walmsley, 2015). Latin America accounts for 12.6% of this population with approximately 1.4 million incarcerated individuals (Vilalta & Fondevila, 2019). Despite this large share of the incarcerated population, criminological research on Latin American countries has been a neglected endeavor in the field. This has, ultimately, led to gaps in our understanding of criminal justice systems in many Latin American countries. In the past 20 years, Latin America has experienced a phenomenon known as mass incarceration, as its institutional population has quadrupled (Bergman & Fondevila, 2021). Despite rapid growth, penal research is much more available about regions such as North America and Europe in comparison to Latin America (Birkbeck, 2011). Even studies investigating penitentiaries in Latin America and their historical context often overlook specific countries, often due to the lack of data and documentation regarding such systems. For instance, Salvatore and Aguirre (1996, p. 14) acknowledge such phenomenon as they state, “we know comparatively less about the adoption of penitentiaries in other republics of Central America and the Caribbean” relative to other countries in Latin America. Among these nations, the country of Panama has been notably absent from most research.

There are three major limitations to researching prisons in Panama. First, the general accessibility to documentation, data, and historical writings is lacking (Darke & Karam, 2016). Second, the practices within Latin American penitentiaries are often secretive because of corruption or political interference (Torrijos, 2019). Lastly, the Department of Corrections in
Panama is relatively young, with its founding only coming during the 1940s (Meditz & Hanratty, 1987). Understanding the context surrounding Panama’s criminal justice system, as well as its history, is crucial for the understanding of the system’s functioning, as well as the motivation for any changes and reforms since its inception.

Panama’s penal system is an interesting case for several reasons. First, the rich and multicultural history of penal development in Panama has been influenced by European, American, and Latin American politics as the country was under the control of Spain and Colombia in different points of time. Additionally, Panama was assisted with funding from the United States (U.S.) that has led to western-centric decisions in policy. Second, the country has seen many initiatives to reform these penal institutions “on paper,” however, these institutions have often been criticized for its lack of care for the incarcerated population. And third, the clear sentiments towards the inefficacy of prisons from outside sources (e.g. the U.S., the United Nations) over time. In 1991, the Human Rights Watch reported Panamanian prison conditions as subhuman due to its severe overcrowding (Nachman & Méndez, 1991). Later, in 2007, the U.S. Human Rights Report revealed that prison guards physically abused incarcerated persons, conditions were life-threatening, and incarcerated persons had no formal separation based on severity of their offense (U.S. Dept. of State, 2007). Additionally, the report found political manipulation and corruption in the executive branch, the legislative branch, and security forces, many of which were directly responsible for managing prison facilities (U.S. Dept. of State, 2007). Lastly, in 2015, Lilia Herrera, a Panamanian ombudsman, reported that conditions in one Panamanian prison were inadequate (U.S. Dept. of State, 2016), including poor ventilation and excessive use of solitary confinement (Prison Insider, 2015).
Though the historical records of these prisons, their developments, reforms, and practices is poorly documented, one sentiment is clear: Panamanian prisons have historically been known to be centers of abuse and violate even basic human rights (Americas Watch Committee, 1988; Human Rights Watch, 1991). However, despite such clear sentiment among scholars, news media, and some politicians, the opinion of the average citizen has historically been neglected from commentary whether that be from dictatorship silencing the public or simply a lack of documentation. Therefore, on a large scale, public sentiments of the Panamanian criminal justice system are relatively unknown. These perceptions have the ability to influence the direction of policies affecting corrections (Intravia, 2019), yet historically have been undermined by dictatorship or corruption.

In modern times, corruption cannot always be hidden from public view, nor can it silence public opinion. With a growing cyber-capacity, incidents can now be recorded and exposed through hand-held phones, and screenshots of chats can be leaked. Such situations are real threats to often corrupt Panamanian government officials, with numerous examples of scandals in recent years. In 2017, a video surfaced on the internet which created doubts in the government’s ability to control its prison system. In the video, several incarcerated persons at La Joyita Prison posed and shouted with weapons in hand (Goi, 2017). Just a year before, one of the largest leaks of information, known as the Panama Papers, occurred and was extensively broadcast by the international media. In this case, an unknown source leaked 4.8 million email messages and 2.2 million documents amounting to 2.6TB of data from Mossack Fonseca, a major Panamanian law firm (Obermaier & Obermayer, 2017). The leak exposed many instances of corruption, including tax evasion, illegal lobbying, and money laundering amounting to billions of dollars. The modern age has reduced the secrecy of self-serving behaviors of the elite and government.
Not only has the internet become a space to share invaluable information that would otherwise remain secret, but it has become a place to share media. Although research-based literature on Panamanian and other Latin American prisons is limited, social media allows space for videos, pictures, and other forms of media to be published on major platforms. Additionally, users are able to share ideas, opinions, and reactions toward this content. This form of communication takes shape in written language known as “statuses,” “tweets,” or comments within forums and/or posts. Regardless of form, these remarks become a rich source of data as it offers authentic insight into an individual’s perceptions and opinions on situations. A barrier to retrieving these observations are online trolls who intentionally write language that is provocative, offensive, and in some cases, threatening while also remaining anonymous (Whiting, Olufuwote, Cravens-Pickens, & Witting, 2019). The prevalence of trolling behavior seems to be on an upward trend, an analysis on CNN posts shows that the proportion of flagged posts increased from 0.03 to 0.04 in a period of nine months (Cheng, Bernstein, Danescu-Niculescu-Mizil, & Leskovec, 2017).

Troll-like behavior is most embedded in discussions involving politics and/or religion (March & Marrington, 2019).

Despite this troublesome commentary, analyzing these texts has become increasingly popular among scholars (Döring & Mohseni, 2020, 2019; Cravens-Pickens, & Witting, 2019; Thelwall, 2018). The systematic analysis of data collected from social media has made its way into academia in several forms. In the discipline of criminology and criminal justice, this has ranged from interpreting rape culture on twitter (Stubbs-Richardson et al., 2018), police tweeting during crisis response (Procter, Crump, Karstedt, Voss, & Cantijoch, 2013), and tracking racism through hashtags (Chaudhry, 2015). With growing content on social media platforms, the search for “carcel Panama” yields over a hundred results on YouTube. Furthermore, such online sentiments may
differ from long-held opinions published in official government documents. Therefore, social media becomes an invaluable source of perceptions of Panamanian prisons.

**Importance of the Study**

This study introduces a methodology, content analysis, which has not been used previously in the context of Panamanian prison research. Prior research looking at public opinion of incarcerated individuals, prisons, and punishment has predominately been conducted within the U.S., most often using surveys (Brooks, Visher, & Naser, 2006; Russonello & Stewart, 2001; Swanson, 1993; Wozniak, 2014). By conducting a text analysis of individuals’ comments on YouTube videos, I am able to gather a first-person point of view. Additionally, I can delve into the opinions, views, and relationships of incarcerated people in Panama held by the general public. This could potentially expand further to understand how commenters view policies that affect the prison system, particularly addressing concerns on prison conditions and reforms.

The commenter provides their views as they watch the videos uploaded to the platform, often engaging with other users and regularly returning for responses. For example, we found a commenter who returned to provide their insights over a course of three years and commenting across different videos involving Panamanian prisons. The importance of commenters either returning to comment or commenting in different years provides insights on how attitudes change over time. These changes could potentially be associated with other changes in social fabrics over time such as politics or social movements.

These uncensored comments are directly sourced from the commenter on an open platform, meaning the commenter in no way is incentivized to “perform” a certain way or “side” with a particular view, the view in of itself, is, unfiltered. Survey responses, although aimed to provide exhaustible options, can in some way limit responses by the way questions or narratives are
worded. Additionally, the options provided in the survey may not resonate with the responder. In this sense, the ability to respond on a platform without standardization provides “raw” insights to how the viewers feel or react to the content being presented.

Additionally, if the user does not directly respond via comment or response to another user, he/she has the ability to “react” by engaging with “like” or “dislike” functions with the chat. This, in particular, gives researchers the ability to gauge reactions by observing not only the types of comments that receive likes or dislikes but also the general topics to which people respond. By reviewing YouTube comments, researchers can also examine potential gendered responses. For example, in a study analyzing speech on video platforms such as YouTube and YouNow, a live broadcasting site, Döring and Mohseni (2020) found that female vloggers on both platforms experienced more sexually aggressive commentary. In their replication of the Wotanis and McMillian (2014) study, which aimed to navigate hostile comments of a popular YouTuber, Döring and Mohseni (2020) found that females received more negative and critical comments while receiving fewer positive comments. It is possible, then, that the comments reviewed in this study could differ based on the demographics of the incarcerated individuals in the videos.

It is also important to highlight that YouTube provides an unstructured setting to respond. Unlike survey methodology, commenters do not have to choose from more or less desirable options or are limited to the way the question is asked. Instead, the user views the videos, processes the media through their own framework (shaped by past experiences, relationships, or belief systems), decides whether or not to leave a remark and in turn provides a candid response to a world often systematically forgotten.

The aims of this study is to conduct explore commentary retrieved under YouTube videos that reflect media and messages regarding Panamanian prisons. This design will help investigate
sentiments toward incarcerated individuals and the prison system in Panama. This is exceptionally important as the country has faced shifting waves of prison reform; these perceptions are shaped by the socio-political environment of a country (González, 2019). Commentary is made exclusively from an individual and may be enhanced by interaction with other commenters. This is a unique approach to understanding the discussion and dynamics of Panamanian prisons, those who are incarcerated, reforms, and the government that perpetuates its existence. This method provides important insights to the changes in dynamics and conversations in the commentary. These changes can be time-based (changes in commenter attitudes over time), by gender, and by engagement.

Ultimately, the study aims to understand the attitudes toward Panamanian prisons within an online forum of discussion, and whether commenters believe incarcerated persons are deserving of better conditions, or if instead their criminal conviction should accompany prolonged abuses which are a mark of the Panamanian system. This is an important contribution to literature as it provides an intersection of an area that is fundamentally understudied. Additionally, understanding attitudes which are held at the individual level are important to address when promoting criminal justice policies.
CHAPTER TWO:

LITERATURE REVIEW

Criminal justice reform is defined as the changes in public policies for dealing with criminal activity and punishment (Edwards, 2020). These policies are shaped by current views of crime and of the social perception of its perpetrators. In general, criminal justice reform is considered a rare occurrence in Latin American countries (Gonzalez, 2019). In some cases, reform can take decades to take shape (Macaulay, 2012). Moreover, even when such waves of change occur, many questions surround its actual outcomes, and whether or not the reforms were successful in achieving the purported objectives (Frühling, 2009).

The mere implementation of a criminal justice system is itself a criminal justice reform, as societies begin to think about institutionalized mechanisms for dealing with law violations. Present research typically recognizes four main goals that correctional systems aim to produce: retribution, incapacitation, deterrence, and rehabilitation. Reform typically takes place when one goal is promoted more heavily by government or civil society relative to the current practices of a time. In this sense, shifting to a rehabilitative model when previously focused on retribution could be seen as progress. However, coming from a rehabilitative model and moving the focus towards retribution could be seen as a negative reform.

A Brief History of Panamanian Institutions - Waves of Initiatives, Reform, and Failures

To understand penal institutions of a given country, one must look at its development over time. Panama declared independence from Spain in November 1821, but, was later controlled by the Colombian government. On November 3rd, 1903, Panama officially gained independence from
Colombia with the support of U.S. This financial aid from the U.S. allowed the country to monitor the activities of the Panamanian government. By doing so, the United States created one of the earliest institutions in Panama in 1912, however because the facility was founded by the U.S., it was restricted for American citizens (Sistema Penitenciario, n.d.).

The penal colony Isla Coiba was the first institution on record to be dedicated to incarceration and was built in 1919 (Meditz & Hanratty, 1987). The Isla Coiba institution was built on an isolated island off the Pacific coast of Panama. The institution was made up of 30 camps, designed to house a total of 3,000 individuals (Coiba National Park, n.d.). Isla Coiba’s development and organization is closely reminiscent of Spanish influence, who controlled Panama in a colonial era from 1503 to 1821. The Spanish administration often used penal colonies and hard labor to enforce control over peasantry (Salvatore & Aguirre, 1996). Historically, the inauguration of Isla Coiba coincided with the construction of the Panama Canal, a major political and economic hallmark of the country. The U.S. government assumed controlling ownership of the canal in 1904, which was inaugurated in 1914. During the construction of the canal, and in the subsequent years, Panama was subjected to the influence of numerous political ideologies and cultural backgrounds (Haskin, 1913).

According to Vierba (2013), Isla Coiba was intended to be part of a criminal justice reform led by liberals, who intended to completely transform the Panamanian society into the model of other developed democracies. In this line, liberals believed they could correct offenders by providing them an open space to work agriculturally and contribute to an already promising economy. Reformers emphasized the penal colony’s “scenic” and “open” layout which contrasted to the structural confinement and restraint of penal institutions in other parts of the world (Vierba, 2013). For instance, Birkbeck (2011) highlighted the layers of regimentation through classification
of the facility (e.g., maximum, medium), classification of incarcerated persons (e.g., high risk, low risk), and freedom of movement (e.g., physical restraints, staff escorts, pass systems). However, despite efforts to promote Isla Coiba as a scenic institution highlighting potential reform, the fact remained that those incarcerated were on an isolated island, away from their families and the general public, and were expected to engage in intense daily labor.

The experiences of those incarcerated in Isla Coiba were far from enjoyable. In fact, the facility quickly became notorious as many sought daring escapes, much like at the infamous Alcatraz prison in the U.S. The name “Los Desaparecidos,” meaning the “Lost Ones,” were given to those who were rumored to have died while attempting to escape through shark-filled waters (Coiba National Park, n.d.). During Manuel Noreiga’s dictatorship government (1983-1989), political criminals were often placed in close proximity to the island’s most violent incarcerated individuals, which for many amounted to a de facto death sentence (Gibbens, 2017). In 1991, the Panamanian newspaper La Prensa reported allegations of torture and abuse found by government officials on the island (Tyroler, 1991). Over the following decades, similar reports continued to emerge, gradually straining Isla Coiba’s reputation, and shifting the public’s perception of the iconic facility. The Smithsonian Archives (1956, para. 3) reports “fear of the prison and inmates deterred visitors from the island.” However, it was only in 2004 that the penal colony was finally closed (Coiba National Park, n.d.). Nowadays, Isla Coiba is a national park and a popular tourist destination.

One year after Isla Coiba’s inauguration in 1920, a second penal facility named Carcel Modelo was built in San Miguelito, a town just outside of the capital, Panama City. Carcel Modelo (meaning “The Model Jail” in Spanish) functioned as a holding facility just like most jails in the American correctional system today. The jail was very limited as it only had a capacity to hold
250 detainees. However, the jail was often cited as holding 500 to 3,000 jailed individuals (Rohter, 1996). This led to the failure to meet U.N. Standard Minimum rules of the Treatment of Prisoners (Human Rights Committee, 1988). In part, as a result of this failure the jail was closed and demolished in 1996 (Nunez, 1996).

Gradually, penal discourse in Panama began using language which suggested a transformation was taking place. Like other countries in Latin America, Panama used the word “penitenciario” or penitentiary to refer to penal institutions. The adoption of the idea of penitentiaries reflected a shift from traditional ideals of punishment to a chance for incarcerated individuals to seek penitence, or reform (Hanser, 2020). Thus, in theory, penitentiaries shifted the emphasis of Panama’s ideals of incapacitation through penal institutions to a rehabilitative model. This is confirmed in article 28 of Panama’s 1972 (rev.2004) constitution which states that the penitentiary “is based on principles of security, rehabilitation, and social defense” (Constitute, 2020, Article 28, para. 28). Latin American begins to make a clear distinction in their philosophical values when they adopt such institutions, but perhaps these ideals are only a priority on paper. Birkbeck (2011, p. 11) states “changes have rarely gone beyond rhetoric and have only lasted as long as the corresponding political regime.” The harsh reality is that this rehabilitative rhetoric was underlined by a shift toward more punitive political ideologies, which fostered an overflow of individuals into the criminal justice system. In Latin America, countries like Panama held a “mano dura” approach which, in many ways, is similar to the “tough on crime” approaches implemented in the U.S. (Marmolejo, Restrepo, & Villa, 2015). Other countries, such as El Salvador and Honduras, shared the same approach. These ideologies have been promoted in Panama as recently as Martinelli’s presidency from 2009-2014 (Mattson, 2010). However, despite being considered “tough on crime,” the approach in Panama is still perceived as much softer than in the rest of Latin
America, as many Panamanian officials still felt that rehabilitation should fulfill a larger role in the Panamanian prison system.

From 2010 through 2014, the Panamanian government, in collaboration with the U.N. and the U.S. drafted a project entitled “Apoyando La Reforma Penitenciaria en Panamá” [Supporting Penitentiary Reform in Panama], which aimed to implement reforms to the country’s prison system (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2014). By 2017, La Nueva Joya prison was developed on over 34 hectares of land with the capacity to house 5,504 individuals, making it the largest prison in the country. Additionally, La Nueva Joya has been named the most modern prison in all of Latin America (Álvarez, 2017). According to the UNODC (2014), this construction was implemented to facilitate a four-block model which aimed to produce an efficient prison structure, adhere to human rights standards, provide rehabilitation through re-entry, education and mental health, and improve security capacity. This focus was particularly impressive as it tackled long-standing criticisms of the Panamanian prison system. In contrast to La Nueva Joya, other prisons around the country had little to no structure (Prison Insider, n.d.). Another prison called La Joyita, for example, suffered from overcrowding, lack of physical structure (walls, lighting, and beds), and lack of judiciary support such as trials for pretrial detainees, and criminal classification. Human rights were denied as the prison was known to lack even consistent, clean running water, have food shortages, and incarcerated individuals were subject to abuse (Woods, 2009). Hence, model facilities which are the epitome of a modernized corrections system did not replace, but instead co-existed, with all pre-existing problems. According to the Sistema Penitenciario, there are 23 penal institutions in Panama. As of January 2021, there are 17,837 incarcerated individuals both male and female. According to the data, the Panamanian prison system is designed to hold 14,591 individuals, which means the penitentiary system exceeds its
capacity by over 3,000 persons (Sistema Penitenciario, 2021). These overwhelming conditions and overpopulation have been historically documented, however, insights coming from the general public have been largely underexplored.

Public Opinion and Policy

Public opinion often plays an important role in politics. Polls for example are used to provide insights into the public’s favorability of certain candidates and/or policy decisions. In the U.S., the 70s and 80s marked an era for increased punitive practices which led to mass incarceration and prison expansion (Wagner & Rabuy, 2017). During this same period, an ABC news survey reported 62% of respondents in favor of building more prisons even if taxes increased and a Gallup survey reported 57% respondents saw a need for more prisons (Flanagan & Caulfield, 1984). When there is a significant change in public opinion, policy often moves in the same direction (Page & Shapiro, 1983). Interest groups like lobbyists and donors hold a particular advantage over the progression of certain policies, in this case, the rise of the private prison sector and candidates in support of punitive practices. Wozniak (2014) used mail-based surveys to gauge the associations between perceptions of prisons life and punitiveness with blame, symbolic racism, political ideology and exposure. The study showed that 46% of respondents felt prison life was not harsh enough while 11% felt that it was too harsh. The remaining felt neutral, that prison life was neither too harsh nor too lenient. The public opinion to policy link is not always so clear. Literature highlights contradicting theoretical views, some citing only a small or null effect (Manza & Cook, 2002). Likewise, it could be understandable in areas where dictatorship continues, public opinion is disregarded.

Despite exceptions to some forms of government, understanding how these opinions come about is important. Many people have little knowledge regarding the daily affairs of individuals
that work or are housed in prisons. Because of this, it is important to understand how survey respondents, like the one’s mentioned above, are able to provide insights on prison-related issues. Cecil (2015, p. 9) states “most people must rely on the media to tell them about what is taking place in these institutions.” Television shows, movies, and news all contribute imagery on prisons whether fictional or real. For example, *They Call Us Monsters* highlight prison environments in the U.S. Another show, *Inside the World’s Toughest Prisons*, has successfully introduced prison conditions of Latin American countries such as Costa Rica and Brazil. *Orange is the New Black*, a drama series, highlights the dynamics between women in prison. Even though these shows may not be all encompassing of the prison environment, they provide viewers with insight into prison culture, conditions, and general dynamics that come into play within prison walls. Additionally, news outlets may keep viewers up to date on special issues within prisons. Interestingly, Page and colleagues (2014) show the influence of news television on changes in policy preferences. Below are other mechanisms that shape public perceptions that are also unique social features of Latin America.

**Perceptions and the Potential Barriers to Panamanian Prison Reform**

The social structure of Latin America has unique features that create barriers to prison reform movements. Latin America suffers from several obstacles, these being 1) poverty, 2) violent crime, 3) political culture and 4) corruption and institutional weakness. Public perceptions and opinions, a theme central to this thesis, is considered a mechanism that infiltrates each of the obstacles. It is possible because of these issues shaping perceptions, that public opinion itself is a barrier to penal reforms. In other words, poverty, violent crime, and corruption all shape public perceptions and penal populism which creates a feedback loop of attitudes that shape views on those who are incarcerated, prisons, and punishment. Vilalta and Fondevila (2019) suggest that
prison population growth in Latin America is related to increased punitive attitudes by the public and subsequent adaptation of punitive policies.

Poverty

In 2017, 184 million people were living in poverty of which 62 million were living in extreme poverty in Latin America (United Nations, n.d.). These numbers make up 30.2% and 10.2% of the region’s population, respectively (United Nations, n.d.). To put that number into perspective, 10.5% of the United States’ was living in poverty as of 2019 (Semega, Kollar, Shrider & Creamer, 2020). Panama, however, has always been viewed as a center for economic growth due to its international passageway, the Panama Canal, and its global role as trading center. Despite many economic achievements, more than 30% of Panama’s citizens live in poverty while 14.4% live in extreme poverty (World Bank, 2011). In addition to these alarming rates, there is concern about the historical trends of poverty in Latin American (Hojman, 2004).

Correctional systems demand an extensive number of financial resources to support their operations. Countries with areas of poverty where a lack of resources is common may not be able to meet the needs of such demands. Many of the issues found in prisons, such as lack of prison infrastructure, overcrowding, lack of adequate staff training, limited access to food and water, poor sanitation, and inadequate monitoring (Rahman & Ali, 2018) could potentially be solved with more funding. Penal populism, or the discussion of correctional affairs, may influence policies and funding for correctional systems if they are valued by the majority.

On one hand, individuals living in poverty are disproportionately affected by incarceration (Gonzalez-Bertomeu, 2016). This would question the extent to which families or friends that know someone who is incarcerated would push for reforms. Bergman and Fondevila (2021) make the argument that prisons have become a familiar place amongst those incarcerated and their families.
Potentially becoming more aware of the prisons’ harsh conditions, family and friends would become allies for incarcerated individuals. A 2015 news report stated that families of detained persons gathered to protest for the closure of the Punta Coco, a facility known for abuse and corruption (Lawrence, 2015). With the seeming growth in public awareness of prison conditions in Panama, there should, then, be shift away from a sense of mythical punitiveness, or the obscure belief that society prefers maltreatment of prisoners without any real data to a true understanding of what the public desires in terms of prison reform (Matthews, 2005). Additionally, one proposed goal of the criminal justice system is rehabilitation enacting a call for change. This could mean everyday citizens, regardless of their connection to incarcerated persons, would want productive members of society. Harsh conditions, lack of educational or economic opportunities, and access to other programs could disable the individual’s ability to successfully re-enter society post-incarceration.

While one could assume that the public would demand changes that would alleviate the terrible conditions of these penal institutions, the reality may be that such treatment may actually have public support. Some may feel, for instance, that incarcerated individuals are not deserving of public investment, or of even basic human rights that are presumably universal (United Nations, n.d.). An individual’s economic insecurities may influence one’s motivation to protect their economic self-interest and may act to ensure funding is directed at programs that benefit themselves and other similarly situated individuals, rather than be funneled to criminal justice institutions. In that sense, economically strained individuals could perceive public expenditure in corrections as a waste of valuable resources particularly when incarcerated individuals are being offered services and amenities, such as shelter, food, and healthcare, which are scarce for the poor despite their observance of the law. As such, then, those living in poverty may see offenders or
those in prison, due to their criminal background, as less deserving of resources and use them as “scapegoats” or a source of blame to divert attention from one’s economic concerns (Lehmann & Pickett, 2017). Although more research is needed to gauge such attitudes, research shows that a country’s economy is related to punitive perceptions. Those who believe the national economy is poor or worsening tend to have more punitive attitudes (Singer et al., 2020; King & Maruna, 2009). With a Latin American sample, Singer et al. (2020) theorized that this orientation may be due to the connection between economic anxieties and fear of crime. Fear of crime, in turn, can produce more punitive attitudes.

*Violent crime*

Poverty, economic and resource deprivation, and income inequality are strong predictors of crime (Pratt & Cullen, 2005). Because poverty and crime, particularly homicide, have a complex relationship (Santos, Testa, & Weiss, 2018), this review of the literature does not aim to disentangle such mechanisms, but rather to describe Latin America’s crime rate and elaborate on how fear of victimization, particularly violent victimization, can influence public perceptions. According to Vilalta, Castillo, and Torres (2016), Latin America and the Caribbean account for more than 30% of the homicides in the world, making the homicide rate of this region four times higher than the global average. The authors also find that 47 of the 50 cities with the highest homicide rates in the world are in Latin America. Police and courts tend to focus on short-term alleviation of crime while neglecting the long-term effects of other criminal justice institutions like prisons (Malone, 2012).

From a perceptual standpoint, victimization and/or crime reporting, can indicate a high prevalence of lawbreaking (Smithey & Malone, 2014). However, such crime prevalence does not necessarily correlate directly with the levels of fear of crime. A country like Chile, for instance,
experiences relatively low crime rates, yet suffers from high levels of fear of crime (Dammert & Malone, 2003). This example illustrates two phenomena. The first is that fear of crime may not be reflective of the objective crime rate (Valera & Guàrdia, 2014; Dammert & Malone, 2003). Second, crime not only involves the offender(s) and victim(s), but also society. In this line, punitive public attitudes can be a reflection of high levels of fear, which may or may not be correlated to the actual crime levels.

Research by Armbost (2017) empirically demonstrates that for both men and women fear of crime is a significant predictor for punitive attitudes. When it comes to prioritizing funding to certain goals of the criminal justice system (e.g., rehabilitative vs punitive policies), fear of victimization significantly decreases the odds of supporting rehabilitative relative to punitive policies (Baker, Metcalf, Berenblum, Aviv, & Gertz, 2015). In addition, “heightened fear is a key factor in the withdrawal of citizens from the community” (Weisburd et al., 2011, p. 3). This could, then, potentially impact the way the community builds relationships with those who find themselves incarcerated.

Political culture

In general, prison reforms are considered a political process (Malone, 2014). The political climate of a country directly impacts prison initiatives as “parties with different values and priorities are competing for power” (Laub & Frisch, 2016, p. 56). In some cases, solving prison issues may be a lesser priority of politicians and society itself (Hanser, 2020). This prioritization is highlighted by Tonry (2010, p. 138), who notes that “politicians probably care about police effectiveness; with punishment, effectiveness is seldom a matter of significant concern.” This is consistent with Panama’s historical focus on militarism and policing (Mann, 1996). Latin America has also had a long history under dictatorship, largely undermining the voices of citizens who seek
to voice social concerns within democratic processes (Malone, 2014). Citizens’ preferences for policies are able to shape prioritization of certain social issues. Gonzalez-Bertomeu (2016, p. 80) states “for most of the public, the prison system is of little priority.” One way of looking at this prioritization is by looking at expenditures for institutions within the criminal justice system. For example, Breunig and Ernest (2011) looked at American correctional funding and found that between 1984 and 1999 funding for corrections increased compared to other budget areas. Both liberal and conservative parties are incentivized to increase spending on corrections. The Panamanian government is reported to have spent 12 million U.S. dollars a year on its prisons, with much of this funding coming from outside donors (Leffert, 2006). Due to a lack of research, however, it is difficult to support the narrative that the Panamanian government and citizens prioritize prison matters, specifically prior to the construction of La Nueva Joya. Another way of looking at this prioritization is looking at incarcerated individuals’ rights. Governing policies often limit the rights of individuals serving time in institutional facilities.

*Visible Corruption/ Institutional Weakness*

Even when reforms are promoted “on paper,” bureaucracies can block financial access to equipment and training necessary to prepare criminal justice institutions to provide corrective action (Dammert, 2019). Where some countries prepare to implement criminal justice reforms, corruption overrides these democratic interests in favor of private interests. In some cases, political leaders can support reform for leverage during elections, but abandon such ideals once they reach office.

Citizens are very much aware of issues of corruption in their respective countries (Canache & Allison, 2005). According to the Transparency International (2020), a global organization concerned with perceptions of corruption, 85% of Latin Americans and 90% of Panamanians
consider corruption to be a big problem. Corruption destroys relationships with citizens and promotes institutional weakness. This dynamic also promotes an overreliance on institutions to solve criminal issues rather than a fluid community-oriented dynamic. As Malone (2010) states, citizens will be hesitant to report crime and cooperate with law enforcement if public trust is low. There could potentially be a parallel between these dynamics and the lack of reforms made in Panamanian prisons. Corruption also serves as a mechanism to hide abnormal practices and the misuses of power from ordinary citizens, thus, potentially leading to a delay in a movement towards prison reform in Panama.

Summary

From the establishment of Isla Coiba in 1919 to the construction of La Nueva Joya in 2017, the Panamanian criminal justice system has seen the initial waves of prison reform. However, the reforms have lacked proper sustainability. The aforementioned issues of poverty, violent crime, the political climate, and corruption, present insight on potential reasons why prison reforms in Latin America are at a standstill. Additionally, the media may play a role in shaping public perceptions regarding those who are incarcerated as well as the institutions in which they reside. This raises many questions regarding the frequency with which citizens have seen images or other content about Panamanian prisons, how knowledgeable citizens are in regards to prison issues, and whether or not they support prison reform and/or institutional improvements. Originally, “perceptions” of Panamanian prisons have come from a more observational standpoint stemming from official documents highlighting the conditions found within these institutions by the U.S. government.

Some research has investigated these perceptions in the U.S., however, little research, if any at all, has investigated these perceptions in Latin America, which limits the scope to which we
understand perceptions of Panamanian prisons. Despite this, though, they provide insights in differences of methodology (e.g. survey responses, web-scraping), changes of perceptions based on demographics, and scales of attitudes (e.g. punitive, rehabilitative, etc.) and beliefs (e.g. use of amenities, policies, and practices). This furthers the inquiry on how perceptions of prisons and incarcerated individuals play a role in the lack of successful penal reforms. Using publicly available data from the comments section on YouTube videos regarding Panamanian prisons, this study begins to fill this gap. In the next chapter, provides an overview of the current study.
CHAPTER THREE:
CURRENT STUDY AND METHODOLOGY

The internet offers unprecedented access to data regarding individuals’ perceptions and attitudes. Specifically, many individuals are motivated to write such opinions and attitudes in online discussion forums or comment sections. One such publicly accessible forum is YouTube, which contains many videos regarding the conditions of Panamanian prisons. Each video has a section for public comments, which contain rich content that can be searched and collected with relatively ease by researchers.

The current study aims to understand public attitudes of the Panamanian prisons system. To gain deeper insight on these attitudes, comments under YouTube video showing inside Panamanian prisons were explored. I selected videos for the study that showed imagery and media regarding Panamanian prisons. I, then, used the comments posted under these videos to generate a series of themes that categorized the content of each comment. I ran statistical models to give insights on word usage and frequency, theme prevalence, and usage based on demographics.

Goals of the Study

The goal of this project is to explore the discussions regarding Panamanian prisons in response to YouTube videos. A necessary function of this project is to develop a framework which enables the classification of comments into themes. Doing this allows for a concrete analysis of the prevalence of themes. The prevalence of each theme may provide insights on how commenters view the Panamanian prisons system and incarcerated persons while also assessing other publicly held sentiments. Determining whether commenters for example are “reform-focused” (i.e., calling
for rehabilitation, alleviation of conditions, etc.) or “punitive-focused” (i.e., expressing dehumanizing attitudes, expressions of deservingness of punishment etc.) can provide details on the mechanisms that stall reforms. It is possible that the potential barriers to reform discussed earlier – poverty, violent crime, political culture, and corruption – may appear in the comments. Additionally, public opinion, depending on its content, could be a barrier to reform itself.

**YouTube**

YouTube is an online video sharing website that receives two billion viewers each day (GFC Global, n.d.). According to the platform, there are over 31 million YouTube channels and between two to six billion hours of videos being uploaded each month (YouTube, 2020). With increased traffic on social media, platforms like YouTube have developed new social fabrics, such as “internet culture” and online communities (Norris, 2002). Communities like this where individuals of the same interests can come together and share ideas, express opinions, and promote resources create safety nets where inclusion can also be anonymous.

This exchange of information has become increasingly useful for academic research, with some scholars even recognizing YouTube as an important social media platform (Kousha & Thelwall, 2012). The attractiveness of YouTube stems from its accessibility, a principle that directly impacts the efficiency of comment exploration. Traditionally, such qualitative research was conducted by reviewing messages from newspapers, magazines, and formal documents (Ungvarsky, 2020). This lengthy and costly process has been facilitated by the advent of the internet which enables the instant sharing of information. Another attractive aspect of YouTube is that it enables researchers to observe attitudes and opinions directly from their original source, namely individuals. Unlike news media which can be swayed in one direction or another by the editors of that medium, YouTube comments come from numerous people sharing different
perspectives and opinions that they themselves hold. These online voices unpack complex issues and opens dialogue in a way other forms of media cannot (Whiting, Olufuwote, Cravens-Pickens, & Witting, 2019). Furthermore, YouTube commenters have the choice to remain anonymous, meaning that they can more freely share personal views which they may be hesitant to link to their public image, such as hateful speech. Finally, another benefit of the using YouTube that the platform displays videos in over 100 countries across 80 different languages (YouTube, 2020). Hence, YouTube can serve as a tool to highlight a variety of media messages, perceptions, and images on a global scale. YouTube, in this way, provides a unique approach to looking at perceptions by accessing threads of conversations within comment sections of videos pertaining to Panamanian prisons.

YouTube has a community of corrections-related content, performing a YouTube search of the term ‘prisons’ can yield hundreds of results. Specifically, YouTube offers content on prison television shows, rankings of dangerousness of prisons, previously incarcerated vloggers sharing their experiences, leaked videos, and much more. The platform allows individuals to filter through latest posting, length of video, ratings, etc., and also allows for the searcher to narrow down videos through its search engine. For example, the searcher can add in terms such as ‘Latin American’ or ‘Panamanian’ prisons.
Figure 1. Screen View of Video Posted on YouTube

Data and Collection

In this study, I will be using data in the form of comments posted under YouTube videos containing media and messages about Panamanian prisons. To be included in the study, video titles must include the word Panama AND jail or prison (or the Spanish equivalent carcel or penitenciario). The video must include real-life motion video of Panamanian prisons. I have excluded videos with proper titling but showing virtual reality or game-like characters. Because the focus of the study is to highlight attitudes towards prison conditions and incarcerated individuals, I limited video selection to those that give an inside view of Panamanian prisons rather than video demonstrating life after prison. In one specific example, I include a video showing rehabilitative efforts and news media footage of prison conditions rather than a video of a former...
gang member describing his prison experience. Performing a YouTube search with the phrase *Panama carcel* generated more results than other mixed phrases. For example, search results for *Panama prison* yielded 12 results; however, 7 were excluded based on the set criteria. The search result *Panama carcel* yielded over 100 results. A total of four videos were used for the analysis, containing approximately 569 comments each. Many of the videos that would have been eligible for the analysis, had very little commentary. Thus, the selection of the four videos were as a result of search criteria and density in commentary.

Once selected for use, I recorded the video’s name, url link, date posted, access date, length, and number of video likes/dislikes in a spreadsheet. I manually copied and pasted the comments into an Excel file. Each comment became an observation in the study. The data points I collected from each comment include type (original post, part of thread), number of likes and dislikes, and number of replies given to the original comment. Lastly, the variable gender was collected based on the commenters' name and/or picture, more detail regarding the accuracy of this measure will be discussed in the limitations.

I added this information to the Excel file containing all comments and matched it to the appropriate commenter. I collected these data points to help explore the perceptions of prisons and incarcerated persons by YouTube users or commenters. This study aims to explore the presence and frequency of terms and phrases embedded within this discussion. The dependent variables are specific terms, outlined in a box below, and the tone of the comment. The terms are split in between two groups: 1) terms with either high or low frequency and 2) terms associated with the potential barriers of prison reform highlighted in Chapter Two. The frequency count allows me to identify which topics or phrases are generally embedded in the discussion while we question whether topics like corruption, poverty, crime, and politics are drawn into the discussion. I will investigate the
context framing the two sets of terms, this context has the potential to branch out, turning the single word into a phrase. After the list of terms or phrases have been developed, the content analysis will be used to assess the tone of the terms or phrases. For example, a common phrase found within the comments was “te glaseo el donut?” (Literal translation: “should I glaze your donut?”), which is an expression with a meaning equivalent to “sugar coating” in the English language. This expression was often used sarcastically to rebuke arguments for change, suggesting changing the prison system was an unrealistic idea. Therefore, the tone of this phrase has been identified and categorized as sarcastic (refer to table 2). Lastly, I will examine whether the term has any predictors for example, if men or women are more likely to use certain phrases, terms, or tones.

Analysitical Strategy

This study takes on a mixed-methods approach by combining quantitative analytic strategies and qualitative evaluation. Though the study was conducted to produce two parts, the methodology intersected at different points. Stage 1 included conducting an overall word count and frequency of individual terms found in each comment. First, each comment was cleaned (removing punctuation marks, capitalized letters, or special characters) and uploaded into R statistical software. The coding gave a word count of all the terms collected from the comments and a frequency table that showed how many times each word appeared. A sample of this word frequency chart is shown in Table 1. This was done more so as a guiding tool to determine if 1) whether there was a high frequency in terms related to the possible barriers to prison reform highlighted in the literature review (poverty, violent crime, political culture, and corruption and institutional weakness) and 2) pinpoint concentration of certain topics and/or phrases within the discussion. Stage 2 used the word frequency table shown in Table 1 as a gateway to sort words into categories without bias of the comment content. Table 2 shows a list of categories that were
developed based on individual words meaning relative to the incarcerated person and prisons. These groupings of words and later categories, allowed for the conceptualization of themes further into the study. In **Stage 3** the comments were reviewed in conjunction with Table 2 as a guide. Here comments were assigned a theme based on the content and use of words categorized in Table 2. For example, words that described a call for change outlined in Table 2 were funneled into the category Rehabilitative shown in Table 3. These themes were narrowed down and organized across a spectrum found in Figure 2 as Punitive, Justifying, Neutral, Sympathetic, and Rehabilitative. Any additional themes found placement in the listed themes or were categorized as a subcategory/tone. Definitions of each theme are provided in Table 3. In **Stage 4** the themes were assigned a numerical code. Additionally, each comment was assigned a code based on the theme it corresponded to. A correlation between themes was conducted. A regression model on comment likes with the themes was run under the STATA code. Additionally, a regression on the comment replies with the themes were conducted. Further, the two outreg models were conducted for comment likes and replies, each of with corresponding themes. A logit model was conducted for each individual theme with the predictive variables. **Stage 5** after the quantitative stage gave insight on the prevalence in themes, a final review of the comments was conducted. Here the comments were sorted based on theme. The comments were read through to find similarities and differences. This provided context behind the word usage and comment content.
**Table 1.** Sample of list of terms arranged by frequency (Total word count = 12,825)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dios [god]</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>Libertad [liberty]</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanos [humans]</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Oportunidad [opportunity]</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carcel [jail]</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>Personas [people]</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derechos [rights]</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Triste [sad]</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merecen [deserve]</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Castigo [punishment]</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gobierno [government]</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Errores [mistakes]</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infierno [hell]</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Cambiar [change]</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2.** List of terms explored in each comment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Presence of terms that:</th>
<th>Words</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Describe deservingness / dehumanization</td>
<td>Merecen, inocentes, pecados, culpables,</td>
<td>Deserve, innocent, sins, guilty, sick, criminal, suffer, charge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>enfermos, criminales, sufre, aprendan,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>pena</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanize those who are incarcerated</td>
<td>Humanos, derechos, Libertad,</td>
<td>Humans, rights, liberty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call for change</td>
<td>Cambiar, Dios, oportunidad, justicia,</td>
<td>Change, God, opportunity, justice, fix, to help them, wish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>arreglar, ayudarlos, deberian, deseo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide political context</td>
<td>Gobierno, leyes, politicos, derechos,</td>
<td>Government, laws, political leaders, rights, vote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>voten, votar</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corruption and institutional weakness</td>
<td>corrupcion, corruptos,</td>
<td>corruptions, corrupt,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describe conditions</td>
<td>Hotel, infierno, condiciones, agua,</td>
<td>Hotel, hell, conditions, water, food, education, nutrients</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>comida, educacion, alimentos</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describe emotional response of viewing</td>
<td>Triste, dolor, lastima, doloroso</td>
<td>Sad, pain, pity, painful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>video</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime specific</td>
<td>Robar, matar, violar, robo, robando,</td>
<td>To steal, to kill, to rape, robbers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>robadores, matas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victimology</td>
<td>Victimas</td>
<td>Victims,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describe issues of poverty; resources</td>
<td>Pobresa, impuestos, agua, comida, educacion,</td>
<td>Poverty, taxes, water, food, education, nutrients</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>alimentos</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Blue boxes are used to differentiate terms associated with potential barriers to prison reform
Table 3. List of Proposed Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spectrum Themes</th>
<th>Defined</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Punitive</td>
<td>Negative commentary blaming incarcerated population. Describes a call for action, to punish the incarcerated population.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justifying</td>
<td>Justifies incarcerated persons' conditions based on the criminal conviction of incarcerated person or what they have done to the victim.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Taking neither of the proposed sides of the spectrum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sympathetic</td>
<td>Shows sympathy towards incarcerated populations' conditions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rehabilitative</td>
<td>Describes a call for action, to change the conditions of the prison or rehabilitate the incarcerated persons' behaviors.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subcategories</th>
<th>Defined</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sarcastic</td>
<td>Uses mockery or irony as a rebuttal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational</td>
<td>Describes a familial, friendship, or other form of relationship to someone who is incarcerated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political</td>
<td>Involves political leaders and policy.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2 shows the proposed themes organized into a spectrum. There is a fundamental difference from being at the polar ends of the spectrum (Punitive and Rehabilitative) than at the middle sections (Justifying, Neutral, Sympathetic). This difference is the call to action consistent with Klandermans (1997) where the shift between sympathetic reactions and active support are noted (Thomas, McGarthy, & Louis, 2013).

![Figure 2. Themes Outlined as a Spectrum](image)

The collection of narrative data such as the overall comments, key words and word groupings helped understand the context behind the language being used in each theme. These in
turn were able to be quantified by extracting numerical data such as frequency of words and prevalence of themes.

**Description of Themes**

This section describes each of the themes, using respective quotes to provide context regarding each comment. The comments themselves differ from each other based on the content and narratives being shaped by the commenter. Key words and overall content of the comment help shape this theme. This portion of the study aims to showcase the themes in which they were selected by the content of each comment. The original Spanish comment will be provided following its translation.

**Punitive**

The theme *punitive* was conceptualized to represent ideas that ultimately called for punishment, violence, or death towards the incarcerated population. When using the punitive theme, the commenter places emphasis on the incarcerated individual and the hypothetical crimes committed. In this framework, the incarcerated population deserves to be punished by violence: ‘…que se pudran!!!’ [let them rot], death: a commenter says ‘la pena de muerta para los presos y lito!!!’ [the death penalty for the incarcerated], another says, ‘pena de muerte es la solucion!!’ [the death penalty is the solution], or the mere conditions of the prison: a commenter says ‘se los merecen y mucho peor’ [they deserve this and worse]. One commenter specifically calls for abuse of rights, ‘prenderles fuego a todas esas escorias o dejarlos morir de hambre ahi mismo… problema resuelto’ [light all of these slags on fire, or let them die of starvation, problem resolved]. The crimes referenced in this category are rape, homicide, and robbery. One commenter says ‘si como no violadores, asesinos, y abusadores no merecen nada’ [of course, rapists, killers, and abusers do not deserve anything]. The punitive theme tends to be more extremist and, in some cases,
destructive. For example, one commenter says ‘le hubiese prendido una bomba allí’ [they should have lit a bomb there], another says ‘debe caer un meteorito’ [a meteorite should fall there]. Other commenters have said ‘muerence’ [die] and ‘…la mayoría son basura…’ [a majority of them are trash]. In some ways this theme moves beyond punishment by exhibiting elements of dehumanization and calls for abuse. Sarcastic phrases were found within the punitive theme. The commenter mocks the incarcerated person in the video by questioning whether the individual would expect to receive amenities or luxuries while incarcerated. Commenters would use the phrase “qué quisieran, un hotel de cinco estrellas?” [what did they want, a five-star hotel?]. Similarly, commenters said ‘qué quieren después de hacer tanto dano quieren una mansión’ [what do they want after doing so much damage, they want a mansion], ‘un baño con televisión qué elegancia’ [a bathroom with television, how elegant], ‘quisieran ser reinas? Que tiran besitos… son una carga para la sociedad’ [they want to be queens? To blow kisses… they are a burden to society]. Although not directly punitive, this sarcastic phrase could potentially fit into the punitive theme as it taps into the idea of not wanting people who are incarcerated to have certain amenities and feelings that the incarcerated population deserves such conditions.

Justifying

Under this theme, the commenter justifies the incarcerated individual’s position or prison conditions. The idea of recidivism is often mentioned within this theme. One commenter says, ‘salen de la cárcel y a los días regresan por otros delitos’ [they get out of jail and within days they’re back from other crimes]. In the commenter’s eye, the position of the incarcerated individual is justified because if released, he will continue to commit more crimes. Additionally, the commenter feels that the conditions or position is justified because, the now incarcerated person, willingly gave up their rights when committing a crime. One commenter says ‘cuando renuncias a
tus derechos humanos con tus acciones’ [you give up your rights with your actions]. In this framework, emphasis is placed on the victim’s rights rather than the incarcerated individuals. One commenter says ‘me gustaría escuchar a uno de estos presos pedirle al gobierno por la madre, esposa, y hijos de las víctimas de ellos. Para las víctimas no hay derechos humanos’ [I would like to hear one of these inmates ask the government for the mother, wife and children of the victims]. Another commenter says ‘exigen derecho pero cuando le quitan la vida a otra persona y dejan niños sin sus padres familias con dolor para toda una vida’ [rights exist, except when you take away the life of another and leave children without their parents and suffering for their entire lives].

This theme is categorized by the justification of an incarcerated persons’ conditions and treatment because of the preconceived harms done to victims. Within this theme, sub category was found. The commenters talk about incarcerated individual or the prison in relation to people they may know. These relationships are friendships, familial, and/or neighboring residents. One commenter writes ‘tengo a mi hermano en la joya y muchos mas conocidos’ [I have a brother and more acquaintances in La Joya]. One commenter expressed feelings of shock when reporting he saw a neighbor in the video ‘2:40 quedé impactado cuando vi que ese era mi vecino’ [Minute 2:40 I was impacted when I saw when that was my neighbor]. Other commenters used familial ties as a justification of the incarcerated persons’ conditions relative to their crimes. For example, one commenter writes ‘Oye si a tu mama o a hermana o una hija tuya la tan violando ni dios lo permita que le arias a ese tipo dime no lo matas si tienes la oportunidad...’ [Hey, God forbid, but if your mom or sister or daughter was raped tell me what you would do to that person, tell me you would not kill them if you had the opportunity]. In this sense, the commenter uses a figurative scenario of violence towards a family member to rebuke a comment sympathizer’s position.
Sympathetic

Commenters within this theme express sympathy for the incarcerated population and try to humanize their existence. One commenter states ‘son humano todo tiene una segunda oportunidad bendiciones para todo ellos’ [they’re human, everyone has a second chance, blessings to all of them]. Under this theme, the commenter feels despite the crimes committed, the conditions and treatment of incarcerated people are not justified. The commenter sees the conditions of the prison as deplorable. For example, one commenter says ‘es horrible las condiciones en que viven’ [it’s horrible in the conditions in which they live]. The commenter often references God and religion. Many commenters express sadness under this category. A representative commenter for this theme is as follows: ‘que dolor estos centros penitenciarios son lugares infrahumanos tristes’ [what pain are these prison systems, they are subhuman]. The commenters within this theme see the people who have been incarcerated as humans.

Rehabilitative

The rehabilitative theme calls for change of the conditions or the issuance of help to the incarcerated population. One commenter says ‘por dios, ayuden a esta gente’ [For God’s sake, help these people]. More specifically, a subtheme, political, was identified under this category which called for the government and specific government leaders to change the system. Some examples include: ‘presidente ayude a esa jente’ [president help these people], ‘por favor gobierno ayuden esas personas lo que hacen es transformalas mas’ [please government help those people to transform], and ‘…estan en estado deplorables. Espero que el gobierno haga algo para darle a estas personas un nivel de vida ya que estan privada de su libertad con ayuda que cuando salgan no vuelvan a reinsidir. Escuela. Trabajadoras sociales y muchas cosas mas que se necesita en una prison uniforme para los presos por favor son seres humanos…’ [they are in deplorable conditions,
hopefully the government does something to give them some quality of life now that they are detained. With help when they leave so they do not recidivate. School. Social work and more things that are necessary in a uniform prison for inmates. Please, they are human beings.

Another compares the conditions of the incarcerated population to a previously incarcerated politician and president, Ricardo Martinelli, ‘a Martinelli si le tienen de todo, que pena’ [they have it all for Martinelli, what a shame]. In this sense, the commenter insinuates that politicians receive better conditions than the everyday citizen who becomes incarcerated. In some cases, commenters would blame the government for the conditions ‘el gobierno apesta’ [the government sucks], ‘el gobierno es un gonorea ojala fueren ellos que estubieran all’ [the government is a gonorrhea hopefully it would be them to be there], and ‘...por que los presidents no hacen nada…’ [why don’t the presidents do anything]. This is where commenters begin to tap into the idea of corruption. ‘que va mientras corruptos presidents se llevan miles de millions no hacen nada [meanwhile corrupt presidents take hundreds of millions and don’t do anything] and ‘...polito corruptos dala attencion’ [corrupt politicians, pay attention]. Although this theme had less posts and engagement, the comments were longer, suggesting commenters placed more thought into writing the comments.
CHAPTER FOUR:

RESULTS

Table 4 contains the descriptive statistics for the analytic sample. Four videos with a total of 569 comments were collected in the data. The comments received an average of 2.3 likes. Regarding gender, 24% of the comments were from females while 66.7% were from males, and 9% of the sample remained unknown. Additionally, 80% of the sample of comments had an alias that was name-like while 19.6% had a screen name. 48% of the sample did not have a profile picture. The remaining portion of the sample had pictures that included: a person (29%), an illustration (14.5%), or other (6%). A majority of the comments were an initial post (65%) while 35% of comments were threads or replies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Obs</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. dev.</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>20</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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Table 4. Descriptive Statistics (Continued)

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<th>Std. dev.</th>
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<th>Max</th>
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<td>0.349291</td>
<td>0.477169</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Each of the comments was examined to determine whether it reflected punitive, justifying, neutral, sympathetic, or rehabilitative views towards Panamanian prisons and incarcerated persons depicted in the selected videos. Figure 3 contains the proportion of comments which were flagged with each theme. As demonstrated, there is a relatively balanced presence of each perspective across the comments, with all with proportion around 15%. One clear exception is the rehabilitative theme, which appeared in only 6.2% of the comments. This small proportion suggests that commenters do not hold strong rehabilitative ideals surrounding incarceration. In contrast, the neutral and sympathetic themes are in the highest proportion of comments, at 17.2% and 16.3% respectively. These are followed by the justifying theme at 14.9% and finally by the punitive theme, at 14%.
Each theme was later analyzed for its presence of engagement. Table 5 presents the Negative Binomial Models predicting the comment’s likes and replies. The negative binomial model on likes revealed that having a punitive theme increased the expected count of likes by 9.7%, that coefficient is both small, and is not statistically significant at an alpha level of 0.10. Having a justifying theme increased the expected count of likes by 170%, having a neutral theme decreased the expected count of likes by 46.5%, having a sympathetic theme increased the expected count of likes by 81.6%, and having a rehabilitative theme decreased the expected count of likes by 48.9%. This interpretation suggests that there are more expected counts for the justifying theme, followed by the punitive theme while controlling for other variables. The negative binomial model on replies revealed that having a punitive theme decreased the expected count of replies by 28.6%, having a justifying theme increased the expected count of replies by 50.3%, having a neutral theme decreased the expected count of replies by 12.0%, having a sympathetic theme increased the expected count of replies by 131.0%, and having a rehabilitative theme decreased the expected count of replies by 60.0%. These coefficients show that the expected count of replies is greater for the theme sympathetic, followed by justifying.
Table 6. Negative Binomial Regression of the Comments’ Likes and Replies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Likes</th>
<th>Likes</th>
<th>Replies</th>
<th>Replies</th>
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</thead>
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<td><strong>Themes</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>(0.433)</td>
<td>(0.325)</td>
<td>(0.354)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>2.698**</td>
<td>2.450**</td>
<td>1.503</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>(1.434)</td>
<td>(1.063)</td>
<td>(1.051)</td>
<td>(0.755)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0.700</td>
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<td>(0.221)</td>
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<td>2.310*</td>
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<td>(0.594)</td>
<td>(0.655)</td>
<td>(0.903)</td>
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<td>Rehabilitative</td>
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<td>(0.573)</td>
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<td>(0.916)</td>
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<td>0.382**</td>
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<td>(0.111)</td>
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<td>334</td>
<td>307</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.10; Standard errors in parentheses.

We used the fully controlled models for Likes and Replies to estimate predicted counts for each of the themes, while keeping all other variables constant at their respective means. Panel A of Figure 4 contains the predicted number of likes per theme, and panel B the predicted number of replies. As the figures show, the theme justifying had the highest predicted number of likes (3.84) followed by sympathetic (2.58). The punitive theme has an expected number of 1.56 likes. The
themes with the lowest predicted number of likes are neutral (.76) and rehabilitative (.73). These numbers may suggest that viewers may react to those commenters who take a position on the topic but are hesitant to react to comments which are more radical. Panel B reveals that sympathetic comments had the highest expected number of replies (.99) followed by justifying (.66). The themes with the lowest expected number of replies were neutral (.34), punitive (.30, and the lowest among all, rehabilitative (.17). Comparing both graphs, rehabilitative themes consistently received less engagement than other themes. In contrast both the justifying and sympathetic themes receive more collective engagement.

(A) Likes

Figure 4. Predicted Number of Likes and Replies per Theme
Table 6 reveals the results from the logit regression model of the themes. Males are 67.6% more likely to have a punitive theme within a comment than females. To add, males are 89% more likely to have a justifying theme, 2% more likely to remain neutral, 65% less likely to have a sympathetic theme, and 35% more likely to have a rehabilitative theme relative to females. Commenters with a screen name are 71% less likely to have punitive themes within a comment compared to those using their name. To add, commenters with a screen name are 48% more likely to have justifying themes within a comment, 32% less likely to remain neutral, 131% more likely to have sympathetic themes, and 6% more likely to have rehabilitative themes within a comment relative to using their name. This finding ultimately concludes that there are differences in expression amongst genders.
Table 7. Logit Regression of the Themes

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Punitive</th>
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<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Sympathetic</th>
<th>Rehabilitative</th>
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Note: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.10; Standard errors in parentheses.
CHAPTER FIVE:
CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore commenter reactions to videos posted on YouTube on Panamanian prisons in light of the unique social context of the Latin American society such as inequality, poverty, violent crime, political culture, and corruption. Very few comments were found to address these issues, other than the intersection of politics in the rehabilitation theme. The purpose of the study was to understand the attitudes that arose from commenters during the discussion of the topic of prison conditions and prison reform. A total of 569 comments collected from four YouTube videos about prison conditions in Panama were analyzed. These comments were classified according to their theme, which was categorized between (1) punitive, (2) justifying, (3) neutral, (4) sympathetic, and (5) rehabilitative. The punitive theme was defined as calling for the incarcerated population to be punished even more harshly, including wishes of violence, and/or death towards the individuals. The justifying theme was defined by the commenter justifying the poor conditions the incarcerated people experienced based on the fact that they had criminal conviction or on the harm they have caused to their victims. The neutral theme was defined as the commenter taking neither side of the framework or expression that had little to do with the topics in question. The sympathetic theme was categorized by commenters that show sympathetic emotional expression towards the incarcerated individuals. The rehabilitative theme describes a call for action or change to the prison conditions. Commenters using both the justifying and sympathetic themes conceptualize their views within moderate means, in comparison, the punitive and rehabilitative theme call for action. The overall results present a few key findings regarding use of themes, engagement, user demographics, and anonymity.
Findings

Findings indicate that 14% of the comments were categorized as punitive, 14.9% justifying, 17.2% neutral, 16.3% sympathetic, and 6.2% rehabilitative. This distribution indicates that most themes are similarly represented in the comment’s section, with the exception of the rehabilitative theme, which is much more uncommon than the others. The neutral theme had the highest concentration of comments, followed by the sympathetic, and justifying. Interestingly, this distribution suggests that the neutral and moderate themes (i.e., justifying, and sympathetic) are the most prevalent, in contrast to the more extreme themes who call for action (i.e., punitive, and rehabilitative). Between the two themes that call for action, the punitive has the highest prevalence (14%) in comparison to the rehabilitative theme (6.2%). The comparison of these two themes, show that commenters who do side with “doing” something, are much more in favor of punitive actions. An analysis of engagement within the themes provides further insights into favorability.

The negative binomial regression model was used to predict estimates of engagement within the themes in regard to the number of likes and the number of replies received by each comment, while controlling for observable characteristics of the commenters. On average, the 569 comments received 2.3 likes, and 35% of the initial comments received replies. In general, the analysis showed that the comments with the largest number of likes and replies were those that conceptualize their views or feelings of the incarcerated population within moderate means. To demonstrate, the justifying theme had the highest predicted number of likes (3.84) followed by sympathetic (2.58). The comments who went further than this conceptualization of their views and began to make a call for action received less predicted number of likes. To illustrate, the theme punitive received 1.56 predicted number of likes while the rehabilitative theme received .73 predicted number of likes. This analysis shows lower levels of engagement with comments who
call for action. The engagement with these comments by using likes also demonstrates a clear unfavourability to the rehabilitative theme. This engagement also differs by the commenter.

A set of logit regressions explored which observable characteristics of the commenters where predictive of each of the themes. From the information portrayed with the comments in YouTube, indicators such as gender, type of alias, presence of picture, and type of picture were collected. Based on the screen name and profile comments, results revealed 66.7% were male, 24% were female, and 9% were unclear. Regarding gender, women tended to be much more sympathetic with males being 65% less likely to have a sympathetic theme. Additionally, relative to females, males were 67.6% more likely to use a punitive theme, 89% more likely to have a justifying theme, 2% more likely to remain neutral, and 35% more likely to have a rehabilitative theme. Commenters with a screenname, as opposed to having a name-like alias, were 71% less likely to use a punitive theme and 131% more likely to be sympathetic than respective groups. This reveals that remaining anonymous was more associated with being sympathetic rather than punitive.

The results of these analyses present key findings regarding favorability of the themes, engagement, user demographics, and anonymity. Using previous research on online behaviors such as engagement and gender differences while also understanding Latin American social structure may serve as a contextual framework for these findings. Additionally, the use of previous research will determine if these results are consistent with existing literature.

**Interpretation**

The overall results present a few key findings regarding themes, engagement, and user demographics. The themes were discussed at relatively similar distributions with 14 percent classified as punitive, justifying (14.9%) neutral (17.2%), and sympathetic (16.3%). A clear
exception to this is the rehabilitation theme sharing only 6.2% of the comments. Additionally, the themes punitive and rehabilitative, categorized by a sense of one needing to take action, received less engagement, as measured by number of likes and number of replies, in comparison to themes conceptualized as holding moderate views (justifying and sympathetic) with rehabilitation receiving the least engagement of all theme groups. These two findings demonstrate 1) less favorability of taking action and 2) a weak favorability of rehabilitation. This finding is contrary to the ideals found in Article 28 of Panama’s 1972 (rev.2004) constitution which states that the penitentiary “is based on principles of security, rehabilitation, and social defense” (Constitute, 2020, Article 28, para. 28). Although this excerpt from the constitution is used as the mission statement for the Panamanian prison system, the study indicates that there is a “crisis of confidence” (Flanagan & Caulfield, 1984, p. 34). This phrase is used to describe the public’s lack of confidence or faith in the efficacy of the prison system, particularly rehabilitation (Flanagan & Caulfield, 1984). Since the 1970s, the Martinson Report explains how lack of proper training, funds, and invested persons impact the efficacy of programs using rehabilitative models. Stakeholders have often used this conclusion to argue that prison reforms are consistently unable to rehabilitate incarcerated individuals (Pratt, Gau, & Franklin, 2014) or that “nothing works” in regards to rehabilitation. It is possible that commenters feel underwhelmed with Panama’s consistent failures to keep up with prison reforms. This could explain subthemes found within the rehabilitative theme which question the government’s capability of solving criminal justice issues. For example, one commenter says “que tristeza no c como el gobierno teniendo la capacidad no puede habilitar un major lugar para los reclusos” [How sad, I do not know how the government having such capacity cannot do anything to produce a better place for the inmates]. This lack of faith in the government’s ability to regulate prison reforms can explain why people are less willing
to discuss and side with the rehabilitative actions espoused in the comments. If rehabilitation is delegitimized for the general public, harsher punishment may be perceived as legitimate or more effective in deterring crime.

The act of liking a comment gives off a sense of confirmation, which legitimizes views amongst commenters. In comparison to the rehabilitative theme, the punitive theme appears in a greater proportion of comments and receives much more engagement in terms of likes and replies. Additionally, the justifying theme received the most predicted number of likes than other theme groups. Interestingly, commenters are viewing videos showing the inside of Panamanian prisons, which displays issues such as lack of clean water, overcrowding, insect infestations, and many others. Yet, comments justifying those conditions for those who are incarcerated, and even calling for more harm to be done (e.g., bombing the prison, killing the those inside, or letting them starve), received the most amount of engagement, in contrast to lower counts of likes and replies for sympathetic and rehabilitative comments. This favorability and engagement among the justifying and punitive comments is a form of legitimizing extreme punishment. Thomas, McGarty, and Louis (2013, p. 15) state “radicalization rests on the perception that extreme action is legitimate.” This idea is central to the brutalization effect where Bowers & Pierce (1980) finds evidence that areas which enacted extreme punishment, such as the death penalty, have higher rates of homicide than other areas. In the case of Panamanian prisons, this could potentially increase advocating for harsh conditions and extreme violence if the Panamanian criminal justice system already inflicts extreme violence, which becomes normalized. However, while the support for punitive measures is clear, it is also important to understand which comments in particular advocate for punitiveness.

Punitive perceptions towards incarcerated individuals are dynamic, often influenced by gender, time, race/ethnicity, political affiliations, prior victimizations, and the economy. Because
of the nature of this study, two specific areas were investigated: gender and anonymity. In this sample, 66.7% of commenters were males, 24% were females, and 9% remained unknown. Additionally, 80% of commenters had an alias that appeared to be name-like, while 19.6% used a screen name. The logit models showed that men were 67.6% more likely to use punitive themes in their comments relative to women. This male punitiveness is consistent with studies that find more male support for punitive measures than women (Gault & Sabini, 2000). Those with a screen name - possibly as a strategy for remaining anonymous - were 71% less likely to use a punitive theme and 131% more likely to use a sympathetic theme. Research looking at online behaviors consistently report the opposite, as remaining anonymous is associated with exhibiting more aggressive behaviors because remaining anonymous allows users to display more non-socially acceptable behaviors (Omernick & Sood, 2013). Interestingly, our finding suggests that in the case of online comments about prison conditions, showing sympathy may be less socially acceptable, thus requiring a mask of anonymity, than showing punitiveness. This finding suggests that individuals using punitive themes are more comfortable with their face or name being associated with their ideals. The exploration of gender and anonymity begs the question whether punitiveness by gender is due to the Latin American social context. The concept of Machismo is an identity trait defined by the exaggerated masculine ego often related to aggression and antisocial behavior (Arciniega, Anderson, Tover-Blank, & Tracey, 2008). Ideals held in machista beliefs defend a man’s responsibility for his actions, family, and society. In this sense, male commenters could potentially see the male incarcerated individuals as failures to their responsibilities who must be aggressively punished for their actions while simultaneously being proud of holding these beliefs of aggression.
**Implications for Policy**

The purpose of this study was to understand how YouTube commenters discuss Panamanian prisons and those who are incarcerated inside these institutions. Within the literature, the following barriers to reform were discussed: 1) poverty, 2) violent crime 3) political climate 4) corruption and institutional weakness. It was suggested that these barriers often intersect with public opinion and subsequently shape penal decisions or policies. This study, however, also found that public opinion itself may be a strong barrier to prison reform. First, commenters were much more likely to interact with passive comments simply stating an attitude about the prison conditions (i.e., justifying or sympathetic), than to engage with content that calls for action or seeks to change the conditions of the prison or improve the situation for those inside (i.e., punitive and rehabilitative). Second, between the two themes that call for action, the punitive and rehabilitative, there is significantly more support for increased punitiveness. Durkheim (1984, p. 49) wrote “if severe penalties are required, it is because their example must be deeply inscribed in the hearts of men.” In other words, harsh conditions persist because people want them to and because they are legitimized by those in power. This presents a significant barrier to reform as people are either unwilling to mobilize, or support policies that are even harsher than current conditions faced by those who are incarcerated. With this in mind, it is imperative that the Panamanian government continues to support and fund reforms as done in 2011 in partnership with the United Nations Center for Drugs and Crime. This consistency in providing rehabilitative avenues such as clean and safe conditions, marketable skill building, re-entry opportunities, and many more demonstrate support for ideals held in the Panamanian constitution. Proper implementation and consistency in funding may legitimize rehabilitation among key stakeholders and the community, particularly if
those interventions are linked to reductions in offending and recidivism. This optimistic approach may fuel more progressive penal decisions.

**Limitations**

There are some limitations to the study regarding user data. One important limitation is the inability to definitively ascertain the user’s demographics, such as gender and location. YouTube does not display user data publicly on a user’s account like other platforms such as Facebook. A user can click on a video publisher’s or commenter’s screen name to open up their profile or channel. When clicking the ‘About’ section on the channel, a column named ‘stats’ appears on the right side of the screen. This only provides the date in which the user joined the platform. Therefore, the gender is inferred based on the user’s screen name and uploaded profile picture. This is a large limitation because it does not allow the individual to self-identify and/or guarantee the gender of the commenter. Another limitation to the demographic data is that YouTube does not display user location. Hence, it is difficult to tell whether the comments belong to Panamanian citizens, those of neighboring countries, or even within the continent. This inhibits the ability to gauge whether the user holds western-centric ideals or those shaped around the Latin American social structure. Although this study presents such limitations, there are unique avenues for future research.

**Future Research**

A key benefit of this study is the use of online data which is plentiful and easily accessible. Different methods of investigating these data may provide other insights regarding public attitudes and behavior. For instance, comments could be collected yearly under a time-series approach which could allow comments to be tracked for changes over time. Additionally, a different model could assess the intersection between viewership and different demographics as perceptions can
vary by the gender of the viewer in comparison to the gender of the individuals being presented in the video. In this case, a majority of the comments came from a video presenting a male Panamanian prison. The intersection of gender identity of the viewer and the presenter can shift the narratives of online viewership. For example, as highlighted in the earlier chapters, Döring and Mohseni (2020) found that female video publishers received more sexually aggressive commentary on their platforms. In this sense, the punitive attitudes may be related to the traditional gendered Latin American ideals.

**Concluding Remarks**

The purpose of this study was to explore the comments on YouTube videos showing content inside Panamanian prisons and the incarcerated people within them. I developed a spectrum of themes – punitive, justifying, neutral, sympathetic, and rehabilitative – by analyzing the difference in attitudes within the comments. Overall, the rehabilitative theme, categorized by a call to positively change the system, received the least engagement and was less prevalent amongst all themes and comments. In contrast, the punitive theme, defined as a call to act or impose harsh penalties on incarcerated individuals, received nearly twice the predicted count of likes and replies than the rehabilitative theme. This key finding was particularly interesting because the punitive theme called for extreme actions such as starving and killing incarcerated individuals, even when conditions described and shown in the videos were already in violation of basic human rights.

It is very clear that these views are contrary to the Panamanian constitution and other legal documents, which strongly endorse ideals of rehabilitation regarding the prison system. Although the exact location of commenters cannot be assessed, it is likely most views are held by Panamanian citizens who, through their votes, will likely elect representatives who endorse more
punitive policies. This study asserts that public opinion in of itself is a major barrier to prison reform, as these punitive attitudes overshadow ideals held “on paper” by believing incarcerated individuals as more deserving of harm than of help. In fact, commenters are much more likely to accept the harsh conditions faced by incarcerated individuals, than to call for any action, endorsing an inertia which favors the status quo, which itself poses a challenge for prison reform. Consistent with the extant literature, this study found the YouTube platform to be a rich source of data with the ability to expand into multiple avenues for future research including assessing variations in viewership and changes in commentary over time.


Smithsonian Institution Archives, Alexander Wetmore Papers, Record Unit 7006, Box: 183, Folder Album: Panama and Coiba, 1956


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1. Inside a Panamanian prison where inmates can languish for years without even being sentenced. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aWojQ7jfbRk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aWojQ7jfbRk)
2. La realidad del centro penitenciario la joya [The reality of the penitentiary center La Joya]. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5OwRWD_iiZw&t=2s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5OwRWD_iiZw&t=2s)
3. En la cárcel de mujeres en Panamá ante el COVID-19 solicitan ayuda [In the female jail in Panama during COVID-19]. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8q8Gfg-JOEM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8q8Gfg-JOEM)
4. Panama: privados de libertad en a joya y la joyita ayudan a humanizar su propio entorno [Panama: Inmates at La Joya and La Joyita help humanize their environment]. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1EREJDRsESQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1EREJDRsESQ)
APPENDIX B:

LIST OF LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES BY REGION

North and Central America: Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama

South America: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, French Guiana, Guyana, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname, Uruguay, Venezuela,

Caribbean: Cuba, Dominican Republic, Haiti