



THE
PEW
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Sentencing Reform Oversight Committee
Release Subgroup
September 19, 2017

Outline

- Summary of takeaways
- Research on Incarceration

Summary of Takeaways

- Prison trends since Justice Reinvestment in 2010:
 - Prison population declined by 14%; crime rate declined by 16%; recidivism rate declined by nearly 10%.
 - Imprisonment rate fell from 11th in the nation to 19th; still higher than the national average.
 - Admissions to prison declined by 30%, driven in large part by declines in nonviolent admissions and admissions with short sentences.
- Admissions declined across racial categories, with the largest reduction for the black population.

Summary of Takeaways

- Despite decline, 78% of admissions to prison are for nonviolent crimes:
 - 7 of the top 10 most common offenses at admission are nonviolent; 4 are drug offenses.
 - Uptick in female admissions in last year; female admissions are predominately nonviolent.
 - Wide range in nonviolent admission rate by judicial district.

Summary of Takeaways

- 1 in 4 admissions to prison are revocations for compliance violations:
 - Almost 90% of revocations for compliance violations have underlying nonviolent offenses.
 - On average, revocations for compliance violations are sentenced to nearly 3 years in prison.

Summary of Takeaways

- Average time served for people in prison up 29% since 2010:
 - South Carolina has seen an increase in the number of longest-serving inmates in prison.
 - Among longest-serving inmates, today fewer than 1/3 are parole eligible, down from more than half in 2010.

Research:

- Incarceration and Crime
- Incarceration and Recidivism

Multiple Objectives of Incarceration

- **Incapacitation:** Reducing current criminal involvement by holding offenders in prison where they cannot commit crimes against the public
- **Deterrence:** Reducing the likelihood of future criminal involvement by increasing the punishment for the current offense
- **Rehabilitation:** Reducing the likelihood of future criminal involvement by offering effective programming and treatment during the period of incarceration
- **Retribution:** Payment or punishment, in the form of imprisonment, for violating community norms and order

Incarceration Had Limited Impact on US Crime Decline

Researchers have examined the question of whether increased incarceration caused the crime decline that began in the 1990s, and have found that it was responsible for 10-30% of the crime decline

Other variables responsible for the decline include:

- Improved police strategies, technology, and personal security habits
- Demographic shifts
- Changes in drug markets

US Incarceration Has Passed the Point of Diminishing Returns

- The marginal impact of incarceration (the value to society of sending each additional person to prison) has declined since the 1990s
- Agreement among researchers: Increasing incarceration today will have little if any effect on crime

Researchers have examined whether incarceration reduces recidivism more than non-custodial sanction

Findings:

- In general, incarceration is not more effective than non-custodial sanctions at reducing recidivism
- For many lower-level offenders, incarceration can actually increase recidivism

In general, incarceration is not more effective at reducing recidivism than non-custodial sanctions:

- Campbell Collaboration (2015) (meta-analysis): Found incarceration has a null or criminogenic effect on re-arrest and re-conviction rates compared to non-custodial sanctions
- Nagin & Snodgrass (2013): Found no significant difference in 1, 2, 5, and 10-year re-arrest rates compared to non-custodial sanctions
- Nagin, Cullen & Jonson (2009) (systematic review): Found incarceration has a null or criminogenic effect compared to non-custodial sanctions

For many lower-level offenders, incarceration can actually increase recidivism:

- Nieuwbeerta, Nagin, and Blokland (2009): Found first-time, imprisoned offenders who served less than 1 year were 1.9 times as likely to be reconvicted within 3 years, compared to offenders sentenced in the community
- Spohn and Holleran (2002): Found that drug offenders sentenced to prison were 5-6 times more likely than probationers to be rearrested and charged, controlling for offender characteristics
- Drake and Aos (2012): Found that technical violators of probation serving a period of confinement (jail or prison) had significantly higher recidivism than offenders sanctioned in the community

Researchers have also examined whether longer periods of incarceration reduce recidivism more than shorter periods

Findings:

- Longer prison stays do not reduce recidivism more than shorter stays

Longer prison stays do not reduce recidivism more than shorter stays:

- The United States Sentencing Commission (2014): No difference in recidivism for drug offenders before and after sentence reduction due to the Fair Sentencing Act
- Meade, et al. (2012): Prison terms of 5 years or less have no effect on recidivism; prison terms of 10 years or more have some reduction in re-arrest due to aging out
- Nagin, Cullen & Jonson (2009) (systematic review): Found no relationship between time served and recidivism

Consensus: Limitations to Incarceration as a Recidivism Reduction Tool

“[L]engthy prison sentences are ineffective as a crime control measure... [and] an inefficient approach to preventing crime by incapacitation unless they are specifically targeted at very high-rate or extremely dangerous offenders.”

National Research Council, (2014)
The Growth of Incarceration in the United States

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