

“If we don’t take them off our streets, they’re going to continue to prey on innocent people.”¹

The discourse around recidivism and recidivists in the *New York Times* and the *New York Post*

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Abstract

Mass incarceration and high rates of recidivism in the United States have long been discussed in the scientific literature. A punitive culture has fostered harsh punishments and incarceration without considerable effects on recidivism rates. At the same time, research has indicated that rehabilitative measures and treatment programs for offenders have positive effects on their reintegration into society and help to reduce recidivism rates. In the present study, the discourse surrounding recidivism in the *New York Times* and the *New York Post* is investigated with a corpus of 666,290 words. The analyses indicate that the *New York Times* encourages a discussion of rehabilitative measures and adopts a view of recidivism that highlights recidivists’ potential for change. The *New York Post*, on the other hand, takes a more conservative approach and adopts a more dire view of recidivists, considering recidivism as a character trait rather than an indicator for the relative success of rehabilitation programs.

1 Introduction

The United States have been known for high incarceration rates (cf. e. g., Gotsch/Basti 2018; Mamun et al. 2020), harsh prison conditions (cf. e. g., Darley 2005; van Ginneken/Palmen 2023), and high recidivism rates (cf. e. g., Ostermann/Hashimi 2022; Snyder/Sickmund 2006; Trulson et al. 2016). The high numbers of incarceration are due to a culture of punishment (cf. e. g., Bloom/Bradshaw 2021), strict laws like the Three Strikes Law², and the idea that incarceration is a form of retribution, rehabilitation, and incapacitation. It is also believed to have a deterrent effect on individuals in at least two ways: on the one hand, it is thought to deter individuals from committing any crime in the first place, and on the other hand, it is thought to

¹ Quote by 110th democratic Mayor of New York City, Eric Adams, which appeared in the *New York Post* on March 5th, 2023 (NYC, online).

² Three Strikes Laws are used in several states in the US, but California’s Three Strikes Law is particularly harsh: it “requires that defendants convicted for the second time of any of a certain class of felonies receive twice the normal sentence, and that those convicted for a third time receive a sentence of life imprisonment with no parole after less than 25 years. [...] California is unique in that *any* felony can be called a third strike at the discretion of the prosecutor” (Sutton 2013: 38, italics in the original).

deter offenders from committing another crime once they had been incarcerated, thereby preventing recidivism (cf. Weisberg 2014: 790f.). *Recidivism*, which generally refers to a “relapse into criminal behavior” (Merriam-Webster, s. v. *recidivism*), can be regarded as an indicator of the effectiveness of a criminal justice system (cf. Bird/Nguyen/Grattet 2022: 11), as it provides feedback about how effective the efforts for rehabilitation are. Due to different ways of measuring recidivism, individual states within the US exhibit vastly different recidivism rates. Ostermann/Hashimi (2022: 5) report that “about 24% of formerly incarcerated individuals experience a new arrest within a year of release” and that “this figure grows to 38% within two years”. However, the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (2021) reports recidivism rates as high as 68% for rearrests and 44% for reconvictions within three years. Other studies report recidivism rates ranging from 33% (cf. Snyder/Sickmund 2006) to 85% (cf. Trulson et al. 2016). Numbers further differ with regard to the type of crime (cf. e. g., Langan/Levin 2002; Weisberg 2014), the age (cf. e. g., Langan/Levin 2002; van Ginneken/Palmen 2023) and the gender of the offender (cf. e. g., Bergseth/Bouffard 2012; Cloyes et al. 2010; Goshin/Byrne/Henninger 2014; Richner/Pavelka/McChargue 2022; Staton-Tindall et al. 2015; Yang et al. 2015). The issue of recidivism is thus a highly complex yet central one to the legal justice system and one that reflects underlying ideological differences in the conception of crime, justice, and punishment. Before delving deeper into the causes of recidivism, its possible prevention, and an empirical analysis of its representation in two large media outlets, namely the *New York Times* and the *New York Post*, an attempt is made at providing an overview of different perspectives on recidivism.

1.1 Perspectives on Recidivism

The first issue that arises in the study of recidivism is a definitional one: is a recidivist someone who is **rearrested** by the police, someone who is **charged** with another crime, or someone who is **reconvicted** of another crime? Does the crime the person is rearrested for, charged with, or reconvicted of have to be the same crime as the original conviction, or does it refer to **any** other crime? Does it refer to traffic violations as much as to felonies? These are central questions to the study of recidivism and individual states in the US might answer these questions differently, which makes it difficult to compare recidivism rates across the United States and provide some sense of the complexity of the issue (cf. Doherty 2016).

Weisberg (2014: 789) describes the many faces of recidivism aptly:

(...) by one connotation, recidivism is viewed in terms of the recidivist individual, a character to be condemned and feared. He is the unrepentant sociopath, the most stubbornly resistant to whatever crime-preventing or evil-curing mechanisms that comprise our criminal justice system. By another reckoning, recidivism is a social condition reflecting a tragic or frightening illness in society. By another, recidivism is a policy outcome that provides one of the most specific tests to which we subject criminal justice system programs – the thing the program evaluators report on when they evaluate new correctional or reentry experiments. [...] From another perspective, recidivism is an existential test of the criminal justice system generally.

Weisberg (2014: 789)

By highlighting the different faces of recidivism and noting its various connotations, Weisberg also hints at different underlying attitudes towards recidivists and recidivism. For instance, if

recidivism is seen as inherently linked to a person (e. g., as a character trait), falling back into criminal behavior appears inevitable, and the logical answer to preventing reoffending is to incarcerate the person at risk. On the other hand, if recidivism is not regarded as an inherent personal trait but as something that is connected to the effectiveness of the criminal justice system, then not only can an individual be prevented from recidivating but also the criminal justice system itself carries some responsibility if recidivism rates are high (cf. Lee 2009: 610). How recidivism is conceptualized therefore reflects how recidivists are treated, what kind of punishment is regarded as appropriate, and whether or not treatment options are offered (and if so, which).

1.2 Causes of Recidivism

Many studies have aimed at identifying the causes of recidivism in order to counteract them, and the results are multifarious: for example, higher rates of violent recidivism (but not any other types of criminal behavior) have been linked to traumatic brain injury (TBI) and especially post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (cf. Lattimore et al. 2022: 6). Another factor that was identified in several studies as an increased risk for recidivism is a younger age at the time of release (30 or younger) (cf. Bonta/Andrews 2017; Higley/Lloyd/Serin 2019; Staton-Tindall et al. 2015; van Voorhis et al. 2013). Further, family-related factors such as family criminality, but also substance abuse, an antisocial lifestyle, and psychological variables have all been found to increase the likelihood for recidivating (cf. Katsiyannis et al. 2018; cf. also Hanson/Morton-Bourgon 2004). Race and criminal history, on the other hand, have not been found to have a negative effect on recidivism rates (cf. Katsiyannis et al. 2018).

As hinted at above, incarceration and imprisonment are often viewed as having a deterrent effect on inmates, which means that imprisonment itself supposedly reduces recidivism. Interestingly, however, as Cullen/Jonson/Nagin (2011: 53) state, “most criminologists would predict that, on balance, offenders become more, rather than less, criminally oriented due to their prison experience”, which not only cuts their social bonds and ties with friends and family, but also makes them “endure noxious strains” (ibid: 53). Additionally, by being labeled as criminals, they become stigmatized (ibid: 54) and placed outside societal boundaries, further alienating them from the community (cf. also Bloom/Bradshaw 2021; Green/Winik 2010; Harding et al. 2017; Loeffler 2013; Loeffler/Nagin 2022; Mueller-Smith 2015; Nagin/Snodgrass 2013). In contrast, the strengthening of a non-criminal identity should be fostered (cf. Wakeling/Travers 2022: 759).

Other causes of high recidivism rates can be found in the lack of support for inmates after their release. For instance, due to their convictions, inmates might be excluded from public housing, from welfare programs and student loans, they might face restrictions on the job market and a revocation of their driver’s license as well as a permanent loss of their right to vote (cf. Lee 2009: 618f.). These factors, along with harsh treatment in prisons, might cause them to lose faith in and respect for the justice system and the law, thereby increasing the chances for recidivism (cf. Lee 2009; see also Bloom/Bradshaw 2021; Travis 2002).

A controversial aspect in this debate is the role of private prisons in the US. The first modern private prisons in the US emerged in the late 1980s (cf. Burkhardt 2017; Ortiz/Jackey 2019) and by 2015, more than 8% of all prisoners in the United States were incarcerated in a private

facility (cf. Mamun et al. 2020: 4500). Private prison companies have been highly influential (cf. e. g., Craig/Pond Cummings 2020; Pond Cummings/Lamparello 2016) and have achieved considerable monetary success (cf. Pond Cummings/Lamparello 2016), which has not remained without criticism (cf. e. g., Craig/Pond Cummings 2020; Gotsch/Basti 2018; Lambert et al. 2015; Makarios/Maahs 2012; Mukherjee 2014; Page 2011). Importantly, Mamun et al. (2020: 4500) even point out that “the incentive structure of private prisons may be perverse, as private prisons stand to gain financially as recidivism increases”. While some studies report increased recidivism rates for released offenders from private prisons to be up to 22% higher (cf. Duwe/Clark 2013), other studies report only a 2% increase (cf. Bales et al. 2005), which was still statistically significant. Gaes (2019), however, argues that a possible connection between recidivism and private prisons has not yet been studied in enough detail to draw any safe conclusions.

1.3 Reducing Recidivism

In contrast to the general notion of imprisonment and incarceration having a deterrent effect, as mentioned above, these types of punishment have been found to either have no effect or even a negative effect on recidivism rates. There is empirical evidence, however, that rehabilitation programs do have positive effects and can effectively counteract recidivism (cf. Taxman/Pattavina/Caudy 2014; Petersilia 1998). For example, several studies have suggested that illiterate and unemployed released offenders show disproportionately high rates of recidivism (cf. e. g., Chappell 2003; D’Alessio/Stolzenberg/Eitle 2013; Erisman/Contardo 2005; Lockwood/Nally/Ho 2016; Steurer/Smith 2003; Varghese et al. 2010), thereby highlighting the need for more educational programs (cf. Wakeling/Travers 2022). Further,

while harsh prison conditions apparently fail to deter future offending, there is slightly more support for the idea that positive experiences may have a rehabilitative effect (Auty/Liebling 2020). This effect may result from positive interactions with staff and peers triggering cognitive changes, as well as from meaningful activities, which may additionally equip individuals with helpful skills (van Ginneken/Palmen 2023: 109)

Evidence for this comes especially from Norway, a country with one of the world’s lowest recidivism rates (cf. Deady 2014). In Norway, the prevalent normalization thesis allows a focus on rehabilitation rather than punishment, which means that the treatment of inmates is less harsh, less severe, and less a form of punishment than it is in the United States. That is, inmates enjoy more freedom in prisons and they acquire skills they can draw on once they are released (cf. e. g., Pakes/Holt 2017; Pratt 2008a, 2008b; Pratt/Eriksson 2014). To sum up, it appears that incarceration and imprisonment by themselves without effective efforts for rehabilitation is unlikely to have positive effects on recidivism rates.

2 Data and Methodology

The dataset for this study comprises 666,290 words and is composed of 308 articles of the *New York Post* and 369 articles of the *New York Times*. The data was collected manually from each website and the search was restricted to articles referring to New York City and the state of New York. Table 1 provides an overview of the corpus.

	<i>New York Times</i> (NYT)	<i>New York Post</i> (NYP)
Articles	369	308
Words (Tokens)	463,073	203,217
Time period	04/26/1981 – 06/23/2023 (span: 42 years)	07/27/1999 – 06/25/2023 (span: 24 years)

Table 1: Overview of the dataset

The data was selected as follows: as a search term, *RECIDIV** was entered into the search bar of both newspapers to identify all articles that contain either *recidivism*, *recidivist*, *recidivists* and/or *recidivate*. All articles that appeared in the output are included in the respective corpora. As it is an aim of this paper to investigate the discourse surrounding the phenomenon of recidivism, only duplicate articles were excluded from the corpus; all other articles were retained. The fact that the digital archives of the two newspapers are of different sizes, the *New York Times* corpus is larger and goes back further in time than the *New York Post* corpus. This could explain differences in the results of the analyses and is thus regarded as a limitation. However, where direct comparisons are made, normalized values are used in order to eliminate any effect of corpus size on the results.

The two newspapers that are included in the present study were selected for the following reasons: firstly, they are among the newspapers with the highest circulation rates in the US (cf. Agility 2022); secondly, they both have a focus on New York, which makes their reports generally comparable in terms of topics and regionality; and thirdly, they reflect two different ideologies, with the *New York Times* being located more on the political left, and the *New York Post* more on the political right (cf. AllSides 2023). This allows for an interesting comparison in news coverage and reporting on the controversial topic of recidivism.

The research questions that were developed for this study are the following:

- (1) How are recidivism and recidivists conceptualized in the *New York Times* and the *New York Post*?
- (2) Are there differences in the representation of recidivism and recidivists in the *New York Times* and the *New York Post*, and if so, what are the differences in reporting?

2.1 Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS)

In order to investigate the proposed research questions, a Critical Discourse Analysis complemented by a corpus analysis is conducted. On a basic level, discourse refers to “actual instances of communicative action in the medium of language” (Johnstone 2018: 2) and investigates language use in context based on individual texts (cf. Baker 2006: 3). In order to be able to generalize the findings of such a study, however, a large dataset is needed. Such a dataset cannot be

analyzed manually. Therefore, corpus analysis software is used for this purpose. Corpus-assisted discourse studies (CADS) is a branch of linguistics that “explores discourse (...) through examining corpora” (Gillings et al. 2023: 1), which are “generally large (...) representative samples of a particular type of naturally occurring language” (Baker 2006: 2). Further, taking discourse analysis (DA) with a close focus on individual texts as a starting point, a discourse analysis becomes a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) when it critically examines instances of communication of social phenomena and highlights underlying social issues. It is, however, more an approach than a method and has been used by researchers with various different backgrounds and from various different disciplines. CDA aims at revealing social inequalities and unjust treatment of underprivileged groups (cf. e. g. Baker 2006) by filtering out linguistic devices that are used for manipulation, for the spreading of ideological positions, and the oppression of certain groups of people, among others. By adding a corpus to the analysis, a critical examination of instances of discourse on a larger-scale level is enabled. CDA is well-suited to approach the topic of this paper, as CDA aims to “uncover the ways in which discourse and ideology are intertwined” (Johnstone 2018: 53) and to reveal “how language is used for the exercise of socio-political power” (Widdowson 2004: 89). The investigation of ideologies is central to CDA. As belief systems, ideologies are “representations of aspects of the world” (Fairclough 2003: 9) and can be explicit or implicit in language choices, but whenever language is used, the author makes a particular choice about how actions, actors, and events are represented and this choice can reflect their ideological stances (cf. Johnstone 2018: 54–62). This is particularly relevant in the context of newspaper discourse, where journalists make conscious choices about how they transfer ideas to the reader. Importantly, they “select and organize possible statements on a particular subject” (Richardson 2007: 76), decide on which events are worth reporting on, and how to report on these events in line with the general ideological direction of the newspaper. As Richardson (2007: 76f.) notes, a newspaper text

fulfils particular functions; has been created in accordance with particular production techniques and in specific institutional settings; is marked by particular relationships between other agencies of political, judicial and economic power; is characterised by particular interpersonal relations between writer and reader; and is consumed, interpreted and enjoyed in ways that are specific.

Richardson (2007: 76f.)

Newspapers therefore do not only carry a central role in the production and dissemination of news, but also in the reproduction and perpetuation of ideological stances. As mentioned above, the two newspapers chosen for this study have been shown to be located on the political left (*New York Times*) and the political right (*New York Post*), which makes them suitable for CDA. The central role of the media in the representation of crime, in moral panics, and in the creation of social realities has been discussed previously (cf. Hayes/Luther 2018; Tabbert 2015), and the connection between crime, ideologies, and newspapers is described aptly by Tabbert (2015: 3):

Crime news reinforces (often naturalised) ideologies, which provide the ground for maintaining the current criminal justice system with its retribitional stance. Thus a self-perpetuating circle is created with ideologies influencing the public stance mirrored in the news which influence the authorities’ decisions. This circle reinforces existing values and ideologies.

Tabbert (2015: 3)

The analysis of the corpora in the present study was conducted with AntConc® (Anthony 2020), which enables the generation of frequency lists, keyword lists, and concordance lines, and also allows for the investigation of collocations. Frequency lists are simple lists of all words that appear in the corpus, which are sorted according to the words' frequencies. Hence, such lists provide a general overview of the topics that are most prevalent in the texts of the corpus (cf. Baker 2006: 51–56). Keyword lists, on the other hand, are generated to investigate those words that appear particularly frequently or particularly rarely **in relation to** a comparison corpus. Such an analysis allows for the investigation of differences and similarities between corpora, thereby facilitating direct comparisons between them (cf. Brezina 2018: 79). Concordance lines show the search term within the context in which they appear in the respective articles (cf. Baker 2006: 71–73) and thus offer glances at the co-text (cf. e. g., Widdowson 2004) of the search terms, without which examinations of isolated meanings are ineffective in the context of a CDA. Another means that aids a contextual investigation of search terms is the use of collocations. Collocations are words that frequently co-occur together in the investigated corpus (cf. Brezina 2018: 66–70; Gillings/Mautner/Baker 2023: 27). As Brezina/McEnergy/Wattam (2015) outline, typical criteria for the analysis of collocations are distance, frequency, and exclusivity, but also directionality, dispersion, and type-token distribution among collocates (cf. Gries 2013). Here, distance refers to the distance between the node (the search term) and the collocate. This distance is called collocation window and can differ in size. The larger the window that is investigated, the more general the associations between the words become (cf. Brezina/McEnergy/Wattam 2015; Gillings/Mautner/Baker 2023). The second criterion, frequency, indicates how often the two words co-occur within the investigated corpus. Corpus software offers a variety of collocational statistics for measuring frequency (e. g., MI, LogLikelihood, logDice). These techniques “all try to identify pairs of words that co-occur in the corpus with a frequency that is greater than chance” (Gillings/Mautner/Baker 2023: 29). Thirdly, the relationships between the collocates might not be exclusive, meaning that one word in the pair might also collocate strongly with another word in the corpus (cf. Brezina/McEnergy/Wattam 2015). Further, while one word in the pair might strongly collocate with the other, this does not mean that the relationship is equally strong in both directions. Dispersion refers to the distribution of the search term within the corpus and can, for instance, indicate whether a term appears frequently across all texts or whether its appearances are limited to only a small set of texts. The type-token distribution takes into account not only the strength of the relationship between the words but also the “level of competition for the slot(s) around the node word from other collocate types” (Brezina/McEnergy/Wattam 2015: 141). Within the tradition of corpus linguistics, collocation analyses are regarded as particularly useful “because they bestow additional meanings on words which can help to indicate the author's viewpoint and value judgements shared by speech communities” (Gillings/Mautner/Baker 2023: 27f.). In this paper, the MI statistic is used for the collocation analysis, which “focus[es] on the strength of the relationship between two words [and thereby] favour[s] cases where the words often appear together as opposed to being apart” (Gillings/Mautner/Baker 2023: 29).

3 Analysis and Results

In the first step of the analysis, frequency lists of the most common lexical words were created, as these provide a better insight into the aboutness of the corpora compared to function words,

which are related to style and register (cf. e. g., Baker 2006: 54f.). The analysis will begin with an examination of the *New York Times* (NYT) corpus followed by an analysis of the *New York Post* (NYP) corpus. Afterwards, in the discussion section, both corpora will be compared and the findings contextualized.

3.1 The NYT Corpus

The *New York Times* is one of the largest newspapers in the United States. For 2022, it reported to have had approximately 2 million digital-only subscribers, a 145 million monthly audience world-wide, and a total of 9.6 million subscribers for digital and print options (cf. *New York Times* 2023). Additionally, it had 488.3 million website visits in January 2023 (cf. Words Rated 2023). As mentioned above, the NYT corpus includes 369 articles that contain the words *recidivism*, *recidivate*, *recidivist* and/or *recidivists*.

3.1.1 Overview NYT Corpus

Table 2 shows the 50 most frequent content words in the NYT Corpus, which provide a first glance at the content of the articles. Many of the verbs in the list are typical reporting verbs (cf. e. g., Hyland 1999) and it is thus not surprising to find them among the most frequent words in the newspaper corpus. It is indeed of interest to note that the titles *Mr* and *Ms* appear in the list, indicating that people in the articles are referred to with this title and possibly their last name. The appearance of *city*, *new* and *York* are also not surprising, as the articles largely refer to either New York City or the State of New York. However, *new* is also used as an adjective in references to a new administration, new approaches, new beds, new crimes, new laws, new lives, new prisons, new programs, and new studies, among others.

RANK	WORD	FREQUENCY			
1	Said	4710	19	Years	1057
2	Is	4268	20	Do	1053
3	Was	3035	21	York	1043
4	Are	2947	22	Drug	925
5	Mr	2799	23	Inmates	921
6	Have	2420	24	Court	860
7	New	2230	25	Offenders	839
8	Be	2169	26	Can	822
9	State	2079	27	Time	816
10	Has	1937	28	Ms	791
11	Had	1654	29	Law	714
12	Prison	1533	30	Treatment	705
13	More	1340	31	Last	687
14	Year	1338	32	Like	686
15	Were	1234	34	Programs	650
16	Program	1205	35	Department	641
17	People	1185	36	System	637
18	City	1076	37	Criminal	643
			38	Crime	616

39	Judge	573	45	Jail	546
40	Community	561	46	Get	537
41	First	560	47	School	537
42	Now	559	48	Say	528
43	Police	554	49	County	516
44	Justice	548	50	Children	513

Table 2: The 50 most frequent content words in the NYT Corpus

The list further reveals a focus on prisons, police, inmates, courts, and offenders, but also a coverage of topics surrounding treatments, programs, the community, school, and children. Subsequently, it will be examined how recidivism is represented within this discourse.

3.1.2 Recidivism in the NYT Corpus

With 470 occurrences (i. e., 101.5 occurrences per 100,000 words), the term recidivism does not appear among the 50 most frequent content words. The term *recidivists* appears 7 times (i. e., 1.5 times per 100,000 words), and *recidivist* only occurs twice (i. e., 0.4 times per 100,000 words). As a verb, *recidivate* does not appear at all.

In order to investigate the use of the term *recidivism* and the context of it in its surrounding discourse, a collocation list was created, including five terms to the left (5L) and five terms to the right (5R) of the search term (see Figure 1 for the collocation graph), in order to extract not only narrow grammatical collocations but also ones with wider grammatical relations that appear frequently (cf. Gillings/Mautner/Baker 2023: 28). The most frequent collocates of *recidivism* are the function words *the*, *of*, *to*, and *and*. Even more interesting in the present context, however, are the content words that *recidivism* collocates with. These are listed in Table 3.

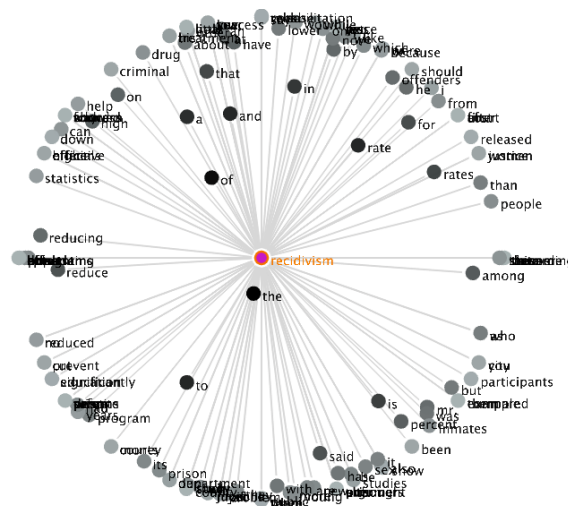


Figure 1: Collocates³ of “recidivism” in the NYT Corpus. Position of words indicates their position in the discourse (left (L) or right (R) of “recidivism”)

³ The collocation graph was created with #LancsBox® (Brezina/Weill-Tessier/McEnery 2020).

RANK	WORD	FREQUENCY	FREQUENCY (L)	FREQUENCY (R)	STATISTIC (MI ⁴)
1	Rate	125	33	91	8.69222
2	Is	78	23	55	4.17354
3	Rates	70	10	60	8.95782
4	Percent	59	16	43	6.32431
5	Reduce	55	54	1	8.40691
6	Said	54	21	33	3.50086
7	High	39	30	9	6.59989
8	Have	37	21	16	3.91614
9	Mr	33	7	26	3.54118
10	Reducing	31	30	1	8.77239
11	Offenders	31	9	22	5.18915
12	Was	26	7	19	3.08044
13	Has	23	9	14	3.55144
14	Risk	21	18	3	6.88037
15	Lower	21	10	11	7.65330
16	Program	20	14	6	4.03459
17	Are	19	9	10	2.67038
18	New	17	6	11	2.91212
19	State	16	5	11	2.92581
20	Sex	16	6	10	5.07712

Table 3: 20 most frequent content words collocating with *recidivism* in the NYT Corpus

The use of the verb *is* in connection to *recidivism* is of interest, as *be* in all its forms describes a relation between two entities, namely a token and a value (cf. Halliday 2014). In this context, it will be examined which qualities or attributes are related to *recidivism*, the combination of which appears 19 times in the corpus. Most of the descriptions of *recidivism* are either neutral or positive (Examples 1–9):

- (1) “The reduction of *recidivism* is achievable, but only by a commitment from forces outside prison walls” (01/31/1982)
- (2) [For students,] “*Recidivism* is virtually nil,” Mr. Del Maestro said.” (10/22/1989)
- (3) “Occasional *recidivism* is common; the goal is a manageable life to the individual addict.” (01/28/1990)
- (4) “(...) the very nature of probation and parole is a gamble, and *recidivism* is inevitable.” (06/07/1992)
- (5) “(...) occupation heightens a prisoner’s self-esteem and so reduces collective tension and, ultimately, *recidivism*” (07/02/1993)

⁴ MI = Mutual information

- (6) “Recidivism is as common to the justice system as orange jumpsuits and iron bars.” (07/25/2008)
- (7) “(...) treatment programs are generally shorter than prison sentences, and recidivism is lower.” (02/27/2009)
- (8) “For prisoners over age 60, the rate of recidivism is about 1 percent” (October 8th, 2013)
- (9) “Advocates for prisoners argue that fear of recidivism is unreasonable, especially for convicts close to death.” (01/29/2010)

On the other hand, it is also mentioned that

- (10) “the rate of recidivism is discouragingly high for parolees” (05/05/1996)
- that
- (11) “The rate of recidivism is so high that something has to be done” (11/11/1990),
- and that
- (12) “criminal-justice experts estimate that the price of a former prisoner’s return to jail, called recidivism, is nearly \$54,000 a year for each inmate” (11/14/1993).

Whether or not these attitudes have changed over time, given that the negative examples stem from the 1990s, is beyond the scope of this paper but poses an interesting avenue for future research.

It is also visible in Table 3 that many of the terms that collocate with *recidivism* are connected to concerns about high numbers of recidivism (e. g., *rate* and *rates*, *percent*, *high*) and to reducing or lowering these numbers (e. g., *reduce*, *reducing*, *lower*). In order to dig deeper into the discourse, concordance lines have to be investigated to see whether these initial assumptions hold true. Table 4 represents sample concordance lines of *recidivism* and *rate*.

LEFT CONTEXT	SEARCH TERM	RIGHT CONTEXT	DATE
And the harm to society generally may even be greater in this context given the high	rate of recidivism	among juveniles.	06/05/1984
Alan Kaufman [...] said that the	rate of recidivism	among the 200 former mental patients in the program was 11 to 13 percent	12/12/1982
The Court Employment Project intervention resulted in a substantially lower	rate of recidivism	among those who successfully complete the program...	02/21/1988
12-year-old program has succeeded in lowering the	rate of recidivism	among young offenders.	05/13/1995
because there is a high	rate of recidivism	among certain types of sex offenders	05/26/2002
The	recidivism rate	for women who graduate in our [Marymount Manhattan] program, as far as we know, is zero.	05/28/2009
“There are complaints about a 36 percent	recidivism rate	in New York State,” Father Chinlund said.	11/13/2009

The evidence and the research show that when prisoners are able to maintain ties with their family, they cope better with their prison experience and they have a lower	recidivism rate.		01/28/2011
Community Education credit the system with helping to reduce the state's	recidivism rate,	as well as its prison population	06/16/2012
with a total of 780 beds, and its [Community Education in Pennsylvania]	recidivism rate	was also 67 percent	03/24/2013
Its [Red Hook Community Court]	recidivism rate	is lower than that in the rest of the city	02/11/2014
the	recidivism rate	is about one – tenth that of other convicts	08/07/2014
The	recidivism rate	for participants in the Brooklyn programs, aimed at young gang members, is less than 10 percent	12/15/2015
over the past decade, and its [New Jersey's]	recidivism rate	is lower than the national average	09/06/2017
he [the governor] said, adding that the high	recidivism rate	for such crimes shows that existing laws were ineffective.	03/20/2019

Table 4: 15 Sample concordance lines of *recidivism + rate* and *rate of recidivism*

The 15 concordance lines in Table 4 confirm the first impression gained by looking at the collocations in Figure 1. The discourse surrounding recidivism in the *New York Times* is centered around statistics and numbers, but by investigating the concordances, it also appears to be a discourse about role models and good examples about what works in reducing recidivism. In this context, it is worth further looking into the concordance lines of *reduce/reducing + recidivism* (see Table 5).

LEFT CONTEXT	SEARCH TERM	RIGHT CONTEXT	DATE
A state experiment designed to ease prison overcrowding by releasing selected prisoners is saving taxpayers money and	reducing recidivism,	according to a study	05/24/1987
hope it will be a way to	reduce recidivism	among D. W. I. offenders	08/02/1987
the state has never studied whether they	reduce criminal recidivism,	or the rearrest rate.	06/03/1989
the welfare-to-work model – a mix of tough love and true training – may	reduce recidivism	and move many of the roughly 550,000 men released from prison each year nationwide into meaningful employment.	12/13/2002
efforts to	reduce recidivism	among criminals.	09/16/2005
These types of vocational programs are an important	reduce recidivism	among inmates	08/06/2006

part of our [Suffolk County] overall plan to			
The effort [a college education program for prisoners] would be aimed at	reducing recidivism,	and giving prisoners a fighting chance upon release.	02/16/2014
[The Sing Sing Correctional Facility is] one that recognized that educating inmates can help	reduce recidivism	and ease their transition back into society upon being released.	12/05/2014
It [Red Hook court] has cut the number of people jailed, access to higher education can enhance public safety by	reducing recidivism	and saving money.	06/11/2015
	reducing recidivism	and facilitating successful reintegration.	09/14/2016
In the Bronx, the Fulton Correctional Facility is now owned by the Osborne Association, a nonprofit, which plans to overhaul and transform the site into a community center focused on	reducing recidivism	by providing temporary housing and job training to former inmates.	05/10/2017
The program [the Boston Reentry Initiative] was successful, he [Judge Weinstein] said, “in	reducing recidivism”	among its participants.	12/08/2017
a Southern District program called RISE aimed	reducing recidivism	among at-risk offenders.	02/05/2022
Mr. Bragg has said such programs can	reduce recidivism	and aid troubled defendants.	05/03/2022
it [Clean Slate Act] won support from a broad coalition of business and labor groups, who say it will both	reduce recidivism	and boost the economy.	06/10/2023

Table 5: 15 sample concordance lines of *reduc/ing* + *recidivism*

As seen in the examples in Table 5, the focus of the reduction of recidivism in this context is on different programs that have proven successful in reducing recidivism, such as educational programs and job trainings. This finding warrants an examination of the programs that are being described, as *programs* is another strong collocation of recidivism. Table 6 shows the concordance lines. The examples in Table 5 further show a preoccupation with different groups of inmates, such as juveniles, sex offenders, and D. W. I. (= driving while intoxicated) offenders, among others. Economic concerns are also voiced, particularly in connection to successful reentry programs that can reduce recidivism rates, which in turn positively impact the economy and are less expensive for taxpayers.

LEFT CON-TEXT	SEARCH TERM		SEARCH TERM	RIGHT CON-TEXT	DATE
“Now that we are getting hard-core offenders, we are seeing more	recidivism	among kids in the	program,”	Mr. Lane conceded.	04/26/1981
According to the best available estimates, the five-year-old	program	has reduced the	recidivism	rate among participants to roughly half that of the general prison population	02/07/1982
all those who completed the	program	would be tracked for five years to determine	recidivism	rates.	05/24/1987
Jim Golbin, said that the adolescent	program	had a reported	recidivism	rate of 4.4 percent	11/04/1990
Mr. Simon said he supported a dedicated	program	to overcome	recidivism	rather than just to punish inmates	03/24/1991
Juvenile	program	lowers	recidivism		05/13/1995
The most recent study in 1992 showed that the	recidivism	rate for the	program	was 19.6 percent	09/05/1996
The	program	will reduce	recidivism	by insuring [sic] that each person has their diploma or is gainfully employed.	09/28/1997
Several inmates and faculty members will soon publish a study that documents the	program's	effects on	recidivism	and prison management.	06/24/2001
In the five years since the	program	began,	recidivism	rates that once hovered around 37 percent have fallen to just over 5 percent	07/16/2004
“We need to give similar services a chance to provide a better education	program,	so that the	recidivism	rate will be lower,” he [Attorney General Richard Blumenthal] said.	03/13/2005
Ms. Vockins said the	recidivism	rate of the	program’s	alumni was lower than the national average	05/27/2007

So far, it [the Center for Employment Opportunities] has found that while the	program	significantly reduced	recidivism	and initially generated a large increase in employment, by the end of a year, participants were no more likely to have regular work	03/03/2009
Max Kenner (...), is convinced that education is a key tool for reducing	recidivism.	How to finance the	program	over the long term is still under discussion.	11/16/2009
to address homelessness, addiction and criminal	recidivism.	Its signature	program,	called Ready, Willing and Able, is a transitional housing and employment effort	08/06/2010
Goldman to invest in city jail	program,	profiting if	recidivism	falls sharply	08/02/2012
If the	program	reduces	recidivism	by 10 percent, Goldman would be repaid the full \$9.6 million	08/02/2012
the financial services giant would profit if the	program	succeeded in significantly reducing	recidivism	rates.	08/02/2012
Among the group's projects was a \$9.6 million loan for a four-year	program	to reduce	recidivism	by young men released from jail at Rikers Island.	12/23/2023

Table 6: All concordance lines of *program* + *recidivism*

The concordance lines in Table 6 show that the programs that are mentioned are mostly about education, employment, and housing. With one exception (03/03/2009), the articles mention programs that are successful in reducing recidivism by targeting the main drivers of high recidivism rates highlighted in research studies mentioned in the introduction: a lack of education, difficulties in finding and retaining employment, and access to the housing market.

Lastly, even though *recidivists* do not play a central role in the discourse of the *New York Times*,⁵ it is worth investigating how they are represented. The concordances show that *recidivists* are largely portrayed neutrally:

- (13) “So, lawyers and recidivists say, it pays to know your options” (07/06/2002),
- (14) “define criteria for commitment and to distinguish people with psychological disorders from other recidivists” (07/12/2002)

⁵ The synonymous expression *repeat offenders* is also used only eight times.

but also positively in terms of having a chance for rehabilitation:

- (15) “But a more basic problem with it is that it’s basically throwing people away,” Ms. Silver said. “Even violent offenders and recidivists can be doing something constructive” (01/16/1994)
- (16) “a perception that prisons are not doing enough to rehabilitate criminals and deter recidivists” (01/16/1994).

However, in one example they are described as “often incorrigible” (08/03/1981).

3.2 The NYP Corpus

Like the *New York Times*, the *New York Post* belongs to the largest newspapers in the United States. On average, it has a weekday circulation of 146,649 printed copies and had 162.4 million visits of their website in January 2023 (cf. Words Rated 2023), making the website the second most visited after the *New York Times*. Subsequently, the results of the analyses conducted with the *New York Post* Corpus will be reported.

3.2.1 Overview NYP Corpus

Similar to the NYT corpus, the most frequent verbs in the *New York Post* are reporting verbs, and the most common nouns relate to crime(s), prison, laws, recidivism, criminal activities, but also bail (as will be discussed later), reforms, the police, justice, offenders, and the public. In contrast to the NYT corpus, however, a proper name, Adams, also appears in the list of 50 most common words, referring to Eric Adams, who is the democratic Mayor of New York City.

RANK	WORD	FREQUENCY			
1	Said	1252	20	Can	391
2	Was	1174	21	Time	328
3	Are	1066	22	Bail	375
4	Have	929	23	Recidivism	366
5	Be	905	24	Criminal	354
6	New	826	25	Last	354
7	Has	818	26	Had	339
8	Year	660	27	Reform	306
9	More	653	28	Justice	293
10	Will	597	29	Other	291
11	State	566	30	Some	289
12	City	563	31	Do	276
13	Crime	544	32	Get	265
14	Prison	497	34	Now	263
15	Were	483	35	Police	262
16	People	465	36	Even	258
17	Years	447	37	Only	258
18	York	418	38	Crimes	257
19	Law	401	39	Just	256
			40	Public	255

41	Court	250	46	Like	229
42	Being	248	47	Most	227
43	Offenders	243	48	Many	226
44	Percent	243	49	Adams	224
45	Released	235	50	System	222

Table 7: The 50 most frequent content words in the NYP Corpus

At first glance, the list of most frequent words of both newspapers appear very similar. It is thus worth examining in more detail how *recidivism* is represented in the *New York Post*, which will be done subsequently.

3.2.2 Recidivism in the NYP Corpus

As shown in Table 7, the term *recidivism* appears 366 times in the corpus (i. e., 180 occurrences per 100,000 words) and is thus among the 50 most frequent words. *Recidivist* appears 20 times (i. e., 9.8 times per 100,000 words), *recidivists* 19 times (i. e., 9.3 times per 100,000 words), and as a verb, *recidivate* is used 6 times (i. e., 2.95 times per 100,000 words). This contrasts with the NYT, which uses all four terms related to recidivism less frequently. In order to investigate the contexts in which the terms appear, a collocation graph of the term *recidivism* was created (Figure 2), and Table 8 lists the 20 content words that are most strongly associated with *recidivism* in the *New York Post*.

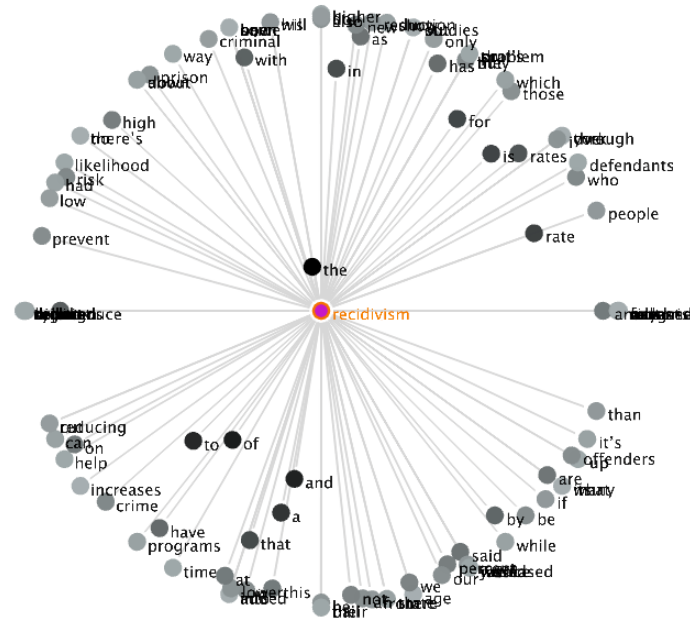


Figure 2: Collocates of *recidivism* in the NYP Corpus. Position of word indicates position in discourse (left (L) or right (R) of *recidivism*)

RANK	WORD	FREQUENCY	FREQUENCY (L)	FREQUENCY (R)	STATISTIC (MI)
1	Rate	68	9	59	7.94704
2	Is	61	14	47	4.31384
3	Rates	44	10	34	7.94704
4	Reduce	37	37	0	8.09760
5	Have	30	20	10	4.16432
6	Has	25	10	15	4.08486
7	Are	24	5	19	3.64393
8	Percent	23	6	17	5.71571
9	Said	21	7	14	3.21926
10	High	19	14	5	6.33147
11	Crime	16	12	4	4.02950
12	Risk	14	12	2	6.35446
13	Be	14	3	11	3.10254
14	Offenders	13	2	11	4.89259
15	Prison	12	9	3	3.74482
16	Prevent	12	11	1	7.61446
17	New	12	5	7	3.01193
18	State	11	5	6	3.43174
19	People	10	2	8	3.57780
20	More	10	4	6	3.08795

Table 8: 20 most frequent content words collocating with “recidivism” in the NYP Corpus

As shown in Table 8, the collocates of *recidivism* in the corpus of the *New York Post* are very similar to those of the *New York Times*: the most common collocates of *recidivism* are *rate*, *rates*, and *reduce*, as well as *percent*, revealing again a preoccupation with rates and statistics. Further, it is again of interest to investigate which qualities and attributes are ascribed to *recidivism* through the use of the verb *is*, a combination which appears 16 times in the corpus. In the *NYP Corpus*, *recidivism* is often portrayed negatively (Examples 17–23):

- (17) “The rate of recidivism is way too great.” (03/06/2008)
 (18) “Recidivism is expensive” (03/20/2015)
 (19) “In other words, recidivism is a serious problem, and if you ignore prior criminal behavior, you do so at your own risk.” (06/07/2015)
 (20) “Recidivism is the enemy of our cities across America.” (12/20/2022)
 (21) “The recidivism is skyrocketing.” (01/26/2023)
 (22) “Now that Soares has presented crystal-clear data showing that recidivism is through the roof” (02/21/2023)
 (23) “‘Recidivism is the undertow pulling against everything we are doing to keeping our city safe,’ Sewell said.” (04/06/2023)

In contrast, it is also mentioned that

- (24) “Recidivism is [sic] New York is roughly 42 percent, but when an inmate receives a college degree while incarcerated, that number drops to 4 percent” (03/07/2020),

that

(25) “the single best thing to do to reduce recidivism is to help young men leaving prison find jobs” (08/05/2011),

and that

(26) “the advocates point out that recidivism is slightly *down* from 2019 to the first nine months of 2021” (09/22/2022, emphasis in original).

Subsequently, the collocation *recidivism + rate/s* will be examined in context (see Table 9).

LEFT CONTEXT	SEARCH TERM	RIGHT CONTEXT	DATE
“A study on released inmates in New York showed teens had the highest	rate of recidivism,	higher than people in their 20s, 30s and, especially, 40s,” said Peter Reinharz	06/19/2001
“They [sex offenders]’re dangerous with a high	rate of recidivism,”	Bonacic said.	06/09/2005
Sexual offenders have the highest	rate of recidivism,	according to studies.	10/03/2005
What is bad is the failure to rehabilitate criminals. The	rate of recidivism	is way too great.	03/06/2008
Last year, his [Goldsmith’s] clients had a	recidivism rate	of only 9%.	11/21/2012
Gitmo ⁶ detainees repatriated to the kingdom have rejoined the jihad for a	recidivism rate	of 21%.	08/04/2013
A program run by Mercy College yielded a 0%	recidivism rate	for its 250 graduates.	09/06/2015
That means 95 percent of those labeled “sex offender” didn’t reoffend – a	recidivism rate	lower than for any other crime except murder.	01/06/2016
This court [in North Carolina] has recognized that they [sex offenders] have a high	rate of recidivism	and are very likely to do this again.	03/01/2017
It’s true the court recognized this “high	rate of recidivism”,	but it’s also true that it was mistaken.	03/01/2017
Of the 1,952 persons whose civil rights were restored, five committed new offenses, a	recidivism rate	of 0.4 percent.	04/08/2018
The program [GOSO] has a	recidivism rate	of 15 percent.	02/25/2019
including conducting and planning attacks and recruiting and funding terrorists. That’s a	recidivism rate	of 31%.	08/21/2021
For suspects charged with grand larceny, the spike was	recidivism rate	hitting 19.7%, up from 6.5%.	07/28/2022

⁶ *Gitmo* is a nickname for Guantanamo Bay, a prison that detains suspected terrorists (Collins Dictionary 2023 s. v. *Gitmo*).

nearly as high – 203% - with the alleged			
data released by the New York Division of Criminal Justice Services showed that the	rate of recidivism	for those out on bail had dropped slightly in each of the two years	10/25/2022

Table 9: 15 Sample concordance lines of *recidivism + rate* and *rate of recidivism*

As Table 9 illustrates, the concordance lines reveal that many of the claims of high (or low) recidivism rates are underpinned with statistics. Interestingly, both high and low recidivism rates are mentioned, for instance in the context of particular programs that yield low recidivism rates versus particular groups of offenders among whom recidivism rates are high. As it is again of interest to zoom into the kinds of strategies that are mentioned as successful in the reduction of recidivism, Table 10 lists concordance lines of *reduce + recidivism*.

LEFT CONTEXT	SEARCH TERM	RIGHT CONTEXT	DATE
“The single best thing we can do to	reduce recidivism	is to help young men leaving prison find jobs, (...)”, Bloomberg said.	08/05/2011
The goal should be to	reduce recidivism	as much as possible.	08/06/2013
These programs are part of a national, data-driven movement to drive down prison populations,	reduce recidivism	and save billions.	02/24/2015
A first-of-its kind public-service experiment seeking to	reduce recidivism	among jailed teens is being terminated for failing to reach its goals	07/09/2015
de Blasio cited research showing that connecting ex-cons to jobs can	reduce recidivism	by 22 percent.	03/29/2017
The bill aims to	reduce recidivism	and lower the prison population.	05/13/2018
the First Step Act would authorize \$250 million over five years to develop programs that	reduce recidivism	and give incentives for good behavior.	05/22/2018
In May, the House passed the First Step Act, which aims to	reduce recidivism	and cut the prison population (and costs) through rehab and training programs for low-level convicts.	05/31/2018
A higher minimum wage did not	reduce recidivism	rates for all types of crimes.	10/02/2018
“There’s going to be a certain percentage of folks that won’t graduate the program or may walk away,” Dixon said. Yet the centers can “really	reduce recidivism	and give these people who are trying to re-enter our communities the support they need.”	04/26/2019
It [the First Step Act] aims to	reduce recidivism	and funds re-entry programs for formerly incarcerated people.	05/27/2019
Together we are going to make our community safer and stronger and we	reduce recidivism	and end the war and black and brown low-income and working class communities.	06/29/2019

are going to do it with community-driven solutions that rebuild trust,	reduce recidivism	and make our justice system fairer.”	10/02/2019	
“It’s about holding people accountable but doing it in a way that promotes human dignity and provides them with tools to contribute back to their community,” Gonzales said Wednesday. “It will		reduce recidivism,”	according to the White House	01/22/2021
“a fierce advocate for policy changes that improve public safety, protect families and victims, and		reduce recidivism	and provide professional treatment for the mentally ill	03/06/2022

Table 10: 15 sample concordance lines of *reduce* + *recidivism*

It is noteworthy in this context that although the reduction of recidivism seems to be as strong a focus in the *New York Post* as in the *New York Times*, in the *New York Post*, several mentions of the reduction of recidivism are references to the First Step Act, which was passed in 2018 by then-president Donald Trump and includes the assignment of prisoners to evidence-based recidivism reduction programs of various kinds (cf. James 2019).

In contrast to the NYT corpus, the term *program*, however, is not among the 50 most common words in the corpus of the *New York Post*, but the term *risk* appears frequently and thus warrants further investigation (see Table 11).

LEFT CONTEXT	SEARCH TERM	RIGHT CONTEXT	DATE
His [Salvatore Gravano] willingness to commit serious new crimes shortly after receiving this leniency shows that the	risk	of recidivism is high.	11/17/2001
Wetzel (...) decided to turn him loose under terms of a fairly new state law that authorizes “strict supervision and treatment” – in lieu of continued confinement – for mentally ill ex-cons who are at high	risk	of recidivism.	04/12/2008
This will create quality loans, with relatively low	risk	of recidivism, on mortgages that do not exceed the home’s value.	02/19/2009
it is not time for our court system to use data analysis – rap sheets and	risk	of recidivism – to more effectively punish crime.	12/20/2009
“The legislative intent is to rehabilitate and therefore avoid recidivism by ‘ex-offenders,’ not those whose convictions have been vacated, who generally do not need rehabilitation and are not at	risk	of recidivism,” the five-judge Manhattan appeals panel wrote	02/07/2017
As the scholar/lawyer Ira Ellman wrote in a stunning expose a few years ago, the “frightening and high” recidivism	risk	cited by Justice Anthony Kennedy in 2002 (...) was based on what turned out to be a single article by a single therapist	03/01/2017

Boyle said Bell has a low	risk	of recidivism because of his age.	04/05/2018
And they noted his prison-earned masters [sic] in sociology, loving wife, prospects of part-time work, his 50 letters of support and what they described as his low	risk	of recidivism.	04/11/2018
The crimes to which he pled guilty for was the non-violent financial crime of wire fraud. However, he is a low	risk	of recidivism for such financial crimes	04/15/2020
Instead, he [Jake Davison] completed a four-month program meant to reduce the	risk	of recidivism. (...) Just a month later he shot and killed his mother	08/21/2021
It [a motion for release] noted that Vailes (...) “desperately needs his support and assistance, and he does not present a recidivism	risk.”		09/29/2021
The judges noted that none of the three sex offenders who sued (...) have been classified as posing an increased	risk	of recidivism.	01/20/2022
Capozzi cited the	“risk	of recidivism” posed by Reiter, who’s serving a life sentence for running one of the city’s biggest heroin-dealing rackets during the 1980s.	04/21/2022
Hoyt, a Level 3 sex offender – meaning he is among those most at	risk	for recidivism – is also accused of making “numerous amounts of unwanted social media contact with the victim”	04/21/2023

Table 11: All concordance lines of *risk*

Table 11 provides all instances in which *risk* is used in the context of *recidivism*. These examples illustrate that the term *risk* is used largely in connection with descriptions of cases or individuals. In this way, the readers can relate more easily to the individuals described in the news stories (cf. e. g., Felton Rosulek 2015; van Leeuwen 1996). However, by selecting case examples like this, fear of crime and criminals can be induced in the reader (cf. e. g., Hayes/Luther 2018). This shifts the perspective to the presumed unchangeable nature of a criminal’s character rather than to the necessity of providing them with interventions and treatment, and thereby fosters the idea that recidivism can only be reduced by incapacitating individuals through incarceration.

Further, the *New York Post*’s reporting on *recidivists* carries many negative connotations (Examples 27–32):

- (27) “Many recidivists used the interviews as an opportunity to argue for release, spinning familiar excuses for why they were in Afghanistan after 9/11.” (06/07/2009)
- (28) “Taking chronic recidivists off the street would protect lives, improve our quality of life, strengthen our economy, reduce burdens on the police and courts” (12/20/2009)
- (29) ““We’re either going to end this or continue allowing recidivists to keep coming out and doing as they please,” Fernando Mateo said, (...)” (08/20/2022)

- (30) “(...) and the Adams administration will not take its foot off the gas in pursuit of targeted changes to state laws that will get recidivists off the street and make all New Yorkers safer.” (City Hall communications director, Max Young) (12/21/2022)
- (31) “Heck, the Rev. Al Sharpton has demanded fixes, particularly to ensure recidivists are kept being bars.” (01/31/2023)
- (32) “(...) with pols like Mayor Eric Adams repeatedly calling for tweaks to keep more recidivists locked up.” (03/15/2023)

None of the discussion of *recidivists* in the *NYP* contains references to programs, rehabilitation, and/or treatment. However, they are reported on rather neutrally in terms of statistics, though less often, as the following examples show:

- (33) “The total number of recidivists out on supervised release rose from 1,994 in 2019 to 4,004 in 2021.” (09/21/2022)
- (34) “This study’s findings and the discussion of high recidivists isn’t necessarily contradictory,” Rempel said. (03/15/2023)

The analyses have unveiled similarities between the newspapers with respect to discussions around numbers and statistics and a focus on the need to reduce recidivism. However, the analyses also indicate that the newspapers have different approaches towards recidivism rooted in their underlying ideologies. While the *NYT* takes a more liberal, positive view of recidivists and highlights their potential for change and reintegration into society, the *NYP*’s approach is rather one of punishment and fear, resulting from the view that recidivism is an inherent character trait.

4 Comparison and Discussion

In order to compare the two corpora in more detail, an analysis of keywords was undertaken. Keywords “give[] a measure of *saliency*” (Baker 2006: 125, emphasis in original) rather than simple frequency and therefore allow for inferences about which topics are particularly central in the investigated corpus in direct comparison to another corpus. Negative keywords are those that are “*under-represented in the data*” (Baker 2006: 139, emphasis in original), i. e., those that occur much less frequently in the investigated corpus as they do in a comparison corpus. A direct comparison between the two corpora yields interesting results and highlights that despite the many similarities in the reporting outlined above, some differences exist that are not detectable without a close inspection of keywords. Table 12 shows a list of positive and negative keywords (i. e., positive keywords are those that are significantly more common in the *NYP*, and negative keywords are significantly more common in the *NYT*).

At first glance, it is noticeable that the *New York Post* reports on what people say by using their names without titles, while the *New York Times* tends to use titles like *Mr.*, *Ms.*, and *Dr.*, the latter of which in particular can add legitimation and credibility to the represented individual’s opinions (cf. e. g., van Leeuwen 2007). Further, the *NYP* seems to focus more on reforms, and the police (*NYPD*, *cops*),⁷ while the *NYT* on the other hand refers to other states as examples,

⁷ Research indicates a positive correlation between political conservatism and confidence in the police (cf. e. g., Stack/Cao 1998; see also Morgan et al. 2010; Silver/Pickett 2015), which might explain why the police assume such a central role in the *NYP*.

particularly Connecticut and New Jersey, the latter one often cited as an example for its comparatively low recidivism rates. Further, programming and treatment are more common in the newspaper articles of the *New York Times* compared to the *New York Post*. An interesting keyword of the NYP is the prefix *al*, which is used in references to al-Qaeda, and Arabic names such as Abdullah al-Sharbi, Moath Hamza Ahmed al-Alwi, and Said Ali al-Shihri. The NYP additionally mentions bail, i. e., the temporary release from prison (cf. Merriam Webster, s. v. *bail*), significantly more often than the NYT. A search in the corpus reveals that *bail* collocates most strongly with the content words *reform* and *controversial*, referring to a bail reform that was introduced in 2019 but revoked again in 2020. The initial reform aimed at eliminating bail for certain types of offenses in order to “reduce the risk that someone would be jailed because they could not afford to pay for release and to reduce the unnecessary use of incarceration” (Grawert/Kim 2023). The revocation of this bill, as the introduction of it, was controversial, and this is represented in the reporting in the NYP.

RANK	WORD	FREQUENCY	KEYNESS	EFFECT
1	NYPD	204	+ 484.62	0.002
2	Reform	306	+ 346.43	0.003
3	Bail	375	+ 311.98	0.0037
4	Pardoned	123	+ 292.16	0.0012
5	Gitmo	100	+ 237.52	0.001
6	Obama	129	+ 228.98	0.0013
7	Cops	103	+ 192.98	0.001
8	Adams	224	+ 178.64	0.0022
9	al	102	+ 178.14	0.001
10	Reforms	124	+ 169.68	0.0012
11	Mr	37	- 1734.9	0.0004
12	Ms	12	- 479.78	0.0001
13	Program	195	- 201.08	0.0019
14	Treatment	71	- 206.94	0.0007
15	Jersey	22	- 183.07	0.0002
16	Drug	154	- 154.54	0.0015
17	Dr	24	- 119.32	0.0002
18	Connecticut	10	- 114.45	0.0001
19	State	566	- 110.92	0.0055
20	Programs	108	- 108.88	0.0011

Table 12: 10 positive (no background) and 10 negative keywords (gray background) in the NYP compared to the NYT. p was set to < 0.0001 and Bonferroni correction was used, keyword statistic:

Log-likelihood (4-term), keyword effect size measure: Dice coefficient.

Even though they do not appear among the 20 most common keywords, words such as *school* (keyness: -71.96, effect: 0.001), *juvenile* (keyness: -62.43, effect: 0.0005), *youths* (keyness: -50.39, effect: 0.0001), *women* (keyness: -45.57, effect: 0.0008), *counseling* (keyness: -43.79, effect: 0.0002), *students* (keyness: -34.81, effect: 0.0003), *housing* (keyness: -28.17, effect: 0.0006), and *education* (keyness: -27.19, effect: 0.0006) are significantly more common in the

New York Times. On the other hand, *terrorists* (keyness: +140.13, effect: 0.0006), *qaeda* (keyness: +100.96, effect: 0.0005), *Saudi* (keyness: +100.3, effect: 0.0005), *terrorist* (keyness: +87.74, effect: 0.0005), *Taliban* (keyness: +75.83, effect: 0.0004), *Afghanistan* (keyness: +56.62, effect: 0.0003), *Guantanamo* (keyness: +54.62, effect: 0.0002), and *jihad* (keyness: +54.62, effect: 0.0002) are, even though not among the 20 most common keywords, significantly more common in the corpus of the *New York Post*. This suggests that a main difference in the reporting of the two newspapers exists in the *New York Times*' stronger focus on educational programs, treatments, and counseling, but also in their focus on groups such as juveniles, women, and drug offenders. The *New York Post*'s focus, in contrast, seems to be very strongly on terrorism and terrorist recidivism. Interestingly, however, studies indicate that terrorist recidivism is not necessarily higher than for other types of crimes (cf. e. g., Renard 2020), although more studies on this topic are required. Interestingly, what is more or less absent from the discourse in both newspapers is the role of private prisons. Even though the NYT mentions *private companies*, their controversial role is not discussed in any kind of detail.

It is a limitation of this paper that only articles of the *New York Times* and the *New York Post* are included, thereby largely limiting the scope of the paper to the context of New York City and the state of New York. Further, due to space restrictions, it is not possible to discuss all interesting words and keywords found in the corpora, an investigation of which has to be left to future research. Future research might also profit from investigating the use of modality as well as the development of the discussion of recidivism and punishment over time and whether the style of reporting correlates with (significant) political events, such as elections.

5 Conclusions

As the discussion shows, the *New York Post* represents more conservative values in connection to offenders, recidivists, and rehabilitation than the *New York Times*. For example, research has shown in the past that politically conservative values as well as lower educational levels correlate with stronger punitive attitudes (cf. e. g., Bowers 1998; Payne et al. 2004; Rossi/Berk 1997), and that politically conservative states in the US have histories of tough correctional policies (cf. Thielo et al. 2015). Together with high religiosity, conservative values may foster more punitive attitudes towards particular groups of offenders (cf. e. g., Stokes et al. 2020). The United States have “long been characterized by high levels of religious affiliation” (Seto/Said 2022: 47), which, as Tonry (2008) for example argues, likely kindles preferences for harsh punishments, including capital punishment (cf. Seto/Said 2022) and might therefore explain many of the policy decisions as well as the perspective that the NYP takes on the issue of recidivism. Importantly, and in light of the different faces of recidivism outlined above, the NYP thus appears to regard recidivism more of a character trait than a problem of the rehabilitation process itself.

It is especially the discourse surrounding recidivists as well as the discussion of terrorism in the NYP that reflects what Lee (2009: 621) hints at, namely that “there are times when the rhetoric surrounding habitual-offender statutes [in this case, news reporting] sounds like an argument in favor of *excluding* certain people from the rest of the society, as opposed to *punishing* them” (ibid., emphasis in original), or even as opposed to **rehabilitating** and **reintegrating** them into society. The belief that punishment is the answer to recidivism is rooted in what Weisman

(2014: 789) points out and what has been quoted in the introduction, namely the belief that a recidivist is an “unrepentant sociopath, the most stubbornly resistant to whatever crime-preventing or evil-curing mechanisms that comprise our criminal justice system”. In this view, a recidivist’s character traits prevent him or her from rehabilitation, not the justice system, and rehabilitation is not possible, hence, locking him or her away, i. e., **taking them off the streets**, is the only answer. However, as the discussion of the literature in this field has shown, the issue is much more complex, because from another perspective, recidivists are not recidivists because they are evil but because they lack adequate support for (re)integration into society (cf. e. g., Harm/Phillips 2001; Lee 2009; Lockwood/Nally/Ho 2016). From this perspective, incarceration by itself is not a stand-alone option. As mentioned throughout this paper, the use of prisons and incarcerations as having a deterrent effect on offenders and on reducing the probabilities for recidivism are not based in results of empirical research. In contrast, research has pointed towards programs that are effective in reducing recidivism and in reintegrating offenders into society. This positive perspective is, although not entirely absent from the NYP, much more prevalent in the NYT. Essentially, the approaches towards the phenomena of crime, recidivism, and rehabilitation thus reflect the newspapers’ underlying ideologies, with the *New York Post* conveying more conservative values and the *New York Times* conveying more liberal ones. In itself, this finding is not surprising. However, it has real-life consequences, irrespective of political orientations. As several case examples highlight, not every offender will refrain from recidivating, regardless of whether or not they have received treatment, but the perpetuation of ideas that ever harsher punishments and locking offenders away will lead to changes in criminal activities, rather than providing them with means to lead a stable life, might deprive those offenders that actually do have a potential for rehabilitation of their chance for reintegration into society.

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