

Understanding Recidivism: Definitions and Return to Prison Rates for Individuals Released from New Mexico Prisons FY 2007—FY 2011

Recidivism reduction is one of the most common performance measures used to evaluate programs that serve criminal justice populations.

Reduced recidivism results in societal benefits like lower criminal justice related expenses and increased public safety. It also yields better outcomes for previously incarcerated individuals such as recovery from addiction, improved coping skills and employment preparation. Although recidivism is defined as a relapse into criminal behavior, there are many ways to measure recidivism.

The broadest measure of recidivism is **arrest** – when an individual is rearrested for either a new charge or for a violation during their term of supervision.

Adjudication refers to whether or not the case was processed through the court system.

Conviction refers to whether or not the individual was convicted.

Incarceration refers to whether or not the arrest resulted in a jail or prison sentence.

Imprisonment refers to whether or not the arrest resulted in a prison sentence.

Return to prison refers to whether or not the individual was returned to prison for either a parole or probation violation or for a new arrest.

Typically, recidivism is measured in 3-year increments. A Bureau of Justice Statistics study of prisoners who released from 30 states in 2005 found that:

- 69% of males were rearrested within three years.¹
- 58.5% of females were rearrested within three years.²
- 49.7% of prisoners were returned to prison within three years.³

While this national information is helpful for contextualizing our current recidivism rates, there is a natural inclination to compare recidivism rates across states. The National Reentry Resource Center cautions against making state to state comparisons because of varying recidivism definitions, differences in states' correctional populations resulting from variations in sentencing practices, and differences in organizational structure in states' systems⁴. Instead, one strategy to understand a state's progress in recidivism reduction is to compare recidivism rates of release cohorts over time.

Additionally, this strategy allows us to compare the program specific recidivism rates for individuals who participated in a program relative to the rate for all individuals released in that same time frame. The table on page 2 sets forth the 3-year and overall recidivism rates for individuals who released from New Mexico Corrections Department (NMCD) facilities from FY 2007 –FY 2011. Here, recidivism is defined as return to prison for any reason. Only the first recidivist event is counted. The calculations were done by the New Mexico Sentencing Commission (NMSC) using data provided by the NMCD. The three-year rate includes all returns to prison from the date of release up to three years after release. The overall rate comprises all returns to prison from date of release through March 2015.

¹ Durose, Matthew R., Alexia D. Cooper, and Howard N. Snyder. "Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 30 States in 2005: Patterns from 2005 to 2010." *Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics* (2014) p11.

² Ibid p.11.

³ Ibid p.15.

⁴ Council of State Governments Justice Center, *Reducing Recidivism: States Deliver Results* (2014).

Males

Cohort	Number Released	Number of Recidivists	3 year rate	Number of Recidivists	Overall rate through 3/31/2015
FY 2007	3,022	1,344	44.5%	1,642	54.3%
FY 2008	3,120	1,362	43.7%	1,660	53.2%
FY 2009	2,962	1,358	45.8%	1,580	53.3%
FY 2010	2,936	1,354	46.1%	1,555	53.0%
FY 2011	2,984	1,412	47.3%	1,525	51.1%

Females

Cohort	Number Released	Number of Recidivists	3 year rate	Number of Recidivists	Overall rate through 3/31/2015
FY 2007	507	169	33.3%	211	41.6%
FY 2008	463	196	42.3%	223	48.2%
FY 2009	472	193	40.9%	237	50.2%
FY 2010	433	142	32.8%	171	39.5%
FY 2011	406	155	38.2%	166	40.9%

The New Mexico Sentencing Commission

The New Mexico Sentencing Commission (NMSC) serves as a criminal and juvenile justice policy resource to the three branches of state government and interested citizens. Its mission is to provide impartial information, analysis, recommendations, and assistance from a coordinated cross-agency perspective with an emphasis on maintaining public safety and making the best use of our criminal and juvenile justice resources. The Commission is made up of members of the criminal justice system, including members of the Executive and Judicial branches, representatives of lawmakers, law enforcement officials, criminal defense attorneys, and citizens.

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