INSTITUTIONAL DETERMINANTS OF CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEMS IN THE UNITED STATES


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Child protection is a highly consequential social institution that simultaneously supports and regulates marginalized families. This dissertation shows that child protection systems are largely a product of the institutional environments in which they are enmeshed. Rates of child welfare intervention are closely tied to the character of a state's social policy regime. Places with aggressive police forces and punitive criminal justice systems are likely to produce higher volumes of reported child abuse and neglect, and are likely to place more children into foster care. Places that exhibit high levels of racial inequality in their criminal justice systems are also likely to exhibit high levels of racial inequality in their foster care systems. Places with relatively generous social welfare systems are likely to place fewer children into foster care, and are likely to institutionalize fewer children in their foster care system. Taken as a whole, these findings show that child protection is sensitive to both feedback effects from criminal justice and welfare systems and to the political and institutional forces that guide policy design and implementation.

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