

Recidivism in Utah: Understanding the Numbers Behind the Narrative

Understanding recidivism requires more than looking at a single number. Utah’s standardized reporting framework tracks specific outcomes over time; however, changes in supervision practices and population composition can affect how trends appear. This brief outlines how Utah measures recidivism, reviews recent data, and explains why certain comparisons or assumptions may lead to inaccurate conclusions.

How Utah Measures Recidivism

Utah uses a **statutory standardized metric** for reporting recidivism across agencies, including CCJJ, UDC, and BCI. The metric tracks:

- Parole: the share of people released from prison to parole who return to prison within 3 years for a new conviction.
- Probation: the share of people starting felony probation who end up committed to prison within 3 years for any reason.

This measure supports consistent reporting and long-term comparisons.
However, shifts in population composition, such as supervising a larger share of high-risk individuals, can make recidivism appear higher even when performance is improving.

What the Data Actually Show

Parole Trends:

Utah’s parole outcomes have improved even as supervision has concentrated on higher-risk people.

- Recidivism for new convictions has **declined** from a peak of 27% (2017 parole cohort) to just **under 18%** for the 2022 cohort.
- For the 2022 parole cohort, 82% **did not recidivate**.
- Outcomes are strong across risk levels: 98% of low-risk, 90% of moderate-risk, 83% of high-risk, and 79% of intensive-risk individuals in the 2022 cohort did not return to prison for a new conviction.
- Over this period, Utah has intentionally shifted parole toward higher-risk individuals: the share of high-risk and intensive-risk parolees increased from 44% (FY2015) to 62% (FY2025). Despite a higher concentration of higher-risk individuals, **returns for new convictions are down**.

Probation Trends:

A smaller share of individuals on felony probation fail to the point of prison commitment, and those who succeed (i.e., complete probation without revocation) do so more quickly.

- Prison commitments from probation remained steady at between 9 and 10.5% for FY2019-2022 cohorts, among the *lowest rates since 2011*.
- Successful discharges within two years increased from 20% (FY2011-2016) to about 30% for the FY2023 cohort.
- The average time to successful discharge dropped by nearly 5.5 months between FY2014 and FY2022 cohorts, enabling officers to focus on higher-risk probationers.

Why the Numbers Can Be Misleading

Parole revocations and recidivism are distinct measures. Recidivism reflects returns to prison for new convictions, while many revocations result from violations without a new crime and are intended to intervene before behavior escalates. Conflating the two can misrepresent public safety outcomes.

1. More High-Risk People Are on Supervision.

As Utah has diverted low-risk individuals away from prison and to treatment alternatives, probation and parole populations now include a higher concentration of individuals with greater criminogenic needs.

- The share of high-risk individuals rose from 44% in 2015 to 62% in 2025 for both probation and parole.
- When low-risk people are diverted from prison and supervision to treatment alternatives, the supervised population becomes more concentrated with people at higher risk of violating conditions.

2. Parole Revocations Dominate Admissions, but This Does Not Mean Recidivism is Rising.

Policy changes have made it easier to use short, capped prison stays as sanctions for violations. This inflates prison admission counts without necessarily reflecting new criminal behavior. This accountability practice is designed to intervene early when a parolee's conduct requires an intermediate response rather than a full revocation to prison.

- In 2025, 59% of prison admissions were for parole violations, a decrease from 70% in 2021.
- From 2021 to 2025, the number of prison admissions from parole decreased 21% (from 2,259 to 1,780).

Bottom line: **higher revocation admissions do not equal higher recidivism.** They reflect supervision design.

3. One Person Can Generate Multiple Admissions.

Under capped sanctions, the same individual may serve several short prison stays, each counted as a separate "admission." This inflates admissions even as the number of people returning to prison is decreasing.

Policy Implications

As the Legislature considers new approaches to recidivism reporting and reduction, three facts are essential:

1. **Utah's recidivism rates are not rising;** they are stable or improving across multiple cohorts.
2. **Supervision is working with a more complex population,** which naturally changes outcome patterns.
3. **Admissions and recidivism are not interchangeable metrics;** conflating them leads to incorrect conclusions.

Grounded, consistent interpretation of Utah's standardized recidivism metric is critical to ensuring that policy changes strengthen, rather than distort, the state's public safety strategies.

Sources:

Utah Commission on Criminal Justice & Juvenile Justice, Justice Reinvestment Initiative Update, Annual Report, 2025
Utah Board of Pardons & Parole Data and Benchmark Report FY 2025