

## Recidivism

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Recidivism is one of the most fundamental concepts in criminal justice. It refers to a person's relapse into criminal behavior, often after the person receives sanctions or undergoes intervention for a previous crime. Recidivism is measured by criminal acts that resulted in rearrest, reconviction or return to prison with or without a new sentence during a three-year period following the prisoner's release.

### National Statistics on Recidivism

Bureau of Justice Statistics studies have found high rates of recidivism among released prisoners. One study tracked 404,638 prisoners in 30 states after their release from prison in 2005.<sup>[1]</sup> The researchers found that:

- Within three years of release, about two-thirds (67.8 percent) of released prisoners were rearrested.
- Within five years of release, about three-quarters (76.6 percent) of released prisoners were rearrested.
- Of those prisoners who were rearrested, more than half (56.7 percent) were arrested by the end of the first year.
- Property offenders were the most likely to be rearrested, with 82.1 percent of released property offenders arrested for a new crime compared with 76.9 percent of drug offenders, 73.6 percent of public order offenders and 71.3 percent of violent offenders.

### Desistance From Crime

In an effort to build on what is currently known about desistance from crime, NIJ issued a directed solicitation in 2012. RTI International, in partnership with Pennsylvania State University's Justice Center for Research, was awarded funds to conduct research that builds on earlier work that examined the main effects of re-entry programming on recidivism.

The research team theorizes that although offender services and programs may have a direct effect on desistance, individuals must decide independently to transform themselves into ex-offenders. Programs and services may facilitate transformation, just as individual transformation — or the lack thereof — may moderate the effects of re-entry assistance.

To examine the cognitive transformation theory of desistance, the RTI-Penn State study involves a long-term follow-up of more than 700 individuals who were originally interviewed between 2004 and 2005 as participants in the Multisite Evaluation of the Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative (SVORI).

The participants include 582 men, 79 of whom were juveniles at the time of the original interviews, and 168 women. These individuals have extensive criminal histories, and more than 80 percent of the men and 75 percent of the women experienced at least one arrest in the four-and-a-half-year period following their release from prison between 2004 and 2005. Researchers will conduct interviews with participants focusing on cognitive transformation. These interviews will take place about a decade after the participants were first interviewed as part of SVORI and an average of 20 to 25 years after they were first arrested. In addition to conducting interviews for their study, the RTI-Penn State researchers are using existing administrative and interview data from SVORI, as well as current official arrest and reincarceration data.

[Learn more about the award.](#)

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**Next Section:** Why Recidivism is a Core Criminal Justice Concern.

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**Notes**

[note 1] Durose, Matthew R., Alexia D. Cooper, and Howard N. Snyder, [\*Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 30 States in 2005: Patterns from 2005 to 2010 \(pdf, 31 pages\)\*](#), Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report, April 2014, NCJ 244205.

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