

DOES PAROLE WORK?

Analyzing the Impact of Postprison Supervision on Rearrest Outcomes

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

- Overall, parole supervision has little effect on rearrest rates of released prisoners. Mandatory parolees, who account for the largest share of released prisoners, fare no better on supervision than similar prisoners released without supervision. In fact, in some cases they fare worse. While discretionary parolees are less likely to be rearrested, this difference narrows (to 4 percentage points) after taking into account personal characteristics and criminal histories.

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The vast majority of prisoners in this country (about 80 percent) are released “conditionally,” subject to a period of supervision in the community, often called “parole.”¹ Parole supervision is used as both a surveillance tool and a social service mechanism and ideally serves a deterrent role in preventing new crimes from occurring. Parole supervision can function as a surveillance tool by monitoring and sanctioning those who violate conditions of release, potentially averting more serious reoffending. Parole supervision can also act as a social service mechanism by using rules and incentives to engage ex-prisoners in positive activities, such as work and drug treatment, and to place ex-prisoners in programs that may help reentry transitions. While the focus of parole supervision has shifted more toward the surveillance function over the years,² the number of people subject to it continues to grow. In 2003, over 774,000 adult men and women were under parole supervision in the United States,³ up from 197,000 in 1980.⁴

Despite its widespread use, remarkably little is known about whether parole supervision increases public safety or improves reentry transitions. Prior research indicates that fewer than half of parolees successfully complete their period of parole supervision without violating a condition of release or committing a new offense,⁵ and that two-thirds of all prisoners are rearrested within three years of release.⁶ To date, however, no national studies have compared the criminal activity of prisoners who are supervised after release to that of their unsupervised counterparts.

In this research brief, we use data from a Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) recidivism study⁷ (see “Data Sources and Limitations” sidebar) to compare prisoners released to parole supervision in 1994 with prisoners who completed their entire prison sentence and were released without any supervision or reporting requirements.⁸ Our goal is to assess, at an aggregate level, whether parole “works” at reducing recidivism among those who are supervised after release from state prison.

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS*(Continued from page 1)*

- Certain prisoners benefit more from supervision—especially discretionary release to supervision—than others. For example, females, individuals with few prior arrests, public order offenders, and technical violators are less likely to be rearrested if supervised after prison. Persons with a combination of these characteristics, representing relatively low-level offenders, exhibit even lower rearrest rates if supervised. Conversely, supervision does not improve rearrest outcomes for some of the higher rate, more serious offenders.
- Of the largest groups of released prisoners—male drug, property, and violent offenders—only property offenders released to discretionary parole benefit from supervision. Violent offenders released to supervision are no less likely to be rearrested than their unsupervised counterparts. For male drug offenders, mandatory release to supervision predicts higher rearrest rates than for unconditional releasees or discretionary parolees.

The report is organized around three key questions. First, do prisoners released with and without supervision differ with respect to demographics, incarceration characteristics, and criminal histories? Second, do prisoners released with and without supervision recidivate at different rates? And finally, if there are differences in recidivism outcomes between those released with and without supervision, when and for whom does supervision matter most?

BEYOND CONDITIONAL AND UNCONDITIONAL: THE ROLE OF THE RELEASE MECHANISM

To assess the relationship between parole supervision and recidivism, we must look not only at *whether* a person is supervised after release, but also *how* they were released. Persons released unconditionally—without any postrelease supervision—are released when their sentences end. Alternatively, persons released conditionally are released to supervision by two different methods, discretionary release and mandatory release. In this section we describe the differences between these release mechanisms and examine shifting trends in their use.

Prisoners released to supervision via *discretionary release* have been screened by a parole board or other authority

to determine “readiness” to return to the community. Parole boards, which often face substantial pressures to reduce prison overcrowding, determine who presents the lowest risk of reoffending and is most prepared for release. Among other factors, parole boards consider criminal histories, institutional conduct, and positive connections to the community such as employment, housing arrangements, and ties to family. Appearing before a parole board may provide an incentive for prisoners to participate in programming and arrange transition plans to improve their chances of early release. Until the 1980s, discretionary parole was the predominant method of release, accounting for 55 percent of all prison releases. Over the past two decades, however, discretionary release has largely fallen out of favor with policymakers.⁹ By 2000, just 24 percent of released prisoners were discretionary releasees (figure 1),¹⁰ and 16 states had abolished discretionary release altogether.¹¹ Other states have retained discretionary release but limit its use to certain offenses.¹²

Mandatory release to supervision typically occurs in states that use determinant sentencing schemes and now accounts for about 40 percent of all prison releases.¹³ Mandatory release occurs when a prisoner has served his original sentence, less any accumulated good time credit, and serves the remaining balance of his sentence under supervision in the community. Good time credit

DATA SOURCES AND LIMITATIONS

This report relies primarily on Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) data on 38,624 prisoners released in 1994 from 15 states: Arizona, California, Delaware, Florida, Illinois, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Texas, and Virginia. This sample of prisoners is representative of the 272,111 prisoners released from those states in 1994—two-thirds of all prisoners released nationwide in 1994. Due to issues with the data, Delaware is excluded from the analysis in this report. The BJS data used for this analysis are available at the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) website, <http://www.icpsr.umich.edu>. The full BJS report, “Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 1994,” by Patrick Langan and David Levin, is available at <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/abstract/rpr94.htm>. Our analysis also used Census Bureau data available at <http://www.census.gov/main/www/cen1990.html> and National Corrections Reporting Program (NCRP) data, available at the ICPSR website.

There are several limitations to our data. First, our analysis relies on rearrests as a proxy for reoffending, although rearrests reflect a combination of both criminal activity and policy decisions (e.g., to report a crime, to arrest an individual, to revoke parole). Further, those on supervision may be watched more closely by law enforcement as well as parole officers, and thus criminal activity committed by

parolees may be more likely to be detected than criminal activity committed by unconditional releasees. Future research would benefit from self-reported data on actual offending behavior.

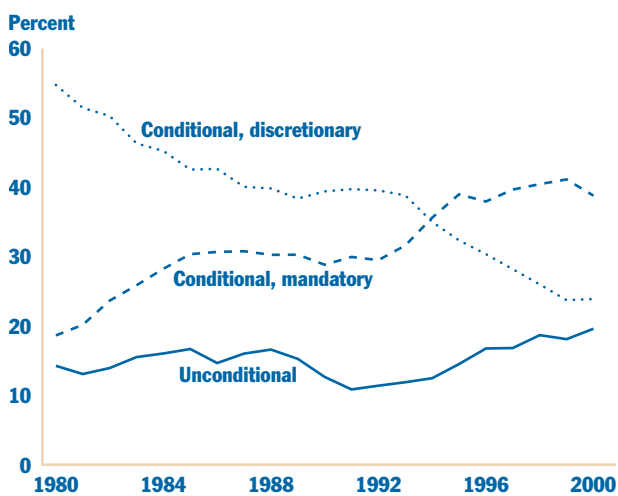
Additionally, while the BJS data sources provided important information on the personal and criminal histories of released prisoners, information on the nature of supervision was not available. Individual-level data on intensity of supervision, length of supervision, reporting requirements, and services received would be useful. And although we were able to control for state-level effects, we did not have specific information on differences in state sentencing and parole practices and revocation policies. In particular, the research would benefit enormously from system-level data about risk assessment tools, contact standards, caseload averages, case planning, case management strategies, and neighborhood-based supervision models. Without such information, we are unable to consider how various types of supervision affect rearrest outcomes. For example, perhaps some supervision strategies are very effective but the aggregate level of the data does not allow observation of these differences.

Finally, as discussed in the “State Variation” sidebar, parole practices and outcomes vary substantially across states. The aggregate nature of our analysis may bury significant differences at the state level relative to the outcomes associated with parole.

is typically earned through program participation or good behavior while incarcerated. Mandatory releasees have not received a determination of fitness to return to the community from a parole board or other authority.¹⁴ Postprison supervision resulting from discretionary or mandatory release is not systematically different. In most states, conditions of supervision are similar for both types of parolees, although discretionary parolees often spend more time under supervision than mandatory parolees (see “State Variation” sidebar).¹⁵

Finally, *unconditional release* occurs when prisoners have served the entirety of their sentence behind bars and must be released without any conditions, community supervision, or reporting requirements. As such, these individuals cannot be returned to prison for any

FIGURE 1. Share of State Prisoners Nationwide Released Conditionally and Unconditionally, 1980–2000



Source: Hughes, Wilson, and Beck, “Trends in State Parole, 1990–2000” and National Corrections Reporting Program.

DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS

Conditional Release: Release from prison to supervision with a set of conditions for remaining on parole, which, if violated, can cause the person to be returned to prison. This subsequent incarceration can be for any of the remaining portion of the sentence the inmate may have on the current offense.

Determinate Sentencing: Fixed prison terms that can only be reduced by good time or other earned time-reduction credit.

Discretionary Release to Parole Supervision: Prisoners are conditionally released to supervision based on a statutory or administrative determination of eligibility by a parole board or other authority.

Good Time Credit: Credit earned by prisoners that reduces their total length of stay in prison. Good time credit may be awarded for good behavior, program participation, exceptional deeds, or, in some cases, automatically. Except for Hawaii, Montana, and Utah, all states have a good time credit system.

Indeterminate Sentencing: A sentencing structure, common in the early 1970s, where no fixed term is assigned and parole boards are given the authority to release offenders from prison.

Mandatory Release to Parole Supervision: Prisoners are conditionally released to supervision after serving a portion of their original sentence less any good time credit earned. Mandatory release generally occurs in jurisdictions using determinate sentencing statutes.

New Court Commitment: Persons entering prison directly from a court sentence for a new offense, and not from an unsuccessful period of community supervision (parole).

Parole or Probation Violator Commitment: Persons entering prison as a result of a parole or probation violation, such as violating a condition of supervision.

Parole Supervision: A period of conditional supervised release following a prison term. Prisoners may be released to parole either by a parole board decision (discretionary) or according to statutory provisions (mandatory).

Unconditional Release: Release from prison upon the expiration of the sentence, without being subject to any conditions of release or supervision in the community. These persons have served their entire prison term and thus do not face the possibility of return to prison for the current offense.

Sources: Definitions adapted from Paula Ditton and Doris Wilson. 1999. "Truth in Sentencing in State Prisons." Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs; Timothy Hughes, Doris Wilson, and Allen Beck. 2001. "Trends in State Parole, 1990–2000." Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs; Greg Jones, Michael Connelly, and Kate Wagner. 2001. "The Effects of Diminution Credits on Inmate Behavior and Recidivism: An Overview." College Park: Maryland State Commission on Criminal Sentencing Policy.

portion of their original sentence (e.g., their release cannot be revoked for violating conditions of release, because there are none). Similar to mandatory releases, prisoners released unconditionally were not granted early release via a parole board in states retaining discretionary parole. Further, unconditional releasees did not earn good time credit while incarcerated and were imprisoned until their original sentence expired.

Prisoners released without supervision account for about one-fifth of all prison releases,¹⁶ with substantial variation across states.

The vast majority of prisoners in the BJS recidivism study were released conditionally: Mandatory releases to supervision accounted for 57 percent of released prisoners and discretionary releases accounted for

35 percent. The remaining 8 percent of prisoners in the sample were released unconditionally.¹⁷ Throughout this report, we discuss released prisoners' characteristics and recidivism outcomes in terms of three categories of releasees: (1) prisoners released conditionally following discretionary release, referred to as "discretionary parolees"; (2) prisoners released conditionally following mandatory release, referred to as "mandatory parolees"; and (3) prisoners released unconditionally, referred to as "unconditional releasees." While we refer to prisoners released to parole as "parolees," they were not necessarily on parole throughout the entire period of analysis.¹⁸

CHARACTERISTICS OF RELEASED PRISONERS

We began our analysis with an examination of the release groups' demographics and criminal histories, as well as the characteristics of the incarceration from which the prisoner was most recently released. Specifically, we were

interested in whether persons released conditionally (via mandatory and discretionary release) and unconditionally had different risk factors that would suggest a greater likelihood of postrelease recidivism.¹⁹ Prisoners in all three release categories had similar demographic characteristics. The average age at release among all three categories was 32 or 33 years old, and the vast majority was male. Just over half of unconditional releasees and discretionary parolees were black, compared with about 40 percent of mandatory parolees (table 1).

More than 90 percent of each group had been arrested in the past. Unconditional releasees and mandatory parolees, however, had slightly higher average numbers of prior arrests than discretionary parolees. We also examined prior arrests for violent crimes as another indicator of potential risk to the community upon release. Our analysis showed that larger shares of prisoners released unconditionally had previously been arrested for a violent offense than had mandatory parolees, with discretionary parolees the least likely to have been arrested

TABLE 1. Characteristics of Prisoners Released in 1994, by Supervision Status at Release

	Unconditional releasees	Mandatory parolees	Discretionary parolees
Demographics			
Average age at release (years)	32.7	32.6	31.9
Male (%)	93	92	90
Black (%)	55	42	54
Criminal history			
Previously arrested (%)	93	94	92
Average number of prior arrests	9.6	9.5	7.5
Previously arrested for violent offense (%)	67	63	55
Prior incarcerations (prison or jail, %)	68	69	67
Average number of prior incarcerations	2.7	2.5	2.3
Incarceration characteristics			
Incarcerated for violent offense (%)	27	21	23
Incarcerated for drug offense (%)	30	31	34
Incarcerated for property offense (%)	33	35	31
Incarcerated for public order offense (%)	9	9	10
Average time served (months)	32.0	18.5	21.3

Source: Urban Institute analysis of Bureau of Justice Statistics data.

for a violent offense in the past (figure 2). Around two-thirds of each group had been confined to prison or jail previously, two to three times on average (table 1).

Additional Findings

- A higher share of the prisoners released unconditionally were serving sentences for a violent offense compared with those released to supervision. A slightly higher share of discretionary parolees were serving time for a drug offense compared with the other groups, while a slightly higher share of mandatory parolees were property offenders (table 1).
- Over two-thirds of discretionary parolees were serving sentences for a new court commitment, compared with about half of unconditional releasees and mandatory parolees. In other words, higher shares of the unconditional releasees and mandatory parolees were incarcerated most recently for a parole or probation revocation.
- Prisoners released unconditionally served almost a year longer behind bars, on average, than prisoners released to supervision. The longer terms served by unconditional releasees may reflect the nature of their charge or institutional conduct that prevented them

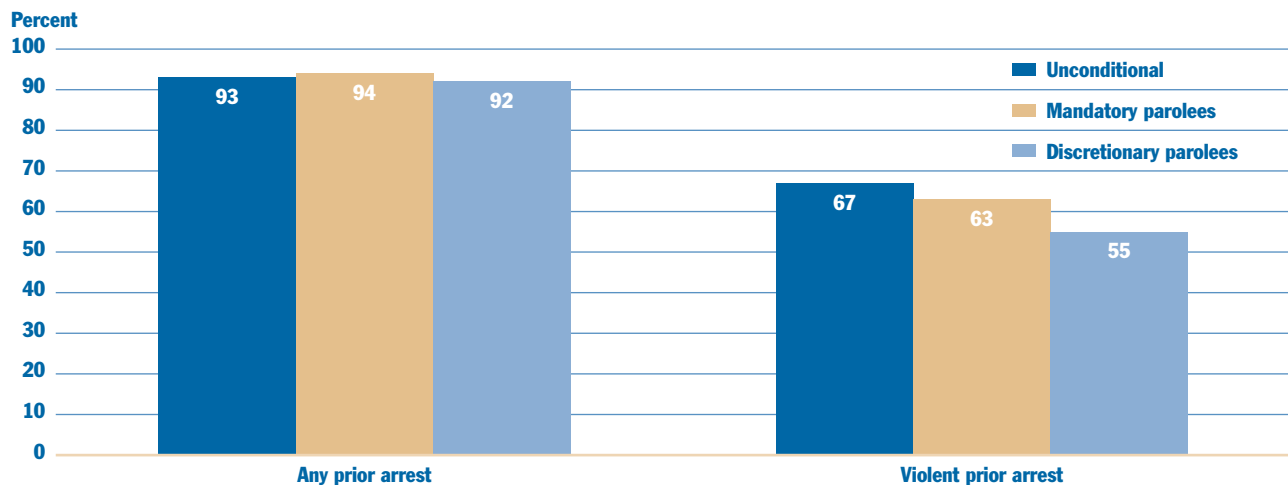
from earning good time credit.²⁰ For those unconditional releasees who returned to prison for a parole revocation, the longer time served may reflect their serving the remaining balance of their original sentence behind bars, which is typical in some states.

In sum, while individuals in all three release groups have similar demographic characteristics, unconditional releasees and mandatory parolees appear to be slightly higher-risk populations overall, as compared with discretionary parolees, given that they had more prior arrests and were more likely to have previously been arrested for a violent offense. Unconditional releasees were also slightly more likely than their supervised counterparts to be serving time for a violent offense. Further, the fact that prisoners released unconditionally served longer terms on average, and thus had been removed from society for a longer period of time, suggests that they may have become more disconnected from positive social networks than their supervised counterparts.

RECIDIVISM OUTCOMES

The BJS recidivism study found that within two years of release, 59 percent of ex-prisoners were rearrested,

FIGURE 2. Share of Released Prisoners with Prior Arrests, by Supervision Status at Release



Source: Urban Institute analysis of Bureau of Justice Statistics data.

WHAT DOES PRIOR RESEARCH SAY ABOUT THE IMPACT OF SUPERVISION ON RECIDIVISM?

While no national studies have compared rearrest rates for U.S. prisoners released with and without supervision, a small study investigated outcomes for prisoners released in Canada in 1968 and found similar trends to those described in this report.¹ The study compared the rearrest rates of discretionary parolees (n=210) to unconditional releasees (those who had applied for parole and been denied [n=100] and those who never applied for parole [n=113]). Within two years of release, 68 percent of the unconditional releasees were rearrested, compared with 44 percent of the parolees. When the study controlled for the fact the parole boards select “better risk” individuals, however, the differences in rearrest rates between parolees and unconditional releasees were virtually identical.

The most rigorous study of supervision and recidivism in the United States is a nine-state randomized evaluation that compared offenders monitored in Intensive Supervision Programs (ISPs) to those subject to standard supervision.² The authors found little difference in overall rearrest rates between the ISP treatment group and the control group, although the treatment group had considerably higher levels of technical violations—likely the result of heightened surveillance inherent in ISPs. The study was unable to determine whether intensive monitoring and sanctioning of technical violations actually resulted in improved public safety outcomes. The research did, however, show that intensive supervision was successful at increasing program participation. Importantly, a review of

four ISP studies, including the one described above, found that supervision strategies that included some level of rehabilitation or treatment in combination with surveillance techniques were more effective in reducing rearrest rates than surveillance alone.³

In addition, a small yet relevant study explored the impact of probation on the criminal activity of 125 offenders.⁴ It compared offenders’ outcomes while on probation with their outcomes in the year preceding probation. The study found that probation did have an impact on the criminal activities of probationers, particularly among older offenders and property and drug offenders. Probation appeared to reduce the number of offenders who recidivated, the rate of offending among recidivists, and high-risk behavior linked to crime. It was not clear, however, whether the arrest and/or sentencing events—and not probation supervision itself—actually affected offending behavior.

¹ Irwin Waller. 1974. *Men Released from Prison*. Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto Press.

² Joan Petersilia and Susan Turner. 1993. “Intensive Probation and Parole.” In *Crime and Justice: A Review of Research*, vol.17, edited by Michael Tonry. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. See also Joan Petersilia and Susan Turner. 1993. “Evaluating Intensive Supervision Probation/Parole: Results from a Nationwide Experiment.” NIJ Research in Brief. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs.

³ Lawrence W. Sherman, Denise Gottfredson, Doris MacKenzie, John Eck, Peter Reuter, and Shawn Bushway. 1998. *Preventing Crime: What Works, What Doesn't, What's Promising*. Research in Brief. Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice. <http://www.ncjrs.org/works/>.

⁴ Doris MacKenzie, Katharine Browning, Stacy Skroban, and Douglas Smith. 1999. “The Impact of Probation on the Criminal Activities of Offenders.” *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 36(4): 423–53.

36 percent were reconvicted, and 19 percent were returned to prison with new sentences.²¹ We expand on these recidivism findings by describing rearrest outcomes by supervision status. We focus on rearrest as the closest proxy to offender behavior, acknowledging that rearrest is an imperfect measure of the relationship between supervision and criminal activity. Rearrests do not measure how much actual reoffending has occurred, but how much criminal activity has been detected, and supervision increases the likelihood that criminal activity will be detected.²² While

the rearrest rates for all three groups may underestimate the actual incidences of recidivism, it may be especially true for unconditional releasees, as the absence of supervision reduces the likelihood that criminal activity will be detected. That said, we still expected to find that prisoners released without supervision would be rearrested more frequently than conditional releasees given the characteristics of the groups (discussed above), combined with the absence of supervision (we assumed supervision *would* deter some criminal behavior among parolees).

Our analysis indicates that in the two years after their release, discretionary parolees were less likely to be rearrested than both mandatory parolees and prisoners released unconditionally. Just over 60 percent of unconditional releasees and mandatory parolees were rearrested at least once over two years, compared with 54 percent of discretionary parolees.²³ Individuals in each group had between two and two and a half rearrests, on average, during the two-year period (table 2).

We evaluated the safety threat these groups posed to the community by examining the types of offenses for which prisoners were rearrested. We started by looking at the distribution of offenses among those who were rearrested at least once. Roughly the same shares of all three groups were first rearrested for property offenses, while a higher share of mandatory parolees were first rearrested for drug offenses, and a slightly higher share of unconditional releasees were first rearrested for violent crimes (figure 3). We then determined what percentage of all prisoners in each group were arrested for a violent crime in the two years following release. About one-fifth (22 percent) of unconditional releasees were rearrested for a violent crime during the two years following release—a larger share than mandatory (17 percent) or discretionary (14 percent) parolees.

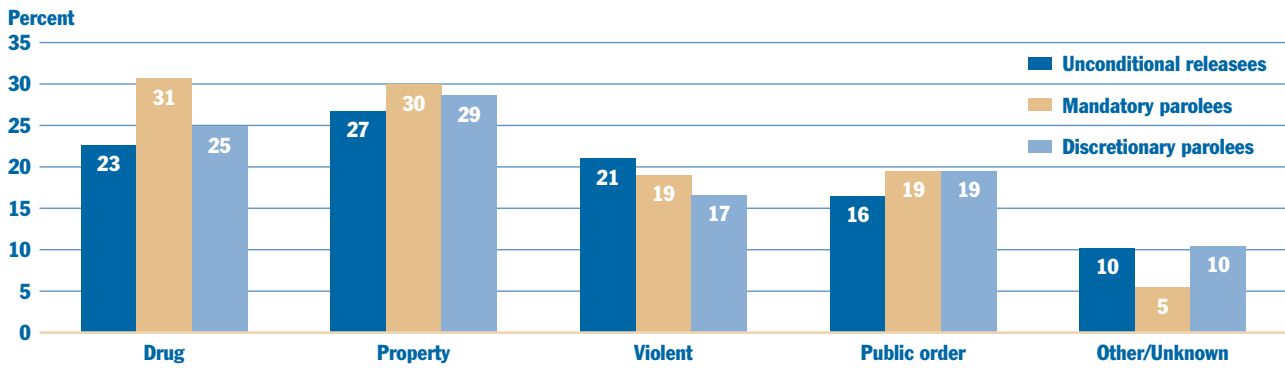
TABLE 2. Rearrest Outcomes after Two Years, by Supervision Status at 1994 Release

	Unconditional releasees	Mandatory parolees	Discretionary parolees
Percent rearrested	62%	61%	54%
Average number of rearrests	2.5	2.1	2.1

Source: Urban Institute analysis of Bureau of Justice Statistics data.

Our finding that discretionary parolees were less likely to be rearrested than unconditional releasees and mandatory parolees could suggest that parole boards are making sound decisions by choosing lower risk prisoners for release. Alternatively, it could indicate that supervision has a more beneficial impact on this group than on mandatory parolees.²⁴ To isolate the impact of supervision on rearrest, we conducted statistical modeling that controlled for all other demographic, criminal history, and contextual variables included in the analysis (see “Methodology” sidebar). The results revealed that when comparing two individuals with similar characteristics, their rearrest outcomes—based exclusively on their supervision status—differ only slightly. Specifically, when all other variables were controlled for, the predicted probability of rearrest for mandatory parolees and unconditional releasees was identical at 61 percent,

FIGURE 3. First Rearrest Offense of Prisoners Who Were Rearrested at Least Once, by Supervision Status at 1994 Release



Source: Urban Institute analysis of Bureau of Justice Statistics data.

STUDY METHODOLOGY

The results presented in this report are based on a combination of descriptive analysis, regression analysis, and simulation results. We relied on descriptive analysis to address the first two questions of interest—whom states release conditionally versus unconditionally, and whether these groups recidivate at differential rates. These results, which are discussed in first half of the report, are based on comparisons of the average characteristics among the three categories of released prisoners. As such, the results are used only to describe the three groups of releasees. To address the remaining research question—when and for whom does supervision matter most—we relied on a combination of multivariate regression and simulation analyses.

We used multivariate logistic regression analysis to better understand the impacts that individual and community characteristics may have on the probability of recidivism for individuals released under supervision and those released unconditionally. Unlike the necessarily bivariate nature of the descriptive analysis, the multivariate analysis allows us to control for the effects of all included characteristics simultaneously. Our final models of the probability of an individual's rearrest within the two-year follow-up period included (1) the individual-level characteristics shown in table 3—criminal history, age, race, admission type, and offense type; (2) an index of community indicators we called “resource deprivation” that takes into account several characteristics of the community to which the released prisoner returns; (3) the prisoner's supervision status at time of release; and (4) a set of state-level fixed effects. Some additional variables, which were initially included in our models, were dropped from the analysis because they were insignificant. Additionally, to allow the effects of supervision status at time of release to vary across individuals and communities, we included a set of interaction terms.

Our resource deprivation index (an empirically defined index) was created from four county-level measures obtained from the Census Bureau that were combined using factor analysis. The four measures included in the final score are (1) proportion of all households headed by

females; (2) county poverty rate; (3) county unemployment rate; and (4) share of county population that is black. We used county of sentencing as the best proxy for county of return because the latter was unavailable.

Based on the results of the regression analysis, we estimated probabilities of rearrest within a two-year follow-up period for various combinations of the included characteristics. This simulation analysis entails estimating and comparing predicted probabilities by varying one or more of the included characteristics while holding the others fixed. In this way, we are guaranteed to capture only the effects of those characteristics that are varied (i.e., their marginal effects). For discrete measures, such as race and gender, this simulation analysis is natural and easy to perform. For continuous variables, however, we need to select specific points at which to simulate the probabilities. For the three continuous variables included in our models—number of prior arrests, age, and resource deprivation—we selected three analysis points based on the distribution of these variables in the data. These points represent typical “low,” “medium,” and “high” values for each of these characteristics. For prior arrests, three prior arrests represented a typical person with few prior arrests, six represented a typical person with medium prior arrests, and 12 represented a typical person with high prior arrests. For age, we used 25 to represent low, 31 to represent medium, and 37 to represent high age. For resource deprivation, an index of factor analysis scores was created, ranging from 0 to 100. Based on the distribution of scores, a score of 31 represented low, 42 represented medium, and 47 represented high. Using different points of evaluation for the simulation changes the predicted probabilities of rearrest, but the qualitative message about benefits for certain persons with these characteristics does not change.

It is important to note that we do not estimate separate models for each combination of characteristics. Instead, the multivariate analysis uses all of these characteristics in one model simultaneously, while allowing prediction of the relevant probabilities under various hypothetical scenarios, that is, using various combinations of these characteristics. More detailed discussion of the regressions and simulations will be available from the authors in a forthcoming technical report.

while the rearrest rate for discretionary parolees was four percentage points lower (57 percent; table 3).²⁵

It is notable that mandatory parolees, who account for the largest share of released prisoners, fare no better with supervision than similar prisoners released without supervision. While discretionary parolees are less likely to be rearrested, this difference is relatively small consider-

ing that discretionary parolees were selected for release based not only on their criminal histories (for which our model controlled) but also on individual attitude, motivation, and preparedness (which the parole boards took into consideration but could not be controlled for in our model). One would expect that discretionary parolees are better positioned to succeed than the rest of the released prisoner population because they have met the parole board's selection criteria. Accordingly, supervision may not be the chief reason for this difference in outcomes.

TABLE 3. Predicted Probability of Rearrest Two Years after Release, by Supervision Status at 1994 Release

	Unconditional releasees (%)	Mandatory parolees (%)	Discretionary parolees (%)
OVERALL	61	61	57
Male	60	62	58
Female	67	51	51
Black	68	67	61
Non-black	54	56	53
Low release age	61	60	57
Medium release age	62	62	58
High release age	52	53	48
Few prior arrests	53	49	44
Medium prior arrests	59	57	52
High prior arrests	68	70	66
Violent offense	55	56	55
Property offense	68	67	62
Drug offense	56	61	54
Public order and other offense	65	57	55
New sentence	56	58	54
Revocation + new sentence	59	62	53
Revocation (technical)	71	68	63
Low resource deprivation	59	61	56
Medium resource deprivation	61	61	57
High resource deprivation	62	62	58

Source: Urban Institute analysis of Bureau of Justice Statistics data. See "Methodology" sidebar for definitions of characteristics.

FOR WHOM DOES SUPERVISION MATTER MOST?

While the modeling revealed small overall differences in rearrest outcomes based on supervision status, certain subgroups were predicted to have substantial reductions in recidivism when supervised. For example, holding all other characteristics constant, the predicted probability of rearrest for a discretionary parolee with *few prior arrests* was nine percentage points lower than for an unconditional releasee with a similar criminal history, and five percentage points lower than for a mandatory parolee (table 3). The likelihood of rearrest for a discretionary parolee who had been serving time for a *technical violation* was eight percentage points lower than for a similar unconditional releasee, and five percentage points lower than for a mandatory parolee.

The impact of supervision seems to differ based on the offense type. Notably, only parolees incarcerated for *public order* or *other offenses* were predicted to have lower rearrest rates—eight to ten percentage points lower—than their unconditional release counterparts. We discuss findings by offense type in more detail below, in the section "How Does Supervision Affect the Largest Release Groups?"

The most sizable difference in outcomes was for *females*: the predicted probability of rearrest for a female parolee (discretionary and mandatory) was 16 percentage points lower than for a female released unconditionally.

We took this analysis a step further by combining all of the factors included in the modeling to predict the probabilities of rearrest for mandatory and discretionary parolees and unconditional releasees with each combination of characteristics. For example, we estimated rearrest outcomes by supervision status for a young, black male with few prior arrests who is a new court commitment for a drug offense and returned to an area with high resource deprivation. By comparing the differences in predicted rearrest rates for each combination of characteristics, we were able to gauge the effect of supervision status on different groups of releasees—that is, to statistically address the question “For whom does supervision matter most?”

Some combinations of characteristics yielded very high benefits from supervision. In other words, their expected rearrest rates were significantly lower when released to supervision than unconditionally released without it. Other groups, by contrast, yielded small or even negative effects from supervision. However, very few people released in 1994 had the combinations of characteristics that were expected to achieve the highest—or lowest—benefits from supervision. In fact, the typical releasee yielded small, if any, gains from supervision. In this section, we describe the characteristics of the highest and lowest benefiting groups, then turn to a description of predicted rearrest rates by supervision status for the largest shares of released prisoners.

Who Might Benefit from Supervision the Most?

The predicted probability of rearrest for some male discretionary parolees was as much as 20 percentage points lower than that of male unconditional releasees with the same characteristics. These “high-benefiting” males tended to be black, had few prior arrests, were serving time for parole or probation revocations, and were convicted of “other” offenses—mostly public order offenses. Conducting the same analyses for females showed similar patterns, with some female discretionary parolees having predicted rearrest rates as much as 34 percentage

points lower than their unconditional counterparts. No patterns were evident among high-benefiting males or females with regard to age or resource deprivation in the communities to which they returned. Repeating the analysis for males and females to compare mandatory parolees with unconditional releasees showed a similar set of characteristics among the highest benefiting groups, although the race trend was not as strong and the potential reduction in rearrest rates was not as high. In sum, those who appear to benefit most from supervision are low-risk, low-level offenders, who account for small shares of the overall release cohort. These individuals are possibly more responsive to the sanctions and services provided by supervision, given their minimal prior involvements with the justice system.

Who Might Benefit from Supervision the Least?

Some male discretionary parolees achieved little to no benefit from supervision in terms of recidivism outcomes. These males tended to be white, had high numbers of prior arrests, were serving time for new court commitments, and were convicted of violent or drug offenses. In fact, some males with these characteristics had a predicted probability of rearrest roughly equal to or as much as 10 percentage points *higher* than unconditional releasees with the same characteristics. The female discretionary parolees who benefited least from supervision were similar to their male counterparts, although no female discretionary parolees had higher rearrest rates than their unconditional counterparts. As with the highest benefiting groups, no patterns emerged for age or resource deprivation in the communities to which the lowest benefiting individuals returned. Comparing mandatory parolees with unconditional releasees revealed those lowest benefiting individuals to also be white, have high numbers of prior arrests, have been serving time for new court commitments, and have been convicted of violent or drug offenses, although the potential negative impact of supervision on males was greater than for females. These results indicate that some of the higher rate, more serious offenders may in fact

benefit the least from supervision. It may be that these individuals, who have extensive and serious criminal histories, are immune to the deterrent effect of supervision and unthreatened by the possibility of reincarceration.

How Does Supervision Affect the Largest Release Groups?

The highest and lowest benefiting groups described above account for very small shares of the total release population. Conversely, male drug, property, and violent offenders together account for over 80 percent of the release cohort in 1994. We therefore sought to address whether those individuals who account for sizable shares of the population released from prison are predicted to have lower rearrest rates when supervised after release. In short, supervision impacts rearrest outcomes differently based on the incarcerating offense type.

Specifically, supervision does not play much of a role among those incarcerated for a violent offense (roughly one-fifth of the released population). Even within this group, when assessing the effects that supervision has on subgroups based on age and gender, we find little evidence of differences in the predicted probability of rearrest based on the three release mechanisms analyzed here. Discretionary parole does seem to benefit property offenders (roughly one-third of the released population), although predicted rearrest rates for mandatory parolees are virtually the same as for unconditional releasees. On the other hand, the predicted rearrest rates for drug offenders are the same for discretionary parolees and unconditional releasees, while mandatory parolees actually have higher rearrest rates than the other two groups (table 4). Mandatory parolees may have higher rearrest rates because, unlike their discretionary counterparts, they are a higher-risk population; unlike the unconditional releasees, they are subject to heightened surveillance, which may include frequent drug testing.

In sum, for the largest release groups, supervision is associated with lower rearrest rates only among property

offenders released via discretionary parole. Among drug offenders, mandatory release actually predicts higher rearrest outcomes.

WHEN DOES SUPERVISION MATTER MOST?

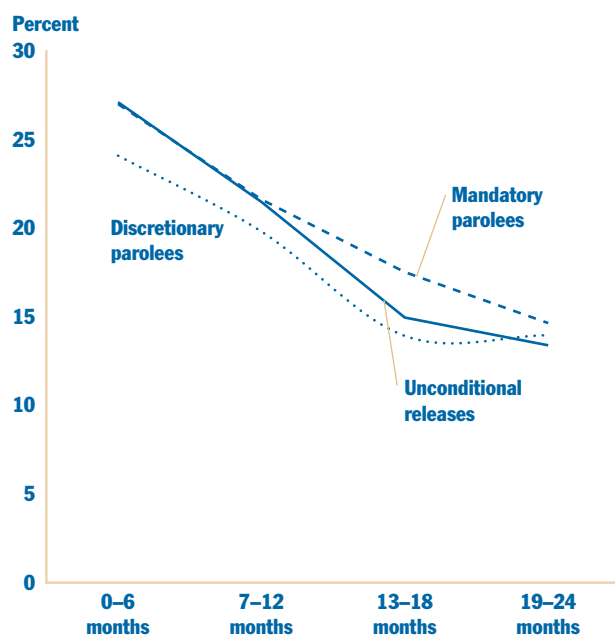
According to the BJS recidivism study, among all prisoners who recidivated within three years of release, nearly two-thirds recidivated in the first year. In our sample, unconditional releasees were, on average, rearrested the earliest (9.9 months)—about half a month before mandatory parolees (10.4 months) and a month and a half before discretionary parolees (11.5 months). However, the likelihood of rearrest for each release group changed over time. Controlling for all other characteristics, discretionary parolees had a 24 percent likelihood of being rearrested in the first six months after release, compared with 27 percent of both mandatory parolees and unconditional releasees. Discretionary parolees who had not been rearrested in the first six months after release (“survivors”) were less likely to be rearrested in the next six months to one year after release than mandatory parolees and unconditional releasees. Between 18 and 24 months after release, the likelihood of rearrest for survivors was roughly equivalent among all three groups (figure 4).

It is possible that these findings reflect the fact that persons *released to* supervision were not necessarily supervised throughout the follow-up period. Since data on the length of supervision for our sample were not available, we chose to measure outcomes at two years after release—the average length of supervision nationally at that time. Over time, however, fewer and fewer people may have been on supervision, and by the end of the two years, individuals in the study may have had similar supervision statuses and therefore similar recidivism rates. In sum, while discretionary parolees were less likely to be rearrested initially, the benefits of (discretionary) supervised release dropped systematically over time.

TABLE 4. Predicted Probability of Rearrest Two Years after Release for Largest Release Groups, by Supervision Status at 1994 Release

	Share of 1994 release cohort (%)	Predicted probability of rearrest (%)		
		Unconditional releasees	Mandatory parolees	Discretionary parolees
Property offenders				
Young males	11.7	68	67	62
Medium males	8.5	68	68	63
Older males	10.5	59	60	53
Drug offenders				
Young males	10.7	55	61	54
Medium males	8.0	55	62	55
Older males	9.7	45	54	45
Violent offenders				
Young males	8.5	55	56	56
Medium males	5.4	55	58	57
Older males	7.4	45	49	47

Source: Urban Institute analysis of Bureau of Justice Statistics data. See “Methodology” sidebar for definitions of age groupings.

FIGURE 4. Probability of Rearrest, by Supervision Status at Release

Source: Urban Institute analysis of Bureau of Justice Statistics data.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

We originally hypothesized that prisoners released to supervision would recidivate at lower rates than prisoners released without supervision. We expected lower rearrest rates because of the characteristics of supervised releases (on average, lower risk than unsupervised releases) and the presumed deterrent effect of supervision. Our findings did confirm that certain parolees—those released by a parole board or other authority—had criminal histories indicating a lower risk. Mandatory parolees, on the other hand, are more similar to unconditional releasees than to discretionary parolees. Upon reflection, this similarity is not surprising given that mandatory parolees and unconditional releasees are both released from prison on a predetermined date, without any form of screening to determine readiness for release.

Our recidivism findings also differed from our original hypothesis. On the whole, discretionary parolees were

STATE VARIATION

While this research brief focuses on national-level trends, it is important to note that the use, duration, and intensity of postrelease supervision varies significantly across states.¹ While postprison supervision is implemented differently across states, it generally involves a set of conditions such as abstinence from drugs, maintaining employment, observing curfews, and staying away from certain high-risk places and persons. Enforcement of those conditions may include home visits, drug testing, electronic monitoring, and even Global Positioning System satellites, where individuals' movements are tracked 24 hours a day.

The share of prisoners released to parole supervision varies considerably by state as well. In Ohio, more than one-third of the prisoners released in 1994 were not subject to any postprison supervision. By contrast, in Illinois nearly all prisoners were released to supervision following mandatory release (table 5). In most states, the conditions of supervision are similar for both discretionary and mandatory parolees, although the length of time on supervision often varies (on average, discretionary releases spend more time on supervision than mandatory releases²). In Maryland, for example, the average time on supervision for a prisoner released by a parole board in 1994 was almost three years (35 months). By contrast, prisoners released to supervision by mandatory release were supervised in the community for less than a year on average (9 months).³ In other states, the supervision period for both types of parolees is similar.

Recidivism outcomes for the various types of releasees also vary by state. In about two-thirds of the states included in the study, discretionary parolees are less likely to be rearrested than either unconditional releasees or mandatory parolees. In other states, the outcomes are reversed, with either mandatory parolees or unconditional releasees being least likely to be rearrested. These differences in outcomes are likely due, at least in part, to variations in state policies on who is supervised after release. In some states, per-

TABLE 5. Share of Prisoners Released Conditionally and Unconditionally in 1994, by State

State	Unconditional releasees (%)	Mandatory parolees (%)	Discretionary parolees (%)
Arizona	16	1	83
California	2	97	1
Florida	22	1	77
Illinois	2	98	0
Maryland	9	49	42
Michigan	9	0	91
Minnesota	2	77	21
New Jersey	22	0	78
New York	5	13	82
North Carolina	3	59	38
Ohio	39	0	61
Oregon	0	35	65
Texas	2	40	58
Virginia	3	53	44

Source: Urban Institute analysis of Bureau of Justice Statistics data. These statistics exclude the category of releases called "transfer/other."

sons released to supervision have more extensive criminal histories than their unsupervised counterparts and may be more likely to recidivate as a result. Other states have different policies, which result in the highest risk prisoners as the most likely to serve their full sentence behind bars. Note that many states have undergone substantial changes in their release policies and supervision practices since 1994, which may alter the current distribution of releasees by supervision type and affect recidivism rates.

¹ Anne Piehl and Stefan LoBuglio. Forthcoming. "Does Supervision Matter?" In *Prisoner Reentry and Crime in America*, edited by Jeremy Travis and Christy Visher. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press.

² Timothy Hughes, Doris Wilson, and Allen Beck. 2001. "Trends in State Parole, 1990–2000." Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs.

³ Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services, Office of Planning and Statistics.

less likely to be rearrested than unconditional releasees in the two years after release, but the rearrest rates for mandatory parolees and unconditional releasees were very similar. When we expanded our analysis to isolate the effect of supervision on rearrest, independent of demographic characteristics and known risk factors such as criminal histories, the difference in rearrest rates decreased even further: the predicted probability of rearrest for mandatory parolees and unconditional releasees was identical at 61 percent, while the probability of rearrest for discretionary parolees was only 4 percentage points lower at 57 percent. In other words, mandatory parolees, who represent the largest share of released prisoners, are no better off in terms of rearrests than prisoners released without supervision. Those screened by a parole board are less likely to be rearrested, but the difference was relatively small, particularly given that parole boards selected these individuals as low-risk candidates for release. Moreover, even this modest difference may be due to factors other than supervision, given that parole boards base their decisions on such factors as attitude, motivation, and preparedness for release that our model cannot take into account.

The modest difference in overall rearrest rates should not suggest that supervision had no effect on rearrests for anyone in any way at any time. For certain individuals—including females, those with few prior arrests, public order offenders, and technical violators—being released to supervision, especially via discretionary release, predicted rearrest rates as much as 16 percentage points lower than rates observed with unconditional release. In addition, persons with combinations of these characteristics (e.g., females with few prior arrests who were incarcerated for a public order offense) who were released to supervision were predicted to have even lower rearrest rates. On the other hand, certain high-rate offenders—such as white males with many prior arrests who were serving time for new court commitments for violent or drug offenses—received no benefit in terms of reduced rearrest rates from supervision.²⁶ In fact, some of these males had a higher

predicted probability of rearrest than similar individuals released without supervision. Notably, few prisoners have a combination of characteristics that yield either the highest or lowest benefits from supervision.

By contrast, the public safety impact of supervision is minimal and often nonexistent among the largest shares of the release cohort—male property, drug, and violent offenders. Supervision does not appear to improve recidivism outcomes for violent offenders or property offenders released to mandatory parole. Rather, our analysis shows that supervision is only associated with lower rearrest rates among discretionary parolees who had been incarcerated for a property offense. In fact, for male drug offenders, mandatory release to supervision predicts higher rearrest rates than for unconditional releasees or discretionary parolees. These higher rates may reflect the fact that mandatory parolees are a higher-risk population than discretionary parolees and face heightened surveillance (such as drug testing) compared with unconditional releasees. In short, while postprison supervision may have modest effects on recidivism in some cases, it does not appear to improve rearrest rates for the largest subsets of released prisoners.

It bears repeating that the nature of our analysis does not allow for insights into whether certain *types* of supervision, such as neighborhood-based or case management models, are more effective than others or whether there are differences in outcomes across states. It is also unclear how much rearrest outcomes are the result of policy directives (e.g., a decision to watch more closely and arrest more quickly) and not criminal activity alone. At the same time, given our country's heavy reliance on parole to manage those released from prison, it is discouraging—although not wholly unexpected—to find that the overall effect of supervision appears to be minimal. For years, parole experts have suspected that parole supervision was ineffective although national data did not exist to support those assumptions. At a 1998 meeting on

supervision sponsored by the Department of Justice, experts described current probation and parole models in a state of “dangerous opportunity,” lacking clarity in purpose as well as public and political credibility.²⁷

More recently, reentry experts reached similar, if bolder, conclusions. Jeremy Travis, preeminent scholar of prisoner reentry and current president of John Jay College of Criminal Justice, has called for “an end to parole as we know it.”²⁸ Travis has conceptualized a new approach to supervision, recommending innovative incentives for early release and limited supervision conditions that would align with each prisoner’s needs and risks.²⁹ Martin F. Horn, commissioner of the New York City Departments of Corrections and Probation and former corrections secretary for Pennsylvania, has proposed abolishing parole altogether given the lack of evidence that it discourages criminal behavior. Instead of parole, he recommends that released prisoners be provided with vouchers that can be used for transitional services that they choose.³⁰ Joan Petersilia, a professor at the University of California, Irvine, and renowned researcher on parole, has argued for the reinstatement³¹ and redesign of discretionary parole, relying more heavily on risk assessment tools that predict a prisoner’s likelihood of committing future crimes in making release decisions.³²

Prior research and discussion have suggested several reasons why parole, as typically implemented, is not as effective as it could be.³³

- Parole supervision is, in fact, quite minimal in most cases. Most parole officers manage large caseloads (an average of 70 parolees apiece) and typically meet with individuals for about 15 minutes once or twice a month.³⁴ Why would we expect such a small amount of contact to make a large amount of difference?³⁵ Parolees don’t: According to one study of parolees, most report that their parole officer did not have a major positive *or* negative impact on their postprison behavior.³⁶ Clearly parole supervision must be more than occasional if it is to have an appreciable effect.
 - Parole officers are often located far from the neighborhoods where parolees reside, and therefore lack an understanding of the situational context that geographically oriented supervision could provide. Similar to community policing, community-based parole officers could get to know their neighborhood resources and high-risk areas, and thus be in a better position to meaningfully assist and sanction parolees on their caseloads.³⁷
 - In most states, responses to violations are often inconsistent and inappropriate to the seriousness of the infraction.³⁸ Parolees may violate conditions without being caught or may be caught several times but receive nothing more than a warning, and then a seemingly random violation results in their return to prison for the remainder of their sentence.³⁹ The research literature suggests that to be effective, punishment should be immediate and predictable, with clear, enforceable consequences for violations.⁴⁰ Parole could benefit from an array of intermediate sanctions to employ in response to violations, as opposed to the “all or nothing” approach often used today. Such an overhaul in the parole violation and revocation process could, ideally, enhance the deterrent effect of supervision.
 - In recent years, the parole function has shifted from a service orientation to a surveillance-oriented, control-based strategy centered on monitoring behavior, detecting violations, and enforcing the rules.⁴¹ New surveillance technologies such as drug testing, electronic monitoring, and Global Positioning System satellites make it easier and more efficient to monitor behavior than traditional casework.⁴² However, prior studies indicate that surveillance alone will not invoke change. Rather, a mix of appropriate⁴³ treatment and surveillance is needed to positively affect offender
-

behavior.⁴⁴ Importantly, the field’s major evaluation of Intensive Supervision Programs found that supervision *can* effectively direct individuals to treatment and community programming.⁴⁵ This positive finding should inform new efforts to improve parole.

- It is also possible that the traditional approach to parole supervision is conceptually ill-suited to reduce recidivism among released prisoners. As currently implemented, supervision either focuses on ex-prisoners’ risks, through a control model, or on their needs, through a support model. Researchers Shadd Maruna and Tom LeBel suggest that a strengths-based approach that builds on an ex-prisoner’s positive assets would be perceived as more legitimate by ex-offenders and would be more effective in allowing them to take responsibility and become part of the community.⁴⁶

Looking Forward

Given this country’s large-scale investment in supervision—it is currently the most prevalent tool in managing reentry—the topic warrants additional research attention and should be brought to the forefront of every policy discussion on the topic of prisoner reentry. It is critical to understand not only why supervision does not work as well as it should across the board, but also why supervision *does* work for some groups and how similar gains could be realized for larger subsets of the parole caseload. Importantly, correctional leaders need analysis that gets inside “the black box” and considers the different models of parole and their relationship to recidivism outcomes. In addition, it is worth considering whether any lessons from the discretionary release process could be transferred to postrelease supervision. That is, are there other ways to stimulate good behavior, increase individual motivation, and better prepare a greater share of prisoners prior to release? Moreover, could incentives be put in place to enable individuals to earn their way off of parole supervision? There should also be more testing and evaluating of innovative super-

vision strategies across the country. Given the diversity of practice across the states as well as the experimentation around prisoner reentry currently under way, there is a ripe opportunity to assess what is going on and learn from the field.

It is important to note that despite disappointing findings and substantial criticism from corrections experts and the public alike, few would recommend postprison supervision be abandoned altogether. As is evident from our study, prisoners released unconditionally are also highly likely to reoffend upon release. Further, common sense suggests that prisoners, *especially* the high-risk prisoners that supervision appears least likely to help, warrant some sort of structure—a mix of supervision and support—after prison. As a nation, we face an opportunity to rethink, revise, and perhaps reinvent parole supervision so that it is vastly better at producing public safety outcomes and enhancing the odds of successful reintegration for the more than 600,000 individuals leaving prison each year. Without renewed efforts to improve the public safety benefits of postprison supervision, our reliance on parole serves little purpose apart from providing false comfort.

ENDNOTES

¹ Bureau of Justice Statistics. Reentry Trends in the U.S. Available at: <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/reentry/releases.htm>.

² See Joan Petersilia. 2003. *When Prisoners Come Home: Parole and Prisoner Reentry*. New York: Oxford University Press; Edward Rhine. 1997. “Probation and Parole Supervision: In Need of a New Narrative.” *Corrections Management Quarterly* 1(2): 71–75.

³ Lauren Glaze and Sera Palla. 2004. “Probation and Parole in the United States, 2003.” *Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs.

⁴ Timothy Hughes, Doris Wilson, and Allen Beck. 2001. “Trends in State Parole, 1990–2000.” *Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice. <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/tsp00.pdf>.

⁵ Ibid. The study also found that more than half of discretionary parolees successfully complete their term of supervision compared with one-third of mandatory parolees.

⁶ Patrick Langan and David Levin. 2002. “Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 1994.” *Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ In 2000, almost 20 percent of state prisoners—or 112,000 persons—were released from state prisons without any postprison supervision. See Hughes, Wilson, and Beck, “Trends in State Parole, 1990–2000.”

⁹ Ibid. Critics of discretionary release claim that abolishing parole would both reduce disparities in length of time served and keep inmates imprisoned for longer amounts of time. In fact, research has shown that length of stay is actually longer in states that still utilize discretionary parole.

¹⁰ Ibid. The percentages shown in figure 1 represent the shares of all prisoners released each year who were released by these three methods. The total pool of released prisoners also includes releases to probation, commutations, and other unspecified releasees.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² For more information see table 3.1 in Petersilia, *When Prisoners Come Home: Parole and Prisoner Reentry*

¹³ Hughes, Wilson, and Beck, “Trends in State Parole, 1990–2000.”

¹⁴ In fact, while uncommon, in states that have retained discretionary parole, mandatory releasees may have been *denied* early release by a parole board.

¹⁵ Hughes, Wilson, and Beck, “Trends in State Parole, 1990–2000.”

¹⁶ While unconditional releasees accounted for around 40 percent of prisoners released during the first half of the 20th century, the percentage of prisoners released without supervision declined steadily until the 1980s. Between 1980 and the mid-1990s, the share of prisoners released unconditionally fluctuated between 11 and 17 percent, and has risen to just under 20 percent since then. Because of the growth in prison releases over the century, the *number* of prisoners released unconditionally has continued to rise over time. Jeremy Travis and Sarah Lawrence. 2002. *Beyond the Prison Gates: The State of Parole in America*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute. http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/310583_Beyond_prison_gates.pdf.

¹⁷ It is worth noting that while the 15-state BJS sample represents two-thirds of all prisoners released in 1994, the portion of prisoners released

unconditionally, estimated at 13 percent nationwide in 1994, is under-represented. Jodi M. Brown, Darrell K. Gilliard, Tracy L. Snell, James J. Stephan, and Doris James Wilson. 1996. *Correctional Populations in the United States, 1994*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics.

¹⁸ Data on the amount of time individuals in our sample actually served under parole supervision were not available. We therefore chose to measure outcomes at two years after release—the approximate time served on parole nationally in the 1990s (23 months in 1990; 26 months in 1999 per Hughes, Wilson, and Beck, “Trends in State Parole, 1990–2000”).

¹⁹ For example, other studies have found that younger offenders, those convicted of property offenses, and those with more extensive criminal histories are more likely to reoffend. Langan and Levin, “Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 1994”; Christy Visser, Vera Kachnowski, Nancy G. La Vigne, and Jeremy Travis. 2004. “Baltimore Prisoners’ Experiences Returning Home.” Washington, DC: The Urban Institute. <http://www.urban.org/url.cfm?ID=310946>.

²⁰ It is unsurprising that unconditional releasees serve longer terms in prison given that—by definition—they are not released early like their discretionary and mandatory counterparts, and therefore serve their entire sentence in prison.

²¹ Langan and Levin, “Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 1994.” Note that we report recidivism outcomes for a two-year follow-up period because it most closely represents the average length of time ex-prisoners are under supervision in the community, and is thus the best point of comparison in assessing the impact of supervision on recidivism outcomes. In 1990, the average time served on parole was 23 months; in 1999, it was 26 months (Hughes, Wilson, and Beck, “Trends in State Parole, 1990–2000”).

²² For more discussion, see Anne Piehl and Stefan LoBuglio. Forthcoming. “Does Supervision Matter?” In *Prisoner Reentry and Crime in America*, edited by Jeremy Travis and Christy Visser. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press. Also see “Data Sources and Limitations” sidebar.

²³ In the two years after release, 38 percent of unconditional releasees were reconvicted, as were 37 percent of mandatory parolees and 32 percent of discretionary parolees. Twenty percent of mandatory parolees returned to prison for a new offense, as did 17 percent of unconditional releasees and 15 percent of discretionary parolees.

²⁴ As noted earlier, discretionary and mandatory parole supervision do not differ from each other systematically across states.

²⁵ Because California often influences the national trends so heavily, we re-ran our model including all study states except California (and

Delaware, which was excluded from the entire analysis, as discussed in the “Data Sources and Limitations” sidebar). The overall recidivism findings change when California is excluded, but not dramatically: the predicted probability of rearrest for unconditional releasees rises to 63 percent, compared with 60 percent for mandatory parolees and 56 percent for discretionary parolees.

²⁶ This finding may seem at odds with the treatment literature, which suggests that treatment is most effective when targeting the criminogenic needs of high-risk offenders. While our research suggests that supervision benefits low-risk ex-prisoners more than their high-risk counterparts (in terms of rearrest outcomes), our study does not speak to the effect of treatment (or the mix of treatment and supervision) on either high- or low-risk populations.

²⁷ The focus group participants determined five possible outcomes for the future of parole and probation, ranging from continuing the current state of affairs by “muddling along” to a model explicitly focused on public safety. Walter Dickey and Michael Smith. 1998. *Dangerous Opportunity: Five Futures for Community Corrections*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs. <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/probation/>.

²⁸ Jeremy Travis. 2002. “Thoughts on the Future of Parole.” Remarks delivered at the Vera Institute of Justice, New York, May 22. <http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/410521.pdf>.

²⁹ Jeremy Travis. Forthcoming. *But They All Come Back: Facing the Challenges of Prisoner Reentry*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press.

³⁰ Martin F. Horn. 2001. “Rethinking Sentencing.” *Corrections Management Quarterly* 5(3): 34–40.

³¹ Reinstitution of discretionary parole would occur in the 16 states that have abolished it.

³² Petersilia, *When Prisoners Come Home: Parole and Prisoner Reentry*.

³³ Some of the major issues and recommendations summarized here are discussed in more detail in the Report of the Reentry Policy Council. The report consists of policy statements and recommendations that address the various dimensions of prisoner reentry. It also includes examples of innovative parole strategies currently being implemented around the country. The report reflects the broad consensus of the Re-Entry Policy Council, a bi-partisan group of leading policymakers and practitioners representing a broad spectrum of criminal justice, health, housing, and employment systems. The Report of the Re-Entry Policy Council is available at <http://www.reentrypolicy.org>.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ At the same time, research suggests that more intensive supervision results in more violations, but not necessarily more public safety benefits. Joan Petersilia and Susan Turner. 1993. “Evaluating Intensive Supervision Probation/Parole: Results from a Nationwide Experiment.” *NIJ Research in Brief*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs.

³⁶ Edward Zamble and Vernon Quinsey. 1997. *The Criminal Recidivism Process*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

³⁷ Petersilia, *When Prisoners Come Home: Parole and Prisoner Reentry*.

³⁸ National Institute of Corrections. 2004. *Parole Violations Revisited: A Handbook on Strengthening Parole Practices for Public Safety and Successful Transition to the Community*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Corrections. NIC 019833. <http://www.nicic.org/pubs/2004/019833.pdf>.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Peggy Burke. 1997. *Policy-Driven Responses to Probation and Parole Violations*. Silver Spring, MD: Center for Effective Public Policy.

⁴¹ Petersilia, *When Prisoners Come Home: Parole and Prisoner Reentry*.

⁴² The intensive supervision literature indicates that when parolees are monitored more closely, they are caught more frequently, although the public safety benefits are unclear. Petersilia and Turner, “Evaluating Intensive Supervision Probation/Parole: Results from a Nationwide Experiment.”

⁴³ In-prison treatment interventions are most effective when programs are matched to prisoners’ risks and needs, when they are well-managed, and when the intervention is supported through postrelease supervision. Gerald Gaes, Timothy Flanagan, Laurence Motiuk, and Lynn Stewart. 1999. “Adult Correctional Treatment.” In *Prisons*, edited by Michael Tonry and Joan Petersilia. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

⁴⁴ Lawrence W. Sherman, Denise Gottfredson, Doris MacKenzie, John Eck, Peter Reuter, and Shawn Bushway. 1998. “Preventing Crime: What Works, What Doesn’t, What’s Promising.” *Research in Brief*. Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice. <http://www.ncjrs.org/works/>.

⁴⁵ Joan Petersilia. 1998. “A Decade of Experimenting with Intermediate Sanctions: What Have We Learned?” *Federal Probation* 62(2): 3–9.

⁴⁶ Shadd Maruna and Thomas P. LeBel. 2003. “Welcome Home? Examining the ‘Reentry Court’ Concept from a Strength-based Perspective.” *Western Criminology Review* 4(2): 91–107.

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