

Prisoner Reentry in Michigan

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with Sinead Keegan

research for safer communities



URBAN INSTITUTE
Justice Policy Center

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Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank several individuals from the Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC) who made valuable contributions to this report. First, we are grateful for the support, guidance and access provided by Deputy Director Dennis Schrantz. We would also like to thank Stephen DeBor, R. Douglas Kosinski, Jeffrey Anderson, and Kenneth Dimoff of the MDOC's Office of Research and Planning who provided the data that serve as the backbone of the analysis in this report and who reviewed the findings and presentation of the results. Special thanks go to Ken Dimoff for all of the care and time he took to prepare and explain the MDOC data and to discuss the results of the analysis. We are also grateful to staff from the Urban Institute's Justice Policy Center who contributed substantially to this report, including Barbara Parthasarathy, who prepared the maps included in this report; Meagan Funches who formatted the text and graphics and shepherded the production process; and Nancy La Vigne who provided critical feedback and guidance along the way. Finally, we thank our funders and project partners, Helena Huang at the JEHT Foundation and Thomas MacLellan at the National Governors Association. Without their support, this report would not have been possible.

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Executive Summary

This report describes the process of prisoner reentry in Michigan by examining the trends in incarceration in the state, the characteristics of the state's released prisoners, the geographic distribution of prisoners returning to communities in Michigan, and the social and economic climates of the communities that are home to the highest numbers of returning prisoners. The report consolidates existing data on incarceration and release trends and presents a new analysis of data on Michigan prisoners released in 2003. The data used in this report were derived from several sources, including the Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC), the Bureau of Justice Statistics, and the U.S. Census Bureau. Highlights from the report are presented below.

Incarceration Trends. Michigan's incarceration trends over the past two decades are similar to those observed at the national level. Between 1980 and 2003, the Michigan prison population more than tripled, increasing from 15,148 to 49,357. Notably, in 2003, the prison population declined for the first time in two decades.

Since 1990, admissions to MDOC have fluctuated moderately around 12,000 per year, with the largest increase occurring from 2001 to 2002 and the largest decrease occurring from 2002 to 2003. Over the same time frame, MDOC's releases increased 41 percent from 9,752 prisoners released in 1990 to 13,707 released in 2003. Releases have shown steady increases since 2000, rising by 26 percent from 2000 to 2003.¹ Notably, a majority (61 percent) of individuals incarcerated in 2001 were on probation or parole at the time of their admission.

Characteristics of Prisoners Released in 2003. Of the prisoners released from MDOC in 2003, most were male (93 percent). The population was fairly evenly divided in terms of race with 53 percent black and 45 percent white. The median age at release was 35.7 years. Over half (58 percent) of all releases had one or more dependents. Nearly two-thirds (63 percent) had never been incarcerated in the Michigan prison system.

Approximately one-quarter (26 percent) had been serving time for violent offenses, 17 percent for drug offenses, 33 percent for nonviolent (and nondrug) offenses, and the remaining 24 percent had been incarcerated for a parole technical violation. Excluding parole technical violators (who served an average of 1.8 years), the average time served was 3.7 years.

Release and Supervision Policies and Practices. In 2003, 83 percent of all released prisoners exited prison at the discretion of the parole board to a period of supervision. The number of individuals under supervision has increased in recent years. At the end of 2003, there were 17,449 individuals on parole. In 2003, 3,806 parolees were returned to prison for violations of their parole.

Geographic Distribution of Released Prisoners. Approximately one-third (34 percent) of prisoners released to parole in 2003 returned to Wayne County—a county that already faces greater economic and social disadvantage than many other counties throughout the state. For example, the percentage of families living below the federal poverty level in Wayne County is 72 percent higher than the statewide average, and the Part I crime rate is 57 percent higher in Wayne

¹ In this report, "admissions" and "releases" are not the same definitions that MDOC uses; i.e., MDOC does not consider parole technical violators to be "admissions," and therefore, the admissions numbers presented in this report are higher than what MDOC reports.

County. The majority (80 percent) of prisoners released to parole in Wayne County returned to Detroit, where the unemployment rate in 2000 was more double what it was in the rest of the state, and where over one-fifth of the families live in poverty. Among the prisoners released to parole in Wayne County, 41 percent returned to eight zip codes—all of which are in Detroit. Most of those eight zip codes display high levels of economic and social disadvantage.

Introduction

This report examines the prisoner reentry phenomenon in Michigan. Prisoner reentry—the process of leaving prison and returning to society—has become a pressing issue both in Michigan and nationally, and with good reason. Rising incarceration rates over the past quarter century have resulted in more and more individuals being released from prison each year. Nationwide, an estimated 630,000 prisoners were released from state and federal prisons in 2001, a fourfold increase over the past two decades.² Thus, released prisoners, their families, and the communities to which they return must cope with the challenges of reentry on a much greater scale than ever before.

And the challenges of reentry are many. More prisoners nationwide are returning home having spent longer terms behind bars, exacerbating the already significant challenges of finding employment and reconnecting with family.³ Prisoners today are typically less prepared for reintegration, less connected to community-based social structures, and more likely to have health or substance abuse problems than in the past. In addition to these personal circumstances, limited availability of jobs, housing, and social services in a community may affect the returning prisoner's ability to successfully reintegrate.⁴

These challenges affect more than returning prisoners and their families; they can also have serious implications for the communities to which prisoners return. Two-thirds of the prisoners released in 1996 returned to major metropolitan areas across the country—up from 50 percent in 1984.⁵ Within central cities, released prisoners are often concentrated in a few neighborhoods.⁶ These high concentrations of returning prisoners may generate great costs to those communities, including costs associated with crime and public safety, greater public health risks, and high rates of unemployment and homelessness. Thus, developing a thorough understanding of the characteristics of returning prisoners and the challenges they face is an important first step in shaping public policy toward improving the safety and welfare of all citizens.

In many ways, the dimensions and challenges of prisoner reentry observed on the national level are mirrored in Michigan. Incarceration increased dramatically in Michigan in recent decades. Between 1980 and 2003, the Michigan prison population more than tripled, increasing from 15,148 to 49,357. Admissions to Michigan prisons fluctuated moderately around 12,000 for much of the 1990s before increasing to over 14,000 in 2002 and then decreasing to 12,473 in 2003.

Michigan has experienced notable growth in the number of people being released from prison as well. In 1990, 9,752 individuals were released from the state's prisons compared with 13,707 in 2003, an increase of 40 percent. Virtually all of those released to parole from Michigan prisons in 2003 returned to communities in Michigan. Over one-third (34 percent) of those released to parole returned to a single county in the state, Wayne County. The flow of prisoners was further concentrated in a small number of communities within Detroit, the main city in Wayne County.

² Paige M. Harrison and Jennifer C. Karberg. 2003. "Prison and Jail Prisoners at Midyear 2002." Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Statistics.

³ James P. Lynch and William J. Sabol. 2001. "Prisoner Reentry in Perspective." *Crime Policy Report*, vol. 3. Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute Press.

⁴ For an overview of prisoner reentry, see Jeremy Travis, Amy L. Solomon, and Michelle Waul. 2001. *From Prison to Home: The Dimensions and Consequences of Prisoner Reentry*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.

⁵ Lynch and Sabol. 2001. "Prisoner Reentry in Perspective."

⁶ *Ibid.*

Government leaders, corrections officials, local organizations, and service providers are increasingly aware of the reentry challenges experienced by states and communities across the country, and they have begun to use both research and programmatic knowledge to address these challenges. Notably, the National Governors Association (NGA) launched the Prisoner Reentry State Policy Academy in Summer 2003. The goal of the Academy is to help governors and other state policymakers develop and implement effective prisoner reentry strategies that reduce costly recidivism rates. Seven states—Georgia, Idaho, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Jersey, Rhode Island, and Virginia—were selected to participate in this intensive eighteen-month policy academy. Activities include an in-state policy workshop, two policy academy meetings, and customized technical assistance. The purpose of this report is to present information on prisoner reentry in one document that can be used to inform state officials and policymakers as they develop strategies to address prisoner reentry in Michigan.

This report, produced in association with the NGA Reentry Policy Academy, describes prisoner reentry in Michigan by examining the state's incarceration, admissions, and release trends over time, describing the characteristics of prisoners released from Michigan prisons, examining the geographic distribution of those released prisoners across the state, and describing the social and economic climates of communities that are home to the highest concentrations of returning prisoners. This report does not attempt to evaluate a specific reentry program, nor does it empirically assess Michigan's reentry policies and practices. Rather, the report consolidates existing data on incarceration and release trends and presents a new analysis of data on Michigan prisoners released in 2003.

About the Data

The data used for this report were derived from several sources. Longitudinal data describing the incarceration trends in Michigan and the nation were derived from statistics compiled by the Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC), as well as from the federal government's Bureau of Justice Statistics. The chart of the total incarcerated population in Michigan and the United States shows data from these sources for the period from 1980 to 2003, while charts of admissions and releases generated from MDOC data are restricted to 1990 to 2003. It should be noted that the MDOC does not provide historical release counts in their annual reports in a way that we could disaggregate the specific types of releases required for this report. As a result, the release counts presented chapters 1, 3, and 5 were generated based on a calculation involving the admissions and stock population counts.

The data presented in chapter 2 on the population of inmates released from Michigan's prison system in calendar year 2003 come from several datafiles downloaded from the MDOC's Corrections Management Information System (CMIS). From those many datafiles, we generated a main datafile with only the first release from prison for each individual in 2003. As a result, the 2003 release counts from chapters 1, 3, and 5 are not directly comparable to those presented in chapters 2 and 4, as the counts in chapters 1, 3, and 5 can include multiple releases in 2003 for the same offender.

We obtained the postincarceration address data utilized in chapter 4 from a datafile downloaded from the MDOC's new OMNI database. The OMNI database includes postincarceration addresses only for those inmates who are released to supervision (though a portion of those released to supervision did not have release address information). We had no source for postincarceration address for inmates who were not released to supervision. Given that the majority (83 percent) of the prisoners released from MDOC in 2003 were released to parole, and that virtually all of that population returned to communities in Michigan, the geographic analysis in chapter 4 represents a large portion of the release cohort. The release county for 76 percent of the parolees returning to Michigan was determined by the county of residence (based on the postrelease city or zip code from the MDOC's OMNI database), while the release county for the remaining 24 percent was determined by the county of the parole office to which the parolee was assigned after release. For the analysis of prisoners returning to Wayne County, of the 3,703 prisoners who returned to Wayne County, 31 percent were missing a zip code and could not be included in that analysis. A comparative analysis of the population with a zip code in Wayne County and the entire population released to Wayne County indicated that, in terms of certain demographic and incarceration data, the population with zip codes was largely representative of the entire population released to Wayne County. Finally, we utilized data from the U.S. Census Bureau (Census 2000) for county- and zip code-level demographic information, as well as data from the Geospatial and Statistical Data Center at the University of Virginia for county-level crime information.

CHAPTER 1

Incarceration Trends in Michigan

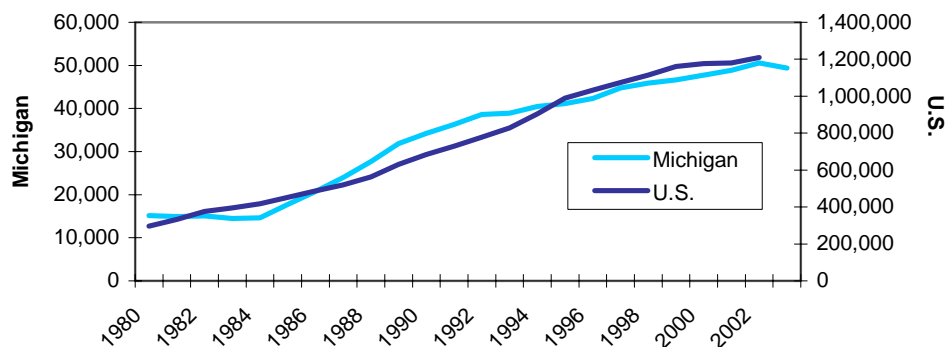
In order to understand prisoner reentry in Michigan, it is first necessary to examine recent incarceration trends in the state. This section provides an overview of recent incarceration trends and describes some basic changes in the state's prisoner population. This context will help frame the reentry issue and will provide background for the discussion of released prisoners that follows later in this report.

PRISON POPULATION OVER TIME

The Michigan prison population has grown tremendously since 1980, reflecting the rise in prison populations nationwide. Between year-end 1980 and 2003, the number of inmates incarcerated in the Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC) more than tripled from 15,148 to 49,357 (figure 1).⁷ Notably, the prison population ended 2002 at over 50,000 inmates and then declined for the first time in two decades to end 2003 at 49,357.

From 1980 to 2002, the Michigan prison population posted average annual increases of 6 percent—just below the average annual rate of growth for the nationwide state prison population of 7 percent.⁸ In terms of incarceration rates, Michigan had a slightly higher rate (501 per 100,000 residents) in 2002 compared with the United States as a whole (476 per 100,000).⁹

Figure 1. Michigan and U.S. State Prison Populations, 1980–2003



Sources: MDOC, 2001 Statistical Report, Table B1c; MDOC, Client Census Summary Report: Year End 2002–2003; BJS datafile: corpop05.wk1: Prisoners in Custody of State or Federal Correctional Authorities, National Prisoner Statistics data series (NPS-1), (August 2000); and Paige M. Harrison and Allen J. Beck. *Prisoners in 2002*. Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice (July 2003).

Note: Michigan prisoner population counts include prisoners in institutions, camps, the Special Alternative Incarceration program (SAI), and community residential programs; it excludes a small population held in county jails. The U.S. state prison population figure for 2003 is not yet available.

⁷ MDOC, 2001 Statistical Report, Table B1c; and MDOC, Client Census Summary Report: Year End 2002–2003. Michigan prisoner population includes prisoners in institutions, camps, the Special Alternative Incarceration program (SAI), and community residential programs; it excludes a small population held in county jails.

⁸ MDOC, 2001 Statistical Report, Table B1c; and MDOC, Client Census Summary Report: Year End 2002–2003; BJS datafile: corpop05.wk1: Prisoners in Custody of State or Federal Correctional Authorities, National Prisoner Statistics data series (NPS-1), August 2000; Paige M. Harrison and Allen J. Beck. *Prisoners in 2002*. Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice (July 2003).

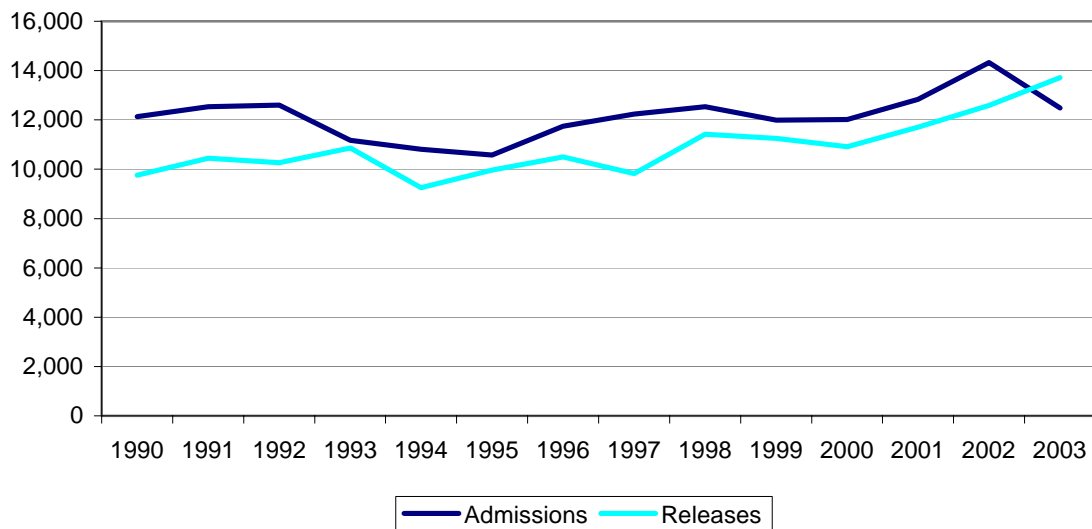
⁹ The incarceration rate represents sentenced prisoners under the jurisdiction of state or federal correctional authorities. Harrison and Beck. *Prisoners in 2002*.

ADMISSION AND RELEASE TRENDS

Since 1990, admissions to and releases from MDOC facilities have displayed several periods of increases and decreases (figure 2).¹⁰ For most of the period from 1990 to 2003, admissions fluctuated moderately around 12,000, and in 1990 and 2003, the admissions counts were 12,127 and 12,473, respectively. The average annual percent change in admissions from 1990 to 2003 was less than 1 percent. The largest percentage increase in admissions since 1990 occurred from 2001 to 2002, when admissions grew by 12 percent to over 14,000, and the largest decrease occurred from 2002 to 2003, when admissions fell by 13 percent.

Releases also displayed a series of increases and decreases, although release counts grew 41 percent from 9,752 in 1990 to 13,707 in 2003. The largest sustained growth occurred from 2000 to 2003, when releases increased by 26 percent.

Figure 2. Admissions to and Releases from MDOC facilities, 1990–2003



Source: MDOC, Intake Profiles 1995 to 2002; MDOC, "Prison Population and Capacity." Presentation to the Senate Judiciary Committee Hearing, February 10, 2004; MDOC, Miscellaneous Trend Charts—End of Year 2003; MDOC, 2001 Statistical Report, Table B1c; MDOC, Client Census Summary Report: Year End 2002–2003.

Note: The release counts presented above were generated based on a calculation involving the admissions and stock population counts for institutions, camps, the SAI program, and the community residential programs.

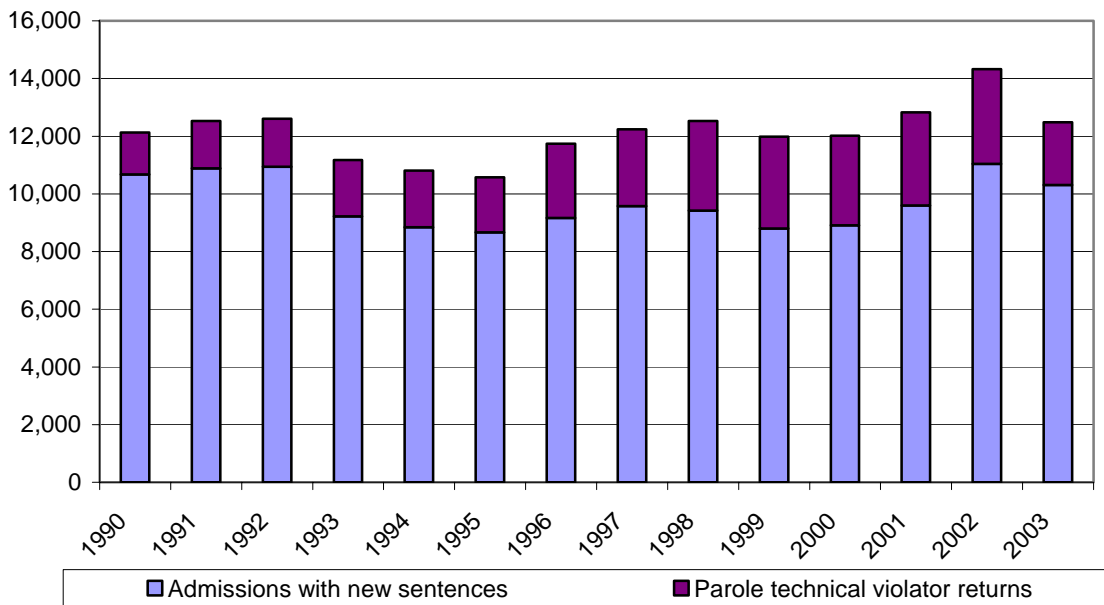
Significant Changes from 2002 to 2003

As noted above, admissions to MDOC posted a decline of 13 percent from 2002 to 2003. At the same time, releases grew by 9 percent. Due to these movements, releases exceeded admissions in 2003 and resulted in the first decline in MDOC's incarcerated population in two decades.

¹⁰ Admissions and releases presented in this report are not the same definitions that MDOC uses; that is, MDOC does not consider parole technical violators to be "admissions," and therefore, the admissions numbers presented here are higher than what MDOC reports. In addition, the MDOC does not provide historical release counts in their annual reports in a way that one can disaggregate releases to parole, discharges at the maximum sentence, and deaths/escapes from institutions, camps, the SAI program, and the community residential programs. As a result, we generated the release counts presented in chapters 1, 3, and 5 based on a calculation involving the admissions and stock population counts for the types of releases and facilities listed above.

The decline in admissions from 2002 to 2003 was driven by decreases in the numbers of both individuals admitted with new sentences and parole technical violators returned to prison (figure 3). The MDOC attributes the 6 percent decline in admissions with new sentences to the increased use of community corrections alternatives to prison encouraged under the MDOC’s *Five Year Plan to Control Prison Growth* that was initiated in FY 2003. The substantial decline in the number of parole technical violators from 3,289 in 2002 to 2,161 in 2003 (a drop of 34 percent) was attributed to “the Department’s efforts under the *Five Year Plan* to utilize community-based sanctions, control, and treatment options for more of these violators.”¹¹

Figure 3. Admissions to MDOC by General Admission Type, 1990–2003

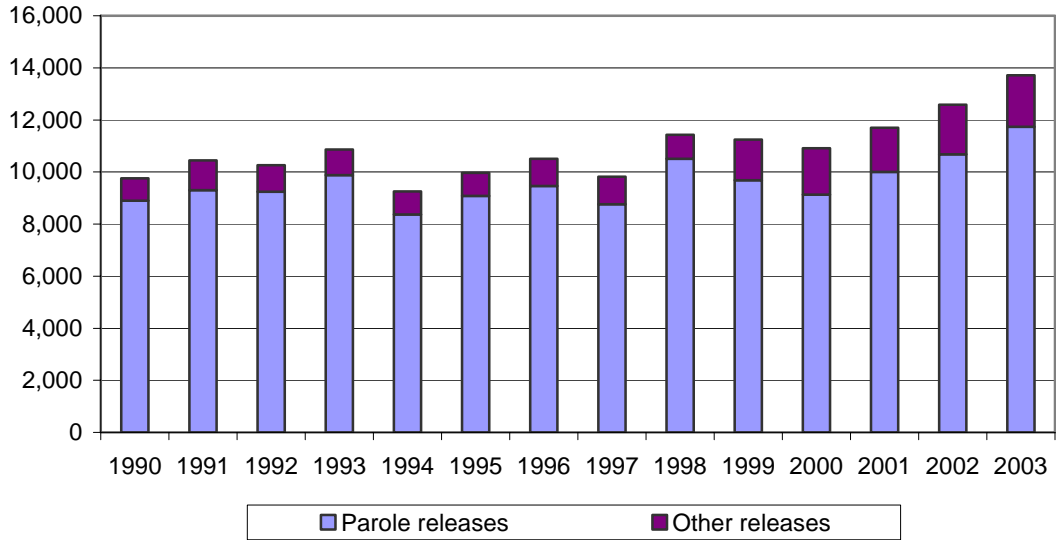


Source: MDOC, Intake Profiles, 1995 to 2002; MDOC, “Prison Population and Capacity.” Presentation to the Senate Judiciary Committee Hearing, February 10, 2004; MDOC, Miscellaneous Trend Charts—End of Year 2003.

¹¹ Patricia L. Caruso, Director of MDOC, Letter to the Senate and House Appropriations Subcommittees on Corrections (subject: Prison Population Projections), February 1, 2004.

In terms of releases, the growth in the number of releases to parole from 2002 to 2003 drove the overall increase in releases (figure 4). Parole releases increased by 10 percent from 10,682 in 2002 to 11,752 in 2003, continuing the trend of significant increases in releases to parole starting in 2000. Since 1990, releases to parole have comprised the vast majority (approximately 85 to 90 percent) of all releases, as indicated in figure 4.

Figure 4. Releases from MDOC by Release Type, 1990–2003



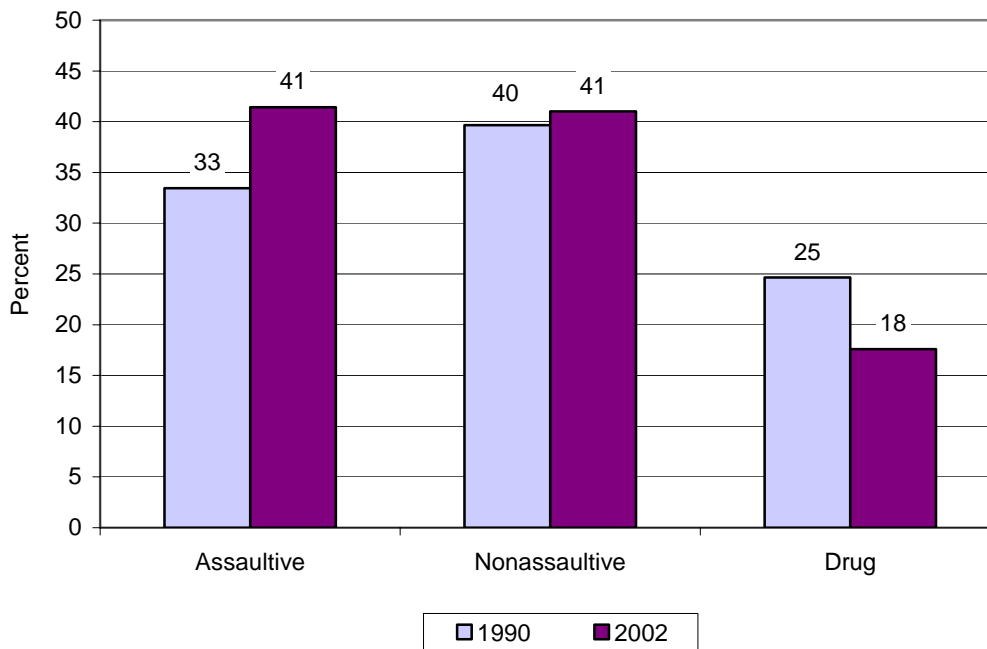
Source: MDOC, Intake Profiles, 1995 to 2002; MDOC, "Prison Population and Capacity." Presentation to the Senate Judiciary Committee Hearing, February 10, 2004; MDOC, Miscellaneous Trend Charts—End of Year 2003; MDOC, 2001 Statistical Report, Table B1c and D1; MDOC, Client Census Summary Report: Year End 2002–2003; MDOC, Corrections Data Fact Sheet for December, 2002 and 2003.

Note: Other releases include discharge at maximum sentence served, death, and escape.

Admissions by Offense and Admission Type

Figure 5 compares the composition of the population admitted to MDOC with new sentences in 1990 and 2002 by the most serious conviction offense. It illustrates higher proportions of admissions for assaultive offenses in 2002 compared with 1990 and lower proportions of drug offenses, with admissions for nonassaultive offenses being largely unchanged.¹² The results presented in figure 5 suggest that prison bed space is increasingly being allocated for prisoners convicted of assaultive offenses over drug offenses. An analysis of the composition of MDOC's end of year population over the same time illustrates the same finding.

Figure 5. Percentage of Admissions to MDOC with New Sentences by Offense Type, 1990 and 2002



Source: MDOC, Intake Profiles, 1995 to 2002.

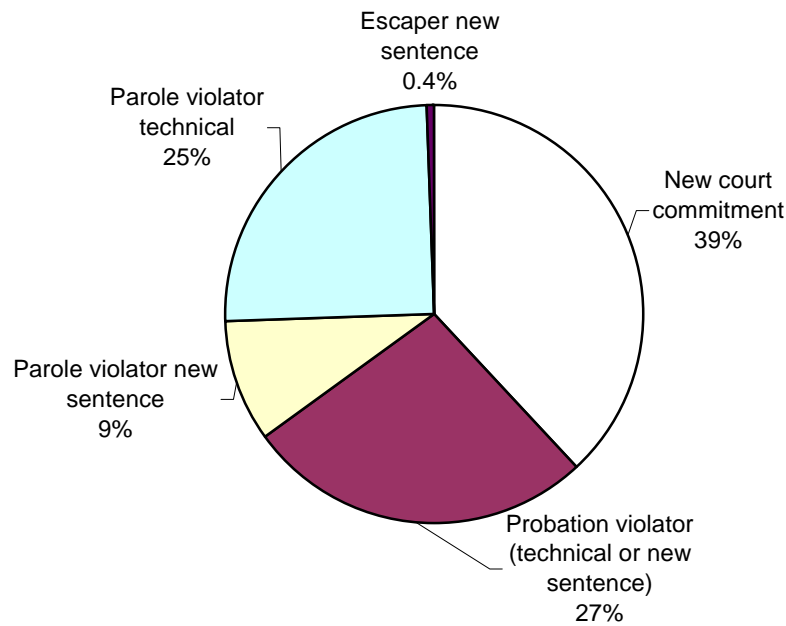
Note: The figure excludes the 2 percent of admissions with new sentences in 1990 that were missing an offense type.

¹² Assaultive offenses include homicide, robbery, criminal sexual conduct, assault, and arson.

In terms of admission type, the majority of admissions to MDOC in 2001 were of individuals who had been on some form of community supervision when they committed a new offense or a technical violation of supervision conditions. Of the nearly 13,000 admissions in 2001, 61 percent had been on community supervision, with 27 percent on probation and 34 percent on parole (figure 6).

While figure 6 divides the parolees returned to prison into those with technical violations and those with new sentences, two recent studies by the MDOC’s Office of Research and Planning found that a large proportion of the parole technical violators returned to prison actually had new criminal activity. In the most recent study (unpublished) of parolees returned as parole technical violators from November 2002 to March 2003, 83 percent involved new criminal activity, compared with 70 percent in a similar study issued in August 2002.¹³ When parolees commit new criminal offenses, prosecutors often decide not to prosecute the parolee for the new criminal activity, but rather allow him or her to be returned to prison for a technical violation and serve the time that remains on his or her prior conviction. Prosecutors retain the option of bringing the new charges at a later time. Nevertheless, the shaded portions of figure 6 make clear the prevalence of individuals entering the prison system who were on parole or probation prior to their incarceration in 2001.

Figure 6. Admissions to MDOC by Admission Type, 2001 (n = 12,846)



Source: MDOC 2001 Statistical Report; MDOC, Miscellaneous Trend Charts—End of Year 2003.

¹³ MDOC, Office of Research and Planning. “Parole Technical Violators: Reasons for Return to Prison.” May 2003 (unpublished).

Michigan Department of Corrections

The Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC) is responsible not only for incarcerating felons who have been sentenced to prison, but also for supervising probationers and parolees in communities around the state, as well as producing pre-sentence and other investigations.

The MDOC's prison system houses adults (as well as juveniles sentenced as adults) convicted of felonies with a statutory maximum of more than one year. The MDOC facilities consist of 42 institutions, 10 camps, a reception center, a mental health facility, a boot camp, and a leased youth prison.¹⁴ The MDOC's camps house minimum security prisoners and are often utilized at the end of a prisoner's sentence as a means of facilitating the transition back to society. The boot camp, or Special Alternative Incarceration (SAI) program, serves as an alternative to prison for individuals on probation, as well as a program for a relatively small population of prisoners. Note that only the prisoners (and not the probationers) who participated in the boot camp are included in the analyses in this report. The boot camp is a short-term program with military-style exercises as well as work assignments and other programming.

The MDOC's community residential programs (CRP) are another way in which minimum security prisoners can transition back to life in the community. Prisoners in CRPs serve approximately six months in a county corrections center or on electric monitoring and must have a job or attend classes during the program. Prisoners who participate in CRPs before release to parole are included in the analyses in this report.¹⁵

¹⁴ MDOC. "Prison Population Capacity." Presentation to the Senate Judiciary Committee Hearing, February 10, 2004.

¹⁵ Unless otherwise noted, the information contained in the sidebar came from the MDOC's Web site: <http://www.michigan.gov/corrections> (accessed March 3, 2004).

CHAPTER 2

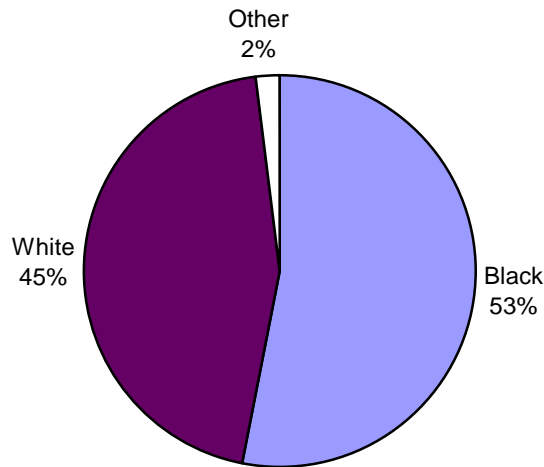
Characteristics of Michigan's Returning Prisoners

In order to better understand prisoner reentry in Michigan, it is important to examine the characteristics of the population being released from Michigan prisons. This section describes the 13,045 individuals released from the Michigan Department of Corrections in 2003, examining basic demographics, education levels, most serious incarceration offenses, time served, and prior incarceration histories.¹⁶

DEMOGRAPHICS

The vast majority of released prisoners were male (93 percent). In terms of race, slightly more than half of the release cohort was black (53 percent), slightly less than half was white (45 percent), and a small portion was another race (2 percent) (figure 7).¹⁷

Figure 7. Percentage of Prisoners Released in Michigan by Race, 2003 (n = 13,045)



Source: Urban Institute analysis of MDOC datafile of 2003 releases.

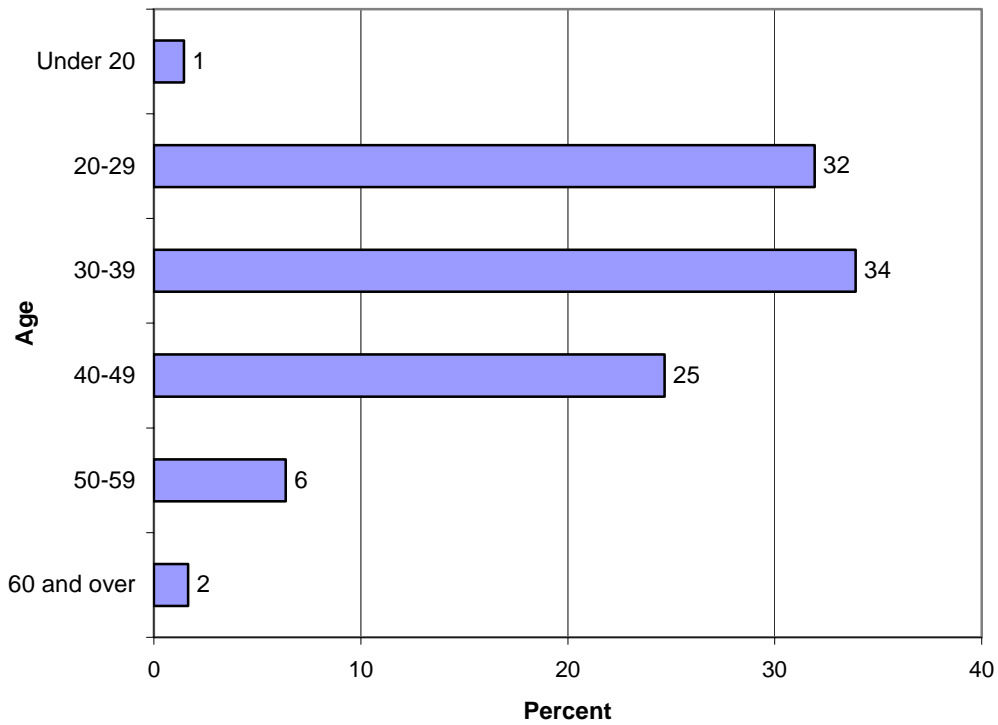
¹⁶ Unless otherwise noted, the results presented in this chapter were generated from a datafile provided by the MDOC. The analysis includes only the first release from MDOC for each inmate in calendar year 2003. Therefore the 13,045 individuals released in 2003 represents a slightly smaller number than the actual number of releases in 2003 due to the fact that some individuals were released from MDOC facilities more than once in 2003. While 99 percent of the individuals exited MDOC facilities only once in 2003, 1 percent had two or three releases in 2003. Note that the first release in 2003 may not be the first release for the commitment (e.g., the prisoner may have been initially released in 2002, returned as a parole violator, and was subsequently released in 2003).

The analysis includes prisoners released from MDOC institutions, camps, and community residential programs. While the analysis excludes offenders who are admitted to MDOC to serve a three-month term in the Special Alternative Incarceration (SAI), or boot camp, as a condition of probation, it does include the small population of prisoners who initially served time in an MDOC institution followed by time served in the SAI. Sample sizes for the analyses presented in this chapter are indicated on each chart. Differences in sample sizes are a function of missing data or data excluded for reasons explained in accompanying notes.

¹⁷ Note that ethnicity (such as Hispanic) is not part of the race definition.

Nearly two-thirds (66 percent) of the release cohort were between the ages of 20 and 39 at the time of release (figure 8) and the average age of the releasees was 35.7 years. The females released from Michigan’s prisons in 2003 were slightly older than the males; the average age at release for females was 37.2 years compared with 35.5 years for males.

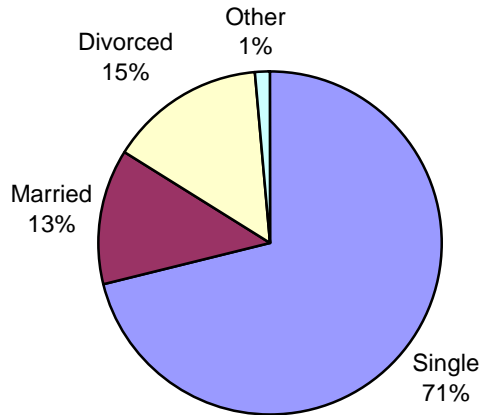
Figure 8. Percentage of Prisoners Released in Michigan by Age at Release, 2003 (n = 13,045)



Source: Urban Institute analysis of MDOC datafile of 2003 releases.

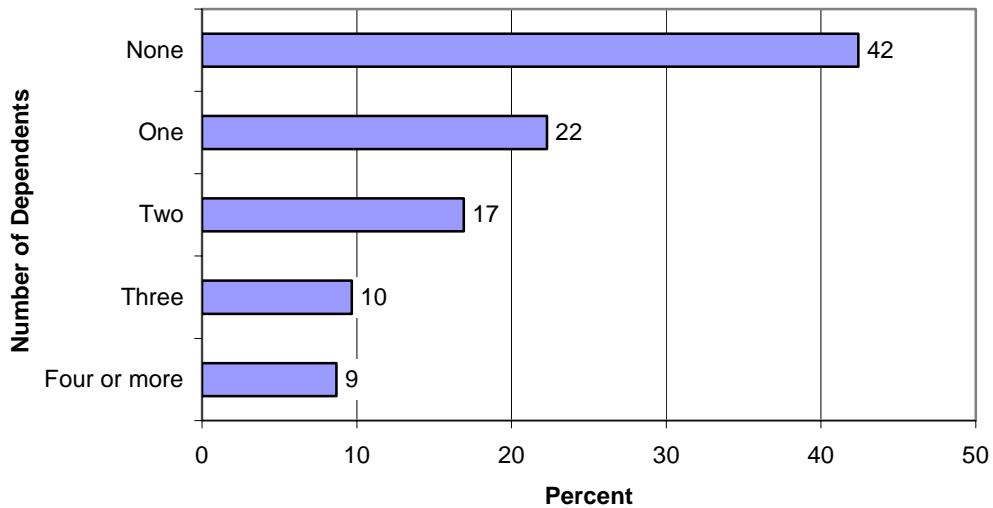
In terms of marital status at time of admission, almost three-quarters (71 percent) of the released prisoners were single, 13 percent were married, and 15 percent divorced (figure 9). Over half (58 percent) of the release cohort had one or more dependents, with 18 percent having three or more dependents (figure 10).¹⁸

Figure 9. Percentage of Prisoners Released in Michigan by Marital Status, 2003 (n = 13,045)



Source: Urban Institute analysis of MDOC datafile of 2003 releases.
 Note: Self-reported at intake.

Figure 10. Percentage of Prisoners Released in Michigan by Number of Dependents, 2003 (n = 13,036)

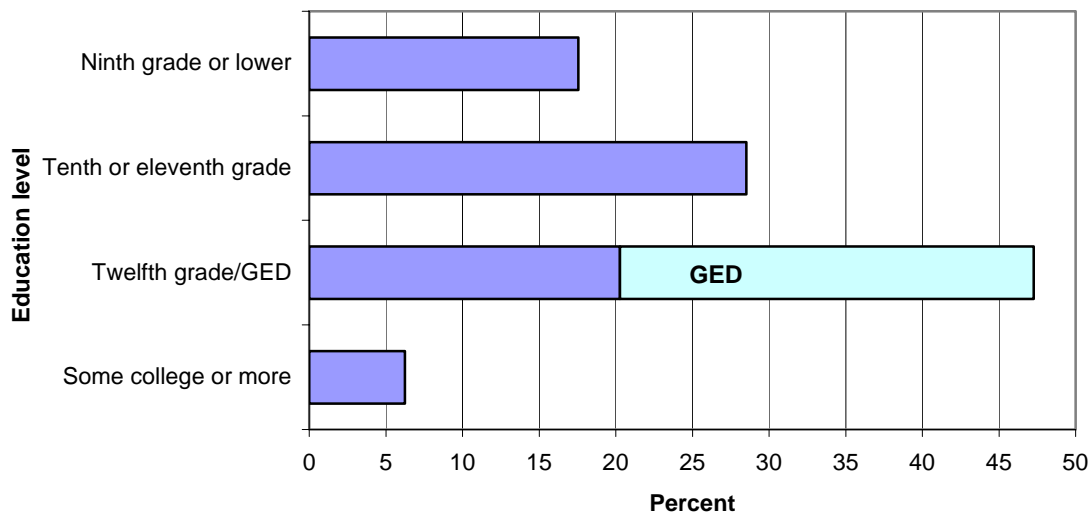


Source: Urban Institute analysis of MDOC datafile of 2003 releases.
 Note: Self-reported at intake.

¹⁸ Self-reported at intake. Note that the definition of dependents can include a variety of relationships such as children, spouses, parents, etc.

Just over half (54 percent) of the released prisoners reported having at least completed high school or obtained a GED at the time of admission, with 6 percent of that group having at least some college experience. At the other end of the spectrum, 18 percent of the released prisoners reported having gone no farther than ninth grade at the time of admission (figure 11).¹⁹

Figure 11. Percentage of Prisoners Released in Michigan by Highest Education Level Attained, 2003 (n = 12,919)



Source: Urban Institute analysis of MDOC datafile of 2003 releases.

Note: The darker portion of the "Twelfth Grade/GED" bar indicates the percentage of prisoners who reported the highest education level they attained at the time of admission to prison was "twelfth grade," while the lighter portion of the bar indicates those who reported their highest education level attained as "GED".

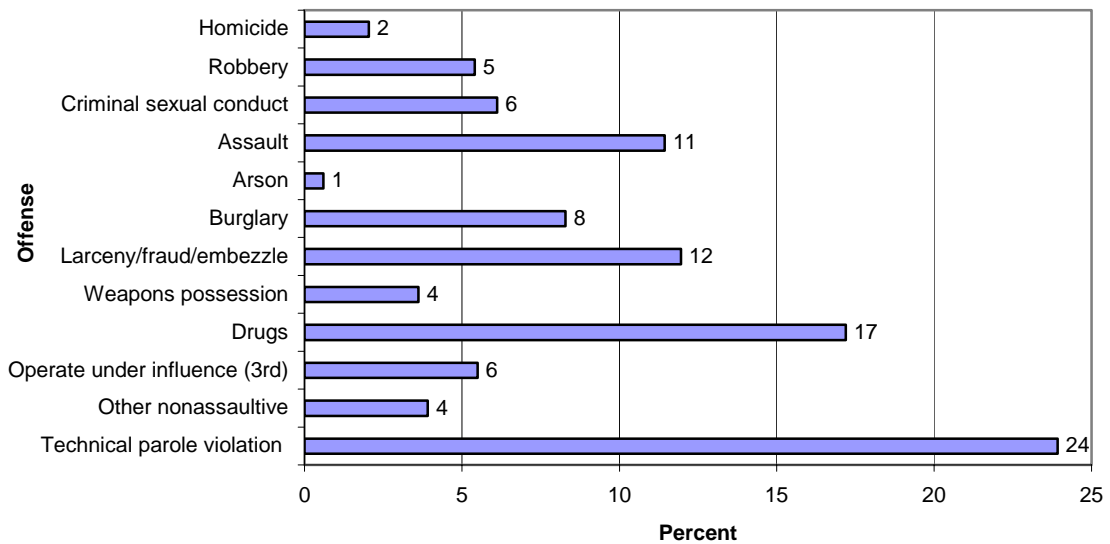
During the intake process, close to half (43 percent) of the released prisoners reported having a history of drug use, and approximately one-third (32 percent) reported having a history of alcohol use.

¹⁹ Michigan law requires prisoners to have completed high school or obtain a GED prior to being paroled except in certain circumstances such as insufficient time to complete or learning disabled.

INCARCERATION OFFENSE

Figure 12 presents the most serious offenses for which the prisoners released in 2003 were incarcerated. Notably, ex-prisoners under parole supervision who had been returned to prison for a technical violation comprised nearly one-quarter (24 percent) of the releases.²⁰ Nearly one-fifth (17 percent) of the prisoners released had been incarcerated for a drug crime.

Figure 12. Percentage of Prisoners Released in Michigan by Category of Most Serious Incarceration Offense, 2003 (n = 13,044)



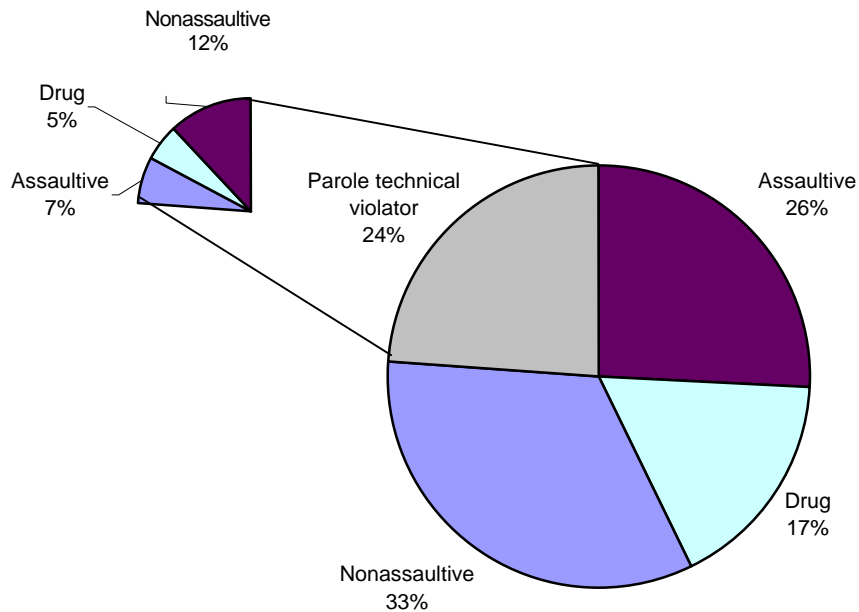
Source: Urban Institute analysis of MDOC datafile of 2003 releases.

²⁰ It is important to note that many parole technical violators actually have committed new crimes. Instead of being prosecuted for the new crime, the violator is returned to prison to serve the time that remains on his/her prior conviction.

Figure 13 collapses the assaultive and nonassaultive (and nondrug) crimes together to illustrate the broader categories of offenses for which prisoners were incarcerated. When the prisoners with new sentences are combined into broader offense categories, 26 percent of the prisoners released in 2003 had an assaultive offense as their most serious incarceration offense, 17 percent had a drug offense, and 33 percent had a nonassaultive (and nondrug) offense.

The figure also indicates the offenses for which the parole technical violators were originally incarcerated (“underlying offenses”). Half (12 of the 24 percent) of the parole technical violators were originally incarcerated for a nonassaultive offense, with assaultive and drug offenses roughly splitting the other half.

Figure 13. Percentage of Prisoners Released in Michigan by General Category of Most Serious Incarceration Offense, 2003 (n = 13,044)



Source: Urban Institute analysis of MDOC datafile of 2003 releases.

TIME SERVED

Over the past few years, Michigan has made significant changes to its sentencing laws by adopting both legislative sentencing guidelines and “truth in sentencing.” The switch from judicial to legislative sentencing guidelines applies to offenses committed on or after January 1, 1999, and sets forth ranges within which judges must, in most cases, set the offender’s minimum sentence absent a departure on the record. Michigan’s truth-in-sentencing law applies to selected assaultive crimes committed on or after December 15, 1998, and to all felonies committed on or after December 15, 2000. Michigan’s truth-in-sentencing law requires felons incarcerated in the MDOC to serve their entire minimum sentence in a secure facility and prohibits felons from earning disciplinary credits. Once prisoners have served their minimum terms, the Parole Board may release them to parole or decide to keep them in MDOC custody (up to their maximum sentences which are determined by statute based on the conviction offense).

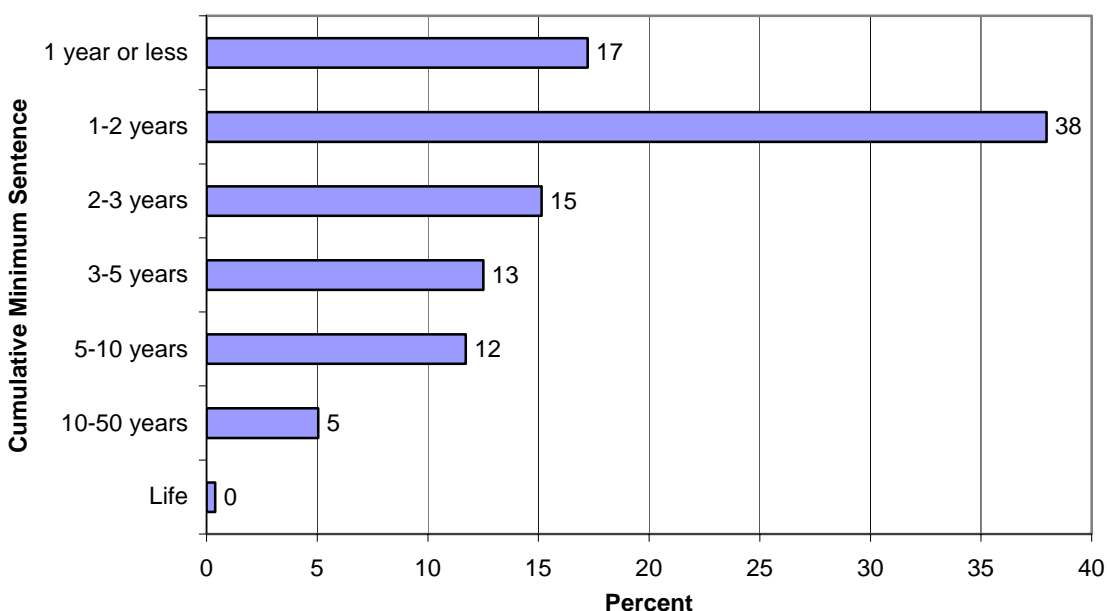
The cohort released from MDOC facilities in 2003 includes prisoners who were sentenced under a variety of sentencing laws. As a result, these prisoners differ in the ways in which their minimum and maximum sentences were imposed and whether (and to what extent) they received disciplinary credits or good time.²¹ Over time, more and more prisoners released from Michigan will have been subject to both the new sentencing guidelines and truth in sentencing. Given the centrality of offenders’ minimum sentences in determining their time served in MDOC custody, the analysis that follows focuses on minimum sentences.

²¹ Prisoners sentenced for crimes committed after April 1, 1987, could no longer earn good time, but could earn disciplinary credits up to a maximum of 84 days per year. Under the truth-in-sentencing law, however, prisoners could no longer earn disciplinary credits. MDOC website: Definitions/Glossary. <http://www.michigan.gov/corrections/0,1607,7-119--17490--,00.html> (accessed 2/25/2004).

Sentence Length

Over half (55 percent) of the release cohort in 2003 had a cumulative minimum sentence of two years or less.²² At the other end of the spectrum, 17 percent of the prisoners released in 2003 had a cumulative minimum sentence of more than five years (figure 14). Parole technical violators released in 2003 are excluded from the analysis of sentence length, since they did not receive a new sentence when they were reincarcerated.

Figure 14. Percentage of Prisoners Released in Michigan by Cumulative Minimum Sentence, 2003 (n = 9,925)



Source: Urban Institute analysis of MDOC datafile of 2003 releases.

Note: Figure excludes the population of released prisoners who had been reincarcerated for a parole technical violation (n = 3,120). For the categories on the left axis that are expressed as a range, they include the upper end of the range, but not the lower end of the range (e.g., the category “2–3 years” includes data from just over 2.00 years to exactly 3.00 years).

²² Sentence length as reported here is the cumulative minimum term of the conviction offense(s) that led to the prisoner’s most recent incarceration event and takes into account whether the sentences were to be served concurrently or consecutively. The cumulative minimum sentence also includes any additional term imposed for having a firearm while committing the offense (commonly referred to as “gun law time”). Finally, the cumulative minimum term also includes the time from any additional sentences imposed on or after the sentence date for the prisoner’s most recent incarceration and before his or her first release date in 2003. Less than 9 percent of the nonparole technical violators in the 2003 release cohort had an additional sentence imposed, and the impact of including the time from the additional sentences has little impact on the overall results of the analysis.

Excluding the parole technical violators and the prisoners with a minimum sentence of life²³, the release cohort in 2003 had an average cumulative minimum sentence of 3.4 years. Notably, the average minimum sentence varies by the prisoners' admission types (table 1).

Table 1. Average Cumulative Minimum Sentence by Admission Type for Prisoners Released in 2003

Admission type	Average cumulative minimum sentence (in years)	Count of released prisoners
New commitment	4.3	4,594
Escaper with a new sentence	3.0	72
Parole violator with a new sentence	2.9	1,496
New Commitment - Probation Violator	2.4	3,696
All of the above	3.4	9,858

Source: Urban Institute analysis of MDOC datafile of 2003 releases.

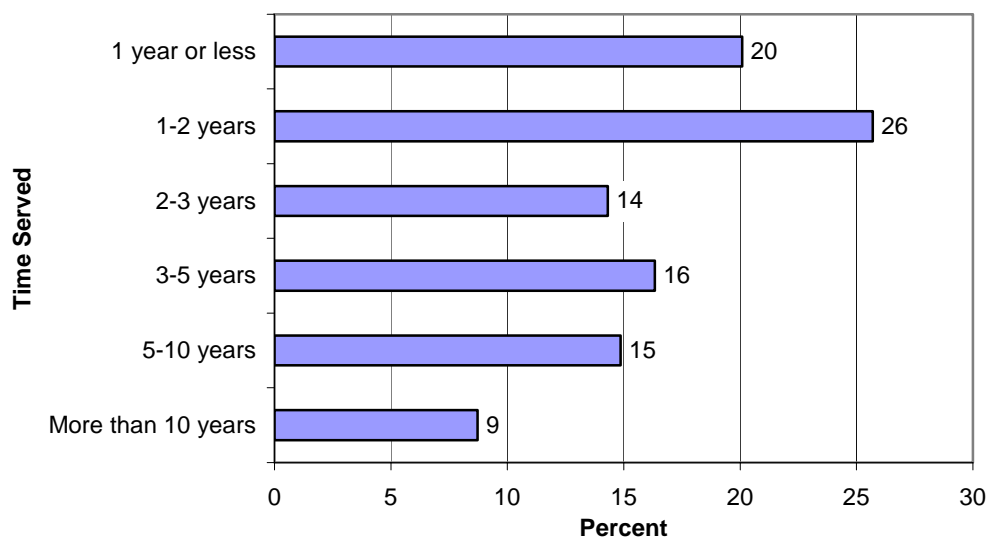
Note: Table excludes the population of released prisoners who had been reincarcerated for a parole technical violation, as well as those with a minimum sentence of life.

²³ Note that of the 39 prisoners with a minimum sentence of life who exited MDOC in 2003, 32 died in custody and 7 were paroled.

Time Served

Figure 15 presents the time served in MDOC custody for the 2003 release cohort for their most recent incarceration event, excluding parole technical violators and prisoners who exited MDOC by death or escape. One-fifth (20 percent) of the release cohort served one year or less, and nearly half (46 percent) served two years or less. Nearly one-quarter (24 percent) served more than five years. The average time served for the 2003 release cohort, again excluding parole technical violators and prisoners who exited MDOC by death or escape, was 3.7 years. Similar to the sentence length analysis, the time served analysis indicates that the average time served varies distinctly by the prisoners' admission and release types (table 2).

Figure 15. Percentage of Prisoners Released in Michigan by Time Served in MDOC Custody, 2003 (n = 9,491)



Source: Urban Institute analysis of MDOC datafile of 2003 releases.

Notes: Figure excludes parole technical violators and prisoners who exited MDOC by death or escape. Categories on the left axis that are expressed as a range include the upper end of the range but not the lower end of the range (e.g., the category "2-3 years" includes data from just over 2.00 years to exactly 3.00 years).

Table 2. Average Time Served by Admission/Release Type for Prisoners Released in 2003

Admission/release type	Average time served (in years)	Count of released prisoners
SAI (boot camp) prisoners (all released to parole)	0.7	533
New commitments paroled	3.5	6,488
Parole violators with a new sentence paroled	3.8	1,408
New commitments discharged at their maximum sentence	6.1	986
Parole violators with a new sentence discharged at their maximum sentence	10.0	51
All of the above	3.7	9,466
Parole technical violators	1.8	3,120
Other releases (deaths/escapes)	4.7	433

Source: Urban Institute analysis of MDOC datafile of 2003 releases.

Percent of Minimum Sentence Served

As noted above, the prisoners released from MDOC in 2003 were sentenced under a variety of sentencing policies that affect the portion of the minimum sentences they served in custody. While some released prisoners were sentenced under “truth in sentencing” and therefore were required to serve fully their minimum sentences in a secure facility, others were eligible to receive disciplinary credits or good time that allowed them to serve less than their minimum sentences. In addition, a small group of prisoners applied for and was permitted to serve a shortened term in the Special Alternative Incarceration (SAI), or boot camp, before being released to parole supervision. As table 3 indicates, this group of boot camp prisoners had a far lower percentage of cumulative minimum sentence served than the other groups of prisoners. On the other hand, prisoners who were discharged at their maximum sentences served far in excess of their cumulative minimum sentences. Table 3 presents the wide range of the average percentage of cumulative minimum sentence served across groups of prisoners by admission and release types. The overall average percentage of cumulative minimum sentence served (excluding parole technical violators, prisoners with a minimum sentence of life, and prisoners who exited MDOC by death or escape²⁴) was 136 percent.

Table 3. Average Percentage of Cumulative Minimum Sentence Served by Admission/Release Type for Prisoners Released in 2003

Admission/release type	Average percentage of cumulative minimum sentence served	Count of released prisoners
SAI (boot camp) prisoners (all released to parole)	57.7	528
New commitments paroled	123.2	6,282
Parole violators with a new sentence paroled	163.7	1,317
New commitments discharged at their maximum sentence	215.4	966
Parole violators with a new sentence discharged at their maximum sentence	336.8	47
All of the above	136.1	9,140

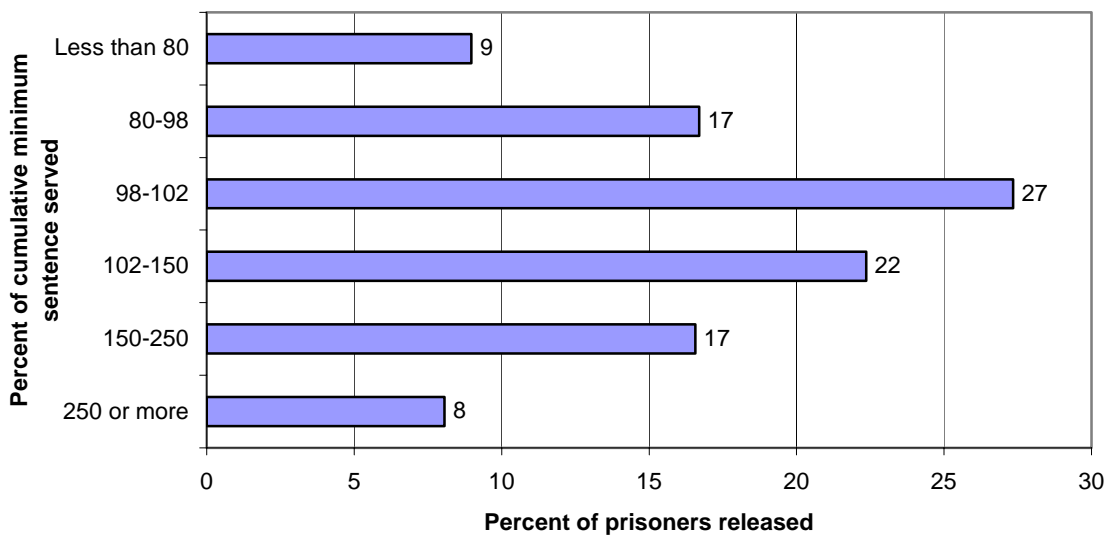
Source: Urban Institute analysis of MDOC datafile of 2003 releases.

Notes: Table excludes parole technical violators, prisoners with a minimum sentence of life, and prisoners who exited MDOC by death or escape. Analysis includes days spent in jail that are credited toward a prisoner's sentence. Analysis capitates percentage of sentence served at 1,000 percent, excluding fewer than 50 cases.

²⁴ Parole technical violators are excluded from the percentage of sentence served analysis because they are returned to prison without receiving a new sentence. The very small group of prisoners with a minimum sentence of life who were paroled is excluded because parole from a life sentence is a rarity in Michigan. Finally, prisoners who exited MDOC by death or escape are excluded because they serve an unpredictable and artificially low portion of their sentences.

Figure 16 presents the percentage of cumulative minimum sentence served for the population released in 2003, excluding parole technical violators, prisoners with a minimum sentence of life, and prisoners who exited MDOC by death or escape. Over one quarter (27 percent) of the release cohort exited MDOC right around their cumulative minimum sentence (98 to 102 percent of minimum sentence).²⁵ Approximately one-quarter (26 percent) of the release population served less than 98 percent of their cumulative minimum sentence, and the remaining 47 percent served 102 percent or more of their cumulative minimum sentence. As time goes on and as more prisoners are sentenced under “truth in sentencing,” the picture of the percentage of sentence served will likely show that fewer and fewer prisoners have served less than their cumulative minimum sentence.

Figure 16. Percentage of Prisoners Released in Michigan by Percentage of Cumulative Minimum Sentence Served, 2003 (n = 9,205)



Source: Urban Institute analysis of MDOC datafile of 2003 releases.

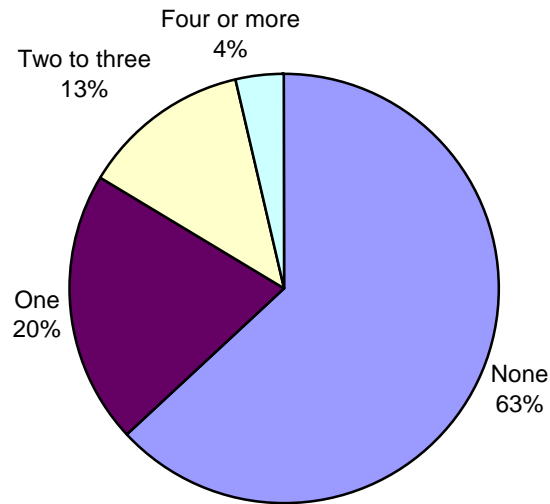
Notes: Figure excludes parole technical violators, prisoners with a minimum sentence of life, and prisoners who exited MDOC by death or escape. Analysis includes days spent in jail that are credited toward a prisoner's sentence. Analysis capitates percentage of sentence served at 1,000 percent, excluding fewer than 50 cases. The categories on the left axis that are expressed as a range include the lower end of the range but not the upper end of the range (e.g., the category “98–102%” includes data from exactly 98.00 percent to just under 102.00 percent).

²⁵ The category of “98 to 102 percent of minimum sentence” includes data from exactly 98.00 percent to just under 102.00 percent.

PRIOR INCARCERATION

Nearly two-thirds (63 percent) of the prisoners released from Michigan prisons in 2003 had not had a prior incarceration in the Michigan prison system.²⁶ One-fifth (20 percent) had been incarcerated in MDOC once before, and another 17 percent had two or more prior incarcerations in MDOC (figure 17).

Figure 17. Percentage of Prisoners Released in Michigan by Number of Prior Incarcerations in MDOC, 2003 (n = 13,045)



Source: Urban Institute analysis of MDOC datafile of 2003 releases.

²⁶ For the parole technical violators returned to prison, their original prison term is not counted as a prior term of incarceration.

CHAPTER 3

Release and Supervision Policies and Practices

As Michigan's prison population has grown over the past two decades, so has the number of prison releases (chapter 1.) In 2003, 13,707 people were released from the custody of the Michigan Department of Corrections, 41 percent more than the number released in 1990 (9,752).

HOW PRISONERS ARE RELEASED

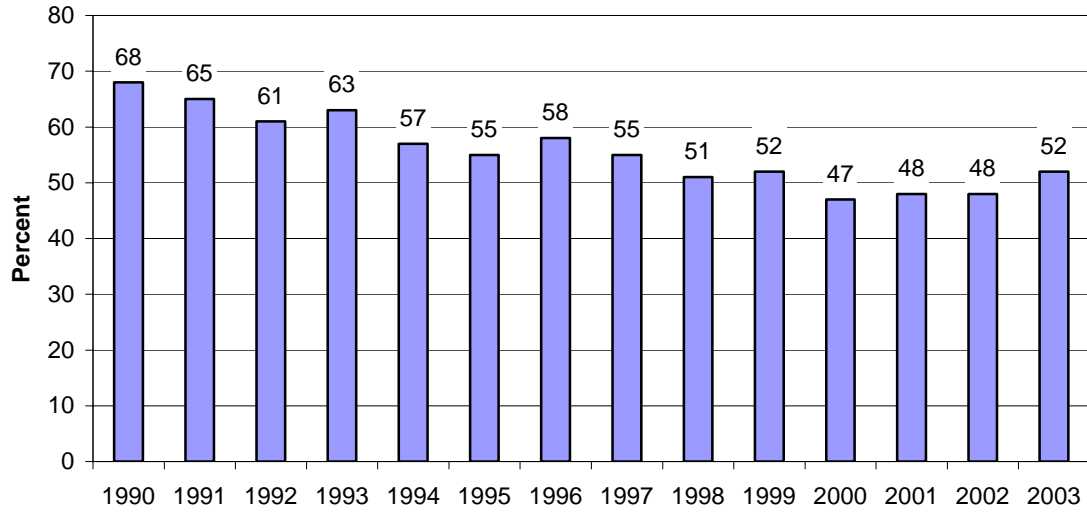
In most states, including Michigan, prisoners can be released through either a discretionary or a nondiscretionary (mandatory) process. With discretionary release, the prisoner's release is decided by a parole board, and is usually followed by a period of supervision. The date of mandatory release is determined by a judge at the time of sentencing rather than by a panel or board.

Almost all prisoners in Michigan become eligible for parole when they have served a minimum period of time, as established by the judge at the time of sentencing. Inmates appear before a three-person panel of the Parole Board, and the panel reviews each individual case regarding the risk to public safety of releasing an individual into the community.²⁷ If parole is not granted at the time of a hearing, the panel sets a date at which the individual's case can again be reviewed.

While the number of paroles granted by the Parole Board has increased in recent decades, the share of cases that are paroled has decreased. In 2003, the Parole Board granted parole to 52 percent of cases (figure 18). In contrast, the Parole Board's "approval rate" in 1990 had been 68 percent.

²⁷ Individuals sentenced to life in prison with possibility of parole must receive a majority vote of the entire ten-person Parole Board to earn release.

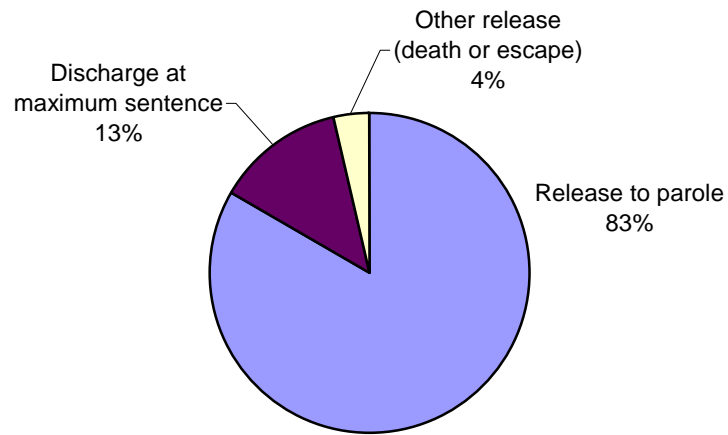
Figure 18. Overall Parole Approval Rate, 1990–2003



Source: MDOC Office of Research and Planning, 2004

The majority of Michigan inmates are released at the discretion of the Parole Board. Specifically, of those released from the MDOC in 2003, 83 percent were released by the Parole Board to a period of parole (figure 19). A small share (4 percent) either escaped or died in prison. The remaining inmates—13 percent—were discharged because their sentences ended. Many of these individuals who were discharged at their maximum sentence previously appeared before the Parole Board but were denied parole, while others served their remaining maximum sentences following parole failures, and a small proportion served flat sentences with no parole eligibility (e.g., gun law cases).

Figure 19. Percentage of Prisoners Released in Michigan by Release Type, 2003 (n = 13,045)



Source: Urban Institute analysis of MDOC datafile of 2003 releases.

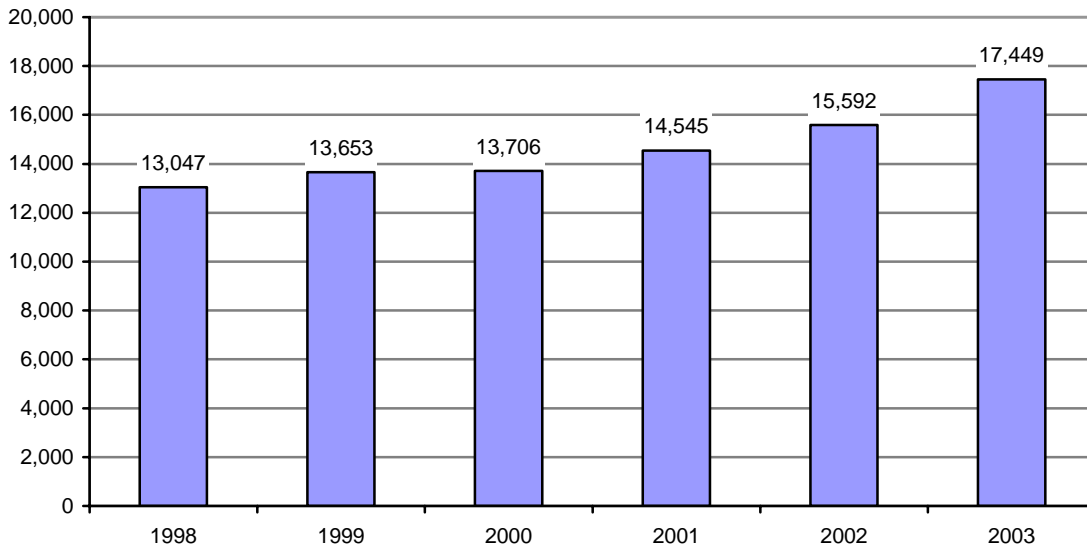
PREVALENCE OF POSTRELEASE SUPERVISION

As previously stated, 83 percent of individuals released from MDOC in 2003 were granted release by the Parole Board. All of these individuals were supervised postrelease by parole officers. In other words, there are conditions attached to their release. If they fail to abide by these conditions, parole officers can impose sanctions, including the return to prison. Individuals who are released because they “max out” of their sentences are not supervised after their release and have no conditions attached to their freedom.

POSTRELEASE SUPERVISION

The MDOC supervises inmates released to parole (see sidebar “Michigan Department of Corrections” in chapter 1). The number of individuals on parole in Michigan has increased in recent years as the number of individuals released from prison has increased (figure 20.) On December 31, 2003, there were 17,449 individuals on parole. The average caseload size for supervision officers in September 2003 was 69.7 cases per officer.²⁸

Figure 20. Population on Parole, 1998–2003



Source: MDOC, Corrections Data Fact Sheet for 12/31/98 – 12/31/03

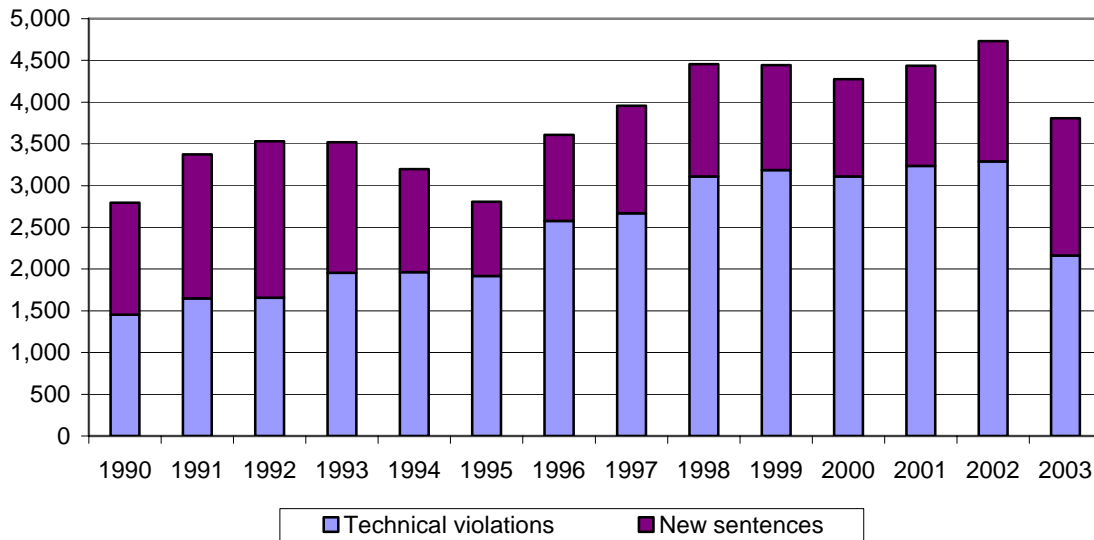
To remain on parole, parolees must abide by the conditions of their release. These include restrictions on movement, regular reporting to an agent, and seeking and maintaining employment. Parolees are prohibited from engaging in criminal behavior, associating with known criminals, and owning a firearm. The Parole Board may also require a parolee to abide by special conditions that are associated with the individual’s background and the crime committed.

Parole agents respond to individuals’ failures to abide by conditions of release by imposing increasingly restrictive conditions: from community service or substance abuse treatment to jail time, placement in a secure facility for parole violators for up to 90 days, or the revocation of parole and return to prison. In 2003, 3,806 parolees were returned to prison (figure 21). Over half (57 percent) of the parolees were returned for what were characterized as technical violations of the conditions of their release, while the remaining 43 percent were returned to prison with a new sentence because of a conviction for a new crime. As discussed in chapter 1, a recent unpublished study by the MDOC’s Office of Research and Planning found that 83 percent of parolees returned to prison for technical violations actually had engaged in new criminal activity. Between 1990

²⁸ In addition to their supervision duties, supervision officers perform other tasks such as conducting Presentence Investigations. Supervision caseloads include parolees, probationers, and a small population in the MDOC’s Community Residential Programs. MDOC, Fact Sheet, September 2003; and MDOC Internal Memorandum, “Impact of MDOC Five Year Plan on FOA” (Field Operations Administration), 1/16/2004.

and 2003, the share of parolees returned to prison as a result of a technical violation ranged from a low of 47 percent in 1992 to a high of 73 percent in 2001. Note that the marked decline in the number of parole violators returned to prison with new sentences in the mid-1990s was due to a lower court ruling in 1993 that was overruled by the Michigan Supreme Court in 1996.²⁹ Despite the increase in the number of parolees returned to prison (depicted in figure 21), the rate of return to prison among parolees is lower than historical rates due to large increases in the parole population.

Figure 21. Parole Revocations Resulting in Returns to Prison, 1990–2003



Source: MDOC, Parole Violator 1990–2003 Historical Charts, 6/25/2004.

Despite the general increase in parole revocations, it is important to note that the majority of individuals in Michigan successfully complete their parole the first time that they are released. In other words, most first-time parolees are released from parole without being returned to prison. For example, 57 percent of individuals who were paroled for the first time in 1997 and who were released from parole by the end of 2001 were released successfully. The remaining 43 percent were returned to prison. This included 29 percent who were returned for what were characterized as technical violations of their release, and 14 percent who were returned with a new sentence.³⁰

²⁹ A lower court ruled in 1993 (Young decision) that parole violators with new sentences (PVNS) cases had to serve the entire maximum term for the sentence from which they paroled before serving the new minimum term for the new sentence. The Michigan Supreme Court eventually overruled the decision in 1996, but during the time from 1993 to 1996 that the lower court ruling was in force, judges strongly disagreed and responded by sentencing parole violators to probation and jail instead of prison in record numbers to keep the ruling from applying. That response drove the annual number of PVNS returns to prison down dramatically throughout the time period. PVNS returns to prison have rebounded gradually in subsequent years as judges returned to past practice, but despite the much larger parole population of today, annual PVNS returns are still below the highest recorded year for PVNS (1992).

³⁰ MDOC Statistical Report 2001

CHAPTER 4

Geographic Distribution of Released Prisoners

The community context of prisoner reentry can have an important influence on postrelease success or failure. It stands to reason that ex-prisoners returning to communities with high unemployment rates, limited affordable housing options, active drug markets, and few services may be more likely to relapse and recidivate. This chapter presents findings from a geographic analysis of released prisoners and examines this reentry distribution in relation to the socioeconomic characteristics of the areas with the highest percentages of released prisoners in 2003.

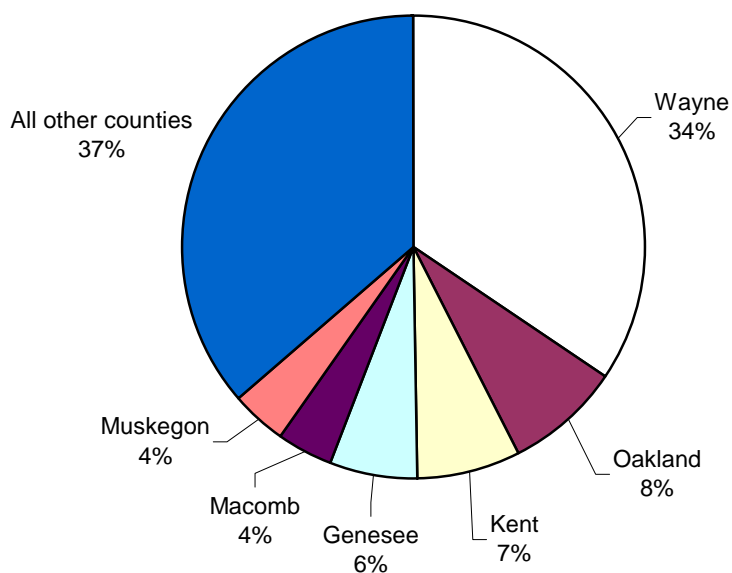
The results presented in this chapter are restricted to prisoners who were released to parole in Michigan in 2003, since the MDOC's data system captures release address information only for those individuals.³¹ Given that the majority (83 percent) of the prisoners released from MDOC in 2003 were released to parole, and that virtually all of that population returned to communities in Michigan, the geographic analysis in this chapter represents a large portion of the release cohort.

³¹ Recall that the analysis includes only the first release from MDOC for each inmate in 2003 and that the first release in 2003 may not be the first release for the commitment.

REENTRY IN MICHIGAN

Six of Michigan's 83 counties (Wayne, Oakland, Kent, Genesee, Macomb, and Muskegon) accounted for 63 percent of inmates released to parole (figures 22 and 23).³² Those six counties accounted for 53 percent of Michigan's resident population.³³ Notably, the number of prisoners released to Wayne County far exceeded the number released to other counties: 34 percent of prisoners released to parole returned to Wayne County, with the next highest county (Oakland) accounting for 8 percent of releases to parole. Aside from the six counties noted above, no other county was home to more than 3 percent of released prisoners in 2003.

Figure 22. Number of Prisoners Released to Parole by County, 2003

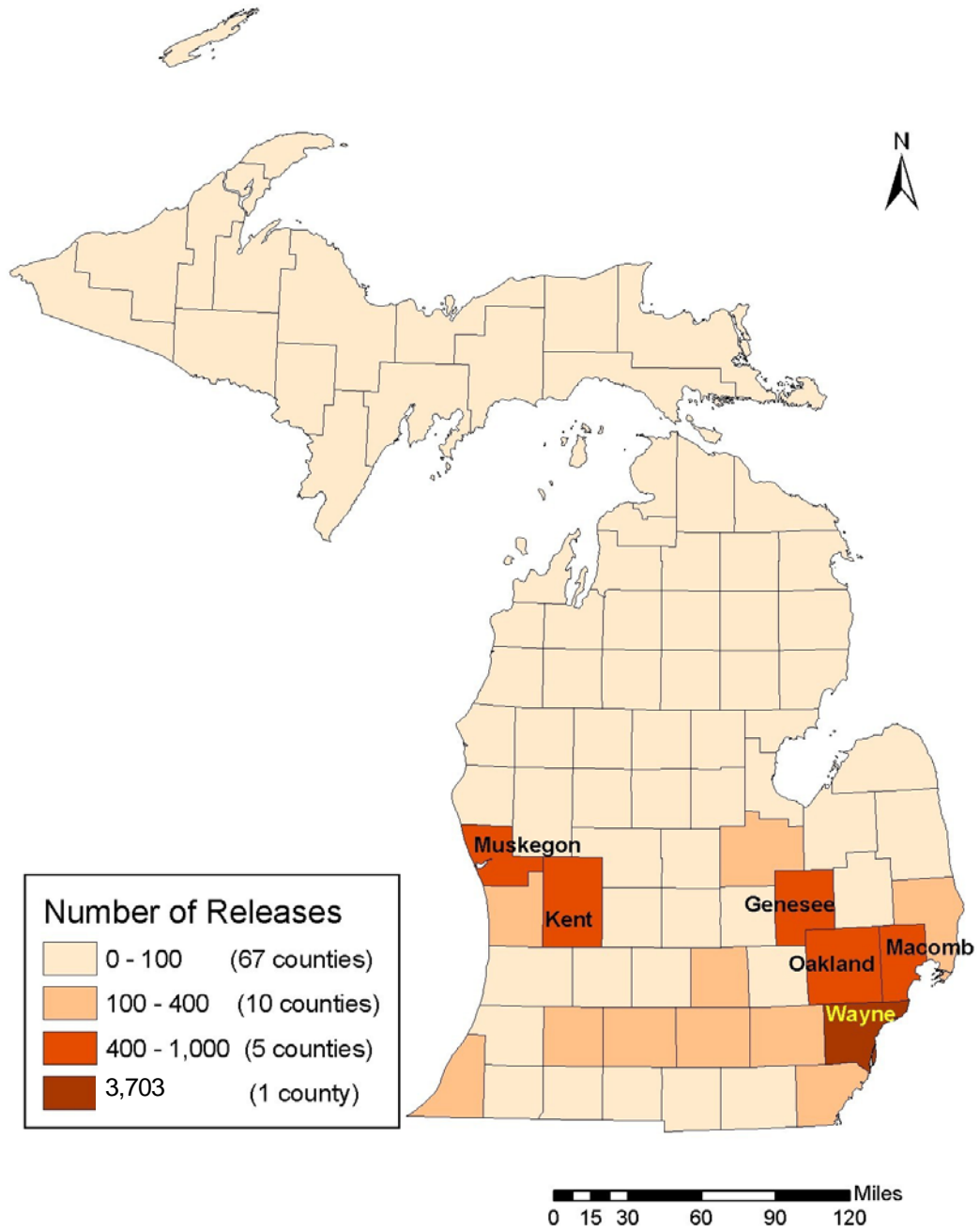


Source: Urban Institute analysis of MDOC datafile of 2003 releases

³² Of the 10,771 individuals released to parole in Michigan in 2003, the release county for 76 percent (n = 8,225) was determined by the county of residence (based on the postrelease city or zip code from MDOC's OMNI database), while the release county for the remaining 24 percent (n = 2,546) was determined by the county of the parole office to which the parolee was assigned after release.

³³ U.S. Census Bureau, 2000.

Figure 23. Percentage of Prisoner Releases to Parole by County, 2003



Source: Urban Institute analysis of MDOC datafile of 2003 releases.

An examination of the concentration of parolees returning to the six counties with the highest number of prisoners released to parole in 2003 presents a slightly different picture. Whereas Wayne County had by far the highest *number* of prisoners released to parole, Muskegon County topped the list with the highest *concentration* of prisoners released to parole in 2003 (table 4).

Table 4. Concentration of Parolees Returning to the Six Counties with the Highest Number of Prisoners Released to Parole, 2003

County	Concentration of prisoners released to parole per 100,000 residents
Muskegon	245.0
Wayne	179.7
Genesee	148.6
Kent	137.7
Oakland	73.2
Macomb	53.8
All of the above	131.3
All Counties in Michigan	108.4

Sources: Urban Institute analysis of MDOC datafile of 2003 releases; U.S. Census Bureau, 2000.

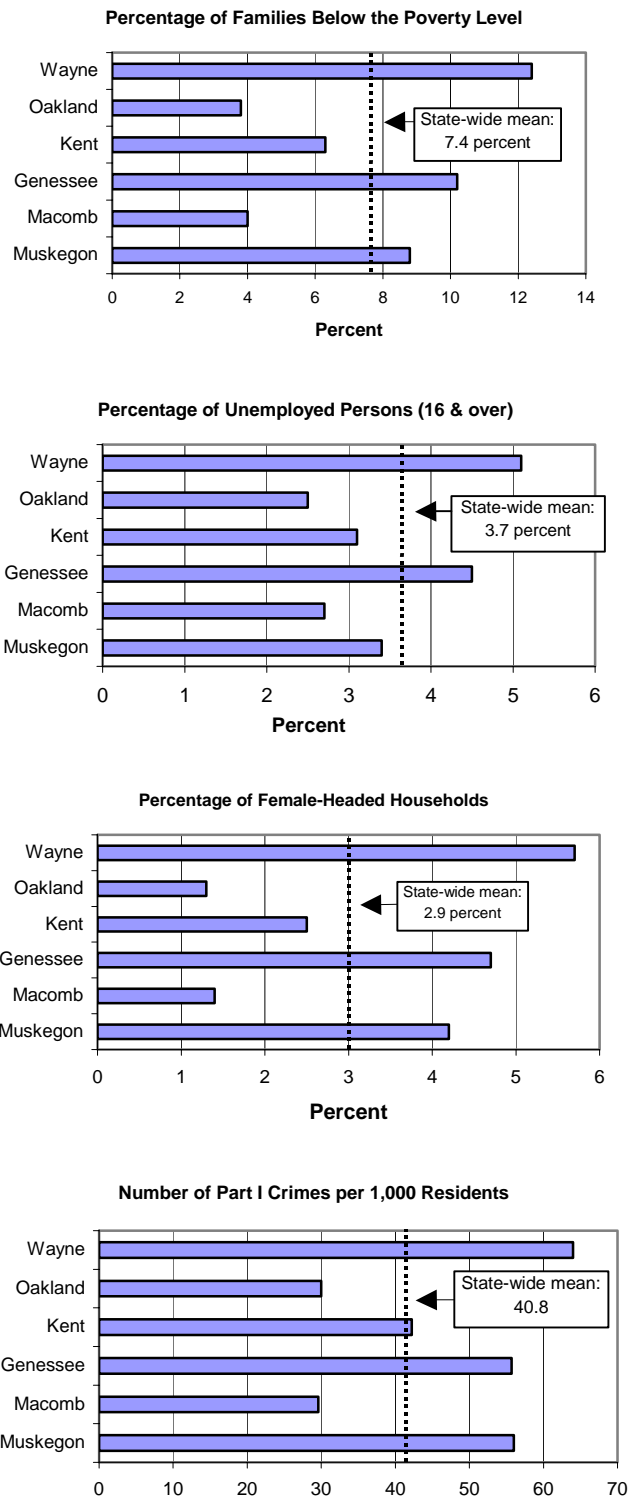
The six counties with the highest number of prisoners released to parole in 2003 differ in terms of selected measures of social disadvantage and crime. An examination of these measures (figure 24) shows that three of the counties, Wayne, Genesee, and Muskegon, usually exceeded the statewide levels of disadvantage, while the other three, Kent, Oakland, and Macomb, usually fell below the statewide mean. Specifically, in terms of the number of families living below the poverty level, the rate of unemployment, the number of female-headed households, and the number of Part I crimes per 1,000 residents, Wayne County exceeded the other five counties, followed by Genesee and Muskegon Counties (figure 24). As Wayne is the county with by far the highest number of returning prisoners, the text that follows compares the Wayne County results to the statewide means.

Across Michigan, 7.4 percent of families lived below the poverty level compared with 12.7 percent in Wayne County. The rate of unemployment among persons 16 and older in Michigan was 3.7 percent in 2000 compared with 5.1 percent in Wayne County. Female-headed households accounted for 2.9 percent of all households statewide, while in Wayne County they accounted for 5.7 percent of all households.³⁴ Finally, the number of Part I crimes per 1,000 residents in Michigan was 40.8 compared with 64.0 in Wayne County.³⁵ Thus, the disproportionately high number of prisoners returning to Wayne County may face additional challenges when reintegrating into their communities due to higher levels of disadvantage and crime in certain areas within Wayne County.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Uniform Crime Reports County Data from the University of Virginia, Geospatial and Statistical Data Center.

Figure 24. Census and Crime Data for the Six Michigan Counties with the Highest Numbers of Prisoners Released to Parole in 2003



Source: U.S. Census Bureau and University of Virginia, Geospatial and Statistical Data Center.

RELEASES TO WAYNE COUNTY IN 2003

As noted in the previous section, the largest number of MDOC prisoners released to parole in 2003 returned to Wayne County: 3,703 (34 percent). With just over 2 million people, Wayne County accounts for approximately 20 percent of Michigan's population of nearly 10 million people.³⁶

The majority of inmates released to parole in Wayne County were male (94 percent) and black (80 percent) and had an average age of 36.6 years. Twenty percent had been serving time for drug crimes, 24 percent for assaultive crimes, 25 percent for nonassaultive (and nondrug) crimes, and 31 percent for technical violations of their conditions of supervision.³⁷ Excluding parole technical violators and prisoners who exited MDOC by death or escape, the prisoners released to parole in Wayne County had an average time served of 3.9 years. Forty-three percent of released prisoners returning to Wayne County had been incarcerated in the MDOC at least once before.

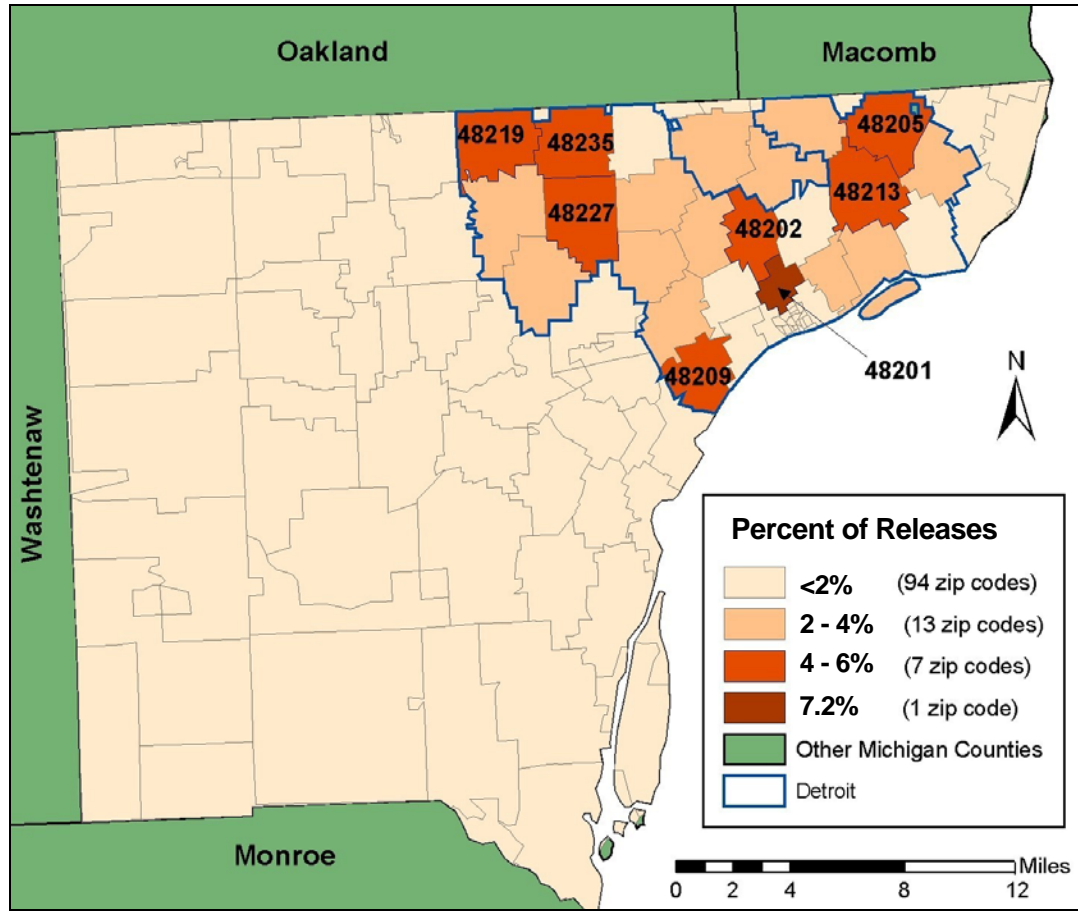
Within Wayne County, the majority (80 percent) of prisoners released to parole returned to Detroit.³⁸ Furthermore, eight zip codes within Detroit had the highest numbers of returning prisoners and accounted for 41 percent of all prisoners released to parole in Wayne County (figure 25). As an indication of the concentration of returning prisoners in those areas, the eight zip codes accounted for 17.5 percent of Wayne County's population. Just over 7 percent of the prisoners released to parole in the county returned to one zip code, 48201 (shown in brown), with 4 to 6 percent returning to another seven zip codes (shown in red).

³⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, 2000.

³⁷ Again, recall that many parole technical violators actually have committed new crimes. Instead of being prosecuted for the new crime, the violator is returned to prison to serve time that remains on his/her prior conviction, possibly with a pending charge.

³⁸ Of the 3,703 prisoners who returned to Wayne County, 1,151 (31 percent) were missing a zip code and could not be included in this analysis. The results of the analysis presented above are based on the 2,552 (69 percent) prisoners with zip codes. A comparative analysis of the population with a zip code in Wayne County (n = 2,552) and the entire population released to Wayne County (n = 3,703) indicated that in terms of certain demographic and incarceration data, the population with zip codes was largely representative of the entire population released to Wayne County.

Figure 25. Percent of Prisoners Released to Parole in Wayne County by Zip Code, 2003



Source: Urban Institute analysis of MDOC datafile of 2003 releases.

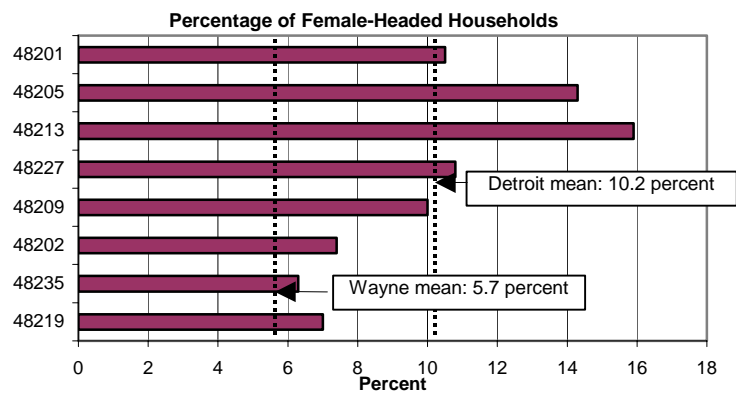
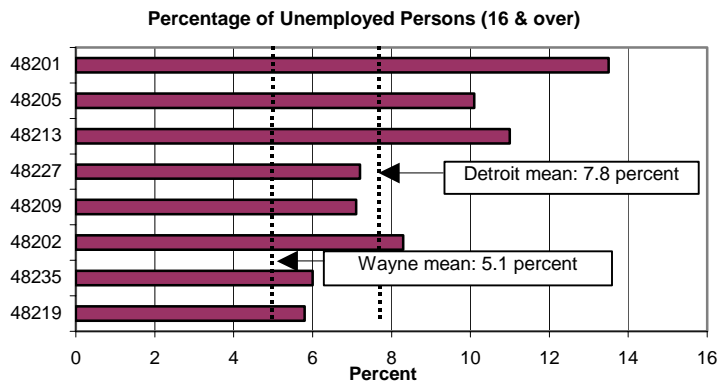
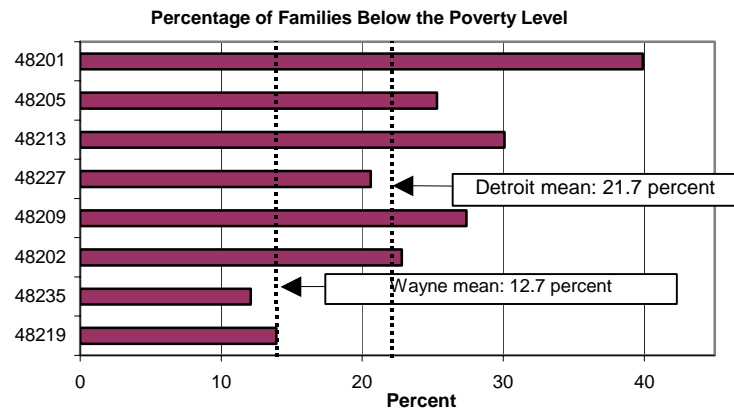
Note: Of the 3,703 prisoners who returned to Wayne County, 1,151 (31 percent) were missing a zip code and could not be included on this map. The percentages reported above are based on the 2,552 (69 percent) prisoners with zip codes.

Figure 26 presents some socioeconomic data for the eight zip codes with the highest numbers of prisoners returning to Wayne County. The charts are ordered by the zip code with the highest number of prisoners returning to the county at the top, followed by the zip code with the next highest number of returning prisoners, and so on. These charts demonstrate that the communities with the highest numbers of returning prisoners are also socially and economically disadvantaged and are among the least well equipped to handle the returning prisoners in terms of economic and human capital resources.

In the first chart of figure 26, the zip code with the highest number of returning prisoners also had the highest percentage of families living below the poverty level (40 percent). Looking from the top bar of the chart to the bottom, the chart shows a generally decreasing percentage of families living below the poverty level as the number of returning prisoners declines. Five of the zip codes have percentages of families living below the poverty level that exceed the figures both for Detroit (21.7 percent) and for Wayne County (12.7 percent). The second chart illustrates that the zip code with the highest number of returning prisoners also has the highest percentage of unemployed persons among those ages 16 and over (13.5 percent). Looking from the top bar of the chart to the bottom, this chart also shows a generally decreasing percentage of unemployed persons as the number of returning prisoners declines. Four of the zip codes have percentages of unemployed persons that exceed the figures both for Detroit (7.8 percent) and for Wayne County (5.1 percent).

The third chart illustrates that the four zip codes with the highest number of returning prisoners also have the highest percentage of female-headed households (over 10 percent). Four of the zip codes have percentages of female-headed households that exceed the figures both for Detroit (10.2 percent) and for Wayne County (5.7 percent).

Figure 26. Census Data for the Eight Zip Codes with the Highest Numbers of Prisoners Released to Parole in Wayne County in 2003



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Note: The charts are ordered by the zip code with the highest number of prisoners returning to the county at the top, followed by the zip code with the next highest number of returning prisoners, and so on.

CHAPTER 5

Looking Forward

Over the past two decades, the growth in prison populations nationwide has translated into more and more people being released from prison and reentering society. The state of Michigan has experienced similar incarceration and release trends, and thus faces the reentry challenges that accompany such growth. Between 1980 and 2003, the Michigan prison population more than tripled, increasing from 15,148 to 49,357. Admissions to Michigan prisons fluctuated moderately around 12,000 for much of the 1990s before increasing to over 14,000 in 2002 and then decreasing to 12,473 in 2003. The number of people released from Michigan prisons reflects these rising admissions and population trends: in 2003, 13,707 prisoners were released from Michigan prisons, 41 percent more than were released in 1990. The majority of these released prisoners were single males, with an average age of 36. The largest percentage of prisoners had been serving time for nonviolent (and nondrug) offenses, and the average time served for all released prisoners (excluding parole technical violators) was 3.7 years.

The largest number of prisoners released in Michigan returned to Wayne County, and specifically the city of Detroit. Zip code-level analyses indicate that returning prisoners are even more concentrated within a few community areas within Detroit. An examination of demographic data for these areas indicates that they are generally economically disadvantaged compared with the city average. It is likely that these community characteristics have an effect on reentry success or failure. Thus, from a reentry planning perspective, it is important to consider the community context of prisoner reentry. Are jobs available in or near the communities to which prisoners return? What is the availability of affordable housing in these areas? What is the prevalence of assets, such as faith-based institutions, versus risks, such as open-air drug markets? It is also useful to understand whether services for ex-prisoners are located within or in close proximity to these neighborhoods with high rates of returning prisoners, and whether prisoners returning to Detroit are able to access these resources.

Another important facet of prisoner reentry is the family context of the reintegration experience. That more than half of the 2003 returning prisoners left children behind while incarcerated highlights the importance and challenge of family reunification upon a person's release from prison. Some families may be a strong source of support to returning prisoners, while others have their own histories of substance abuse and criminal activity that may make them negative influences for returning prisoners. Understanding the family context of prisoner reentry is thus critical in reentry planning efforts.

Returning prisoners in Michigan, like those nationwide, have many needs as they begin the process of reintegration. Health problems, issues of dependency on drugs and/or alcohol, and low levels of employability are likely to pose significant reentry challenges to the state's returning prisoners—challenges that could seriously affect the ease of transition to life on the outside. For those released in 2003, for example, a large percentage of prisoners (46 percent) had not completed high school or obtained a GED prior to incarceration. For prisoners that did not complete their high school-level education while incarcerated, this may have significant implications for their employability after release. Mental and physical health conditions of returning prisoners also have important public health implications, specifically related to the spread of infectious disease to the general population and the added strain on the health care system.

We also know that the likelihood of recidivating is high. Over one-third of released prisoners in Michigan had served prior terms in prison, and many had violated their parole at some point in their criminal careers. In fact, one-quarter were serving time for a violation of parole. These extensive criminal histories do not bode well for maintaining crime-free lifestyles, and they can also create barriers to employment, housing, and eligibility for food stamps and other forms of public assistance, and can limit opportunities for civic participation. It is thus paramount that state officials, service providers, and community stakeholders approach the reentry issue comprehensively, considering these many dimensions of the reentry experience and tapping the numerous resources that could provide assistance to returning prisoners and their families.

It is clear that the challenges of reentry in Michigan are great, but so are the opportunities. Successful reentry is critical for ensuring public safety, reducing the costs of incarceration, and promoting the well-being of individuals, families, and communities.