

Reincarceration among Roca participants in Massachusetts

Roca serves young men at the greatest risk of involvement in violent crime, including those who have served time in jail or prison for violent offenses. In this brief, we describe reincarceration rates for Roca Massachusetts participants one, two, and three years after they join Roca.

AUTHORS

Shelby Hickman
Claudia Masters
Nikitha Reddy





Reincarceration among Roca participants in Massachusetts



Authors: Shelby Hickman, Claudia Masters, Nikitha Reddy

Introduction

Roca serves young men at the greatest risk of involvement in violent crime, including those who have served time in jail or prison for violent offenses. In this brief, we describe reincarceration rates for Roca Massachusetts participants one, two, and three years after they join Roca.

Key Takeaways

We find that a relatively small proportion of Roca participants are reincarcerated.

- **Roca’s 2017 cohort shows lower reincarceration rates than the state average** at one, two, and three years follow-up, **even for those with a history of violent offenses.**
- Over time, the gap widens, with **Massachusetts’ three-year rate 30% higher than Roca’s.**

Methods

Data. These analyses draw on Roca’s program data and Criminal Offender Record Information provided by the Department of Criminal Justice Information Services in Massachusetts.

Sample. The sample includes 18- to 24-year-old male Roca participants at the Boston, Chelsea, Lynn, Holyoke, and Springfield sites with a history of incarceration in Massachusetts prior to joining Roca. We describe reincarceration rates for participants with a history of any incarceration prior to joining Roca programming, as well as those with a history of incarceration for a *violent offense* who are reincarcerated for a *violent offense*.

Our sample is designed to match the recidivism cohort structure used by Massachusetts for its recidivism analysis. Sample sizes for each annual cohort are described in Table 1.

Table 1. Sample size by annual cohort

Cohort	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Roca participants	94	249	174	222	223
Roca participants with a history of incarceration	44	165	128	136	151
Roca participants with a history of incarceration for a violent offense	31	109	86	81	92
Massachusetts cohort, total releases ^a	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	1,104

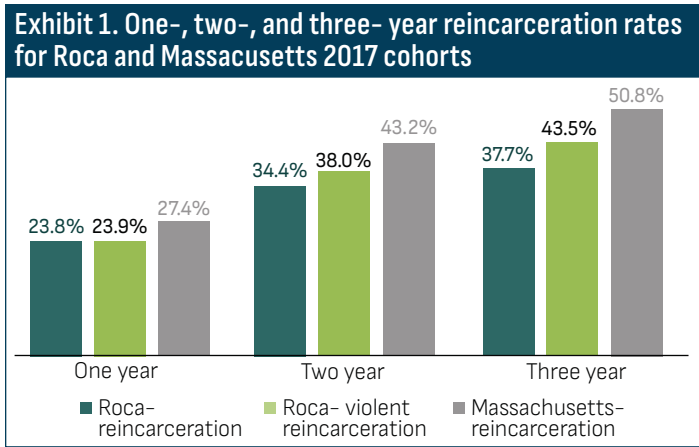
a: Source: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/cross-tracking-system-recidivism-query-model>

A Roca cohort includes male participants 18-24 who joined Roca in a given calendar year. The state cohort includes all men ages 18-24 who were released from a House of Corrections, Department of Corrections facility, or jail in a calendar year.

Comparison of Roca reincarceration versus Massachusetts reincarceration rates.

We compare the rates of reincarceration for Roca participants to rates of reincarceration for the Massachusetts sample in the 2017 cohort. This is the best reference group we can obtain using publicly available reports. We use 2017 because this is the most recent year that state data are available where at least two subsequent years are not affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. During the COVID-19 pandemic, changes to arrest, release, transfer, and court policies and procedures are associated with unusual trends for incarceration and reincarceration. Any comparisons we make are meant only to provide a reference point for the Roca calculations. We cannot make any inferences about statistical differences between the Roca sample and Massachusetts sample for three key reasons:

1. To conduct a statistical test of differences for two proportions, the two samples must be independent of each other. In this case, members of the Roca sample who are reincarcerated are also included in the Massachusetts sample, which means the samples are not independent.
2. The Massachusetts reincarceration rate counts each *release* during the year, making it possible for one person to be included multiple times if they are incarcerated more than once in the same calendar year. Our calculations for Roca participants include each *individual* only one time per calendar year. This means that if someone is reincarcerated twice in one year, it counts one time in our Roca estimate, but twice in the Massachusetts estimate. Although it is uncommon for a participant to enroll with Roca more than one time per year, this methodological difference can elevate the rate of reincarceration estimated for the state cohort when compared to rates we report for the Roca cohort.
3. The “clock” for our reincarceration calculations for Roca participants begins the day they join Roca. The state, by contrast, begins its “clock” the day a person is released from jail or prison. Because the starting point for each group is different, the Roca estimates at one, two, and three years after joining Roca, can actually be more than one, two, and three years after release, depending on the amount of time between release and joining Roca. This means Roca estimates might be biased toward higher levels of incarceration than the state comparison for reincarceration.



Massachusetts total reincarceration rates. Rates for each Roca annual cohort 2013–2017 are summarized in Table 2, below.

These trends show promise for Roca’s program. Further, the difference between Roca and the state reincarceration rates for the 2017 cohort grows over time and is greatest at three years, where the Massachusetts rate is 30% higher than Roca’s. This suggests that longer engagement with Roca could have added marginal benefit for participants. Extended engagement is central to Roca’s program model, which lasts four years. These trends show that, indeed, longer engagement seems to have a payoff. Given that Roca engages participants during the period of the life course when offending rates are highest (ages 18–24), it is possible that any impacts of Roca programming on incarceration are sustained as participants age out of this high-risk period.

The analyses presented in this brief, however, do not isolate the effect of Roca’s programming. We present reincarceration rates without controlling for factors known to influence likelihood of offending and incarceration. Factors such as services received in jail, social and family supports, employment, and conditions of parole or probation can all affect likelihood of incarceration and would provide a more nuanced understanding of recidivism among Roca’s participants. Overall, even without the benefit of a direct comparison group that would tell us what incarceration would have been if these participants did not enroll in Roca, only a small proportion of Roca participants are reincarcerated.

Results and Discussion

Although Roca serves only the most high-risk individuals, its participants have lower rates of reincarceration than are seen for Massachusetts in the same cohort (2017). As shown in Figure 1, for the 2017 cohort, we see that Roca participants consistently have lower rates of reincarceration than the state sample at one, two, and three years. Among Roca participants at highest risk for reincarceration — those who have previously been incarcerated for a violent offense — rates of reincarceration for a violent offense are also lower than the

Table 2. Roca reincarceration rates at one, two, and three years by cohort

Follow up period	One Year					Two Years					Three Years				
	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Cohort															
Roca reincarceration	16%	29%	25%	27%	24%	39%	40%	38%	38%	34%	48%	47%	47%	50%	38%
Roca violent reincarceration	19%	29%	27%	32%	24%	45%	42%	37%	38%	38%	48%	51%	47%	47%	44%

Abt Global is a consulting and research firm that has combined data and bold thinking to improve the quality of people’s lives since 1965. For nearly 60 years, we have partnered with clients and communities to advance equity and innovation—from creating scalable digital solutions and combatting infectious diseases, to mitigating climate change and evaluating programs for measurable social impact. Our global workforce crosses geographies, methods, and disciplines to deliver tailored solutions in health, environmental and social policy, technology, and international development.

Connect With an Abt Expert

[abtglobal.com](https://www.abtglobal.com)

