

Oklahoma Governor Kevin Stitt's Management of the Criminal Justice System is Finding Success

Recidivism isn't just a statistic. It is the key to lowering crime in communities. Every time a person reoffends, it means another victim, another case for prosecutors, another trial, and often another expensive prison cell. Beyond those costs is the human toll for the victim. Reducing recidivism is the best way to cut crime.

Oklahoma is a success story. It boasts the lowest recidivism rate (19%) in the nation. This is a measurement of the success of the Oklahoma Department of Corrections under Governor Kevin Stitt's leadership in rehabilitating many of those who break the law. That is not the end of the good news.

In late 2019, Governor Stitt commuted sentences for hundreds of non-violent offenders who lived by the rules in prison, and were prepared to be good, upstanding citizens. And there is even more good news. Of those whose sentences were commuted, recidivism has been extraordinarily low. Just 4% of those granted clemency returned to prison.

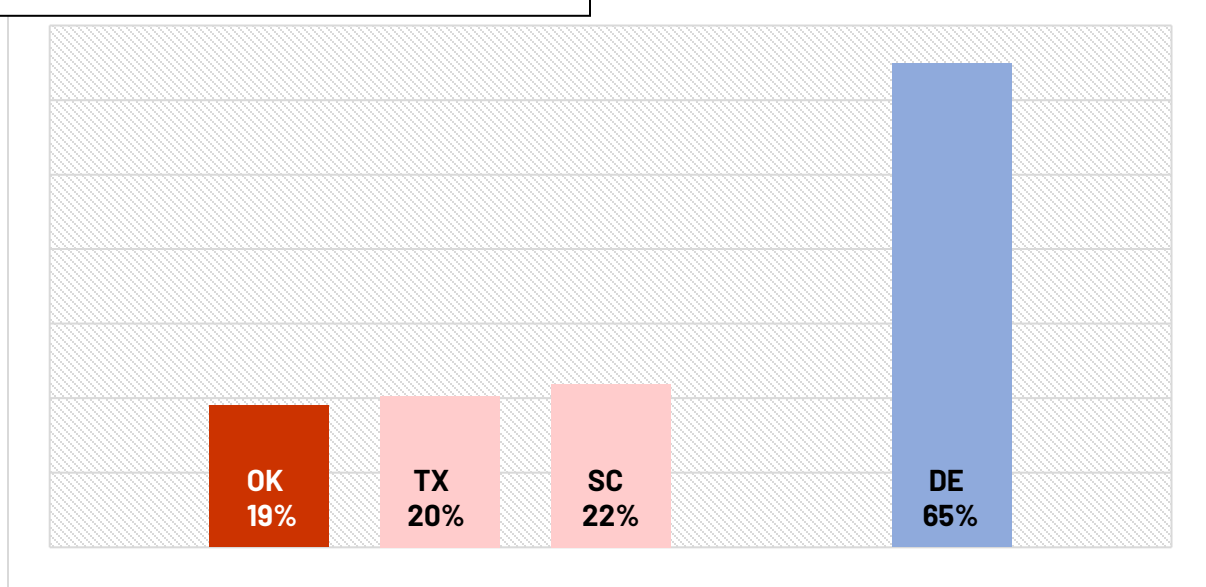
Governor Stitt's management of Oklahoma's prisons, and lowering the incarceration rate in Oklahoma are consistent with keeping Oklahomans safe and saving taxpayer dollars, which can go towards making communities safer.

Oklahoma Recidivism Rate

- Over the past several years, Oklahoma has approved several criminal justice initiatives aimed at improved sentencing practices and reduced recidivism. These have included initiatives such as SQ780 and SQ781, which raised the felony larceny threshold, and lowered certain drug possession offenses.
- In addition, Governor Stitt has improved management and administration of the state criminal justice system. Governor Stitt has also advocated for better prison educational programs, as well as safely reducing the prison population to address the misallocation of resources. In short, Governor Stitt's Department of Corrections has focused on **rehabilitation** and not simply **punishment**.
- These initiatives have earned Oklahoma the status as the state with the **lowest recidivism rate in the country**.
- Reducing recidivism is the key to lowering crime in communities. Every time a person reoffends, it means another victim, another case for prosecutors, another trial, and often another expensive prison cell. Beyond the cost is the human toll for the victim. By cutting recidivism, the Governor's initiatives have made Oklahoma safer.



Figure 1. State Recidivism Rates



- Oklahoma recidivism data provided by the Oklahoma Department of Corrections.
- Texas recidivism data provided by the State of Texas Legislative Budget Board
- South Carolina recidivism data provided by the South Carolina Department of Corrections
- Delaware recidivism data provided by the Delaware Department of Correction

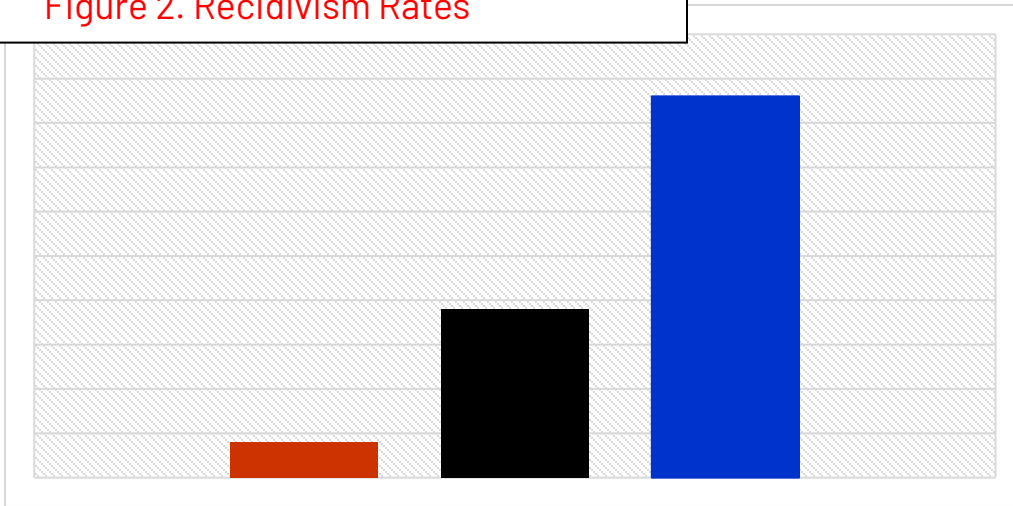
The Docket


- His first year in office, Governor Stitt, following the recommendation of the Oklahoma Pardon and Parole Board, signed 744 commutations, 290 pardons, and 101 paroles. Among Governor Stitt's commutations were 577 low-level, non-violent drug offenders.

Recidivism Rate Among Those Whose Sentence was Commuted

- Among the 577 individuals whose sentences were commuted for drug possession offenses, just 23 of them became incarcerated again. This is a recidivism rate of approximately 4% - **about one fifth of the state average, and about one tenth of the national average.**
- That is exceedingly low - even when compared to those of Norway which has the lowest recidivism rate of any country in the world at approximately 20%.
- **This recidivism rate indicates that further incarceration would have had little additional public safety benefit,** since 96% of them remained crime-free. The data suggest that offenders with similar profiles pose little risk to their community.
- This low recidivism rate is also a testament to the new philosophy of rehabilitation being implemented by Governor Stitt's Department of Corrections. By giving people the opportunity to focus on rehabilitation and future employment, they are less likely to resort to crime to earn a living upon release. **This makes recidivism an important measure of community safety.**

Figure 2. Recidivism Rates



	-	Mass Commutation Docket Recidivism Rate	-	4%
	-	Oklahoma Recidivism Rate	-	19%
	-	Average United States Recidivism Rate	-	43%

Return on Investment

- The Oklahoma Department of Corrections spends, on average, \$26,616 per year per prisoner. **The money saved from commuted sentences can be reinvested into justice strategies proven to lower crime rates.** These strategies include putting additional cops on the street, increasing salaries to retain experienced police officers, offering addiction and mental health treatment to prisoners, and providing them with education and job training.
- The mass commutation docket works towards Oklahoma’s goals of reducing recidivism and lowering the overall incarceration rate and has proven incredibly safe. With an exceptionally low re-offense rate overall, Oklahomans can sleep soundly knowing that dangerous criminals are not being released back on the street.
- We recognize that the few who did reoffend did real harm. However, criminal justice policy cannot account for every bad actor. The only possible way to guarantee that no one will reoffend would be to hand out life without parole sentences to everybody sent to jail. Obviously, this is an absurd and very costly proposition. Lawmakers should, instead, look for ways to continue reducing the recidivism rate at the margins, while implementing more effective crime control strategies (e.g., recruiting and retention of quality law enforcement, education, training of offenders while in prison, and drug and mental health treatment, etc.). In fact, Governor Stitt’s policies have come as close to the 0% recidivism goal as possible.
- Governor Stitt’s mass commutation docket safely lowered the prison population significantly, with an incredibly small number of re-offenders. This reduced costs, as well as pressures on the system caused by overcrowding and insufficient staffing.

Methodology

Individual-level snapshots from the Oklahoma Department of Corrections were used to assess the impact of the recent mass commutation dockets. All information about the Oklahoma prison population and expenditures including individual incarceration records, per-inmate cost of incarceration, and state-level recidivism rates were provided by the Oklahoma Department of Corrections.

Overall US recidivism rate was determined by aggregating data from the Department of Corrections or equivalent agency from all fifty states and finding the average, with each state weighted equally.

According to the [National Institute of Justice](#), recidivism is defined as “a person's relapse into criminal behavior, often after the person receives sanctions or undergoes intervention for a previous crime.” In this study, recidivism refers to individuals who had been taken back into the custody of the Oklahoma Department of Corrections. This is the way the metric is defined [by the department](#).

Conclusion

Governor Stitt's policies have given Oklahomans safer communities while saving significant taxpayer dollars. Lawmakers in other states should study the reasonable Oklahoma reforms and apply them in their own states.