



## STATISTICAL BRIEF

APRIL 2023

NCJ 306141

# Recidivism of Females Released from State Prison, 2012–2017

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This statistical brief presents findings from the Bureau of Justice Statistics' (BJS) recidivism study on persons released from state prison across 34 states in 2012. It compares females and males by their commitment offenses, recidivism patterns during the 5 years following release (from 2012 to 2017), and post-release offenses.

## Key findings

- About 11% (45,100) of the 408,300 persons released from state prison in 2012 in 34 states were female (table 1).
- About 7 in 10 (69%) females released in 2012 were serving time for a property or drug offense, compared to about 5 in 10 (52%) males. Females (17%) were less likely than males (29%) to be serving time for a violent offense.
- Thirty-eight percent of females released in 2012 had 10 or more prior arrests, compared to 44% of males. The median number of prior arrests among females was seven, compared to eight among males. Both females and males had a median of four prior convictions in their criminal history.

**TABLE 1**  
**Criminal history of persons released from state prison in 34 states in 2012, by sex**

	Female*		Male	
	Percent	Standard error	Percent	Standard error
All persons released from prison	100%	~	100%	~
Most serious commitment offense				
Violent	17.3%	0.20%	28.8% †	0.22%
Property	36.4	0.27	27.3 †	0.24
Drug	32.3	0.27	24.6 †	0.23
Public order	13.9	0.19	19.3 †	0.21
Prior arrests				
4 or fewer	30.2%	0.25%	25.0% †	0.21%
2 or fewer	14.3	0.19	11.2 †	0.14
3–4	15.9	0.21	13.8 †	0.17
5–9	31.8	0.27	31.1 †	0.24
10 or more	38.0	0.26	43.9 †	0.25
Median	7	~	8	~
Mean	9.9	0.05	10.9 †	0.05
Prior convictions				
Median	4	~	4	~
Mean	5.0	0.03	5.5 †	0.03
Number of released persons	45,100	20	363,200	127

Note: Prior arrests and convictions include those in a person's criminal history and those that resulted in the imprisonment. Person counts are rounded to the nearest 100. Details may not sum to totals due to rounding.  
~Not applicable.

\*Comparison group.

†Difference with comparison group is significant at the 95% confidence level.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Recidivism of State Prisoners Released in 2012 data collection, 2012–2017.

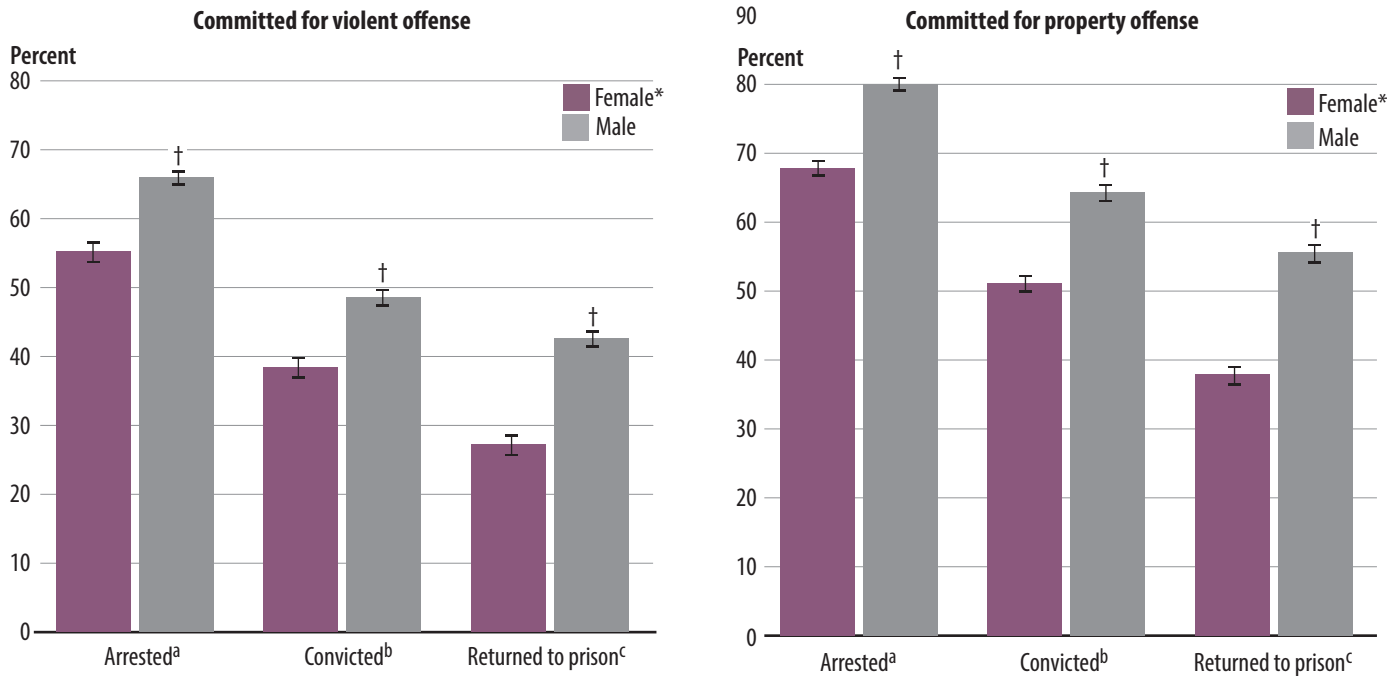
■ During the 5 years after their 2012 release, more than half (55%) of females who were serving time for a violent offense were arrested, while more than a third (38%) had a new conviction and about a fourth (27%) returned to prison (**figure 1**). These recidivism rates were higher across all three measures among males serving time for a violent offense: 66% arrested, 49% convicted, and 43% returned to prison. Similar

patterns were observed among persons who were serving time for property offenses: females were less likely than males to be arrested, convicted, and returned to prison within 5 years of their 2012 release.

- The percentage of females who returned to prison within 5 years was higher among those serving time for a property offense (38%) than a violent offense (27%).

**FIGURE 1**

**Persons released from state prison in 2012 who were arrested, convicted, or returned to prison within 5 years, by most serious commitment offense and sex**



Note: The most serious offense was identified as the one with the longest sentence length for persons serving time for more than one offense. Estimates include 95% confidence intervals. See appendix table 1 for estimates and standard errors.

\*Comparison group.

†Difference with comparison group is significant at the 95% confidence level.

<sup>a</sup>Estimates are based on persons released across the 34 states in the study who had a new arrest for any type of offense.

<sup>b</sup>Estimates are based on persons released across the 31 states with the necessary court data.

<sup>c</sup>Estimates are based on persons released across the 21 states with the necessary data on persons returned to prison for a probation or parole violation or for an arrest that led to a new sentence.

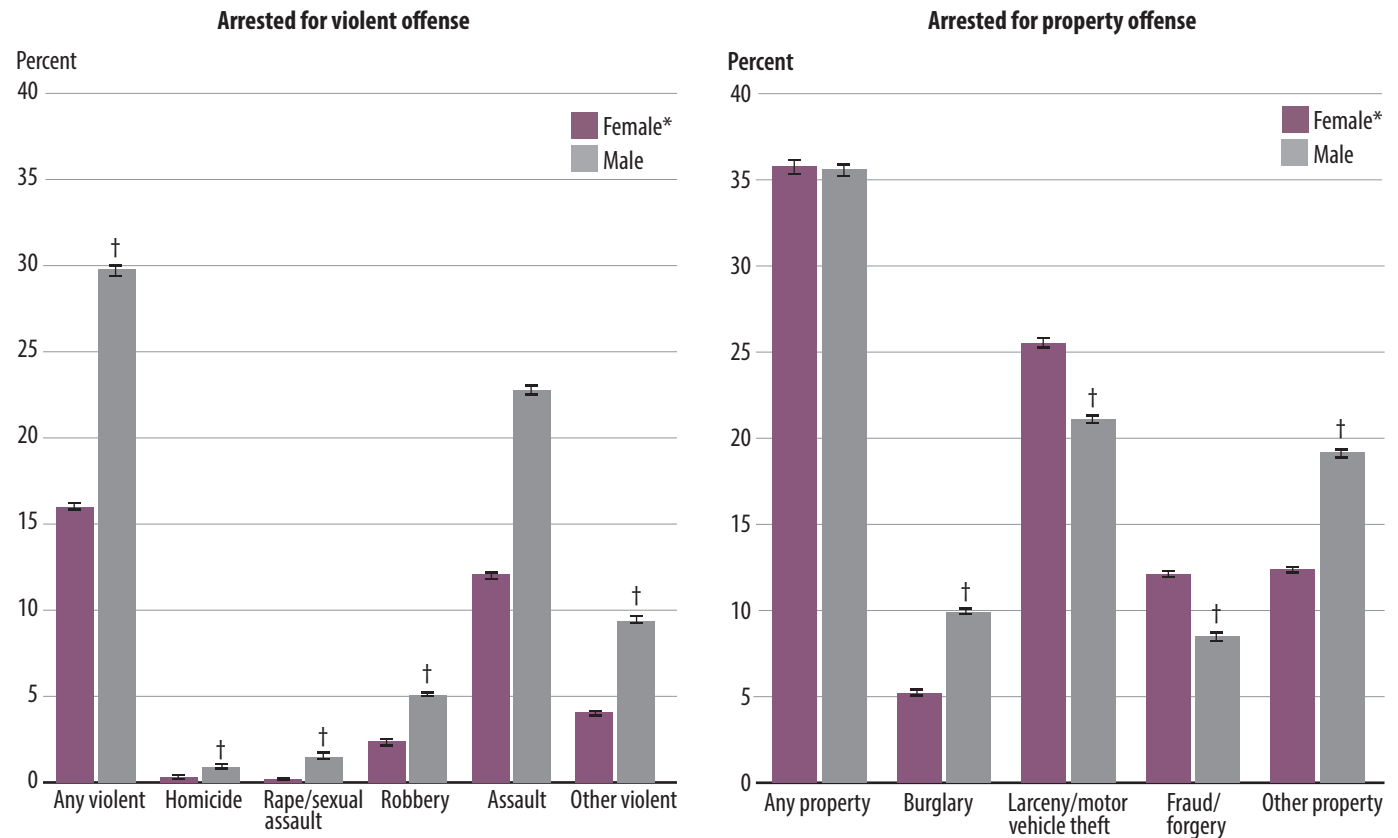
Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Recidivism of State Prisoners Released in 2012 data collection, 2012–2017.

- Overall, females (16%) were less likely than males (30%) to be arrested for any type of violent offense within 5 years of their 2012 release (**figure 2**). Females (29%) were also less likely than males (33%) to be arrested for a drug offense (appendix table 2).
- Differences were also observed in the types of offenses that females and males were arrested for after leaving

prison. During the 5-year period following their 2012 release, females (12%) were less likely than males (23%) to be arrested for assault, whereas females were more likely than males to be arrested for larceny (26% of females and 21% of males) and fraud or forgery (12% of females and 9% of males).

**FIGURE 2**

**Persons released from state prison in 34 states in 2012 who were arrested within 5 years, by post-release arrest offense and sex**



Note: Includes all arrests during the 5-year follow-up period, not only arrests that resulted in a conviction or return to prison. A person may be arrested more than once for different types of offenses, and each arrest may involve more than one offense. Estimates include 95% confidence intervals. See appendix table 2 for estimates and standard errors.

\*Comparison group.

†Difference with comparison group is significant at the 95% confidence level.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Recidivism of State Prisoners Released in 2012 data collection, 2012–2017.

## Methodology

The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) used prisoner records from the National Corrections Reporting Program and criminal history data from the FBI and state repositories to analyze the post-release recidivism patterns of persons released from prison across 34 states in 2012. These 34 states provided the FBI or state identification numbers that were needed to collect the criminal history data. While the arrest measure was available for persons released in all 34 states, the conviction measure was based on persons released in the 31 states with the necessary court data and the return-to-prison measure was based on persons released in the 21 states with the necessary prison data.

Across the 34 states in the study, BJS selected a stratified random sample of about 92,100 persons released from state prison in 2012 to represent the approximately

408,300 persons released from state prison that year. All persons released from prison in 2012 after serving time for homicide, rape, or sexual assault were included in the sample. Within each state, persons released after serving time for other offenses were sorted by the county in which the sentence was imposed, race or Hispanic origin, age, and most serious commitment offense. Females and males were sampled separately from each state at sizes that yielded estimates with equal variance to increase the sample of females and improve the precision of their recidivism estimates. Each person in the sample was assigned a weight based on the probability of selection within the state.

For details on the study methodology and other key findings, see *Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 34 States in 2012: A 5-Year Follow-Up Period (2012–2017)* (NCJ 255947, BJS, July 2021).

## APPENDIX TABLE 1

Estimates and standard errors for figure 1: Persons released from state prison in 2012 who were arrested, convicted, or returned to prison within 5 years, by most serious commitment offense and sex

Most serious commitment offense	Estimate			Standard error			95% confidence interval					
	Arrested <sup>a</sup>	Convicted <sup>b</sup>	Returned to prison <sup>c</sup>	Arrested	Convicted	Returned to prison	Arrested		Convicted		Returned to prison	
							Lower bound	Upper bound	Lower bound	Upper bound	Lower bound	Upper bound
<b>Female*</b>	63.1%	46.5%	34.0%	0.27%	0.30%	0.32%	62.6%	63.6%	45.9%	47.1%	33.4%	34.6%
Violent	55.2	38.4	27.2	0.64	0.66	0.67	53.9	56.5	37.1	39.7	25.9	28.5
Property	67.9	51.2	37.9	0.44	0.50	0.54	67.0	68.8	50.2	52.2	36.8	39.0
Drug	62.7	46.1	33.5	0.50	0.55	0.58	61.7	63.7	45.0	47.2	32.4	34.6
Public order	61.2	45.2	33.8	0.73	0.78	0.92	59.8	62.6	43.7	46.7	32.0	35.6
<b>Male</b>	71.7% †	55.4% †	47.2% †	0.23%	0.27%	0.31%	71.2%	72.2%	54.9%	55.9%	46.6%	47.8%
Violent	66.0 †	48.6 †	42.6 †	0.40	0.46	0.52	65.2	66.8	47.7	49.5	41.6	43.6
Property	80.0 †	64.3 †	55.6 †	0.42	0.52	0.61	79.2	80.8	63.3	65.3	54.4	56.8
Drug	71.0 †	54.2 †	44.9 †	0.49	0.58	0.66	70.0	72.0	53.1	55.3	43.6	46.2
Public order	69.5 †	55.0 †	45.0 †	0.57	0.63	0.75	68.4	70.6	53.8	56.2	43.5	46.5

Note: The most serious offense was identified as the one with the longest sentence length for persons serving time for more than one offense.

\*Comparison group.

†Difference with comparison group is significant at the 95% confidence level.

<sup>a</sup>Estimates are based on persons released across the 34 states in the study who had a new arrest for any type of offense.

<sup>b</sup>Estimates are based on persons released across the 31 states with the necessary court data.

<sup>c</sup>Estimates are based on persons released across the 21 states with the necessary data on persons returned to prison for a probation or parole violation or for an arrest that led to a new sentence.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Recidivism of State Prisoners Released in 2012 data collection, 2012–2017.

## APPENDIX TABLE 2

Estimates and standard errors for figure 2: Persons released from state prison in 34 states in 2012 who were arrested within 5 years, by post-release arrest offense and sex

Post-release arrest offense	Female*				Male			
	Percent	Standard error	95% confidence interval		Percent	Standard error	95% confidence interval	
			Lower bound	Upper bound			Lower bound	Upper bound
<b>Any</b>	63.1%	0.27%	62.6%	63.6%	71.7% †	0.23%	71.2%	72.2%
<b>Violent</b>	16.0%	0.21%	15.6%	16.4%	29.8% †	0.24%	29.3%	30.3%
Homicide	0.3	0.03	0.2	0.4	0.9 †	0.05	0.8	1.0
Rape/sexual assault	0.2	0.03	0.1	0.3	1.5 †	0.06	1.4	1.6
Robbery	2.4	0.09	2.2	2.6	5.1 †	0.12	4.9	5.3
Assault	12.1	0.18	11.7	12.5	22.8 †	0.22	22.4	23.2
Other violent	4.1	0.11	3.9	4.3	9.4 †	0.15	9.1	9.7
<b>Property</b>	35.8%	0.27%	35.3%	36.3%	35.6%	0.25%	35.1%	36.1%
Burglary	5.2	0.12	5.0	5.4	9.9 †	0.16	9.6	10.2
Larceny/motor vehicle theft	25.5	0.25	25.0	26.0	21.1 †	0.22	20.7	21.5
Fraud/forgery	12.1	0.19	11.7	12.5	8.5 †	0.15	8.2	8.8
Other property	12.4	0.18	12.0	12.8	19.2 †	0.20	18.8	19.6
<b>Drug</b>	29.1%	0.26%	28.6%	29.6%	33.0% †	0.25%	32.5%	33.5%
Possession	8.2	0.16	7.9	8.5	11.7 †	0.17	11.4	12.0
Trafficking	19.8	0.23	19.3	20.3	22.2 †	0.23	21.7	22.7
Other drug	17.0	0.20	16.6	17.4	16.8	0.18	16.4	17.2
<b>Public order</b>	44.9%	0.27%	44.4%	45.4%	55.2% †	0.25%	54.7%	55.7%
Weapons	2.7	0.09	2.5	2.9	10.3 †	0.17	10.0	10.6
DUI/DWI	6.3	0.14	6.0	6.6	9.0 †	0.15	8.7	9.3
Other public order	42.2	0.27	41.7	42.7	49.6 †	0.25	49.1	50.1

Note: Includes all arrests during the 5-year follow-up period, not only arrests that resulted in a conviction or return to prison. Details may not sum to totals because a person may be arrested more than once for different types of offenses and each arrest may involve more than one offense.

\*Comparison group.

†Difference with comparison group is significant at the 95% confidence level.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Recidivism of State Prisoners Released in 2012 data collection, 2012–2017.



The Bureau of Justice Statistics of the U.S. Department of Justice is the principal federal agency responsible for measuring crime, criminal victimization, criminal offenders, victims of crime, correlates of crime, and the operation of criminal and civil justice systems at the federal, state, tribal, and local levels. BJS collects, analyzes, and disseminates reliable statistics on crime and justice systems in the United States, supports improvements to state and local criminal justice information systems, and participates with national and international organizations to develop and recommend national standards for justice statistics. Alexis R. Piquero, PhD, is the director.

This report was written by Matthew R. Durose and Leonardo Antenangeli, PhD. Erica Grasmick verified the report.

Maureen Stuart edited and produced the report.

April 2023, NCJ 306141



NCJ 306141

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