

**COLORADO'S RURAL WAR ON DRUGS:
A Case Study Of Grand Junction's
Legalized Marijuana Implementation,
Politics, And Carceral Ethos**

Presented by: Alexia Thompson

*Thesis for the Department of Sociology and Criminology,
University of Denver*

Faculty Advisor: Michael Campbell II, Department of
Sociology and Criminology

THE AMERICAN WAR ON DRUGS

October 27th, 1970

The Comprehensive Drug Abuse Prevention And Control Act was passed.
Created 5 drug schedules based on a drug's addiction potential and medicinal values.

June 17th, 1971

President Nixon declares drugs as "public enemy number one"

July 1973

President Nixon created the Drug Enforcement Administration.
Combined the Federal Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs, the Office for Drug Abuse Enforcement, and the Office of Narcotics Intelligence

1980's

Expansion of the private prison industrial complex

1982

Nancy Reagan initiated the "Just Say No" campaign
Targeted young kids, eventually led to D.A.R.E

President Reagan signed the **Comprehensive Crime Control Act (1984)** and the **Anti-Drug Abuse Act (1986)** into law.

Created 100:1 sentencing disparities for crack v. powder cocaine, and created mandatory minimum sentencing laws

1989

President George H.W. Bush created 1208 Program
Militarized state and local police for "counterdrug" measures

1990's

Started to see the creation and use of three-strikes laws and truth-in-sentencing laws

1994 Crime Bill

Largest crime bill, gave enormous funding to police and prison construction, incentivized more states to pass mandatory minimum sentencing laws

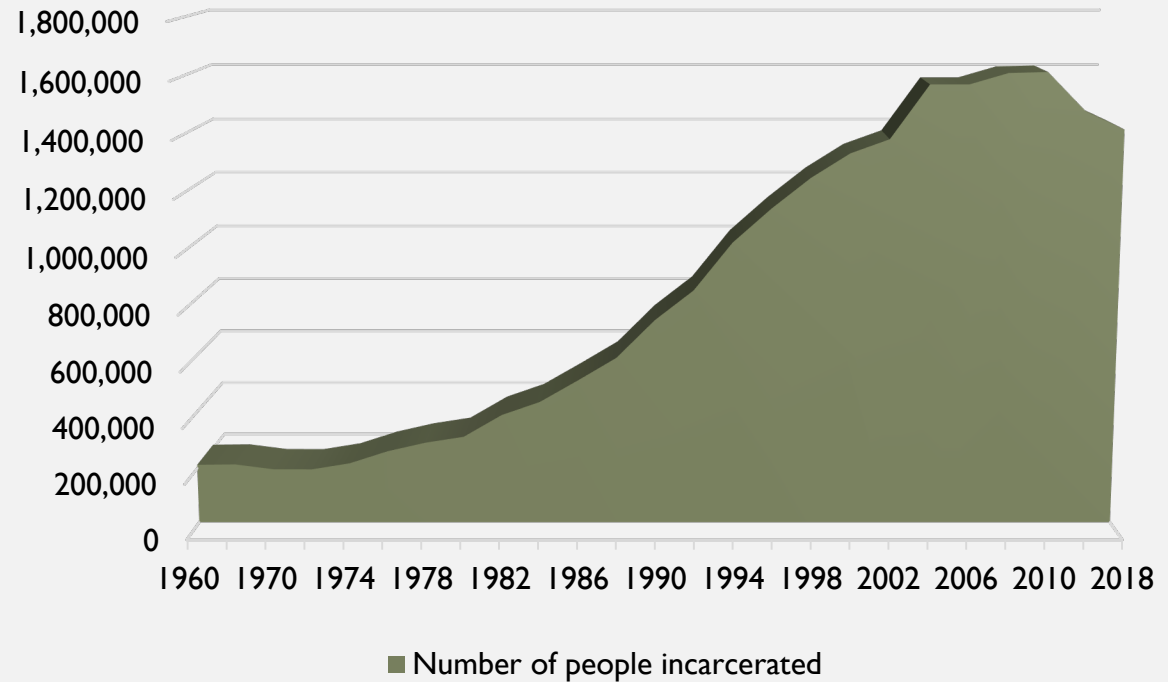
AMERICAN MASS INCARCERATION

Mass incarceration has grown exponentially since the Nixon and Reagan eras, especially through the War on Drugs

Starting to see a small decline in incarceration, but US remains **world's largest jailer**

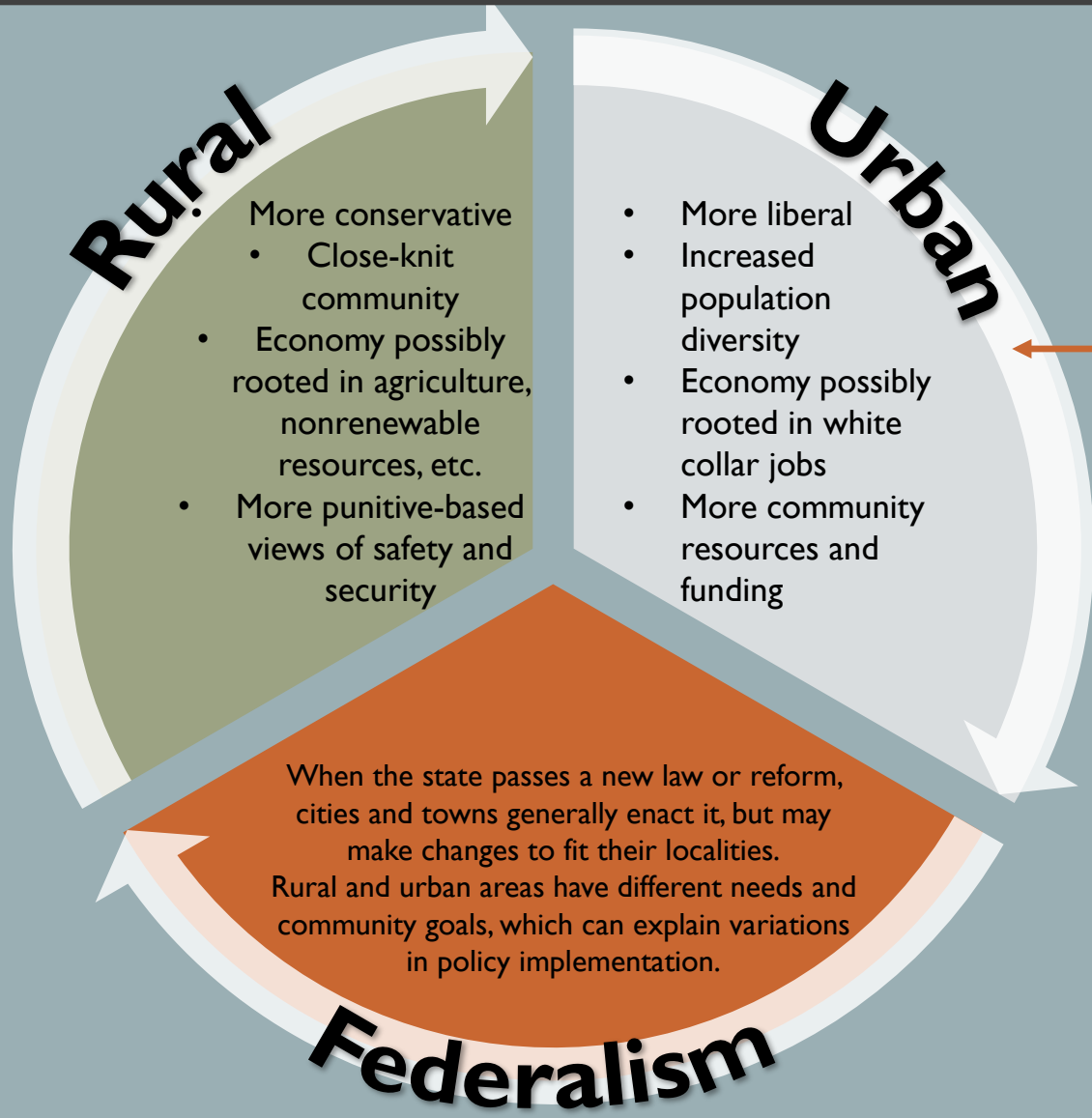
Still seeing increased policing in communities, power of plea bargains, judicial and prosecutorial discretion, private prisons, and strict sentencing laws

People incarcerated in the US (1960-2018)

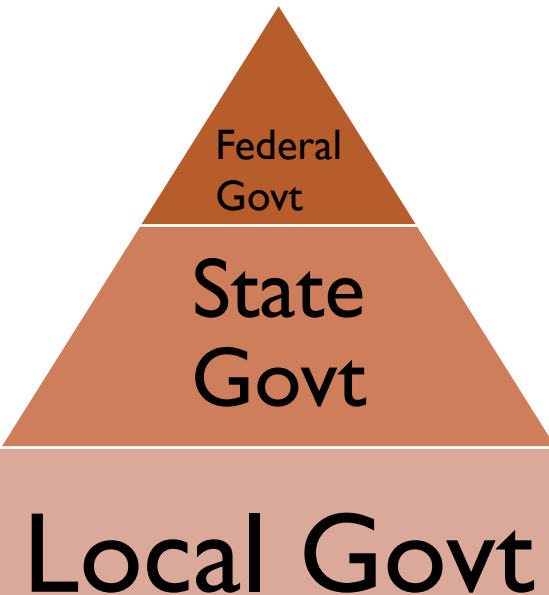


*Data courtesy of the Sentencing Project

URBAN VS. RURAL LOCALITIES, AND THE IDEA OF FEDERALISM



Federalism describes the relationship between federal, state, and local governments in their implementations of policies.



GUIDING RESEARCH QUESTION

When examining Grand Junction, Colorado how do socio-economic, political, and carceral characteristics explain why rural counties are resistant to implement state-wide drug law reforms and legalizations? And how do these characteristics contribute to upholding a rural carceral ethos related to local policy feedback loops?

METHODOLOGIES

Qualitative

Data collection from Grand Junction's local newspaper, the *Daily Sentinel*. Currently being coded in an excel spreadsheet by category.
Dates range from January 2009 and will end approx. December 2016

Literature review of works that discuss federalism, drugs, enforcement behaviors, local practices, carceral ethos, feedback loops, and politics.
Works used were academic journals, peer-reviewed journals, or books.
Included works from Michael Campbell II, Katherine Beckett, Anjuli Verma, Lisa Miller, Phillip Jenkins, and Michael Gizzi

Quantitative

Data collection from the US Census Bureau, Mesa County Coroner's Office, Mesa County Clerk and Recorder, Mesa County Sheriff's Office, Grand Junction Police Dept., Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program, and various other websites in Grand Junction (i.e., GJ City Council).

GRAND JUNCTION, COLORADO

Population*:
approx. 63,597
Mostly white
(93%)
Politically
conservative

4 hours
away from
next
largest city
I-70 runs
through
north side
of town

Issues with drug
trafficking,
methamphetamine
use, and drug
overdoses
Consistent rates
of suicide

Socio-economic contributors

Mesa County
Sheriff's Office,
Grand Junction
Police Dept., CO
State Patrol,
Western
Colorado Drug
Task Force, and
DEA Office

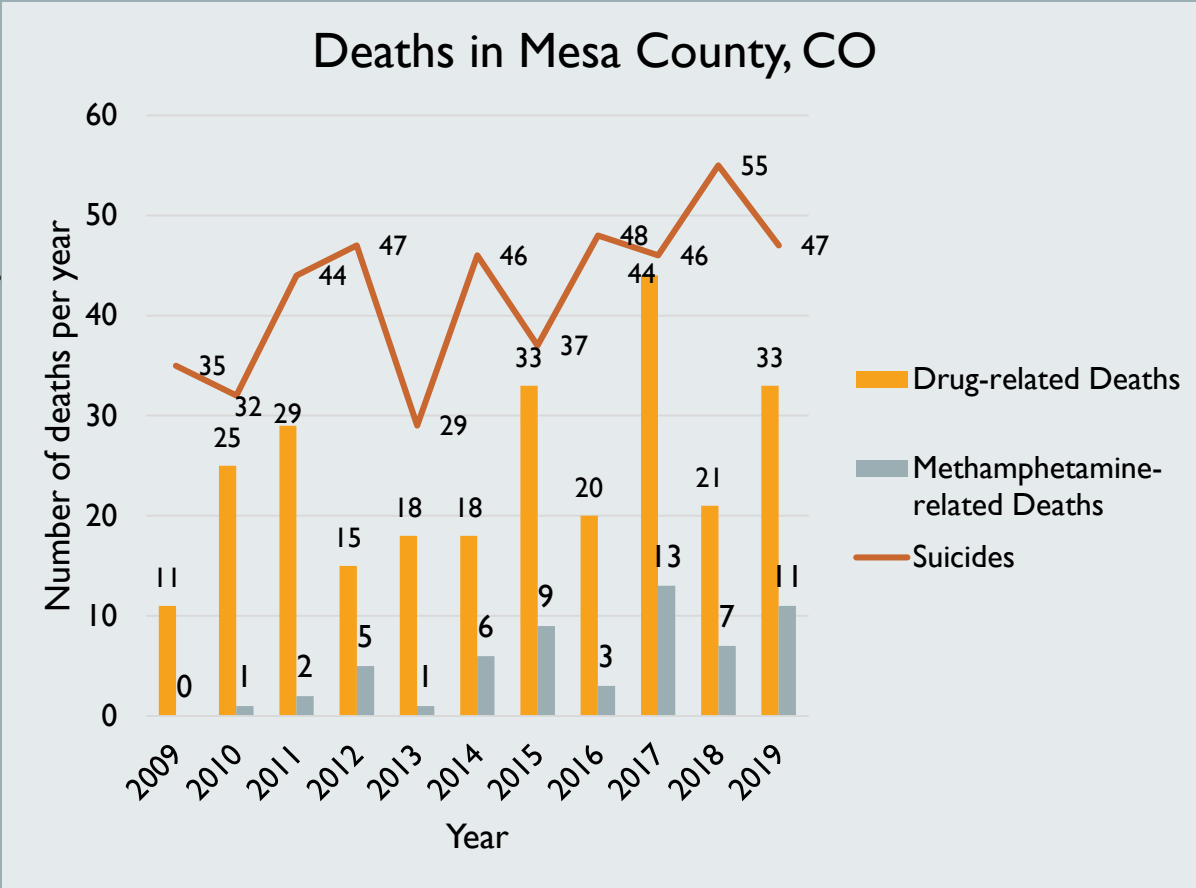
In 2021, the
Police Dept.
accounted for
33% of the total
city budget
And they have
33% of all fulltime
employee
positions**

Carceral characteristics

Voted against
Amendment
64 in 2012
with a 51.72%
NO and
45.85% YES***

Allowed medical
marijuana
dispensaries in
early 2000's
- passed ordinance
that banned
dispensaries in city
limits in 2011

Marijuana Politics



*Data courtesy of US Census Bureau
**Data courtesy of the City of Grand Junction's Adopted 2021 Budget
***Data courtesy of CO Secretary of State 2012 Amendment 64 Voting Results

Data courtesy Mesa County Coroner's Office Annual Reports (2009-2019)

EMERGING THEMES FROM ORIGINAL RESEARCH

For The 3rd Time **NO!**

**DO NOT RISK Our Kids &
Grandkids Health & Safety**

NO Pot Shops in GJ - Greedy Money!

...It's Just Wrong

Vote

****NO!** On Measure 2A & 2B**

Paid for by NOMJinGJ

www.NOMJGJ.com

Courtesy of www.nomjgj.com

Remaining against implementing legal marijuana because of problems with methamphetamine and other opiates

Investing and continuing to support law enforcement & carceral solutions when community is in dire need of social services-based solutions

Preservation of local and rural carceral ethos through statements and positions of local actors (like the District Attorney, Law Enforcement Chiefs, Mayor, City Council Members, etc.) like broader patterns of the American carceral state

WHY THE GRAND JUNCTIONS OF AMERICA MATTER

There are cities like Grand Junction throughout America

Cities that are relatively small but can have strong political impact in areas where there is one large metro area and smaller surrounding rural areas

Places that implement strong levels of federalism against state and national political movements

Cities that have seen the effects of methamphetamine or other drugs

This has been in the forefront of peoples' minds recently since the beginning of the opiate epidemic

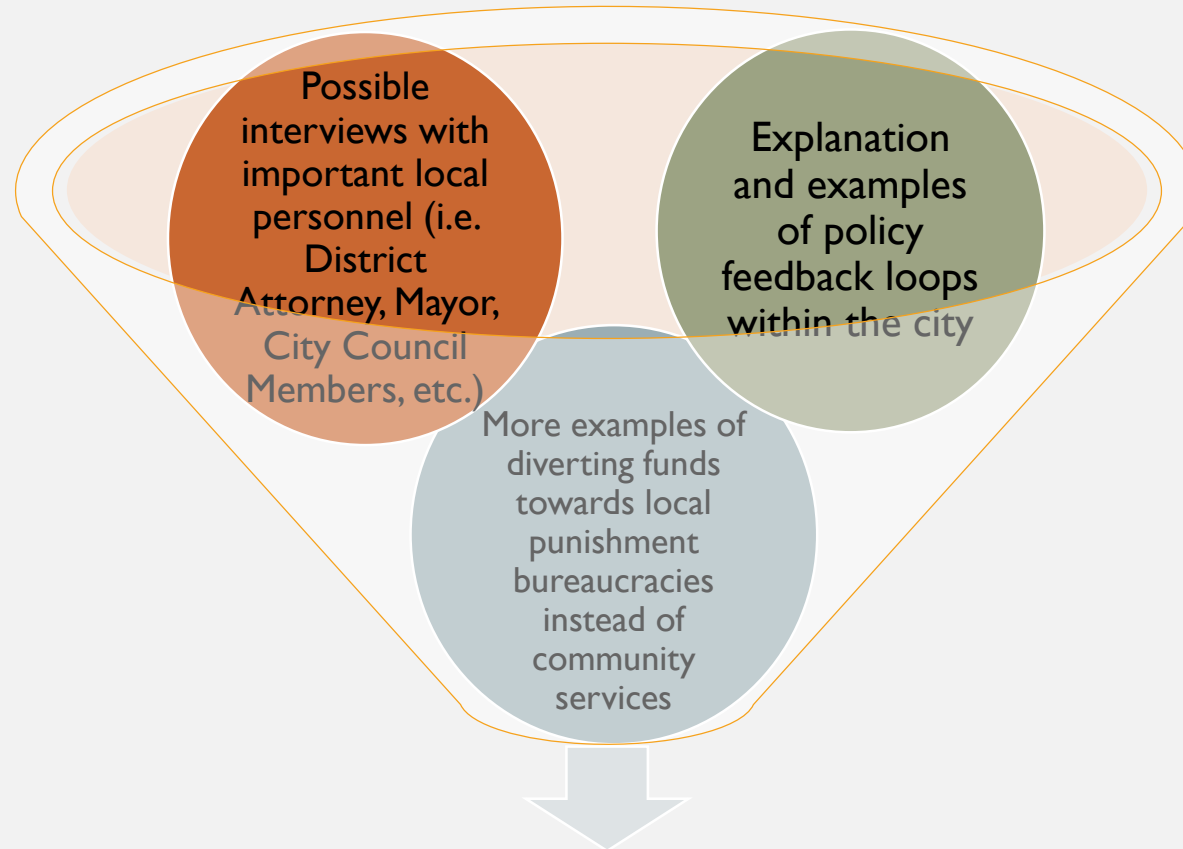
Increased policing within smaller communities rather than \$\$\$ being diverted to treatment-based resources under the guise of "safety"

Smaller cities that uphold conservative values in a "blue state"

Other areas in their state are reconsidering the punitive approach to crime and drugs

While rural areas are reluctant to adopt these approaches because of deeply held 'tough on crime' antics

WHAT I HOPE TO FIND IN FURTHER RESEARCH & POTENTIAL HYPOTHESIS



I predict that Grand Junction was opposed to adopting recreational marijuana because of the long-felt effects of methamphetamine, which caused this conservative community to invest in carceral 'treatment' measures. These measures also upheld the criminalization of marijuana so local actors in this area could justify their expansive carceral response and deem this as an essential practice for the benefit of the community.

REFERENCES & WORKS CITED

- “Annual Reports - Mesa County, Colorado.” *Coroner*, Mesa County Coroner's Office, 2019, www.coroner.mesacounty.us/annual-reports/.
- Aspin, Les. “H.R.2461 - 101st Congress (1989-1990): National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Years 1990 and 1991.” *Congress.gov*, House - Armed Services Committee, 29 Nov. 1989, www.congress.gov/bill/101st-congress/house-bill/2461.
- “Criminal Justice Facts.” *The Sentencing Project*, 2 Sept. 2020, www.sentencingproject.org/criminal-justice-facts/.
- “Grand Junction City, Colorado; United States.” *QuickFacts Grand Junction City, Colorado; United States*, US Census Bureau, 1 July 2019, www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/grandjunctioncitycolorado,US/PST045219.
- “Thirty Years Of America's Drug War | Drug Wars | FRONTLINE.” *PBS*, Public Broadcasting Service, 2014, www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/drugs/cron/.
- United States, Office of the City Manager. *2021 Annual Adopted Budget Book*, City of Grand Junction, 2021. www.gjcity.org/401/City-Council-Adopts-2021-Budget.