



**CRIMINAL  
DISPOSITION  
COMMISSION**



SI Newhouse  
Center for Law and Justice  
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Newark, New Jersey 07102

**BRIEFING REPORT**

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May 1990

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**PRIOR CRIMINAL HISTORY**

4-22-92  
MFL

**RECTIONAL INMATES - OCTOBER 10, 1989**

Data Committee

Criminal Disposition Commission

133417

PREPARED BY:

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**U.S. Department of Justice  
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this study is to determine the criminal history (prior arrests and convictions), as well as the drug history of adults incarcerated in the state prison system. Using SBI number as the key identifier, the Department of Corrections' Offender Based Correctional Information System (OBCIS) database was merged with the State Police Offender Based Transaction System/Computerized Criminal History (OBTS/CCH) database and resulted in a match for 85% or 14,235 of the department's adult residents. Major findings of this study are as follows:

**PRIOR ARRESTS/CONVICTIONS:**

- \* There was an average of 7.6 arrests per resident, with a median of 6.
- \* Three out of four of the current state prison residents had prior convictions.
- \* There was an average of 4.2 convictions per resident, with a median of 3.
- \* Two out of three were convicted of a violent offense or had a previous violent conviction.
- \* Only 9% of the state prison population had no reported history of violence and no prior convictions.

**DRUG HISTORY:**

- \* 60% of residents had at least one drug arrest.
- \* Four out of 10 residents had at least one drug conviction.
- \* One third of all residents had distribution as the most serious drug arrest charge.
- \* Over 25% of all residents had possession as the most serious drug arrest charge.
- \* One third of all residents had at least one distribution arrest, with almost 20% having a minimum of one distribution conviction.
- \* Half of all residents had a minimum of one possession arrest, with over 30% having a minimum of one possession conviction.

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ACQUISITIONS

RESIDENTS INCARCERATED FOR VIOLENT OFFENSES:

- \* Half are currently incarcerated for violent offenses.
- \* Four out of ten had prior violent convictions.
- \* 34% had prior non-violent convictions.
- \* 27% had no prior convictions.
- \* 41% of current residents with sexual offenses as the most serious offense, had no prior convictions.
- \* Half of the residents incarcerated for robbery had a prior violent conviction.

RESIDENTS INCARCERATED FOR NON-VIOLENT OFFENSES:

- \* Half are currently incarcerated for non-violent offenses.
- \* 30% of the residents incarcerated for a non-violent offense had a prior violent conviction.
- \* 54% of all non-violent offenders had a prior violent arrest or conviction.
- \* 24% of all non-violent offenders incarcerated for drug offenses had no reported prior convictions.
- \* Half of residents currently incarcerated for a weapons offense had prior violent convictions.

## I. Introduction

The purpose of this study is to determine the extent of prior arrests, convictions and drug history of adult residents in Department of Corrections facilities.

## II. Methodology

On October 10, 1989, the Department of Corrections' Offender Based Correctional Information System (OBCIS) recorded 16,835 residents in the department's adult facilities. In order to secure data concerning previous arrests and convictions for the group, the Department solicited the assistance of the New Jersey Criminal Disposition Commission and the Department of Law and Public Safety's Division of Criminal Justice.

Using SBI number as an identifier, the OBCIS database was run against the State Police Offender Based Transaction System - Computerized Criminal History (OBTS/CCH) files. The run of one database against the other yielded a match for 85% or 14,235 of the department's adult residents. These 14,235 residents were matched to OBTS/CCH files for arrest and conviction, as well as SBI number. This resident population does not include the additional 3,000 adult offenders that are housed in county jails awaiting entrance to the state prison system.

It should be noted that conviction data do not include federal or out of state arrests or convictions. Conviction data may also be somewhat understated due to historical

reporting problems with OBTS/CCH data. Tables VI and VII represent a total of 13,338 residents, reflecting a 6% error due to incompatibility between OBCIS instant offense type (violent/non-violent) and CCH/OBTS offense type.

III. Findings

Table I indicates that 76% (or 3 out of 4) of the 14,235 residents matched had prior convictions. Approximately half of the residents are currently incarcerated for violent offenses and half for non-violent offenses. Violent offenses include homicide, kidnapping, robbery, assault and sexual offenses.

Table I

Prior Convictions  
Based on Current Offenses

Current Offense	Previously Convicted		No Prior Convictions		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Violent Offenders*	5126	36.0	2078	14.6	7204	50.6
Nonviolent Offenders	5754	40.4	1277	9.0	7031	49.4
Total	10880	76.4	3355	23.6	14235	100.0

\* Includes assault, murder, rape, robbery

Of the resident population, 9,419 or 66% (2 out of 3) were convicted of a violent offense or had a history of a violent offense conviction (Table II). Only 9% of the population had no history of violence and no prior convictions.

Table II

Prior Convictions  
Based on Current & Prior Offenses

Current & Prior Offenses	Previously Convicted		No Prior Convictions		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Violent Offenders*	7241	50.9	2178	15.3	9419	66.2
Nonviolent Offenders	3639	25.5	1177	8.3	4816	33.8
Total	10880	76.4	3355	23.6	14235	100.0

\* Includes assault, murder, rape, robbery

**Note:** Assault offenses included simple and aggravated assault. Of all residents, 3% had prior simple assault convictions.

A total of 108,607 arrest incidents resulting in 60,199 convictions were recorded for the 14,235 resident offenders. The number of arrest incidents for individual offenders ranged from 1 to 59, with an average of 7.6 arrests per resident and a median of 6. Convictions ranged from 1 to 46, with an average of 4.2 and a median of 3 (Table III).

Table III

### Arrests and Convictions by Violent/Nonviolent Offenders

	Arrests		Convictions	
	Average	Median	Average	Median
Violent Offenders*	6.5	5	3.6	3
Nonviolent Offenders	8.8	7	4.8	4
Drug Offenders	7.1	7	3.9	3
Total	7.6	6	4.2	3

\*Current Offenses

Average and median number of arrest incidents and convictions were lower for violent offenders than non-violent offenders. Drug offenders were included in the non-violent category, and were analyzed separately, as well.

Almost 60% of all residents had at least one drug arrest incident (Table IV) within their current and prior arrest history. Over 40% of all residents had at least one drug related conviction.

TABLE IV

Drug Arrests and Convictions  
for All Offenders

Most Serious Offense	Arrests		Convictions	
	#	%	#	%
Distribution Charges*	4737	33.3	2661	18.7
Possession Charges*	3674	25.8	3148	22.1
	8411	59.1	5809	40.8

\*Includes current and prior offenses

One third of all residents had distribution as their most serious drug arrest charge, while over 25% had possession as their most serious drug arrest charge.

As Table V indicates, one third of all residents had at least one distribution arrest, resulting in almost 20% of all residents having at least one distribution conviction. Almost 50% of all residents had at least one possession arrest with over 30% of all residents having at least one possession conviction.

TABLE V

Drug Arrests & Convictions  
Frequencies for All Offenders

Number of Times	Arrests		Convictions	
	#	%	#	%
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Distribution Charges*				
0	9498	66.7	11574	81.3
1	2637	18.5	1995	14.0
2	1066	7.5	507	3.6
3-5	917	6.5	157	1.1
6+	117	0.8	2	**
Possession Charges*				
0	7604	53.4	9860	69.3
1	3348	23.5	2691	18.9
2	1609	11.3	986	6.9
3-5	1463	10.3	652	4.6
6+	211	1.5	46	.3
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\*Includes current and prior offenses

For all residents incarcerated for violent offenses, 39% had prior violent convictions, 34% had prior non-violent convictions and 27% had no prior convictions recorded (Table VI).

TABLE VI

Prior History  
of Violent Offenders

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INCARCERATED FOR VIOLENT CRIMES

Current Offense	No Prior Convictions		<u>Previously Convicted</u>				Total	
			No Prior Violence		Prior Violence			
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Homicide	498	39	399	31	389	30	1286	100
Kidnaping	59	28	62	30	87	42	208	100
Sexual Offenses	474	41	325	28	362	31	1161	100
Robbery	507	19	1031	37	1224	44	2762	100
Assault	216	21	376	38	407	41	999	100
TOTAL	1754	27	2193	34	2469	39	6416	100

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Of all offenders with sexual offenses as the most serious current offense, 41% had no prior convictions. Almost 50% of the offenders incarcerated for robbery had a previous conviction for a violent offense.

Note: Tables VI and VII total only 13,338 residents rather than 14,235 as depicted in Tables I through III. This reflects a 6% reduction due to incompatibility between OBCIS offense type and CCH/OBTS offense type.

As indicated by Table VII, 30% of all residents incarcerated for a non-violent offense had a prior violent conviction. While not included in this table, 45% of the residents incarcerated for a non-violent offense with no prior violent convictions, had prior arrest incidents which included violent charges. In all, 54% of residents currently incarcerated for non-violent offenses have been previously arrested or convicted of a violent offense.

TABLE VII

Prior History  
of Nonviolent Offenders

Current Offense	INCARCERATED FOR NONVIOLENT CRIMES							
	No Prior Convictions		Previously Convicted				Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Burglary	146	9	965	57	577	34	1688	100
Larceny/Theft	86	9	528	57	310	34	924	100
Arson	31	22	67	48	41	30	139	100
Fraud	9	16	28	51	18	33	55	100
Drugs	811	24	1780	52	824	24	3415	100
Weapons	46	15	109	35	154	50	309	100
Other	48	12	162	41	182	47	392	100
TOTAL	1177	17	3639	53	2106	30	6922	100

Twenty-four percent of all non-violent offenders incarcerated for drug offenses, had no prior convictions. Of all non-violent offenders currently incarcerated for a weapons offense, 50% had prior violent convictions (Table VII).