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**COMPARATIVE RECIDIVISM RATES OF PAROLEES
IN MASSACHUSETTS AND OTHER STATES**

Massachusetts Department of Correction

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1. A statistical question of general interest is "How do the recidivism rates in Massachusetts compare with those in other states?" While this question cannot be answered for all releasees from Massachusetts Correctional Institutions, it can be answered for men released on parole using figures from the Uniform Parole Reports produced by the National Council on Crime and Delinquency. These figures compare the parole performance of men paroled in 1968 from state institutions in Massachusetts and the other 49 states. Using this report, some striking differences can be noted between the "recidivism rates" of men paroled in Massachusetts and the other 49 states. The major findings are:

- A. Men paroled in Massachusetts have a significantly higher recidivism rate than men paroled in other states.
- B. This can apparently be largely explained by the longer records of men paroled in Massachusetts. That is, more of the Massachusetts parolees fall into the higher recidivism rate categories of men with longer criminal histories.

2. The term "recidivism rate" in this study refers to the percentage of men reincarcerated within two years of release. This includes men reincarcerated on new convictions, as well as on parole violations. Thus, defined, the recidivism rates for parolees were as follows:

Other States = 28%
Massachusetts = 42%

Again, this difference in recidivism rates is a function of the longer records of Massachusetts parolees.

3. The figures from the Uniform Parole Reports also provide a basis for comparing the types of parolees in Massachusetts with the types of parolees in the other 49 states. The most striking difference was that men paroled in Massachusetts were more likely to have a greater number of prior non-prison sentences (referred to above as "criminal history;" figures presented in section 4). Other major differences were that men paroled in Massachusetts were:

	<u>Mass.</u>	<u>Other States</u>
More likely to be sentenced for armed robbery	31%	11%
Less likely to be sentenced for burglary	23%	33%
Less likely to be court commitments due to violation of probation	2%	14%
More likely to be court commitments due to other than violation of probation	92%	74%
More likely to have no prior prison sentences	72%	64%

4. As noted above, the difference most relevant to the recidivism rates is the number of "prior non-prison sentences." This term refers to prior convictions not resulting in prison commitments but instead in probation, suspended sentences, House of Correction commitment, jail, camp, state juvenile institution, or fine. In other words, the number of prior non-prison sentences is the number of prior convictions with dispositions other than being sent to prison. As shown in the table below, men paroled in Massachusetts have longer records of prior non-prison sentences than men paroled in other states ($X^2 = 940.6$).

	<u>Number of Prior Non-Prison Sentences</u>					
	<u>0-2</u>		<u>3-6</u>		<u>7 or more</u>	
	<u>Mass.</u>	<u>Other Sts.</u>	<u>Mass.</u>	<u>Other Sts.</u>	<u>Mass.</u>	<u>Other Sts.</u>
Recidivism Rate	28%	24%	34%	34%	51%	38%
% of Sample	(20%)	(61%)	(26%)	(26%)	(54%)	(13%)

Upon examination, the greater percentage of Massachusetts parolees with longer records of prior non-prison sentences seems to largely account for the higher recidivism rate of Massachusetts parolees. The recidivism rate increases as men have longer records of prior non-prison sentences, and Massachusetts has a disproportionately high number of parolees with longer records of prior non-prison sentences (and higher recidivism rates). If the same proportion of male parolees in Massachusetts were to have shorter records of prior non-prison sentences as is the case for other states, the recidivism rate for Massachusetts parolees would have been 32% instead of 42%.

Recidivism Rate (% returned within two years)

28%	Other States
42%	Massachusetts
32%	Massachusetts (holding prior non-prison sentences constant for Mass. and other states)

5. It is noteworthy that the recidivism rate is higher in Massachusetts for those with seven or more prior non-prison sentences (51%) than it is for other states (38%). As shown in the table below, this is largely due to more such men being returned as parole violators in Massachusetts.

Recidivism Rates for Male Parolees with Seven or More Prior Non-Prison Sentences

	<u>Mass.</u>	<u>Other States</u>
Returned as parole violators	40%	28%
Returned on new major convictions	11%	10%
Total Returned	51%	38%

One implication of this finding is that the higher recidivism rate of Massachusetts parolees is also to a degree a function of a greater likelihood to return men with longer records of non-prison sentences as parole violators.

6. Having noted that men released on parole in Massachusetts have longer records of non-prison sentences before being sent to state correctional institutions, it is relevant that Massachusetts has a lower imprisonment rate than the rest of the country. According to figures for late 1967, the number of prisoners in state institutions for adult felons was 33 per 100,000 population in Massachusetts and 88 per 100,000 population for the rest of the nation.*

7. In brief, apparently Massachusetts waits until a man's record is longer before imprisoning him in a state correctional institution, therefore imprisons relatively fewer people in state institutions for adult felons, and therefore has higher recidivism rates among men paroled from state correctional institutions.

* Figures on U.S. prison population and estimates of U.S. population as of December 31, 1967 obtained from National Prisoner Statistics for 1967, (July, 1969). Estimated Massachusetts population as of December 31, 1967 obtained from Massachusetts Department of Commerce and Development.