

Measuring Post Prison Outcomes

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Overview: Three Questions

- Three questions have arisen during my recent research experience:
 - What is the population of interest? A release cohort? Or individuals who experience prison? Recidivism rates depend on the answer.
 - What is the role of post-confinement community and custodial supervision? Most importantly, how does supervision interact with crime commission?
 - How do we interpret outcomes – arrests, convictions, incarceration – in terms of seriousness? From a policy perspective, should we care about arrests per se?
- I do not pretend these topics are novel but they are important.

What is the Population of
Interest?

Two Populations

- Offender-based population
 - Every offender who ever enters prison counts once in any statistical analysis.
 - We find that returning to prison is infrequent.
- Event-based population
 - Every time an offender is released from prison, that offender counts in any statistical analysis.
 - We find that returning to prison is frequent.
- Studying offender-based populations is in the spirit of studying criminal careers; studying event-based populations is in the spirit of studying release cohorts.

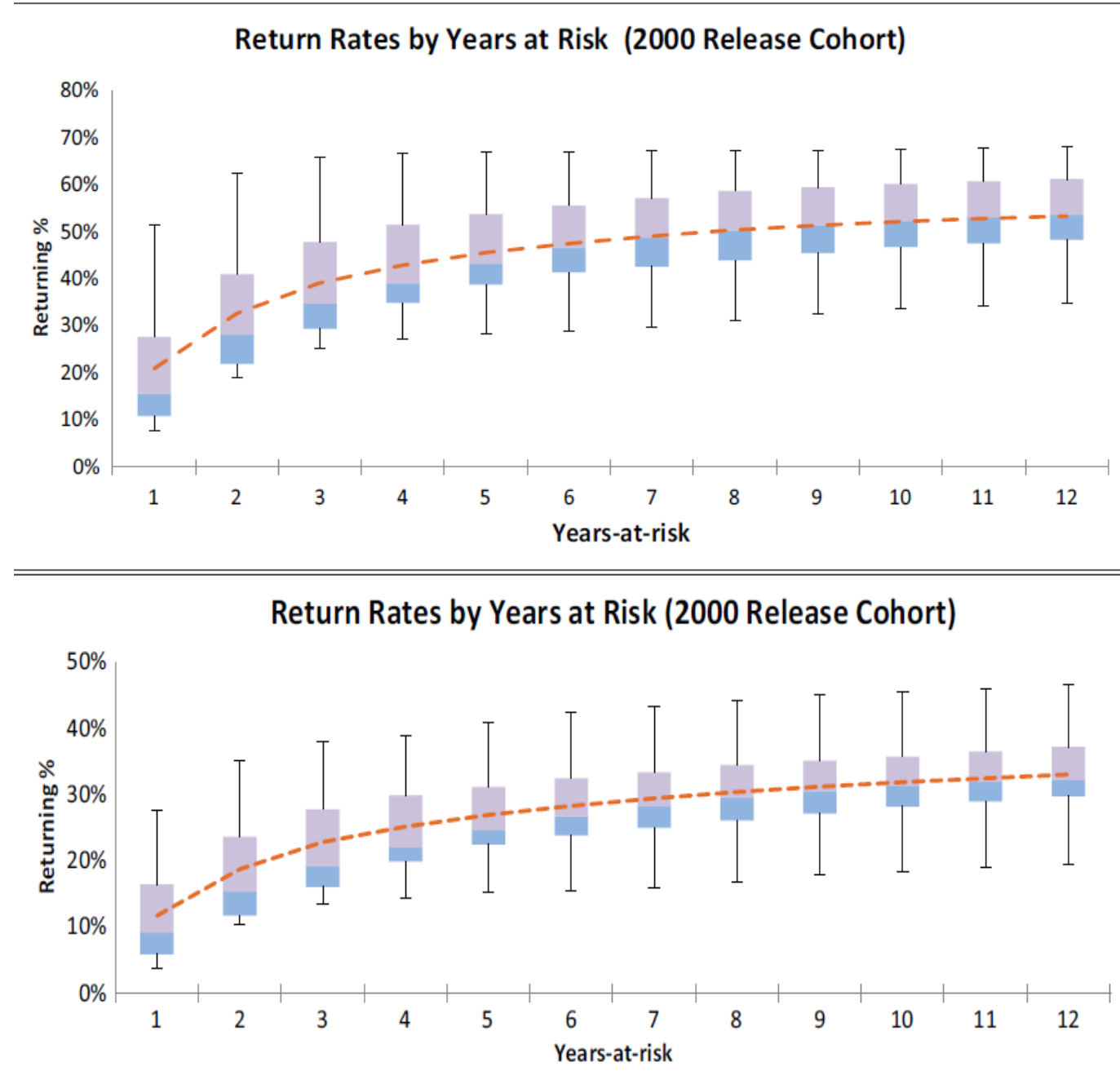
Stylized Illustration

- An illustration:
 - Starting in 2000, 999 first-time offenders enter prison every year.
 - They served exactly one year.
 - There are two subpopulations:
 - 666 of the 999 will never return to prison.
 - 333 of the 999 will return exactly three years following release.
 - Offenders desist after 20 years.
- After a steady-state is achieved:
 - Offender-based perspective: $\frac{2}{3}$ will never reenter prison.
 - Event-based perspective: fewer than $\frac{1}{10}$ will never reenter prison.

The two figures show estimated recidivism rates for 17 different states using the event-based population (top figure) and offender-based population (bottom figure). Recidivism is returning to prison. The dotted red line represents the unweighted average for the states.

The three-year average difference was 39% versus 23%.

For methodology, see Rhodes, W., Gaes, G., Luallen, J., Kling, R., Rich, T., & Shively, M. (2014). Following Incarceration, Most Released Offenders Never Return to Prison. *Crime & Delinquency*.



Interaction between Recidivism and Supervision

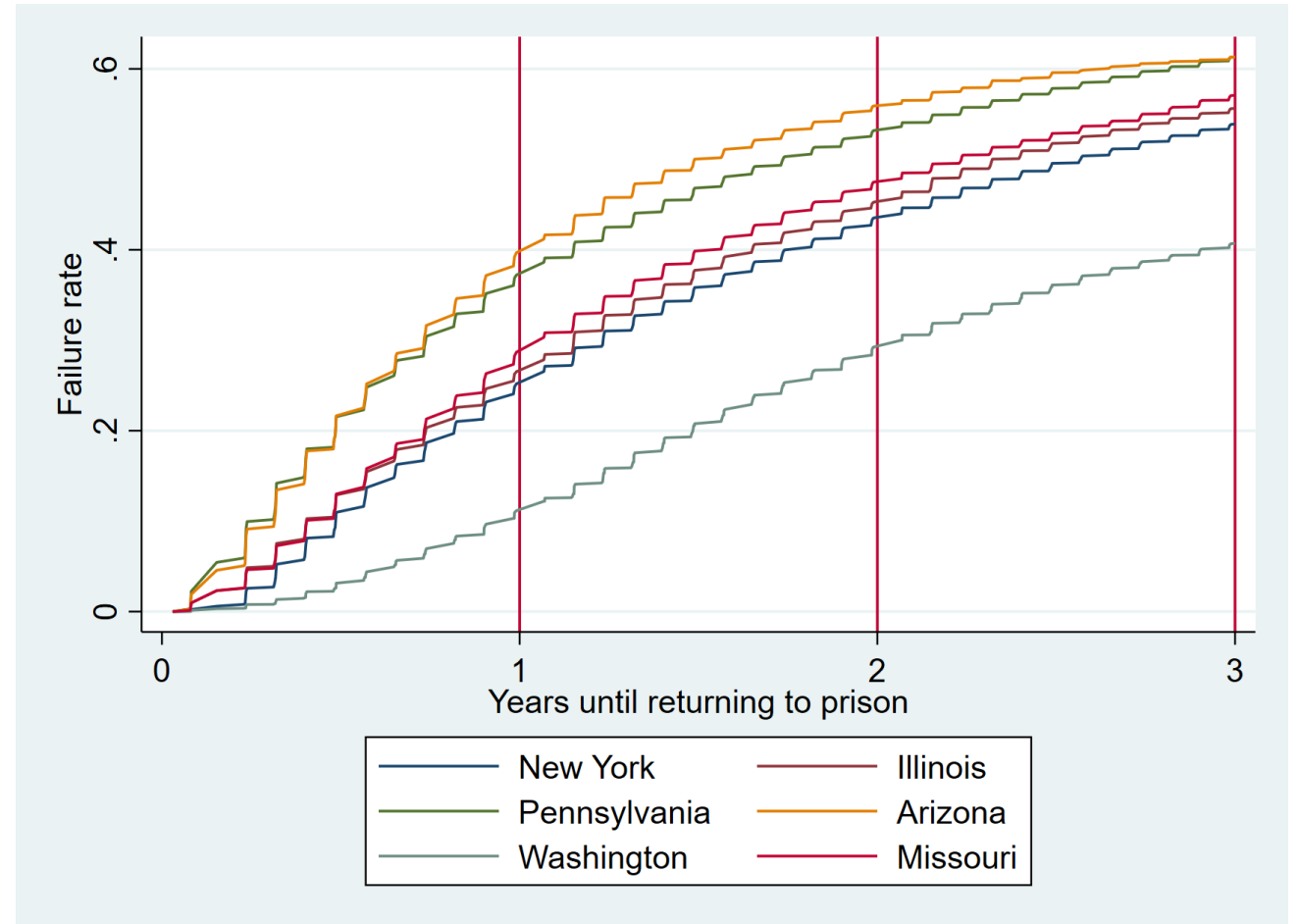
Background

- I am currently working with Gerry Gaes and Bill Sabol to study the interaction between post-confinement community supervision (including parole) and returning to prison. The work is sponsored by the Arnold Foundation.
- We have just begun the project, and the following is preliminary meant only to make a point about community supervision. The methodology will soon be available in a working paper.

Returning to Prison while under PCCS

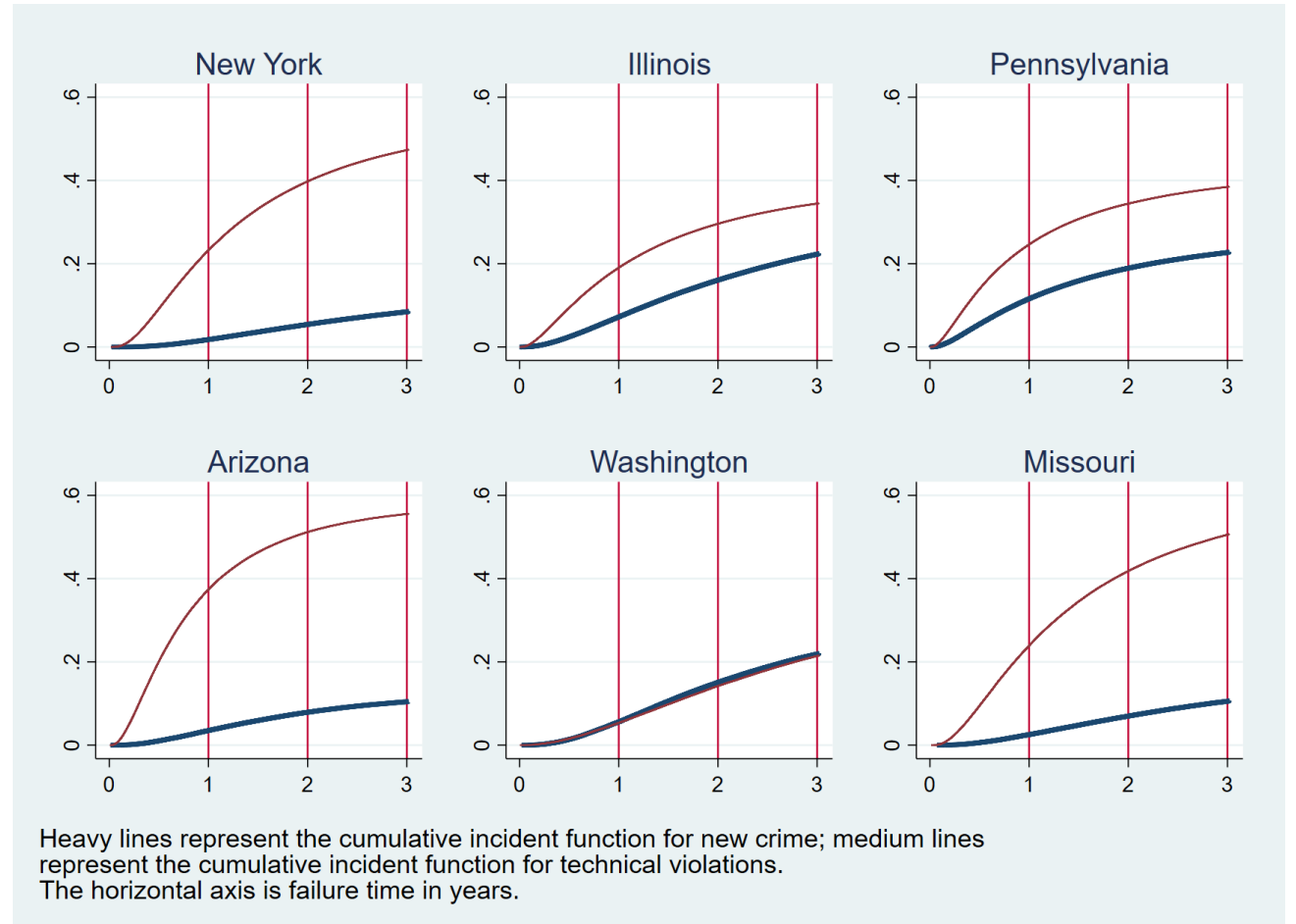
The figure shows the rate of returning to prison while under PCCS. Data are from the NCRP. The six states have the most reliable PCCS data. The methodology uses a Kaplan-Meier estimator. Interpretation should be cautious because PCCS terms typically last fewer than three years.

Based on an event-based methodology, recidivism rates are high.



Cumulative Incidence Functions across the States

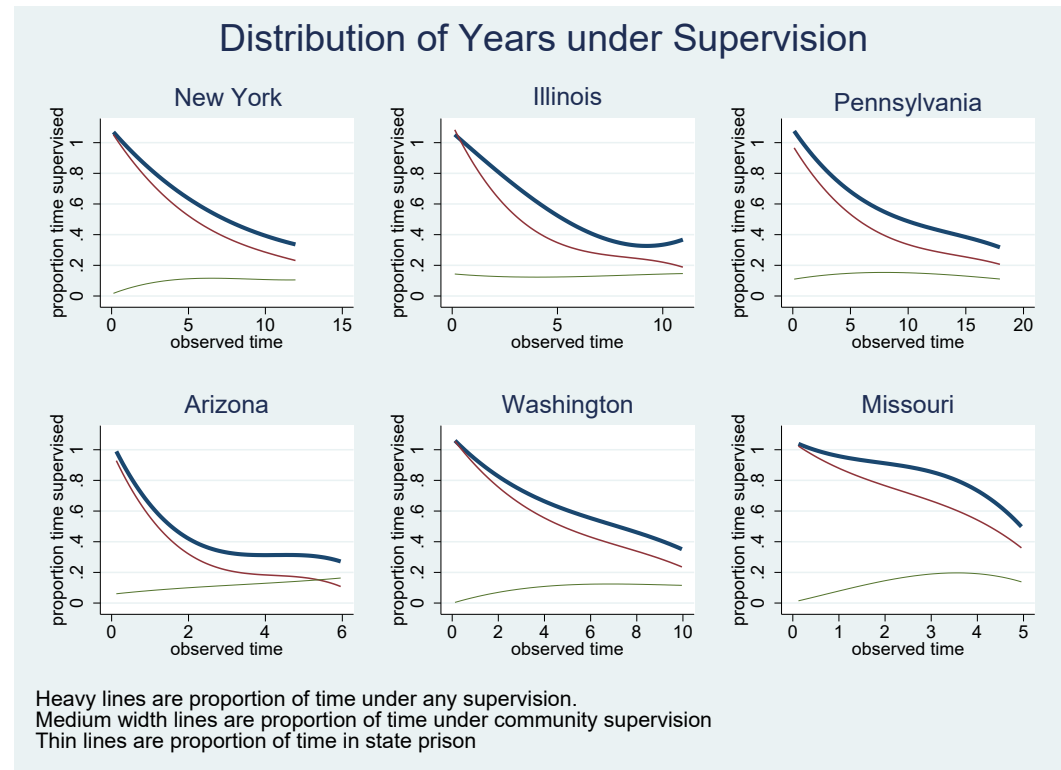
A technical violation is returning to prison without a new sentence. A new crime is returning to prison with a new sentence. The interpretation is that revocations for technical violations prevent many new crimes. The classification is inexact. See Gaes, G., Luallen, J., Rhodes, W., & Edgerton, J. (2016). *Classifying Prisoner Returns: A Research Note. Justice Research and Policy*, 48-70.



Time Under Supervision

Released offenders spend considerable time under supervision, during which recidivism is “controlled”. Observed time is the time from entering PCCS until the end of data collection. Even ten years after entering PCCS, offenders can expect to spend about 40% of their time on supervision principally PCCS.

The previous slide suggests that PCCS supervision interrupts crime commission and reincarceration incapacitates, so recidivism is difficult to understand without overlapping correctional experiences.



What is an Arrest Event?

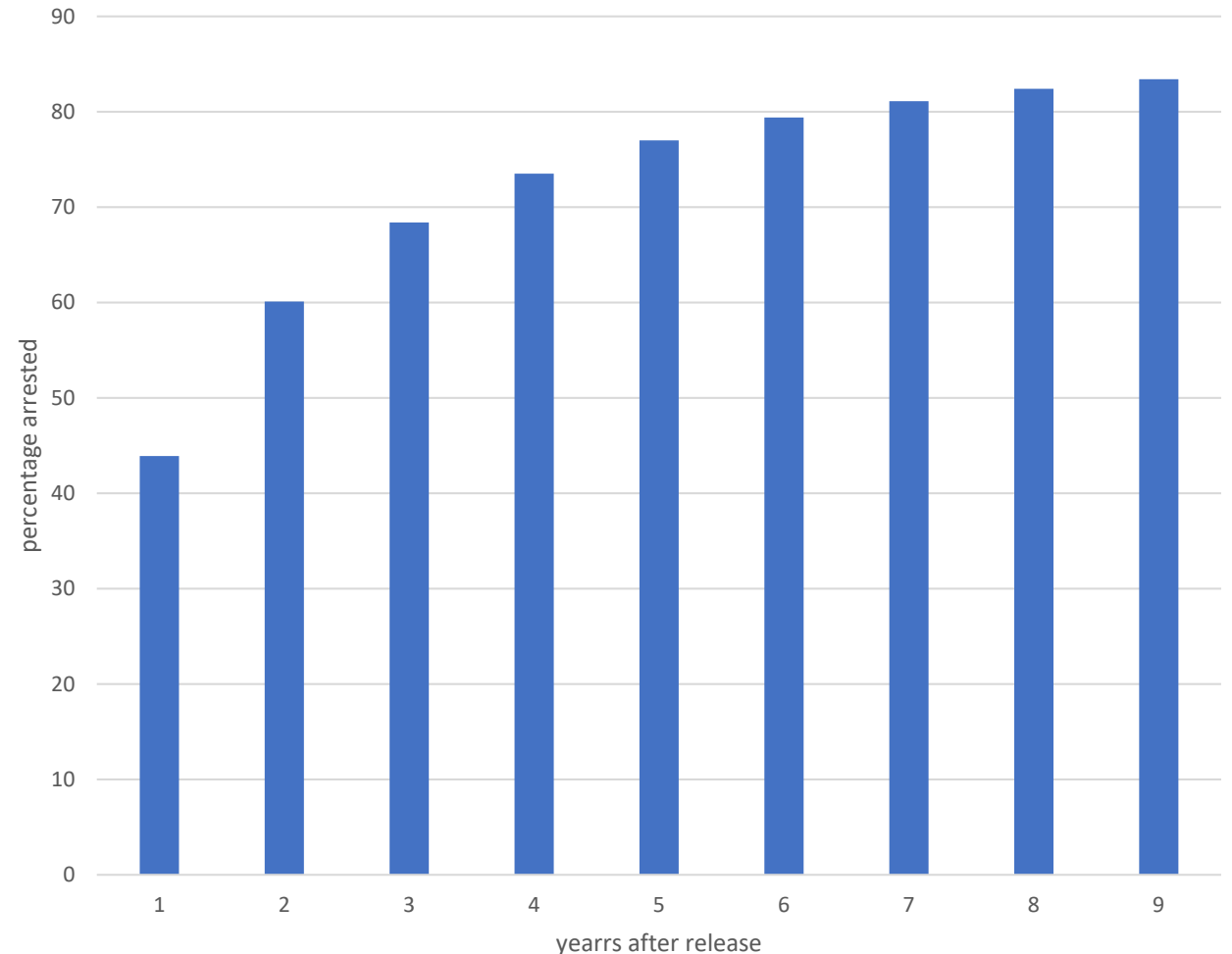
What Does an Arrest Imply?

- The Bureau of Justice Statistics has issued two impressive studies of recidivism by a release cohort:
 - Alper, M., DuRose, M., & Markman, J. (May 2018). 2018 Update on Prisoner Recidivism; A 9 Year Follow-up Period (2005-2014). *U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics.*
 - Durose, M., Cooper, A., & Snyder, H. (2014). *Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 30 States in 2005: Patterns from 2005 to 2010.* U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics
- These are impressive studies that I nevertheless use as collectively as a strawman.

Arrests Post Release

I reconstructed the rearrested rates following release from prison as a function of time since release. The 83% rearrest rate is startling, almost leading to the impression that offenders are so incorrigible that they should not have been released. A closer look at offenses leaves a different impression.

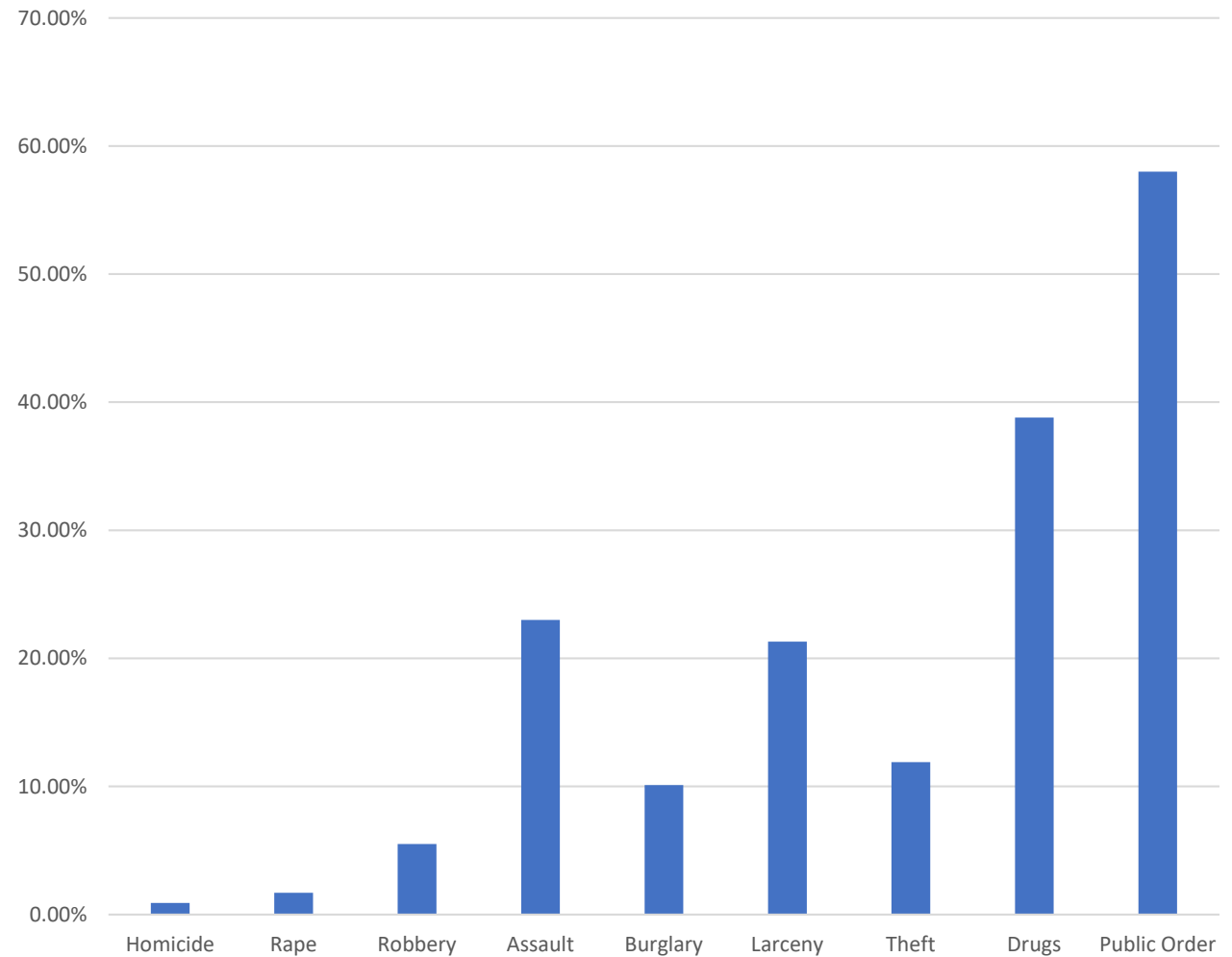
Alper, M., DuRose, M., & Markman, J. (May 2018). 2018 Update on Prisoner Recidivism; A 9 Year Follow-up Period (2005-2014). *U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics*.



Arrest Type within Five Years

The figure shows arrests within five years post release by charge. Consider: (1) If simple assaults are not considered violent (per the FBI but not BJS), and if the UCR reports of arrests are indicative, then only 27% of the assaults are violent. (2) Probably drugs is principally simple possession. Most arrests appear to be nuisance offenses. When judging recidivism, understanding harm would be helpful.

Durose, M., Cooper, A., & Snyder, H. (2014). *Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 30 States in 2005: Patterns from 2005 to 2010*. Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Table 2.



Summary

When measuring recidivism:

- Population matters: Should we focus on individuals or events?
- The role of community supervision and incarceration matter.
- The seriousness of recidivism matters.