

PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT SERIES

Recidivism after Release from Prison



August 2016

**Office of the Secretary
Research and Policy Unit**

Inquiries regarding this report may be directed to the authors:

Joseph R. Tatar II, Ph.D.
(608) 240-5814
Joseph.Tatar@wisconsin.gov

Megan Jones, Ph.D.
(608) 240-5801
Megan.Jones@wisconsin.gov

State of Wisconsin
Department of Corrections

Scott Walker
Governor

Jon E. Litscher
Secretary



State of Wisconsin
Department of Corrections

Mailing Address

3099 E. Washington Ave.
Post Office Box 7925
Madison, WI 53707-7925
Telephone (608) 240-5000
Fax (608) 240-3300

August 29, 2016

To: Executive Planning

From: Jon E. Litscher, Secretary

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jon E. Litscher".

I am pleased to share with you the fourth in a series of "Recidivism after Release from Prison" reports, produced by the Wisconsin Department of Corrections' cross-divisional Research and Policy Unit.

This report provides updated recidivism trends for more than 156,000 offenders who were released from the Wisconsin correctional system between 1990 and 2013. Following a steady decrease beginning in 1993, recidivism rates have remained relatively stable in recent years.

In addition to updating overall trends in recidivism, this report adds new measures of recidivism. These new measures include recidivism rates by offenders' original incarceration offenses, and an analysis of the degree to which recidivists specialize in certain offense types. The report also includes recidivism rates by risk to reoffend. These measures will assist the Department in its continued efforts to match offenders with appropriate services to ensure their successful reentry into the community.

The Department will continue to identify and implement policies and procedures based on evidence-based principles to achieve the best possible outcomes for offenders, staff, and tax payers. Ultimately, our goal is to create safer communities. I'd like to thank all of the staff involved in the compilation of this report.

Recidivism after Release from Prison

August 2016

Table of Contents

Executive Summary _____	4
Introduction _____	5
Release from Prison Recidivism Rates _____	6
Recidivism Rate Trends _____	6
Recidivism Rates by Gender _____	7
Recidivism Rates by Age at Release _____	8
Recidivism Rates by Race _____	9
Time to Recidivism Event _____	10
Recidivism Rates by Length of Prison Stay _____	11
Recidivism Rates by Risk Level _____	12
Recidivism Rates by Original Offense Type _____	13
Offense Type Specialization _____	14
Appendix A _____	15
Definition of Recidivism _____	15
Methodology _____	15
Recidivism vs. Reincarceration _____	19
Appendix B _____	20
Table 1. Trends 1990-2013 _____	20
Table 2. by Gender 2000-2013 _____	21
Table 3. by Length of Prison Stay 2000-2011: 3-Year Follow-up _____	22
Table 4. by Risk Level 2000-2011: 3-Year Follow-up _____	23
Table 5. by Original Offense Type 2000-2011: 3-Year Follow-up _____	24

Executive Summary

The Wisconsin Department of Corrections (WI DOC) defines recidivism as a new offense resulting in a conviction and sentence to the WI DOC. One, two, and three-year follow-up periods are calculated beginning on the day the offender is released from prison. Recidivism rates represent the number of persons who have recidivated divided by the total number of persons in a defined population. All recidivism rates are based on only Wisconsin offenses that have resulted in court dispositions that include custody or supervision under the

Recidivism Rates by Follow-up Period

Release Year	Follow-up Period	Recidivism Rate
2013	1-year	14.5%
2012	2-year	25.1%
2011	3-year	31.3%

WI DOC. This report summarizes recidivism rates for a total of 156,026 offenders released from the Wisconsin prison system between 1990 and 2013.

Recidivism rates over the most recent several release years have remained relatively stable. Offenders released in 2009 had the lowest three-year recidivism rate in 20 years at 30.8%. Since then, the three-year rate increased slightly for those released in 2011, to 31.3%. One- and two-year recidivism rates have also

remained fairly constant over the last several release years, with the one-year rate decreasing by 0.7 percentage points from 2011 to 2013, and the two-year rate increasing by 0.3 percentage points from 2010 to 2012.

Highlights:

Gender. Males recidivated at a consistently higher rate than females for all release years and follow-up periods.

Age at Release. Younger offenders were more likely to recidivate compared to older offenders. Offenders aged 20 to 29 made up the largest group of released offenders and recidivists.

Race. Black offenders had slightly higher recidivism rates than White offenders, but the difference between the two groups was the smallest for the entire report period (one percentage point) for 2011 releases.

Time to Recidivism Event. Half of the offenders who recidivated within the three-year follow-up period did so within the first year following their release from prison.

Length of Prison Stay. Recidivism increased with shorter lengths of stay. The lowest recidivism rates were found among offenders released from a period of incarceration that was five years or longer.

Risk Level. High risk offenders demonstrated the highest recidivism rates, followed by moderate risk offenders, then low risk offenders.

Original Offense Type. Offenders originally incarcerated for property offenses had the highest recidivism rates and those originally incarcerated for violent offenses had the lowest.

Offense Type Specialization. Recidivists whose original incarceration was for a violent offense were least likely to commit another violent offense, while public order recidivists were most likely to commit another public order offense.

Introduction

The Wisconsin Department of Corrections (WI DOC) defines recidivism as the following:

Following an episode of incarceration with the WI DOC, to commit a criminal offense that results in a new conviction and sentence to WI DOC custody or supervision.

WI DOC recidivism rates represent the number of persons who have recidivated divided by the total number of persons released from an episode of confinement that included one or more adult conviction prison sentences. Recidivism rates are based only on Wisconsin offenses that have resulted in court dispositions that include custody or supervision under the WI DOC. This means that persons who have committed offenses, and are subsequently serving their sentences under other state or federal jurisdictions, are not counted as recidivists under this definition. Furthermore, offenses that result in only jail dispositions, fines or forfeitures, or municipal violations are not included in recidivism rate calculations.

Recidivism rates for three different follow-up periods are presented throughout this report. A follow-up period is the timeframe during which an offender is tracked to determine if he/she committed a new criminal offense. Recidivism rates are reported for one-, two-, and three-year follow-up periods. Additionally, this report includes recidivism rates for groups of offenders released between 1990 and 2013. A group of offenders released in the same year is referred to as a release cohort. [Appendix A](#) (see page 15) provides a detailed description of the methodology used to calculate recidivism rates.

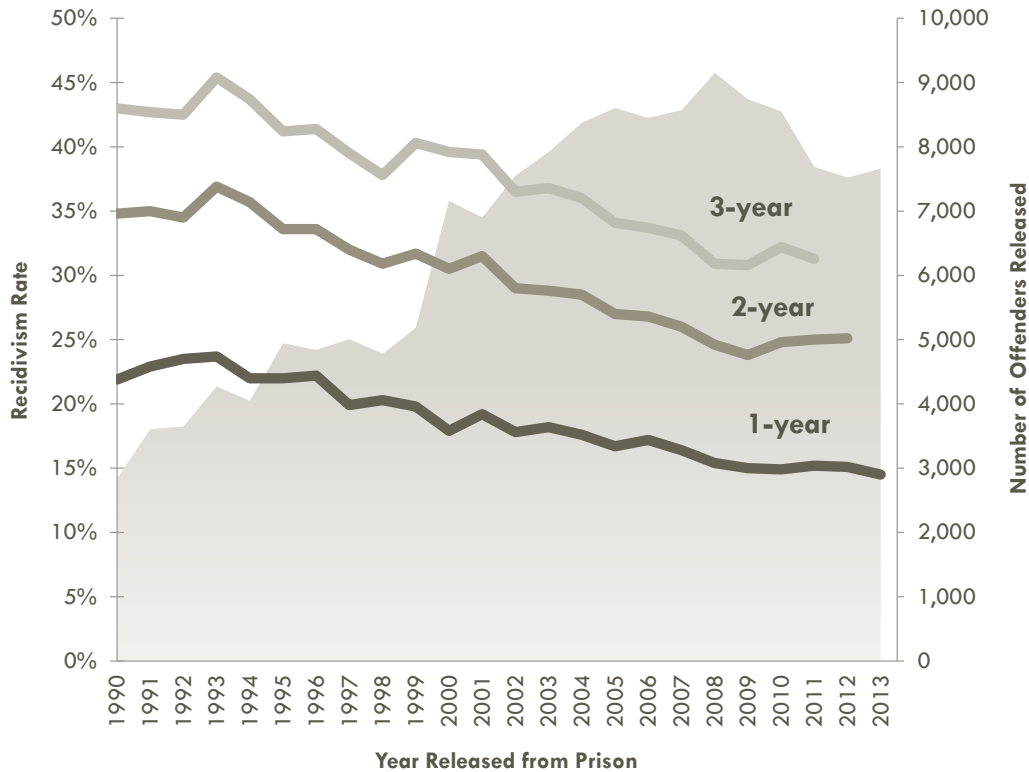
WI DOC considers the offense date the date of the recidivism event. Offenders are often not apprehended and convicted until many years after an offense occurs. WI DOC does not obtain data for an offense until a court sentences an offender to WI DOC custody or supervision. This means that historical recidivism rates can change depending on when the analysis is done. For example, if an offender was released from prison in 1995 and committed an offense in 1996, but was not arrested, convicted, and sentenced until 2011, the recidivism rate for 1995 releases as calculated in 2010 would not count the offender as a recidivist. However, when the rate was calculated again in 2012, the offender would be counted as a recidivist for the 1995 release cohort. Therefore, it is important to note that for this reason, recidivism rates reported in the last [Recidivism after Release from Prison](#) report may differ slightly from rates in the present report.

This report updates recidivism rates previously presented in the June 2014 *Recidivism after Release from Prison* report. More specifically, rates for additional release years are reported for overall trends in recidivism rates, and for recidivism rates by gender, age at release, race, time to recidivism event, and length of prison stay. The present report also includes new data on recidivism rates broken down by risk to reoffend, offenders' original offense types (violent, property, etc.), and offense type specialization.

Release from Prison Recidivism Rates

Recidivism Rate Trends

The figure below shows recidivism rates for releases from prison beginning in 1990, by release year and follow-up period. Overall, recidivism rates have significantly decreased since 1990, with the three-year rate decreasing by 27.2% (11.7 percentage points) from 1990 to 2011. In the last several years recidivism rates have remained relatively stable, with a slight increase in the two- and three-year rates, and a slight decrease in the one-year rate since 2009. Recidivism rates are calculated at one, two, and three years post-release and are cumulative (meaning that the longer follow-up periods include all instances of recidivism from the shorter follow-up periods).¹



Recidivism Trends for Select Release Years*

Release Year	1-Year Follow-up			2-Year Follow-up			3-Year Follow-up		
	Total Releases**	Recidivists***	Rate	Total Releases	Recidivists	Rate	Total Releases	Recidivists	Rate
1990	2,841	621	21.9%	2,834	986	34.8%	2,828	1,215	43.0%
1995	4,943	1,087	22.0%	4,934	1,659	33.6%	4,920	2,026	41.2%
2000	7,161	1,283	17.9%	7,129	2,174	30.5%	7,120	2,820	39.6%
2005	8,604	1,438	16.7%	8,567	2,310	27.0%	8,534	2,908	34.1%
2011	7,689	1,167	15.2%	7,647	1,908	25.0%	7,612	2,379	31.3%
2012	7,521	1,134	15.1%	7,486	1,881	25.1%	—	—	—
2013	7,661	1,109	14.5%	—	—	—	—	—	—

* See [Table 1](#) in Appendix B (page 20) for a table including all release years.

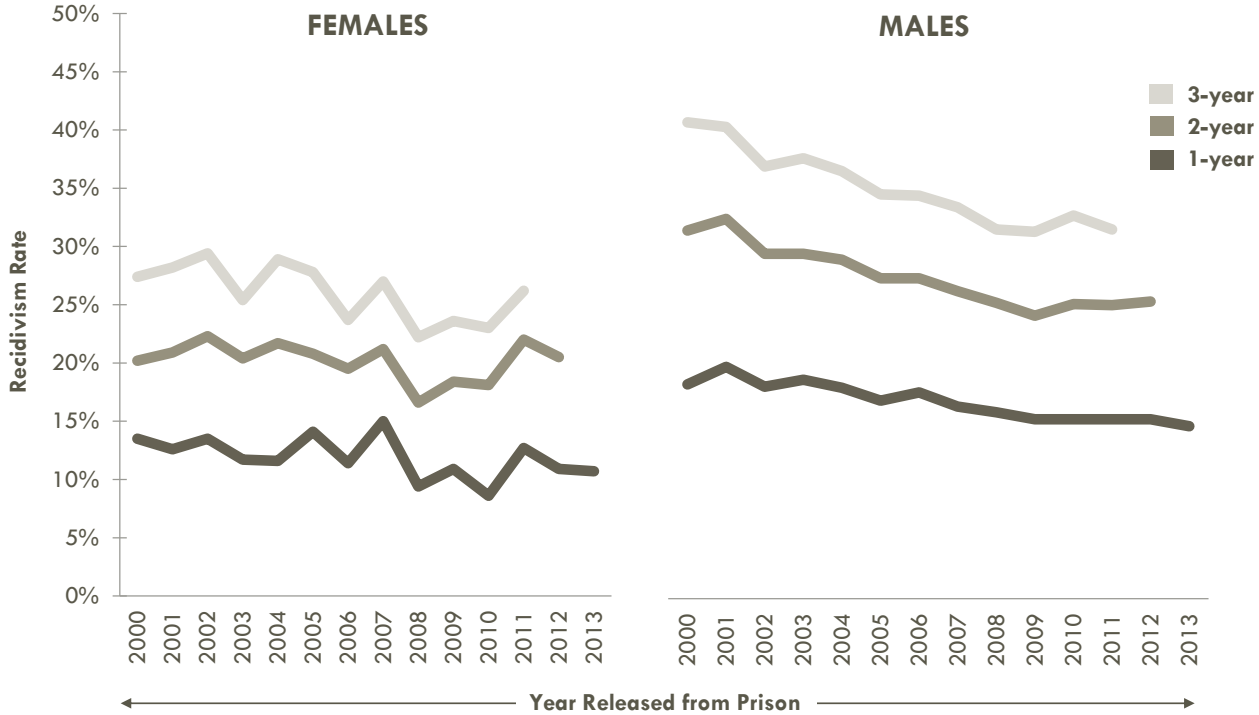
** Total release numbers may differ from those in past years' reports. Data sets are re-run for every new report, and numbers may change slightly due to corrections in data entry regarding release dates or release types for past years.

*** Recidivism rates may differ slightly from those in past reports due to recent convictions and sentences to WI DOC for offenses that occurred many years before the offender was apprehended. See [Recidivism Event](#) subsection of Appendix A (pages 17-18) for a more detailed explanation.

¹ Offenders who died within the timeframe of each specified follow-up period were removed from each cohort prior to recidivism rate calculations. This resulted in slightly different numbers of offenders released and recidivists for each follow-up period for each given release year.

Recidivism Rates by Gender

Male offenders recidivated at a higher rate than female offenders for every release year and follow-up period. The average recidivism rate for males released between 2000 and 2011 (with a three-year follow-up period) was 35.3% while for females it was 26.1%. Male offender recidivism rates followed the same pattern as the overall trend for WI DOC recidivism rates. However, the trend for females was less consistent. This is likely due to the comparatively small number of female offenders released each year (see table below). Within a small release cohort, slight variations in the number of recidivists can cause the recidivism rate to fluctuate more so than within a large release cohort.



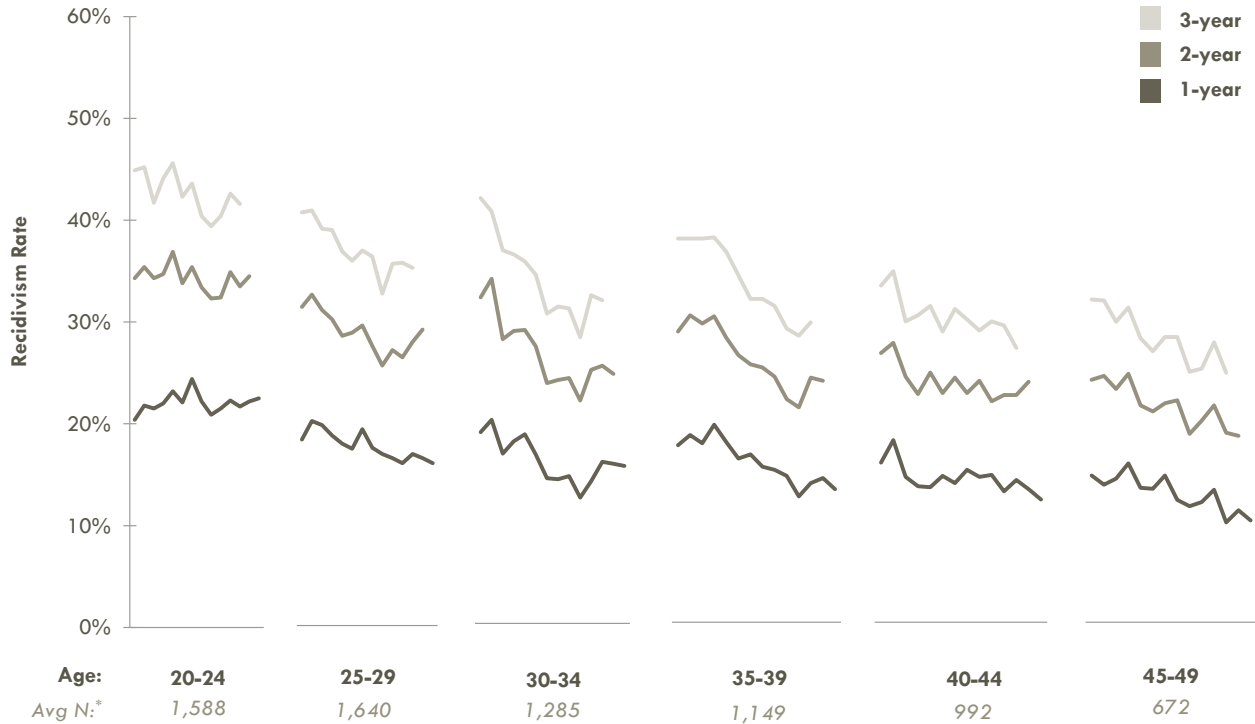
Recidivism Rates by Gender: 3-Year Follow-up*

Release Year	Total Releases	Females		Total Releases	Males	
		Recidivists	Rate		Recidivists	Rate
2000	682	187	27.4%	6,438	2,633	40.9%
2001	663	187	28.2%	6,200	2,514	40.5%
2002	633	186	29.4%	6,888	2,558	37.1%
2003	672	171	25.4%	7,184	2,718	37.8%
2004	705	204	28.9%	7,611	2,792	36.7%
2005	729	203	27.8%	7,805	2,705	34.7%
2006	695	165	23.7%	7,677	2,656	34.6%
2007	677	183	27.0%	7,844	2,636	33.6%
2008	775	172	22.2%	8,317	2,637	31.7%
2009	690	163	23.6%	7,981	2,512	31.5%
2010	635	146	23.0%	7,833	2,579	32.9%
2011	625	164	26.2%	6,987	2,215	31.7%

* See [Table 2](#) in Appendix B (page 21) for table including all follow-up periods.

Recidivism Rates by Age at Release

Younger offenders exhibited consistently higher recidivism rates than older offenders. Offenders aged 20 to 29 represented the largest number of releases and recidivists for all follow-up years. Recidivism rates for those younger than 20 and older than 59 are not reported due to the small number of offenders in each category.² For links to complete tables of recidivists by age at release click [here](#).



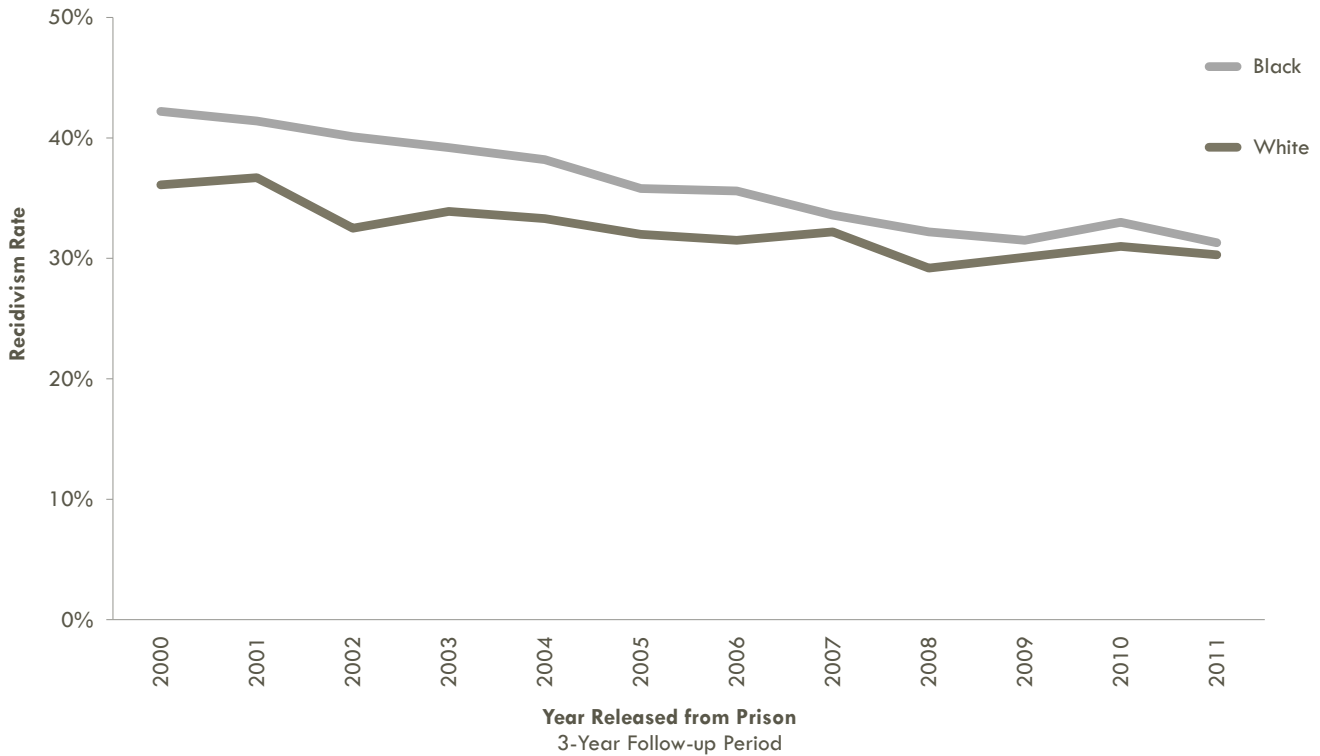
Recidivism Rates by Age for Select Release Years: 3-Year Follow-up

Age Category	2000			2011		
	Total Releases	Recidivists		Total Releases	Recidivists	
19 and Under	297	157	---	100	54	---
20-24	1,683	756	44.9%	1,231	512	41.6%
25-29	1,388	558	40.2%	1,674	582	34.8%
30-34	1,249	520	41.6%	1,220	386	31.6%
35-39	1,152	432	37.5%	924	271	29.3%
40-44	729	240	32.9%	893	239	26.8%
45-49	341	108	31.7%	714	175	24.5%
50-54	157	37	---	497	111	22.3%
55-59	76	8	---	219	39	---
60-64	24	1	---	90	7	---
65 or Older	24	3	---	50	3	---

² A sub-group of offenders must make up at least five percent of the total release cohort for recidivism rates to be reported. Recidivism rates for very small populations can be misleading as slight changes in numbers of recidivists can produce large changes in recidivism rates.

Recidivism Rates by Race

Recidivism rates for Black and White offenders decreased between 2000 and 2011, with the gap between the two groups narrowing to just one percentage point in 2011. This is the smallest difference in recidivism rates between Black and White offenders in the reporting period (the largest gap was 7.6 percentage points for offenders released in 2002). Recidivism rates for American Indian/Alaskan Native and Asian or Pacific Islander offenders are not reported due to the small number of offenders in each category.³ Of those offenders released in 2011, 650 reported Hispanic ethnicity, and of those, 27.2% recidivated within three years (offenders in any race category can also be Hispanic).



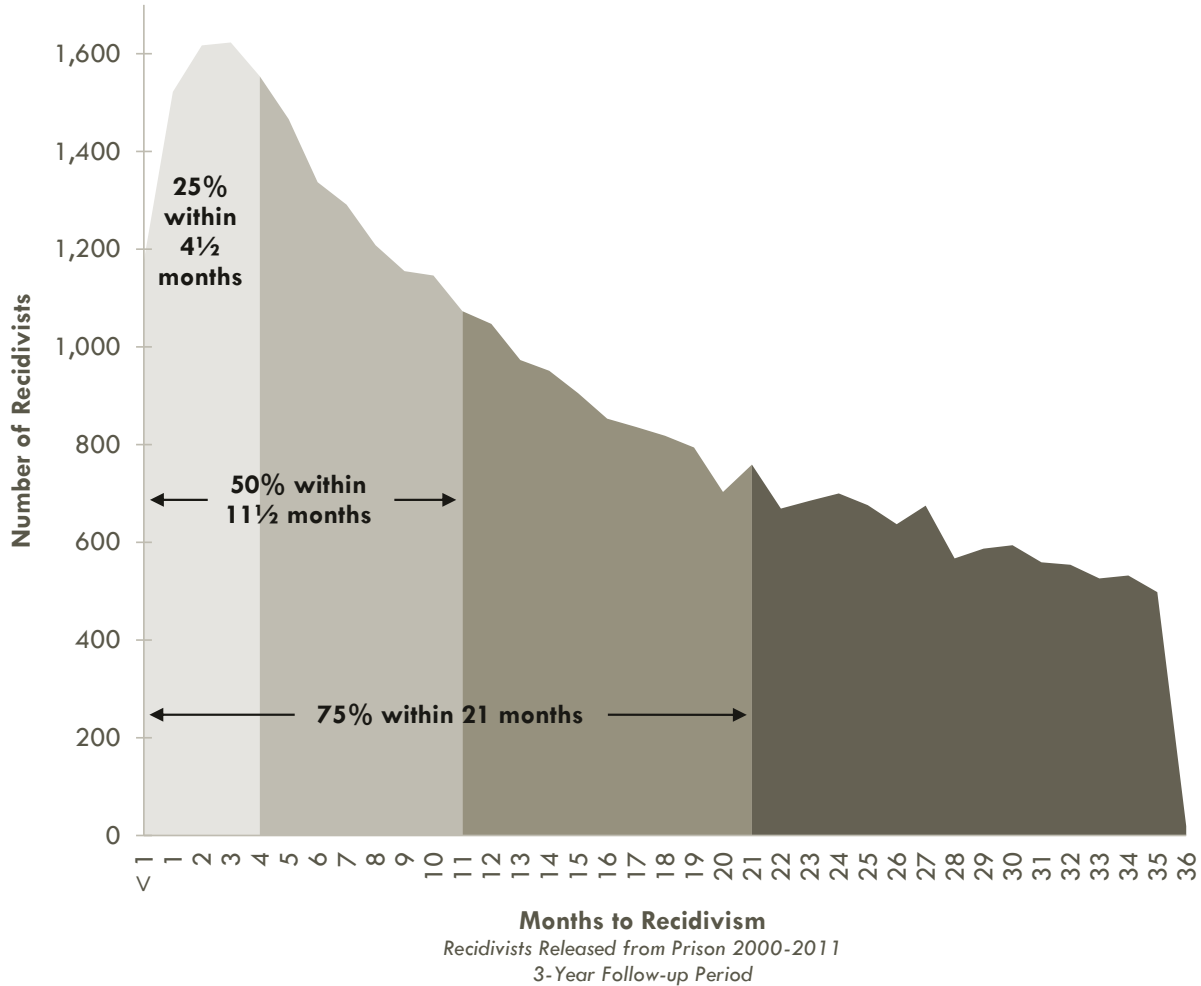
Recidivism Rates by Race: 3-Year Follow-up*

Release Year	American Indian/ Alaskan Native		Asian or Pacific Islander			Black			White			
	Total Releases	Recidivists	Total Releases	Recidivists		Total Releases	Recidivists	%	Total Releases	Recidivists	%	
2000	229	107	---	34	9	---	3,829	1,614	42.2%	3,014	1,087	36.1%
2001	246	121	---	33	5	---	3,441	1,424	41.4%	3,134	1,150	36.7%
2002	264	112	---	39	8	---	3,722	1,491	40.1%	3,491	1,133	32.5%
2003	250	114	---	43	11	---	3,852	1,509	39.2%	3,707	1,255	33.9%
2004	298	140	---	51	15	---	3,873	1,480	38.2%	4,084	1,361	33.3%
2005	314	137	---	65	17	---	3,978	1,424	35.8%	4,155	1,329	32.0%
2006	318	133	---	49	10	---	3,906	1,391	35.6%	4,081	1,287	31.5%
2007	322	129	---	63	18	---	3,898	1,311	33.6%	4,223	1,359	32.2%
2008	357	141	---	51	15	---	4,036	1,301	32.2%	4,634	1,351	29.2%
2009	335	129	---	62	14	---	3,768	1,187	31.5%	4,472	1,345	30.1%
2010	321	140	---	57	10	---	3,602	1,190	33.0%	4,468	1,385	31.0%
2011	320	144	---	54	12	---	3,142	984	31.3%	4,088	1,238	30.3%

³ A sub-group of offenders must make up at least five percent of the total release cohort for recidivism rates to be reported. Recidivism rates for very small populations can be misleading as slight changes in numbers of recidivists can produce large changes in recidivism rates.

Time to Recidivism Event

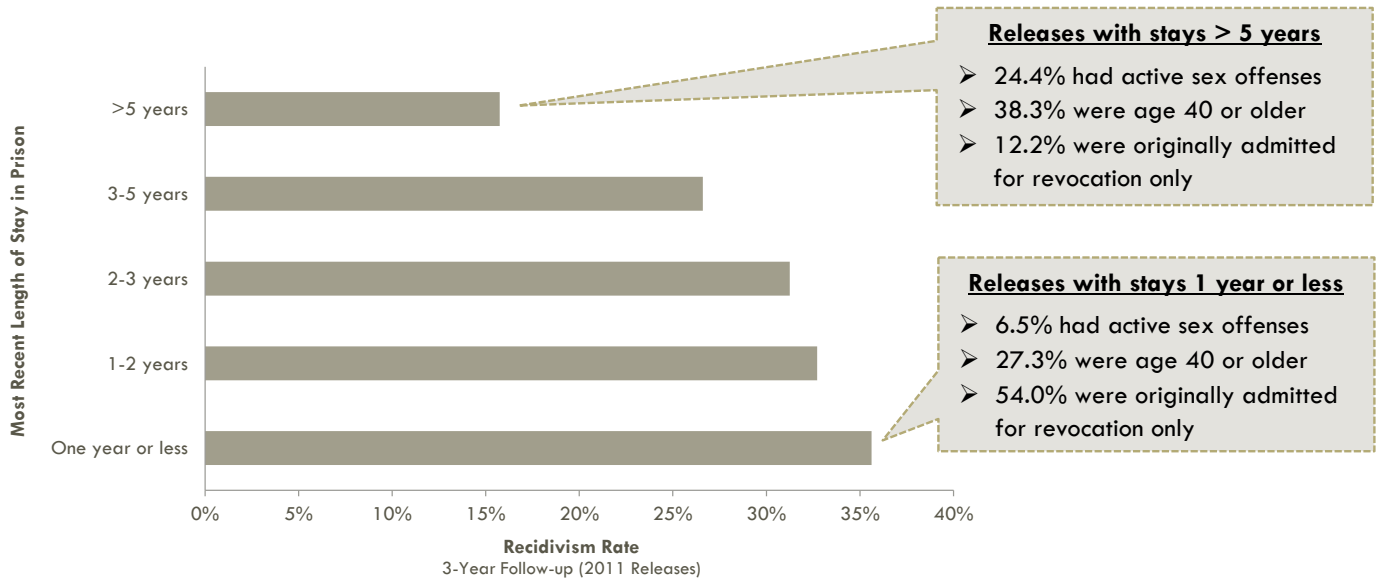
The graph below displays the timeframe in which recidivists committed new offenses. The majority of offenders who recidivated within a three-year follow-up period did so less than two years after being released. Twenty-five percent of recidivists released between 2000 and 2011 committed an offense within 4.5 months, 50% did so within 11.5 months, and 75% committed an offense within 21 months of their release from prison. For a link to a complete table of recidivists by time to recidivism event click [here](#).



Recidivism Rates by Length of Prison Stay

Of the offenders released in 2011, those with a prison stay of one year or less prior to release had the highest recidivism rates compared to all other lengths of stay. For longer lengths of stay, the recidivism rates were progressively lower, and those offenders who spent five or more years in prison prior to release had the lowest recidivism rates.

More than half (56.3%) of the offenders released from prison stays of one year or less were released following admissions for revocations; therefore short lengths of stay do not necessarily indicate short overall sentences (the remaining short lengths of stay were likely due to jail credit). One possible contributor to the differences in recidivism rates between offenders released from shorter and longer lengths of stay could be the larger proportion of sex offenders released from longer lengths of stay (24.4% of those released from a stay of five or more years had active sex offenses compared to 6.5% of those released from a length of stay of one year or less). Wisconsin data shows that recidivism rates for sex offenders are generally much lower than rates for other types of offenders (for more information see the [Sex Offender Recidivism after Release from Prison Report](#)). The ages of offenders in each length of stay category could also contribute to the differences in recidivism rates; offenders age 40 or older made up 27.3% of those released from lengths of stay of one year or less, but made up 38.3% of those released from lengths of stay of more than five years. See Appendix B ([Table 3](#), page 22) for a complete table of recidivism rates by length of prison stay.



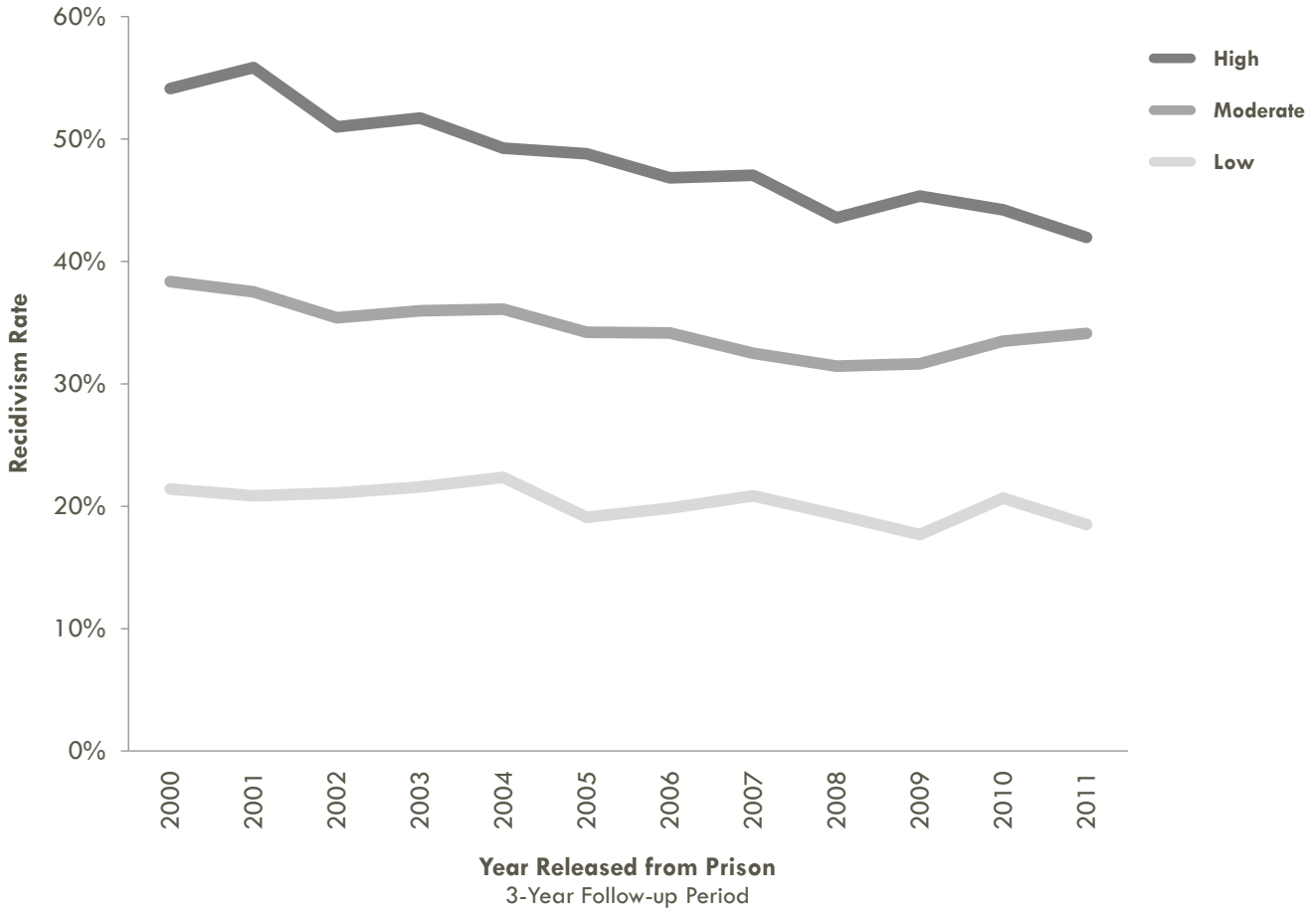
Recidivism Rates by Length of Prison Stay: 2011 Releases, 3-Year Follow-up

Length of Stay in Prison	Total Releases	Recidivists	Recidivism Rate (%)
One year or less	2,482	884	35.6%
1-2 years	2,586	846	32.7%
2-3 years	1,053	329	31.2%
3-5 years	786	209	26.6%
>5 years*	705	111	15.7%

* Average Length of Stay = 9.2 years (Minimum = 5.1 years; Maximum = 28.9 years)

Recidivism Rates by Risk Level

Offenders identified as high risk to recidivate (using a risk proxy tool; see [Appendix A](#), page 18 for a description of the tool) had consistently higher recidivism rates than those identified as moderate and low risk. Moderate risk offenders also had consistently higher recidivism rates than low risk offenders. Recidivism rates for moderate and low risk offenders decreased slightly over the report period while recidivism rates for high risk offenders decreased more sharply between 2000 and 2011 (12.1 percentage points). See [Appendix B \(Table 4, page 23\)](#) for a complete table of recidivism rates by risk level.



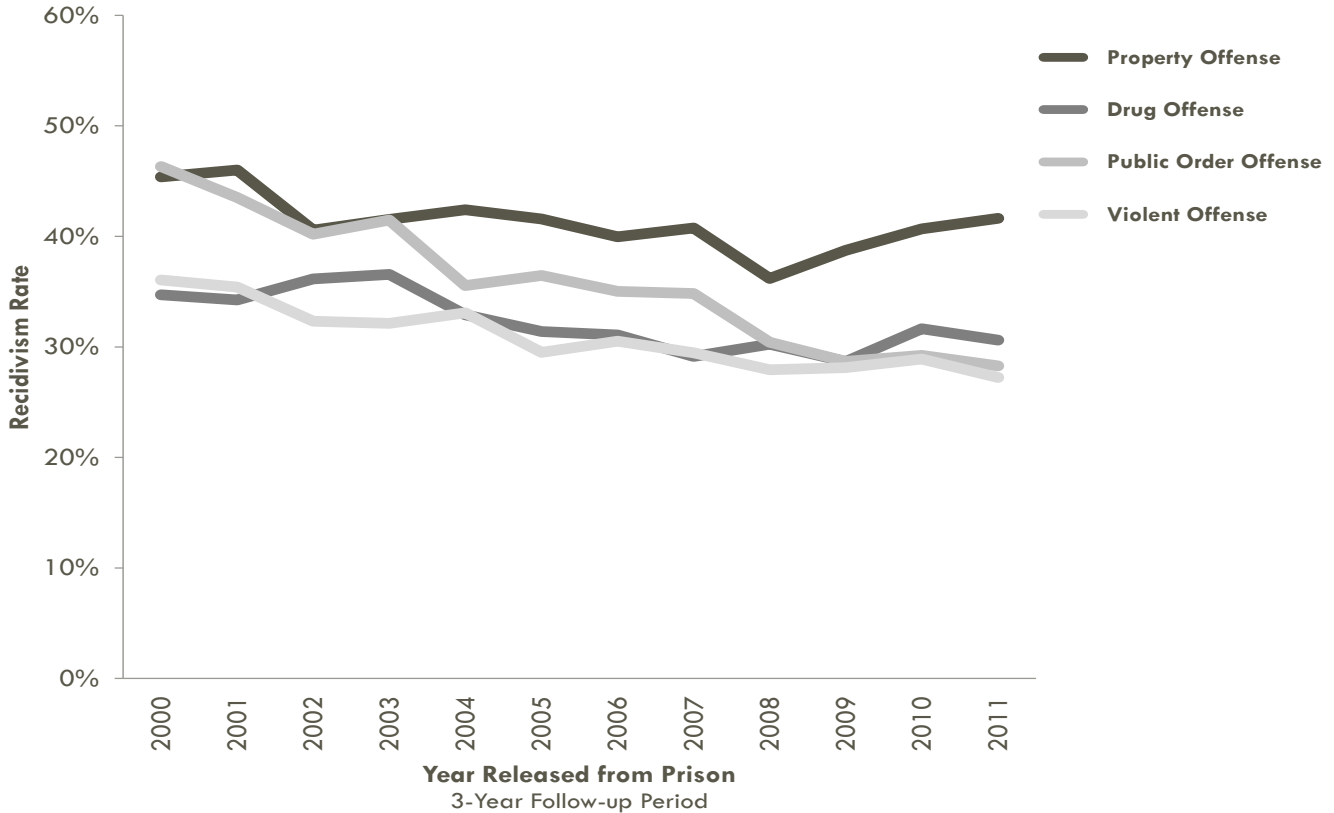
Recidivism Rates by Risk Level for Select Release Years: 3-Year Follow-up*

Risk Level	2000			2006			2011		
	Total Releases	Recidivists	Recidivism Rate	Total Releases	Recidivists	Recidivism Rate	Total Releases	Recidivists	Recidivism Rate
High Risk	2,505	1,356	54.1%	2,323	1,088	46.8%	1,632	685	42.0%
Moderate Risk	2,802	1,075	38.4%	3,719	1,270	34.1%	3,752	1,280	34.1%
Low Risk	1,812	388	21.4%	2,324	461	19.8%	2,222	411	18.5%

* See [Table 4](#) in Appendix B (page 23) for a table including all release years.

Recidivism Rates by Original Offense Type

The graph below shows recidivism rates for offenders released between 2000 and 2011, by the most serious offense committed that led to their original incarceration (note that recidivists did not necessarily commit the same type of offense as the original commitment offense). Those offenders incarcerated for property offenses demonstrated the highest recidivism rates and those incarcerated for violent offenses demonstrated the lowest. Recidivism rates for those originally incarcerated for public order offenses decreased significantly (18 percentage points) between 2000 and 2011. See Appendix B ([Table 5](#), page 24) for a complete table of recidivism rates by offense type.



The table below shows the percentage of offenders in each offense type category who were designated low, moderate, or high risk to recidivate at the time of their release. Notably, the largest proportions of high risk offenders were those in the property and drug offense categories (those offenders with the highest recidivism rates). The violent and public order offense categories contained the largest proportions of low risk offenders (and the lowest recidivism rates).

Most Serious Offense from Original Incarceration by Risk Level (2011)

Total Number of Releases in Each Category

Offense Type Prior to Release	Risk Level						Total	
	Low Risk		Moderate Risk		High Risk		N	%
	N	%	N	%	N	%		
Violent Offense	890	28.9%	1,579	51.2%	613	19.9%	3,082	100.0%
Property Offense	373	22.0%	873	51.4%	453	26.7%	1,699	100.0%
Drug Offense	345	23.7%	752	51.6%	359	24.7%	1,456	100.0%
Public Order Offense	609	44.9%	543	40.0%	205	15.1%	1,357	100.0%

Offenses were categorized based on the Association of State Correctional Administrators (ASCA) Performance-Based Measures System (PBMS) standards (see [Appendix A](#), page 19 for more information). To provide an example of the types of offenses in each category, the table below shows the top five offenses in each category for offenders in the 2011 release cohort.

Most Common Offenses in Each Offense Type Category*

Violent Offense		Property Offense		Drug Offense		Public Order Offense	
Statute Description	N	Statute Description	N	Statute Description	N	Statute Description	N
2nd Degree Sexual Assault of Child	378	Burglary-Building or Dwelling	728	Manufacture/Deliver Cocaine (≤1g)	168	Operating while under Influence (5th or 6th)	547
Armed Robbery	289	Forgery-Uttering	163	Possess. with Intent-Cocaine (>1-5g)	126	Possession of Firearm by Felon	176
Substantial Battery-Intend Bodily Harm	213	Drive or Operate Vehicle w/o Consent	117	Manufacture/Deliver Cocaine (>1-5g)	91	Failure to Support Child (120 Days+)	88
1st Degree Sexual Assault of Child	176	Misappropriate ID Info - Obtain Money	76	Possess w/Intent-Cocaine (>5-15g)	86	Bail Jumping-Felony	83
Battery	167	Theft-Movable Property (≤\$2500)	58	Possess w/Intent-THC (≤200 grams)	72	Vehicle Operator Flee/Elude Officer	57

*Data from 2011 release cohort, 3-year follow-up period. Only the top five most common offenses are listed as an example of the offenses in each offender type category.

Offense Type Specialization

Offense type specialization is the tendency for offenders to be reconvicted for an offense type that is the same as the one they were originally incarcerated for. The table below displays the percentage of recidivists in each original offense type category who committed new offenses in the same category after release from prison. The circled values represent the proportion of recidivists who committed new offenses in the same category as the offense that led to their original incarceration. Overall, offense type specialization was most evident for public order offenses, with 52.6% of recidivists who were originally incarcerated for a public order offense committing another public order offense. This is partly accounted for by specialization among OWI offenders (a subset of the public order offense category), as more than half (58.2%) of the OWI offenders who recidivated committed another OWI offense. Specialization was least evident for violent offenses. Of those recidivists originally incarcerated for violent offenses, 28.3% committed another violent offense. Property and drug offenses fell in the middle with just under half (46.9%) of the recidivists incarcerated for property offenses committing another property offense, and 43.9% of the recidivists incarcerated for drug offenses committing another drug offense.

Percent of Recidivists Convicted for the Same Offense Type as Their Original Incarceration Offense
2011 Releases, 3-Year Follow-up (*recidivists only*)

Original Incarceration Offense Type	Post-Release Recidivism Offense Type			
	Violent Offense	Property Offense	Drug Offense	Public Order Offense
Violent Offense	28.3%	18.8%	16.0%	36.9%
Property Offense	16.0%	46.9%	13.3%	23.9%
Drug Offense	17.9%	12.3%	43.9%	25.8%
Public Order Offense	21.4%	15.1%	10.9%	52.6%

Appendix A

Definition of Recidivism

The WI DOC defines recidivism as a new offense resulting in a conviction and sentence to the WI DOC. This definition of recidivism is based on a rather straightforward, yet fundamental principle in defining public safety. That is, generally, when members of the public are asked what they expect of an offender who is placed on probation supervision, or released from prison following a conviction for a crime, many simply respond "...that they do not commit another crime." Therefore, the WI DOC method for calculating recidivism rates centers on an offense date for which the offender, through full due process of the legal system, is ultimately convicted of another crime. These events can be substantiated through documentation of actions taken by the court (e.g., a Judgment of Conviction).

A notable limitation to fully applying this principle to calculating recidivism rates involves not having full access to data containing information on court dispositions that do not come under the custody or supervision of the WI DOC (see bulleted list at right). As additional data on municipal violations, fines, jail-only sentences, or convictions resulting in sentences in other state or federal correctional systems becomes available to the WI DOC, and can meet stringent validation standards, the Department will expand the scope of its recidivism calculations to include these documented incidents of new criminal behavior. Under current circumstances, the Department can only measure what it is able to count and verify as accurate. Despite this limitation, it is important to note that the WI DOC uses the same methodology to calculate recidivism rates for all past recidivism rates, and will continue to use this methodology for all future rates, allowing for consistent reporting of recidivism trends over time.

Wisconsin recidivism rate calculations do not include:

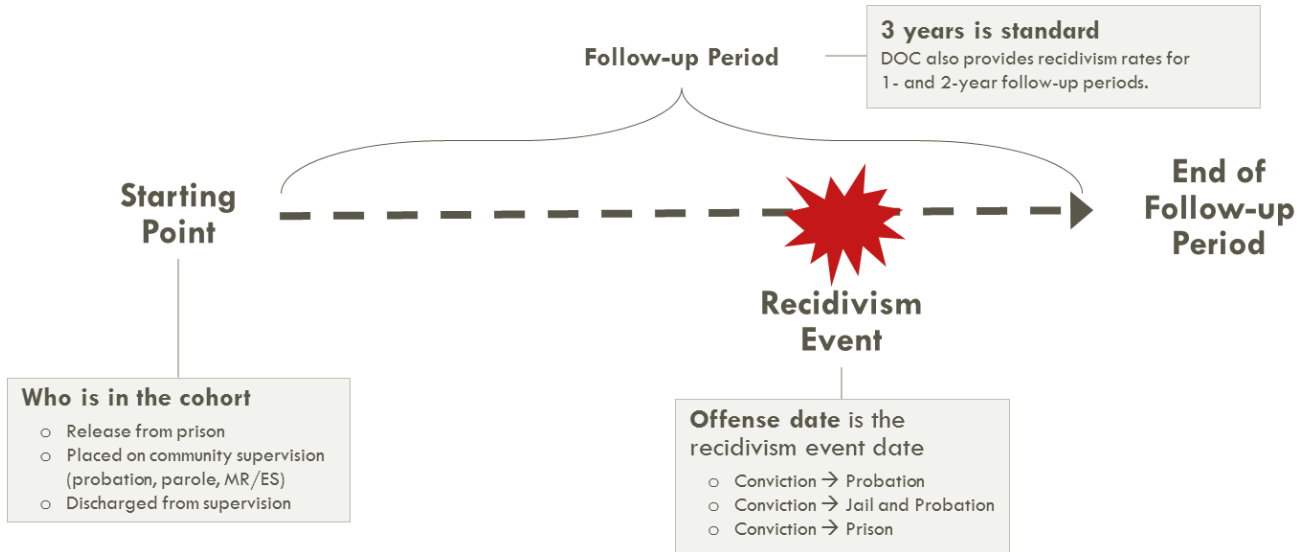
- persons convicted/sentenced in another state
- persons convicted/sentenced in Federal court
- persons convicted/sentenced in another country
- persons arrested with no conviction
- persons charged with no conviction
- persons with municipal ordinance violations
- persons convicted of a crime that results in a court disposition that *does not* lead to custody or supervision under the WI DOC
- persons admitted to jail or prison without a new conviction
- persons who have not been apprehended or convicted of a new crime

Methodology

There are three key components involved in recidivism rate calculations:

- **Starting point** – This defines the cohort, or the group of offenders being examined to see if they recidivated. For example, offenders released from prison in 2007, or offenders beginning supervision in 2005.
- **Follow-up period** – Timeframe in which an offender has the opportunity to engage in a recidivism event. The standard timeframe used for follow-up periods is three years, but other follow-up periods (one, two, five, ten years) are common as well. To accurately measure recidivism rates all offenders in the cohort must have the same amount of follow-up time.

- **Recidivism event** – The measure that identifies whether and when recidivism occurred. Some commonly used recidivism events are arrest, new conviction, new prison sentence, and admission to prison. WI DOC defines a recidivism event as an offense that results in a new conviction and sentence to WI DOC custody or supervision. The WI DOC uses the date of the offense that resulted in the conviction as the date of the recidivism event. Note that the conviction and sentence can occur after the end of an offender’s follow-up period.



It is important to note what starting point, follow-up period, and recidivism event are being used when comparing results from different recidivism studies, as rates are not comparable when any one of these components are different.

Starting Point

For this report, offenders released from a WI DOC facility between 1990 and 2013 were included in the various release year cohorts with the following exception: offenders who were released from a temporary stay in a WI DOC facility, such as a hold, an alternative to revocation (ATR), or an alternative to prison (ATP) were not included in the release cohorts. Only those offenders who were released from a period of incarceration due to completing the confinement portion of their sentence or revocation were included in each release cohort.

An offender was only counted once in any given cohort. If an offender was released more than once during a calendar year, the last release in the year was used as the offender’s starting point for his or her follow-up period.

Follow-up Period

Follow-up periods for a given starting point cohort were the same for every offender in the cohort. Meaning if an offender was released from prison on January 1, 1995, he was followed until December 31, 1997 for a three-year follow-up period, while an offender released on December 31, 1995 was followed until December 30, 1998.

Offenders who died within the timeframe of each specified follow-up period were removed from the starting point cohort. For example, an offender who died one and a half years after being released would not be included in the two-year follow-up cohort, because he died before the two years were complete. However, this offender would still be included in the one-year follow-up cohort, because he did not die until after he had been in the community for the entire one year following his release. The WI DOC is only able to track the deaths of offenders who are under the supervision of the WI DOC at the time of their deaths. Therefore offenders who died and were not under WI DOC custody or supervision at that time remain in the cohort.

Recidivism Event

An offender was considered a recidivist if he or she committed a new crime and was convicted and sentenced to WI DOC custody or supervision within his or her follow-up period. Although an offender must be convicted and sentenced to WI DOC custody or supervision to be considered a recidivist, it is the date of the actual offense that is considered the date of the recidivism event, not the date of conviction, sentencing, or admission to prison. Therefore, the offense itself must have occurred during the offender’s follow-up period. If an offender had multiple offense dates in a given follow-up period the earliest offense date was counted as the recidivism event. An offender can only be counted as a recidivist once within any given cohort.

For some older data, offense dates were missing but corresponding sentence dates were available. Estimated offense dates were calculated for all missing offense dates using the following equation:

$$\text{Estimated Offense Date} = \text{Sentence Date} - 209 \text{ days}^*$$

*Median number of days between offense and sentence dates based on sentence dates that occurred between January 1, 2006 and December 31, 2011

If an estimated offense date fell within an offender’s follow-up period he or she was counted as a recidivist.

WI DOC’s methodology considers the date of an offense as the date of the recidivism event. Often an offender is not arrested, tried, convicted, and sentenced until years after committing an offense. The WI DOC does not obtain data for that offense until the time that the offender is sentenced to custody or supervision under the Department. Therefore, past recidivism rates can change depending on when data are analyzed. For example, if an offender released in 1995 was arrested, convicted, and sentenced in 2011 for an offense committed in 1996, a recidivism rate calculated in 2010 for a 1995 starting point cohort would not count the offender as a recidivist. However, if that rate was calculated again in 2012, the offender would be considered a recidivist for the 1995 starting point cohort.

Even when an offender is arrested, tried, convicted, and sentenced shortly after the occurrence of an offense, the WI DOC still will not obtain offense data until 209 days (on average) after the offense. Therefore, recidivism rates calculated by the WI DOC provide for a minimum one-year lag time to account for the time between apprehension for a new crime and subsequent court disposition. This allows the Department to capture data on offenders who committed crimes during the last year of their follow-up periods, but who were not convicted and sentenced until sometime after the follow-up period. For example, a report of 2013 release from prison recidivism rates with a three-year follow-up period would not be published until after 2017, allowing for the three-year follow-up period (ending in 2016) and the one-year lag time (ending in 2017).

Furthermore, WI DOC is only able to calculate recidivism rates based on the data that is available to the Department. Therefore, offenses that result in fines or convictions to only county jail are not counted as recidivism events because the WI DOC is not notified when offenders receive these types of sentences or court dispositions. At this point in time, the WI DOC is only able to obtain and validate data on offenders who are under WI DOC custody or supervision.

Percentage Change in Recidivism Rate

The percentage change in the recidivism rate reported in the executive summary and on page six is calculated by dividing the percentage-point change by the initial recidivism rate and multiplying the resulting number by 100. This yields the percentage by which the recidivism rate changed. For example, in 1990 the recidivism rate was 43.0%, and it decreased 11.7 percentage points to 31.3% in 2011. Therefore, the resulting change in the recidivism rate was 27.2%.

Age at Release

An offender's age at release was calculated as the number of years between the offender's date of birth and his or her release date. The offender's age was rounded down, meaning that if 25 years and 300 days had passed between an offender's date of birth and release date, that offender was identified as being 25 years old.

Time to Recidivism Event

Time to recidivism event was calculated as the number of months between the offender's date of release and the date of his or her recidivism offense. The number of months was rounded down, such that if the time between the release and the recidivism offense was two months and 27 days, the offender was categorized as having recidivated in two months from his or her release.

Length of Prison Stay

Length of prison stay was calculated as the number of months between the offender's admission date and release date. The category of 1-2 years includes offenders whose lengths of stay were 24 months; the 2-3 year category includes lengths of stay of 36 months; and the 3-5 year category includes lengths of stay of 60 months.

Risk Level

Offender risk level was calculated using the WI DOC version of a proxy risk screening instrument (see [Bogue, Woodward and Joplin, 2006](#)) in order to capture a complete historical analysis of risk level. Though WI DOC currently uses the COMPAS Risk Assessment to capture a more detailed picture of offender criminogenic risk, the measure has only been in use since mid-2012 and would provide incomplete recidivism-by-risk trends. The WI DOC proxy risk instrument incorporates three items to broadly estimate general risk for recidivism: 1) age at release from prison, 2) age at first sentence to WI DOC custody, and 3) number of prior felony convictions in Wisconsin. Scores from the proxy risk screening instrument are used to define three overall risk categories: low, moderate, and high.

Original Offense Type and Offense Type Specialization

Offense type categories were based on the Association of State Correctional Administrators (ASCA) Performance-Based Measures System (PBMS) standards. While the ASCA standards were followed as closely as possible in the categorization of offenses, supplementary rules were developed to aid in categorizing statutes that did not clearly fit into one category or another. Offense categorization methodology is available upon request.

Recidivism rates by original offense type were determined using the most serious active offense at the time of an offender's release from prison.

For offense type specialization, if an offender committed offenses on multiple dates within his or her follow-up period, the first offense date was selected as the date on which the offender became a recidivist. To determine the offender's most serious recidivist offense, the offenses committed on that offense date only were examined.

Recidivism vs. Reincarceration

Reincarceration rates are also commonly reported by corrections agencies, and are sometimes confused with recidivism rates. A reincarceration rate represents the percentage of offenders released from prison who then return to prison for a revocation, a revocation with a new sentence, or a new sentence within a specified follow-up period. The WI DOC tracks reincarceration rates as a means to report on prison bed utilization and population projections, and as an additional outcome measure, but not as a means to calculate recidivism rates.

Appendix B

Table 1. Recidivism Trends 1990-2013

Release Year	1-Year Follow-Up			2-Year Follow-Up			3-Year Follow-Up		
	Total Releases*	Recidivists**		Total Releases	Recidivists		Total Releases	Recidivists	
1990	2,841	621	21.9%	2,834	986	34.8%	2,828	1,215	43.0%
1991	3,605	827	22.9%	3,593	1,258	35.0%	3,581	1,530	42.7%
1992	3,649	857	23.5%	3,640	1,257	34.5%	3,631	1,542	42.5%
1993	4,274	1,011	23.7%	4,261	1,572	36.9%	4,252	1,929	45.4%
1994	4,049	892	22.0%	4,035	1,440	35.7%	4,018	1,755	43.7%
1995	4,943	1,087	22.0%	4,934	1,659	33.6%	4,920	2,026	41.2%
1996	4,840	1,074	22.2%	4,819	1,617	33.6%	4,808	1,991	41.4%
1997	5,009	998	19.9%	4,989	1,595	32.0%	4,979	1,969	39.5%
1998	4,780	969	20.3%	4,771	1,476	30.9%	4,760	1,799	37.8%
1999	5,183	1,025	19.8%	5,176	1,639	31.7%	5,171	2,083	40.3%
2000	7,161	1,283	17.9%	7,129	2,174	30.5%	7,120	2,820	39.6%
2001	6,901	1,323	19.2%	6,876	2,164	31.5%	6,863	2,701	39.4%
2002	7,550	1,344	17.8%	7,539	2,188	29.0%	7,521	2,744	36.5%
2003	7,921	1,438	18.2%	7,883	2,270	28.8%	7,856	2,889	36.8%
2004	8,376	1,471	17.6%	8,342	2,376	28.5%	8,316	2,996	36.0%
2005	8,604	1,438	16.7%	8,567	2,310	27.0%	8,534	2,908	34.1%
2006	8,451	1,450	17.2%	8,407	2,253	26.8%	8,372	2,821	33.7%
2007	8,572	1,407	16.4%	8,543	2,217	26.0%	8,521	2,819	33.1%
2008	9,151	1,412	15.4%	9,112	2,243	24.6%	9,092	2,809	30.9%
2009	8,741	1,312	15.0%	8,704	2,072	23.8%	8,671	2,675	30.8%
2010	8,554	1,276	14.9%	8,499	2,104	24.8%	8,468	2,725	32.2%
2011	7,689	1,167	15.2%	7,647	1,908	25.0%	7,612	2,379	31.3%
2012	7,521	1,134	15.1%	7,486	1,881	25.1%	—	—	—
2013	7,661	1,109	14.5%	—	—	—	—	—	—

* Total release numbers may differ from those in past years' reports. Data sets are re-run for every new report, and numbers may change slightly due to corrections in data entry regarding release dates or release types for past years.

** Recidivism rates may differ slightly from those in past reports due to recent convictions and sentences to WI DOC for offenses that occurred many years before the offender was apprehended. See [Recidivism Event](#) subsection of Appendix A (pages 17-18) for a more detailed explanation.

Table 2. Recidivism Rates by Gender 2000-2013

Release Year	1-Year Follow-Up						2-Year Follow-Up						3-Year Follow-Up					
	Females			Males			Females			Males			Females			Males		
	Total Releases	Recidivists	Recidivism %	Total Releases	Recidivists	Recidivism %	Total Releases	Recidivists	Recidivism %	Total Releases	Recidivists	Recidivism %	Total Releases	Recidivists	Recidivism %	Total Releases	Recidivists	Recidivism %
2000	682	92	13.5%	6,479	1,191	18.4%	682	138	20.2%	6,447	2,036	31.6%	682	187	27.4%	6,438	2,633	40.9%
2001	667	84	12.6%	6,234	1,239	19.9%	665	139	20.9%	6,211	2,025	32.6%	663	187	28.2%	6,200	2,514	40.5%
2002	638	86	13.5%	6,912	1,258	18.2%	636	142	22.3%	6,903	2,046	29.6%	633	186	29.4%	6,888	2,558	37.1%
2003	678	79	11.7%	7,243	1,359	18.8%	677	138	20.4%	7,206	2,132	29.6%	672	171	25.4%	7,184	2,718	37.8%
2004	707	82	11.6%	7,669	1,389	18.1%	705	153	21.7%	7,637	2,223	29.1%	705	204	28.9%	7,611	2,792	36.7%
2005	732	103	14.1%	7,872	1,335	17.0%	730	152	20.8%	7,837	2,158	27.5%	729	203	27.8%	7,805	2,705	34.7%
2006	701	80	11.4%	7,750	1,370	17.7%	697	136	19.5%	7,710	2,117	27.5%	695	165	23.7%	7,677	2,656	34.6%
2007	679	102	15.0%	7,893	1,305	16.5%	678	144	21.2%	7,865	2,073	26.4%	677	183	27.0%	7,844	2,636	33.6%
2008	779	73	9.4%	8,372	1,339	16.0%	777	129	16.6%	8,335	2,114	25.4%	775	172	22.2%	8,317	2,637	31.7%
2009	695	76	10.9%	8,046	1,236	15.4%	692	127	18.4%	8,012	1,945	24.3%	690	163	23.6%	7,981	2,512	31.5%
2010	641	55	8.6%	7,913	1,221	15.4%	637	115	18.1%	7,862	1,989	25.3%	635	146	23.0%	7,833	2,579	32.9%
2011	631	80	12.7%	7,058	1,087	15.4%	627	138	22.0%	7,020	1,770	25.2%	625	164	26.2%	6,987	2,215	31.7%
2012	596	65	10.9%	6,925	1,069	15.4%	590	121	20.5%	6,896	1,760	25.5%	—	—	—	—	—	—
2013	607	65	10.7%	7,054	1,044	14.8%	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Table 3. Recidivism Rates by Length of Prison Stay 2000-2011: 3-Year Follow-up

Release Year	One Year or Less			1-2 Years			2-3 Years			3-5 Years			>5 Years		
	Total Releases	Recidivists	Recidivism Rate	Total Releases	Recidivists	Recidivism Rate	Total Releases	Recidivists	Recidivism Rate	Total Releases	Recidivists	Recidivism Rate	Total Releases	Recidivists	Recidivism Rate
2000	2,654	1,121	42.2%	2,064	829	40.2%	1,103	421	38.2%	807	307	38.0%	492	142	28.9%
2001	2,467	1,058	42.9%	1,929	751	38.9%	944	350	37.1%	909	342	37.6%	614	200	32.6%
2002	2,685	1,090	40.6%	2,067	758	36.7%	1,042	371	35.6%	942	319	33.9%	785	206	26.2%
2003	2,707	1,131	41.8%	2,283	828	36.3%	1,060	366	34.5%	927	317	34.2%	879	247	28.1%
2004	3,036	1,262	41.6%	2,412	830	34.4%	1,089	385	35.4%	877	290	33.1%	902	229	25.4%
2005	3,157	1,195	37.9%	2,566	901	35.1%	1,137	380	33.4%	865	265	30.6%	809	167	20.6%
2006	3,157	1,196	37.9%	2,479	824	33.2%	1,131	383	33.9%	908	254	28.0%	697	164	23.5%
2007	3,323	1,254	37.7%	2,655	875	33.0%	1,027	344	33.5%	862	234	27.1%	654	112	17.1%
2008	3,325	1,173	35.3%	2,991	918	30.7%	1,140	348	30.5%	877	223	25.4%	759	147	19.4%
2009	3,210	1,163	36.2%	2,746	804	29.3%	1,194	347	29.1%	788	223	28.3%	733	138	18.8%
2010	3,029	1,094	36.1%	2,839	947	33.4%	1,056	320	30.3%	849	225	26.5%	695	139	20.0%
2011	2,482	884	35.6%	2,586	846	32.7%	1,053	329	31.2%	786	209	26.6%	705	111	15.7%

Table 4. Recidivism Rates by Risk Level 2000-2011: 3-Year Follow-up

Release Year	High Risk			Moderate Risk			Low Risk		
	Total Releases	Recidivists	%	Total Releases	Recidivists	%	Total Releases	Recidivists	%
2000	2,505	1,356	54.1%	2,802	1,075	38.4%	1,812	388	21.4%
2001	2,321	1,296	55.8%	2,746	1,030	37.5%	1,794	374	20.8%
2002	2,367	1,207	51.0%	3,138	1,111	35.4%	2,012	424	21.1%
2003	2,380	1,231	51.7%	3,311	1,191	36.0%	2,160	466	21.6%
2004	2,430	1,197	49.3%	3,515	1,269	36.1%	2,371	530	22.4%
2005	2,416	1,179	48.8%	3,707	1,268	34.2%	2,409	460	19.1%
2006	2,323	1,088	46.8%	3,719	1,270	34.1%	2,324	461	19.8%
2007	2,253	1,060	47.0%	3,874	1,259	32.5%	2,393	499	20.9%
2008	2,254	982	43.6%	4,169	1,311	31.4%	2,662	514	19.3%
2009	2,033	922	45.4%	4,121	1,304	31.6%	2,512	444	17.7%
2010	1,911	845	44.2%	4,098	1,372	33.5%	2,453	507	20.7%
2011	1,632	685	42.0%	3,752	1,280	34.1%	2,222	411	18.5%

Table 5. Recidivism Rates by Original Offense Type 2000-2011: 3-Year Follow-up

Release Year	Violent Offender			Property Offender			Drug Offender			Public Order Offender		
	Total Releases	Recidivists		Total Releases	Recidivists		Total Releases	Recidivists		Total Releases	Recidivists	
2000	2,707	976	36.1%	2,217	1,006	45.4%	1,538	534	34.7%	650	301	46.3%
2001	2,634	933	35.4%	2,148	988	46.0%	1,343	460	34.3%	717	312	43.5%
2002	2,917	943	32.3%	2,332	946	40.6%	1,447	523	36.1%	816	328	40.2%
2003	3,096	995	32.1%	2,196	912	41.5%	1,644	601	36.6%	916	380	41.5%
2004	3,092	1,023	33.1%	2,396	1,016	42.4%	1,823	600	32.9%	1,004	357	35.6%
2005	3,047	899	29.5%	2,227	926	41.6%	2,083	654	31.4%	1,174	428	36.5%
2006	3,093	944	30.5%	2,150	859	40.0%	1,975	614	31.1%	1,148	402	35.0%
2007	3,170	934	29.5%	2,167	883	40.7%	1,891	551	29.1%	1,286	448	34.8%
2008	3,351	936	27.9%	2,271	822	36.2%	2,007	607	30.2%	1,453	442	30.4%
2009	3,342	940	28.1%	2,063	799	38.7%	1,733	497	28.7%	1,506	432	28.7%
2010	3,338	965	28.9%	1,954	795	40.7%	1,640	519	31.6%	1,515	443	29.2%
2011	3,084	840	27.2%	1,701	708	41.6%	1,457	446	30.6%	1,358	384	28.3%