Is Public Safety Realignment Reducing Recidivism in California?

Magnus Lofstrom, Steven Raphael, and Ryken Grattet

Supported with funding from the Smith Richardson Foundation
Realignments brought sweeping changes to California corrections

- Realignments was the state’s answer to overcrowding
- Prison population declined dramatically
  - 27,000 prisoners, a 17% drop
- More released offenders on the streets
  - Concerns about crime
- Recidivism a central issue
  - Key measure of a correctional system’s overall performance
  - Success of reform hinges on improvements
Released offenders returned to prison at a much higher rate in California

Parolees returned to custody during 2010 divided by parole population at beginning of year

- California
- North Dakota
- Colorado
- Illinois
- Utah
- Arizona
- Minnesota
- Florida
- Rhode Island
- West Virginia
- Nebraska
- South Dakota
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Montana
- Idaho
- New York
- Indiana
- Michigan
- Wisconsin
- Vermont
- Maryland
- Wyoming
- Hawaii
- Arkansas
- Pennsylvania
- Missouri
- New Jersey
- Oregon
- Tennessee
- Georgia
- Nevada
- Louisiana
- Virginia
- Texas
- Alabama
- Ohio
- Alaska
- Oklahoma
Outline

- Realignment and released offenders
- Effect of realignment on recidivism rates
- Conclusions
Realignment significantly reduced reliance on incarceration

- Created new rules for released offenders:
  - Parole violators no longer return to prison; counties now responsible
  - Maximum sentences for supervision violations reduced
  - Most released offenders supervised by county probation

- Encouraged evidence-based practices

- Defined a set of lower-level felonies with sentences served in county jails instead of state prisons
Focus of this study

- Used offender level data provided by CDCR
- Examined one-year rates of
  - Re-arrest, re-conviction, and return to state custody
- Assessed type and number of arrests and convictions
- Grouped released offender by month of release
- Accounted for changes in the released prisoner population
Basic trends suggest improvements

One year recidivism rate vs. Realignment month:

- No Realignment Exposure
- Some Realignment Exposure
- All Realignment Exposure

Graph shows:
- Arrested
- Arrested (adjusted for RTC)
- Convicted
- Return to prison
But the released offender population has changed.
Outline

- Realignment and released offenders
- Effect of realignment on recidivism rates
- Conclusions
Adjusted trends are mostly flat

One year recidivism rate

-24-22-20-18-16-14-12-10-8-6-4-2 0 2 4 6 8

Realignment month

No Realignment Exposure

Some Realignment Exposure

All Realignment Exposure

Arrested

Arrested (adjusted for RTC)

Convicted

Return to prison
Arrest procedures matter

Estimated differences in recidivism outcomes, pre- and post-realignment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arrested</th>
<th>Arrested (adjusted for RTC)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>-2.0%</td>
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(adjusted for RTC)
Convictions are up slightly, returns to prison nearly ended

Estimated differences in recidivism outcomes, pre- and post-realignment:

- Arrested: 2.6%
- Arrested (adjusted for RTC): -2.0%
- Convicted: 1.2%
- Returned to prison: -33.1%
Felony arrests are higher ...
As are conviction rates

Estimated differences in recidivism outcomes, pre- and post-realignment

Felony conviction: 1.0%
Misdemeanor conviction: 0.2%
Arrests are more likely to lead to convictions

Estimated differences in recidivism outcomes, pre- and post-realignment:

- Felony conviction: 1.0%
- Misdemeanor conviction: 0.2%
- Convicted conditional on arrest: 3.1%
Multiple arrests increased noticeably

Estimated differences in recidivism outcomes, pre- and post-realignment

- Multiple arrests: 7.4%
- Multiple convictions: 0.4%
Outline

- Realignment and released offenders
- Effect of realignment on recidivism rates
- Conclusions
Has behavior of released offenders changed?

- Our results are varied
  - Arrest rates down (2 percentage points)
  - Conviction rates up (1.2 percentage points)
  - Chances that arrest leads to conviction up (3.1 percentage points)

- Changes in arrest and prosecution are key
  - Parole violations processed through courts rather than parole board
More effective, targeted policies needed

- No dramatic changes in offender behavior
  - County efforts may be partly offsetting increased street time

- But noticeable increase in offenders with multiple arrests
  - May reflect some counties’ limited jail capacity

- Arrests and convictions remain high
  - Need more effective policies aimed at both crime and rehabilitation
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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.