Public Safety Realignment and Crime Rates in California

Magnus Lofstrom
Steven Raphael

Supported with funding from the Smith Richardson Foundation
Increase in jail population was much less than decrease in the prison population.

Prison and Jail Population, January 2011–September 2012

- Last pre-realignment month
- Prison Population
- Jail Population
Outline

- Realignment and crime trends
- California and other states
- Incarceration and crime prevention
- Conclusions and recommendations
Realignment is a major public safety reform

- Prompted by federal court order to reduce overcrowding
- Shifted responsibilities and funding from state to counties
  - Parole violators no longer sent back to state prison
  - Lower-level felons now go to county jails
  - Counties now supervise lower-level felons released from prison
Fewer offenders are incarcerated as a result of realignment

- Prison population fell by about 27,000
  - A 17% drop
- County jails absorbed only a fraction of these lower-level felons
- As a result, about 18,000 additional offenders on the street
- Raises concerns about crime
California’s long-term decline in crime rates ended in 2012
Is realignment responsible?

- Our study
  - Compared changes in incarceration to changes in crime rates, by county
  - Accounted for county jail incarceration responses, pre-existing county differences, and statewide trends
- Also examined the timing of changes
- And compared California’s crime trends to other states
Increases in property crime, but not violent crime, after realignment
Auto thefts increased most
Only auto theft increases can be attributed to realignment

Estimated impact of one fewer offender incarcerated in prison for one year
Outline

- Realignment and crime trends
- California and other states
- Incarceration and crime prevention
- Conclusions and recommendations
Many other states also experienced increases in violent crime

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Violent Crime</th>
<th>Murder</th>
<th>Rape</th>
<th>Robbery</th>
<th>Aggravated Assault</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of states with larger rise</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Select states

| Arizona | 4.9% | -9.8% | -8.9% | 3.4% | 8.0% |
| Nevada  | 8.5% | -10.8%| 2.0%  | 14.2%| 6.9% |
| Oregon  | 0.1% | 9.5%  | -8.0% | 7.9% | -1.2%|
| Florida | -4.2%| 2.5%  | -0.2% | -6.8%| -3.6%|
| New York| 2.8% | -11.1%| 3.5%  | 0.9% | 4.1% |
| Texas   | 1.7% | 1.2%  | 3.0%  | 6.2% | -0.4%|
California’s increase in property crime stands out more

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Property Crime</th>
<th>Burglary</th>
<th>Larceny Theft</th>
<th>Motor Vehicle Theft</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of states with larger rise</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Select states</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>-3.2%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>-3.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nevada</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>-5.7%</td>
<td>-9.8%</td>
<td>-4.2%</td>
<td>-5.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>-1.0%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>-9.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>-1.9%</td>
<td>-5.1%</td>
<td>-1.1%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
California’s violent crime trends continue to closely track matched states.
Property crime trends diverge after realignment
Cross-state trends confirm findings

- Increase in violent crime part of a broader trend, also seen in other states
- Increase in property crime stands out, is caused by realignment, and concentrated on auto thefts
- About 65 more auto thefts per 100,000 residents per year
  - Or 24,000 additional auto thefts per year
  - Reverses a declining trend, brings it back to 2009 levels
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Counties with high incarceration rates did not prevent more crime
Incarceration has a limited effect on crime prevention...

- About 1.2 more property crimes per year for each offender on the streets

- Why aren’t realignment’s effects greater?
  - Policy targets lower-level, non-violent offenders
  - At high rates, incarceration has a lower impact on crime

- Further reductions in prison population may lead to more crime
  - Property crime could be between 7 and 12% greater than the realignment effect
...and yields a low return on the state’s investment

- Each prison year served prevents 1.2 auto thefts
  - Translates to an estimated benefit of about $11,800
  - Annual prison incarceration cost is $51,900
- Additional $1 spent on incarceration yields 23¢ in crime savings
- But $1 spent on additional policing yields $1.6 in crime savings
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Conclusions and policy recommendations

- Realignment’s impact on crime so far limited to property crime

- Increased crime is not a given
  - Savings from reduced prison expenditures can be channeled into alternative crime-control strategies

- Increased policing is one promising strategy
  - An additional $1 spent on policing rather than incarceration would prevent 3.5 to 7 more crimes

- Look for other alternatives to incarceration
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Notes on the use of these slides

These slides were created to accompany a presentation. They do not include full documentation of sources, data samples, methods, and interpretations. To avoid misinterpretations, please contact:

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Thank you for your interest in this work.