

Fact Sheet

Recidivism in the State of Louisiana: An Analysis of 3- and 5- year Recidivism Rates Among Long - Serving Inmates

Edward S. Shihadeh, Ph.D.
 Keith Nordyke
 Anthony Reed

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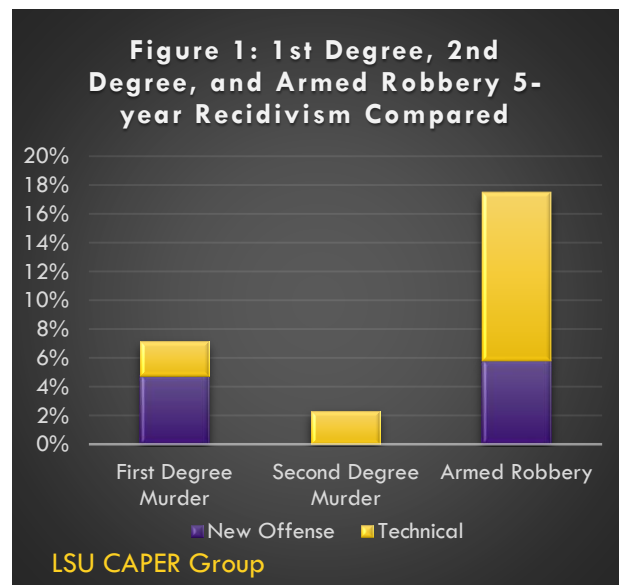
INTRODUCTION

The focus of this study is to examine recidivism among long serving inmates under the jurisdiction of the Department of Corrections (DOC) in the State of Louisiana. Recidivism has always been a central issue in policy debates about crime and in the scholarship on incarceration. Recidivism is defined as acts that resulted in the re-arrest, reconviction, or return to prison with or without a new sentence during a defined period following the prisoner's release. The two data sources for this study were both kindly provided by the Louisiana Department of Corrections. The population in the first data file fall under the Act 790 provisions, which specifically include offenders who have received a sentence of 30 years or more, have served at least 20 years of that sentence, and are currently over the age of 45. The second data file is the pardon data. These data include a select group of inmates, typically murder convicts, who receive life sentences, which are essentially open-ended sentences that require imprisonment for the full term of the convict's life. A pardon, contrary to popular conception, is a not a ticket to walk free, but a change in the sentence from life to some determinant period.

RECIDIVISM BY CRIME

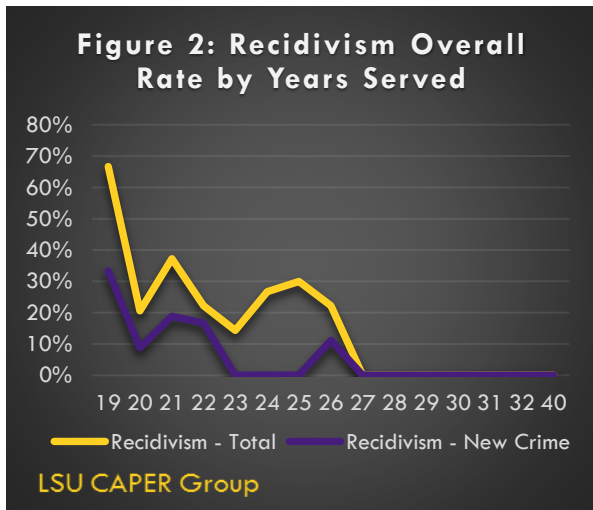
Overall, recidivism rates in the Act 790 file are 11.2% for a 3-year period and 19.8% for a 5-year period. In other words, just over one-tenth of all offenders (regardless of crime) returned to prison within 3 years of release, while nearly one-fifth of them returned with 5 years. However, this recidivism rates includes not just

repeat felony offenders, but also those who violated some technical provision of their release. Figure 1 refines this question further by illustrating recidivism among three groups of offenders: those convicted of 1st degree murder, 2nd degree murder, or armed robbery. The figure further disaggregates the results according to whether the return was due to a technical violation or a new crime. The most interesting finding concerns the middle column, for 2nd degree murders. Their technical violation rate is about 2%, while their rate of new crimes is zero.



RECIDIVISM BY TIME SERVED

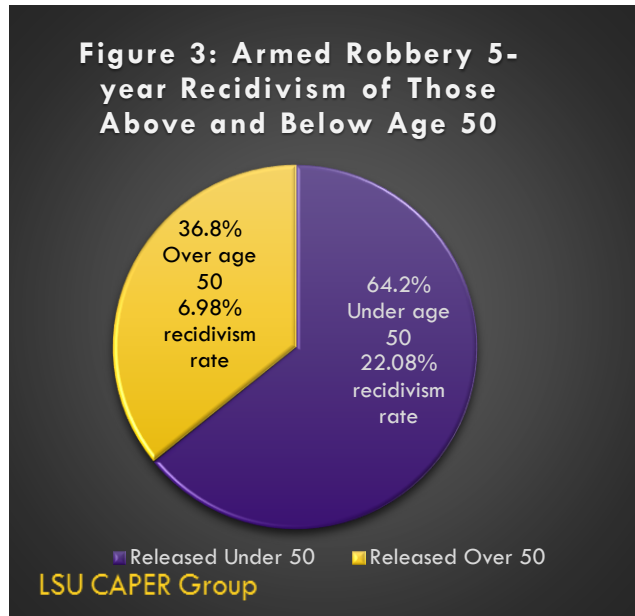
Recidivism is further examined in relations to the years served by the offender before initial release. Specifically, Figure 2 reveals the overall recidivism rates by the years served for all types of crimes, not just murder or robbery. The upper line shows recidivism rates for both technical and new crime violations, while the lower line shows it for new crimes only. Both lines reveal a positive relationship between the recidivism rate and sentence served, meaning that the more years that were served, the lower the likelihood of returning to DOC custody. Indeed, among those who served more than 26 years, the recidivism is essentially zero. The first-pass explanation is that the hardship of longer sentences compels offenders to stay away from crime – what is known as the “specific deterrence” or the effect of a punishment on a particular offender. But sentence length, of course, may be a proxy for the seriousness of the crime, which allows room for an alternative explanation, that serious offenders such as murderers are less likely to reoffend later in life. This conforms to the finding in Figure 1 regarding 1st and, especially, 2nd degree murder offenders.



RECIDIVISM BY AGE

Looking the intersection of age and recidivism more closely, Figure 3 shows the recidivism for two age groups of robbery offenders. The pie chart shows that 36.8% of the robbers who were released were over the age of 50, while 64.2% were under that age. The older group of robbers had a 5-year recidivism rate of 6.98% while the younger group’s rate was 22.1%, or more than three times as high. In other words, older robbery offenders are far less likely to be returned to DOC custody. Further strengthening this inference is the results regarding age and murder. To recall, no 2nd murderers were returned to DOC custody for a new

crime, and only 2 were returned for a technical violation within 5 years (and zero within 3 years). Interestingly, of those two who committed a technical violation, none were older than age 47.



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AUTHORS

Edward S. Shihadeh, Ph.D.,
*Louisiana State University
 Chair of the Sociology Department
 Professor of Sociology
 Coordinator of CAPER*

Keith Nordyke
Nordyke and Greenfield, LLC

Anthony Reed
*Louisiana State University
 Graduate Student in the Sociology department*