

Winter 1936

Editorial

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/jclc>

 Part of the [Criminal Law Commons](#), [Criminology Commons](#), and the [Criminology and Criminal Justice Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Editorial, 27 *Am. Inst. Crim. L. & Criminology* 471 (1936-1937)

This Editorial is brought to you for free and open access by Northwestern University School of Law Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* by an authorized editor of Northwestern University School of Law Scholarly Commons.

EDITORIAL

CHAOS IN PAROLE STATISTICS

Parole statistics in the United States are today in a deplorable state of chaos and confusion. This is forcibly brought out by an examination of the most recent comparative statistics of parole violations by penal and correctional institutions contained in a recent report entitled "Digest of Indeterminate Sentences and Parole Laws" by Robert J. Wright, assistant secretary, Prison Association of New York.

These statistics, if they could be taken at their face value, are quite astounding. Parole violations range, as between different institutions, from 0.1 per cent to 49.0 per cent, or 490 times as high. Even if we limit the comparison to state penitentiaries the violation rate for one institution is 0.75 per cent and for another prison 25.0 per cent or $33\frac{1}{3}$ times as great.

The figures are, however, not comparable. In fact, no valid comparison can be made of the percentages of parole violators as between federal and state penal and correctional institutions. Furthermore, neither the public nor the student of parole statistics can even be certain that reports of parole violators are comparable for institutions within the same state.

The existing chaos may be attributed to several causes. First of all, the definition of parole and the authority empowered to grant parole vary widely in the different jurisdictions. Second, there is no uniformity in regard to eligibility for parole as to groups of inmates included, as to time served, or as to conduct criteria for release upon parole. Third, there is no consensus upon what constitutes a parole violation, which may actually range all the way from a conviction for a new offense to a violation of a parole regulation, e. g., that a paroled man may not be away from home without special permission after 9:00 p. m. Fourth, the number of parole officers, the method of their appointment, their training, and the grade of supervision given the paroled man vary greatly from state to state and from institution to institution. Fifth, the duration of the period under parole differs from one to another jurisdiction. Sixth, the basis upon which parole violation is calculated is different in the various institutions and states.

At present, therefore, comparative statistics of parole violations are meaningless. They will continue to be meaningless until some uniform units of measurement are brought into general use. A standardized system of recording parole violations should as a minimum define 1) the nature of the violation of parole, e. g., major or minor, 2) the basis upon which percentage of parole violation is calculated, e. g., upon all persons on parole during year, or on January 1, or July 1, or December 31; or upon all persons released during year, and 3) the period covered, e. g., one, two, three or more years upon parole.

In the whole range of criminal statistics, those on parole are the least satisfactory. Statistics of arrest by the police, judicial statistics, and statistics on prisoners in institutions while far from perfect are in relatively fair condition and are showing slow but sure improvement. But little or no attempt has been made to standardize parole statistics.

It is to be hoped that the Attorney General's Survey of Convict Release Procedures will make an exhaustive study of this problem and will develop a comprehensive plan for the reporting of uniform parole statistics.

The great advances made in public health depended directly upon the improvement of vital statistics. The control of crime will never attain a secure foundation until criminal statistics and above all parole statistics are standardized to insure both their accuracy and comparability.

ERNEST W. BURGESS.