California’s Parole Violations & Revocations Study

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Study Motivation: CA Prisons
Overcrowded and in Crisis

California State Prison in Los Angeles (Lancaster)

California Institute for Women (Carona)

Triple-bunking in the gym at Mule Creek State Prison (Ione)

California Institute for Men (Chino)
California’s Prison System Declared “State of Emergency”

“The safety of our correctional officers is threatened, we have the highest recidivism rate in the country because there is no room for rehabilitation, and we face the possibility of court-ordered early release of felons.”  
- Gov. Schwarzenegger

“In my 20-year career as a correctional officer, I have never seen conditions as oppressive as they are today. We are sitting on the edge of what NASA calls catastrophic failure.”
- Mike Jimenez, President CCPOA

“Right now, the only tool I have are out-of-state beds.”
- Former Corrections Secretary Tilton

Schwarzenegger administration given six months to ease crowding . . .
- Judge Lawrence Karlton
- Judge Thelton Henderson

Robert Sillen, former court-appointed receiver for inmate medical care threatened to “back up the truck to raid the state treasury” to bring the prison system into constitutional compliance.
The California System

- Largest prison system in U.S.
  - Houses 1 out of 8 U.S. prisoners
  - All time high of 173,000 prisoners in 33 prisons (+5% ’05-’06)
  - 56,000 Employees - 1 out of 6 CA State employees
  - $10 billion budget rapidly increasing
    - $43,000 per inmate, per year (+26% ’07-’08)
  - Most crowded system in nation,
    - at 200% of single-cell capacity
The Culprit?

- Nearly all prisoners released (95%), and all go on formal parole.
- BJS reports that at 3 years,
  - 66% of prisoners are back in CA prisons
    - Nearly twice as high as the national average
  - In fact, 65% of all CA prison commitments come from parole violations, either for new crimes or technical violations.
- Addressing CA’s prison crisis had to address parole practices.
Parolee Outcomes a Function of Several Factors

- Criminal Background (e.g., demographics, prior record)
- Community Environment (e.g., reentry supports, poverty)
- Administration (e.g., how supervised, agent characteristics, formal policies)

Parolee Outcomes Violations & Revocations
Prior Studies Mostly Focus on Parolee Background

Parolee Background
(e.g., personal characteristics
And criminal history)

Parolee Outcomes
Violations & Revocations

Community Environment
(e.g., reentry supports,
poverty)

Administration
(e.g., how supervised,
agent characteristics
formal policies)
Our Study Examined Many Factors Simultaneously

- Parolee Background (e.g., personal characteristics and criminal history)
- Community Environment (e.g., reentry supports, poverty)
- Administration (e.g., how supervised, agent characteristics formal policies)
- Parolee Outcomes
  - Violations & Revocations
Our Study Goals Were Both Scientific and Applied

1. To conduct the most comprehensive, rigorous study of parole violations and revocations ever conducted;

2. Use that knowledge to improve California’s parole practices, including:
   - consistency in decisionmaking
   - cost effectiveness
   - improved public safety