

WASHINGTON STATE RECIDIVISM TRENDS: ADULT OFFENDERS RELEASED FROM PRISON (1990 – 2006)

In this report, we examine trends in long-term recidivism for adult offenders leaving prison in Washington State. This analysis uses the Washington State Institute for Public Policy's criminal history database, which was developed in the 1990s to conduct criminal justice research for the legislature. The data are a synthesis of conviction information from the Administrative Office of the Courts and the Department of Corrections (DOC).¹

In 2007, using these adult and juvenile criminal history data, the Institute developed a risk assessment tool to predict an offender's probability of recidivism.² The result was the *static* risk assessment, which was implemented by DOC in 2008.³ Using the assessment, DOC classifies offenders into one of four risk levels: lower, moderate, high non-violent or high violent risk for re-offense.

Information in this report is presented for 17 annual "cohorts" of offenders from 1990 through 2006. A cohort includes all offenders in a given year who were released from prison.⁴

Recidivism is defined as any felony offense committed by an offender within three years of being at-risk in the community that results in a Washington State conviction.⁵

We analyzed two categories of recidivism:

- Any type of felony conviction, and
- Violent felony convictions only.

The chart on the next page captures extensive information on recidivism rates for close to 70,000 Washington State offenders.

Results

Our analysis reveals quite notable and favorable recidivism trends in Washington.

- ✓ Since 1990, recidivism rates have declined for all four risk classification levels.
- ✓ The largest reductions have been for higher risk offenders.
 - High violent risk offenders: rates dropped 18 percentage points for felony recidivism and 7 percentage points for violent recidivism.
 - High non-violent level offenders: rates declined 12 percentage points for felony recidivism and 4 percentage points for violent recidivism.
 - Moderate risk level offenders: rates fell 5 percentage points for felony recidivism and 4 percentage points for violent recidivism.
 - Lower risk level offenders: rates dropped 1 percentage point for felony recidivism and 2 percentage points for violent recidivism.
- ✓ The classification tool helps to distinguish offenders' risk for recidivism, including the probability of violent recidivism.

In this brief analysis, we did not attempt to identify causal factors underlying these encouraging trends. One might speculate, however, that the decline in recidivism has been a combination of evidence-based public policies adopted in Washington State along with other societal factors.

¹ For research purposes, the Institute conducts a matching process using the court case number and the primary identification number from the data systems to link criminal history records.

² R. Barnoski & E.K. Drake (2007). *Washington's Offender Accountability Act: Department of Corrections' static risk instrument*. Olympia: Washington State Institute for Public Policy, Document No. 07-03-1201.

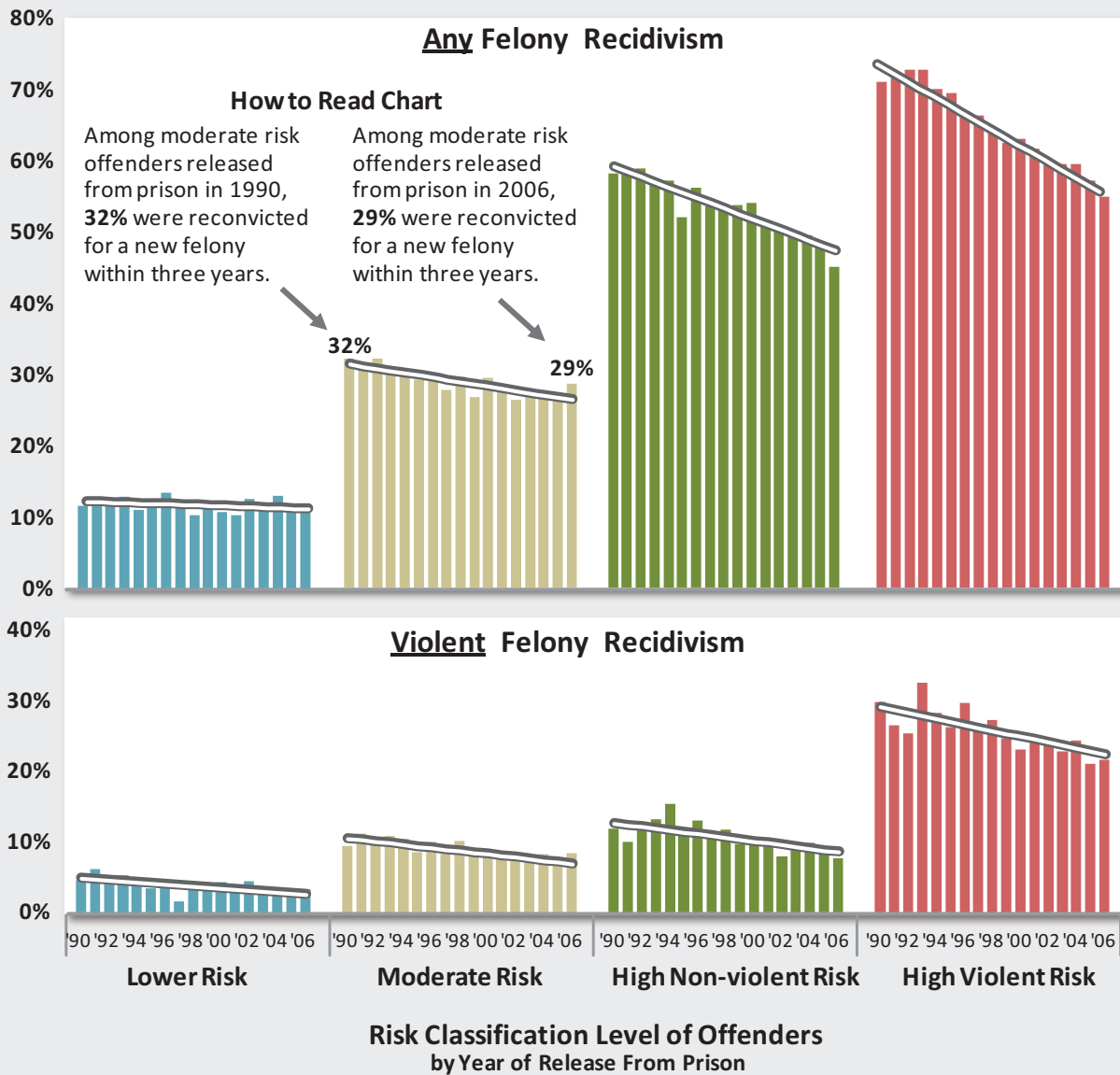
³ Risk factors that cannot decrease, such as criminal history, are termed "static."

⁴ Cohorts do not include offenders who released for a violation of community supervision.

⁵ R. Barnoski (1997). *Standards for improving research effectiveness in adult and juvenile justice*. Olympia: Washington State Institute for Public Policy, Document No. 97-12-1201, pg. 2.

Trends in Recidivism in Washington: 1990-2006

Three-Year Reconviction Rates for Adult Offenders Released From Prison
Annual prison release cohorts by risk classification level



Key Findings

- ✓ Recidivism rates have declined for each risk classification level.
- ✓ The most favorable reductions have been for higher risk offenders.
- ✓ The classification tool helps to distinguish offenders' risk for recidivism, including the probability of violent recidivism.

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