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Governmental Structures and Prison Practices

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Governmental Structures and Prison Practices

PRESENTER:

Nicholas Otto

BACKGROUND:

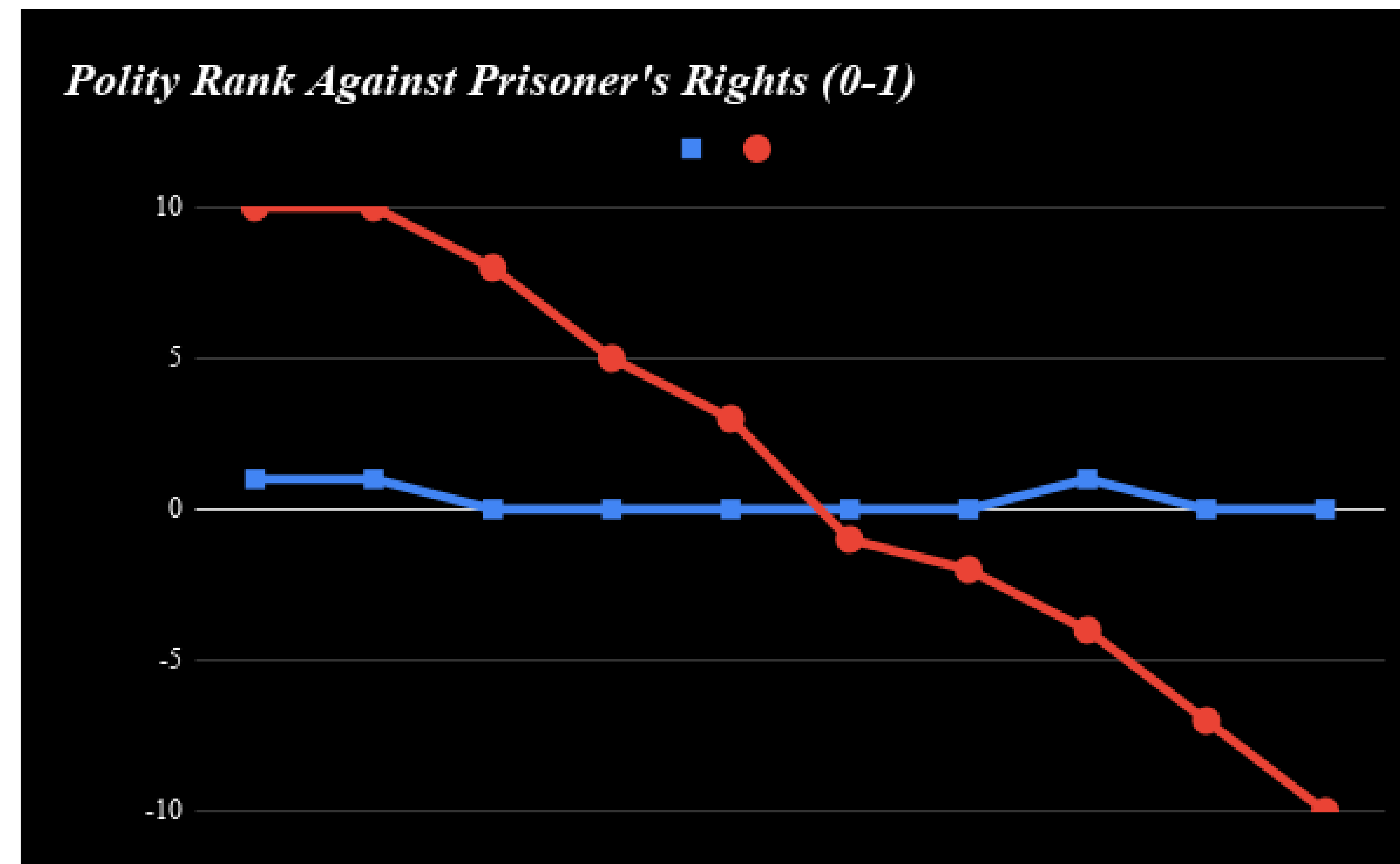
The Polity IV Project has been exhaustively cited in the past as an effective measurement of the level of democracy (or inversely, authoritarianism) in world nations. What if this data was compared to prison practices for countries throughout the world? Can a correlation be found between democracy and less punitive, or even rehabilitative, prison practices? This research will hopefully help in some small way to answer a much larger question: Why do some countries aggressively punish their prisoners, while others are more lenient? Perhaps governmental types are correlated to these practices.

METHODS

- 1) Collected Polity IV Project rankings on 10 countries, with a good spread of rankings, spanning from 10 to -10, the highest to lowest possible scores.
- 2) Used U.S. State Department Country Reports on Human Rights Practices to group those 10 countries into two broadly-defined groups: those that had rehabilitative/lenient prison practices (rated a 1), and those that had punitive prison practices (rated a 0).
- 3) Organized that data to highlight any correlations.

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No definite universal correlation could be found between authoritarian countries and punitive prison practices.



The data graphed:

The **Red Line** represents Polity IV ranks, ranging from 10 to -10.

The **Blue Line** represents prison practices rankings, 1 being lenient (or rehabilitative) and 0 being punitive.

Important Notes and Findings:

1) This data is all from 2013; Polity IV rankings only seem to go up until 2013, so I used the 2013 U.S. State Department Reports on Human Rights for the prison practices data so as to ensure the data covered the same time frame.

2) At first it seemed as though any country of the 10 selected that didn't rank as a 10 for the Polity IV Project (of the 10 countries, only Canada and Sweden scored a 10) had punitive practices, although the country that stood out was Morocco. Although Moroccan prisons (as of the 2013 report) had poor conditions, the report states that the Moroccan government set aside reform and correctional facilities for juvenile offenders, and mentioned vocational and educational programs, more than could be found in the reports for the nations scoring a 0 for prison practices (punitive), which had prisons mostly characterized with life-threatening conditions, beatings, and severe overcrowding, with little or no rehabilitation programs.

3) Without Morocco, there would be a much stronger correlation between authoritarian countries and punitive prison practices, but with such a small sample size, it seems that ignoring Morocco's data would be in bad taste. Hence the final conclusion.



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REFERENCES

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