

There are many deficiencies in a success/failure rate established in this way. The principal ones are:

1) Statistics used for paroles granted include all offenders who are still on parole and who may be in violation later. A more appropriate rate would be based only on paroles that have terminated.

2) Statistics used for paroles granted and paroles violated may involve duplication. Some persons have been granted parole and may have violated it several times on the same sentence or have had several sentences and been granted several paroles.

3) The rate is based on all categories of offenders, i.e., those with long sentences and those with short terms. There are many more parolees with short (provincial cases) than with long terms. They are less likely to violate parole because they just do not have time. Moreover, a rate based on all offenders implies that the parole failure of a dangerous bank robber is the equivalent of the failure of a petty thief.

4) A parole failure rate does not take into account the effect of other agencies of criminal justice. Police, courts and institutions all influence the number and kinds of individuals who are eventually released on parole. To attribute all failures to the parole system, is to assume that other agencies had previously reformed the offenders and the parole system simply undid their work. It therefore appears that a criminal justice index would be more appropriate than a parole failure rate.

5) A parole failure rate can be modified too easily by the selection process that now operates in the parole system. The rate can be artificially "improved" by selecting only the few good risks. A failure rate for those who are not selected for release on parole would have to be established in order to compare the two and determine if the parole selection process is worth the effort. There are already indications that release on mandatory supervision is "better" than release on ordinary parole.¹³

6) A parole failure rate does not measure the improvement that parole supervision may achieve in individual cases. A persistent offender who, because of parole, changes from offences of violence to less serious criminal activity or substantially delays going back to crime has become a lesser risk even though he is counted as a "failure".

We conclude that parole failure rates are not very useful. They distort the picture and convey wrong impressions about the parole system. As a method of public accounting for the system, they do not say anything meaningful. It is possible to establish other kinds of failure rates that would not have the flaws of those now most commonly used. For example, one has been developed based on prisoners released on parole from federal institutions with some form of supervision involved. For the purpose of this rate, failure is defined in terms of parole violation by "revocation or forfeiture of parole or conviction for an indictable offence following release on parole and within the 5-year follow-up period".¹⁴ While it is better than the existing ones, this recidivism rate has too many of the same defects to be a good social accounting measure.