

Does Parole Work?

Research Findings and Policy Opportunities



Amy L. Solomon
Senior Research Associate

Policy Seminar

**Sponsored by the Institute for
Excellence in Justice and the
OSU's School of Public Policy
and Management**

**Columbus, Ohio
June 2, 2006**



Presentation Overview

- Why Study Supervision?
- A Focus on the Question: Does Parole Work?
- Study Overview
- Research Opportunities
- Policy Opportunities



Why Study Supervision?

#1 Large numbers on parole

- Most prisoners - 80% - released to supervision
- 774,000 on parole in 2003, up from 197,000 in 1980
- Resources have not kept pace
 - caseloads up (70:1)



Why Study Supervision?

#2 Failure rates are high

- Only 45% of all parolees successfully complete parole
- Large numbers of parolees return to prison for violations



Why Study Supervision?

#3 Parole is implemented differently state to state.

- Use, duration, and intensity varies widely
- Different supervision strategies employed
- Different methods of release



Context Begs Question: Does Parole Work?

Defining Terms

- “Parole” = any post-prison supervision
- “Works” = reduce rearrests

Acknowledging Limitations

Defending its Importance

- How can we can focus on reentry and NOT demand to know if community supervision – the biggest reentry intervention there is -- is contributing to public safety???



The Study

Compares prisoners released to supervision in 1994 to prisoners released without supervision

Assesses, at an aggregate level, whether parole reduces rearrests among those released from prison

3 research questions:

- Do groups differ?
- Do groups recidivate at different rates?
- For whom does supervision matter most?

Three Study Groups

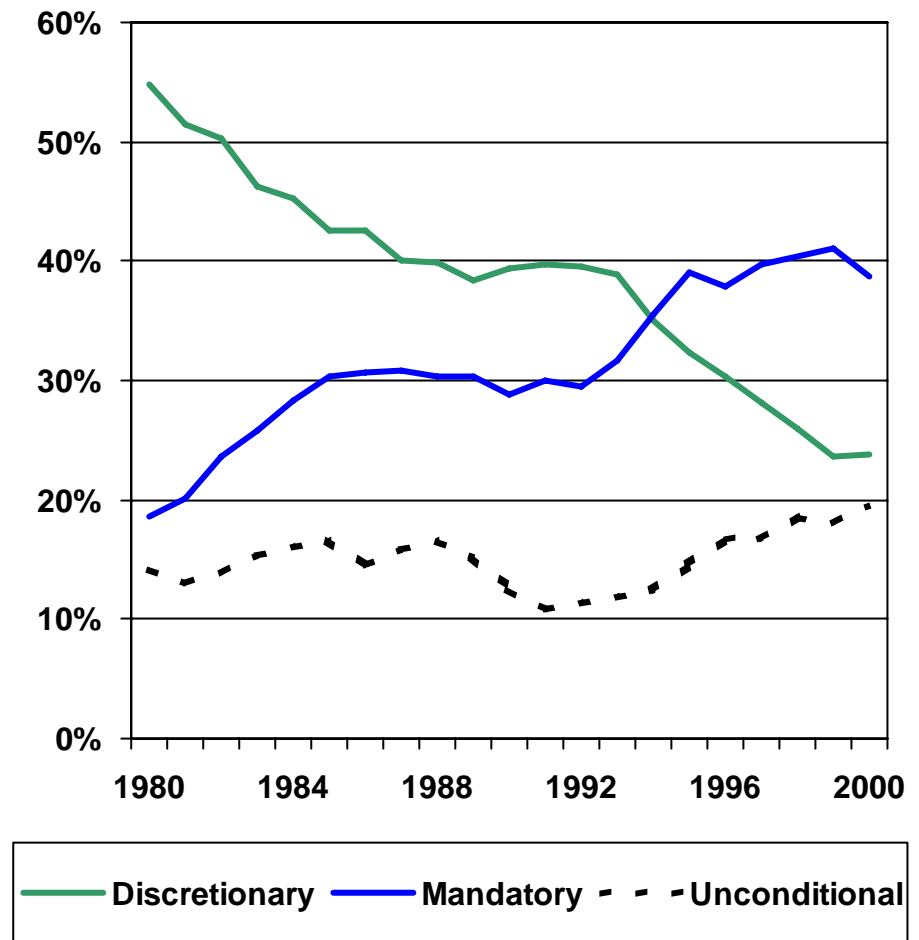
Released to Supervision

1. Discretionary releasees (parole board decision)
2. Mandatory releasees (sentence minus good time)

Released to No Supervision

3. Unconditional releasees (full sentence)

Shift in Method of Release





Source Data

BJS data

- 38,624 prisoners released in 1994 from 15 states
- Sample representative of 272,111 prisoners – 2/3 of all prison releases in 1994
- BJS tracked individuals for 3 years



Research Question #1

Do prisoners released with and without supervision have different demographics, incarceration experiences, or criminal histories?

Characteristics of Prisoners Released in 1994, by Supervision Status at Release

	Unconditional releasees	Mandatory parolees	Discretionary parolees
DEMOGRAPHICS			
Average age at release (years)	32.7	32.6	31.9
Male (%)	93	92	90
Black (%)	55	42	54
CRIMINAL HISTORY			
Previously arrested (%)	93	94	92
Average number of prior arrests	9.6	9.5	7.5
Previously arrested for violent offense (%)	67	63	55
Prior incarcerations (prison or jail, %)	68	69	67
Average number of prior incarcerations	2.7	2.5	2.3
INCARCERATION CHARACTERISTICS			
Incarcerated for violent offense (%)	27	21	23
Incarcerated for drug offense (%)	30	31	34
Incarcerated for property offense (%)	33	35	31
Incarcerated for public order offense (%)	9	9	10
Average time served (months)	32	18.5	21.3

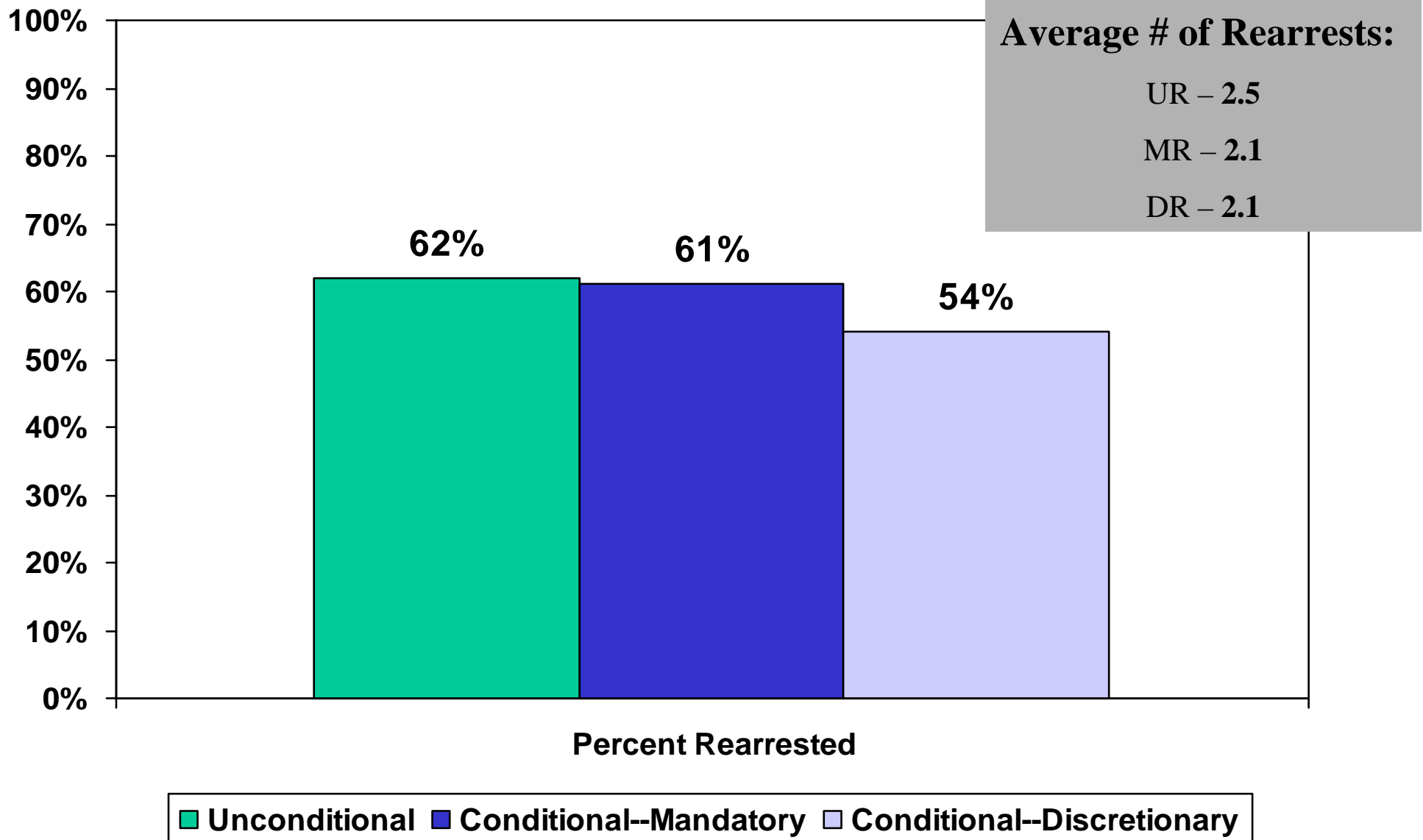


Research Question #2

Do prisoners released with and without supervision recidivate at different rates?

(2 year window)

Recidivism Outcomes, 2 Years Out





Comparing Similar Individuals (Modeled Recidivism Outcomes)

- Controlled for race, age, prior arrests, offense type, admission type, resource deprivation

PREDICTED PROBABILITY OF REARREST

- Unconditional: 61%
- Conditional—Mandatory: 61%
- Conditional—Discretionary: 57%



Research Question #3

For whom does supervision matter most?



Who Benefits Most and Least?

Certain prisoners benefit more from supervision

- females
- individuals with few prior arrests
- public order offenders
- technical violators
- combinations of the above

Little impact on higher rate, more serious offenders



How Does Supervision Affect the Largest Release Groups?

Males with property, drug and violent incarceration offenses account for 80% of 1994 releases

Male violent = 21% cohort, no impact

Male drug = 28% cohort, mandatory higher

Male property = 31% cohort, discretionary lower

Of largest groups, only property offenders released to discretionary parole “benefit”

Summary of Findings

In the aggregate, parole supervision has little effect on rearrest rates

- Mandatory parolees fare no better than unconditional releases
- Discretionary parolees do better, but selected as low-risk

Some groups benefit more from supervision

- Lower-level offenders benefit most
- Comprise small shares of population

Of largest groups, only property offenders released to discretionary parole “benefit” from supervision



Limitations

- 1994 data
- 14 states
- Arrests as proxy for offending
- Multi-state dataset/national-level story despite enormous state variation
- Study doesn't address types of parole strategies that work better than others



Study in Perspective

- Study suggests topic warrants further attention
- Study does **not** conclude that parole **can't** work
- Study does not speak to state level successes, what works where for whom



Research Opportunities

- State level – what works where?
- Across states
 - what types of parole strategies work better than others?
 - role of length, type and intensity of supervision, caseload size, contact standards, programming, treatment in prison and community...
- Why does parole work for some better than others?
- Lessons from the discretionary release process?



Policy Opportunities: Agency Level

- Adopt public safety mission
- Set and be accountable for explicit public safety benchmarks
- Implement evidence-based practices
- Partner with other agencies



Policy Opportunities: Supervision Strategies

- Supervise in neighborhoods – making places safer
- Emphasize both surveillance and treatment
- Align resources with risks
- Prioritize -- and communicate – only rules and conditions that can be realistically monitored and enforced
- Instill swift, certain, consistent, predictable responses to failures
- Provide incentives for successes, including early release



Window of Opportunity

Opportunity for reform, “reinvention”

- Parole not producing large, visible reductions in crime
- Yet great potential to control crime

Timely opportunity to

- Be at center of reentry policy discussions
- Produce public value
- Be major contributor to public safety



URBAN INSTITUTE
Justice Policy Center

***Does Parole Work? Analyzing the Impact of Postprison Supervision on Rearrest Outcomes* is available at:**

<http://www.urban.org/url.cfm?ID=311156>

For more information on prisoner reentry, including several reports on reentry in Ohio, please visit the Urban Institute website at: <http://jpc.urban.org>

To receive email updates of JPC research, send an email to jpc@ui.urban.org