



Measuring Impact: CORI Reform on employment & recidivism rates

March 21, 2017 | 9:00-10:30am | Great Hall, John Adams Courthouse

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Reintegrating the Ex-Offender Population in the U.S. Labor Market: Lessons from the CORI Reform in Massachusetts

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Disclaimer: The views expressed here are those of the presenters and do not necessarily represent the views of the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston or the Federal Reserve System.



The Reintegration of Ex-Offenders

- How to reintegrate the large number of ex-offenders into civil society is an important policy question
 - 30% of U.S. adult population has some type of criminal record (DOJ 2006)
- Ex-offenders face serious barriers in seeking legal employment and are prone to recidivism
- State laws allow employers to check applicants' criminal records when making hiring decisions

Massachusetts CORI Reform

- MA implemented major reform changing employers' access to Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) in 2010 and 2012
- Expectations:
 - Improve ex-offenders' labor market outcomes
 - Reduce ex-offenders' recidivism
- Research question:
 - Did the CORI reform affect the employment and recidivism of ex-offenders?

Preview of Findings

- The research suggests the CORI Reform resulted in:
 - Small reduction in ex-offender employment
 - Small reduction in recidivism
- More changes are needed in order to better support the reintegration of ex-offenders into civil society

Access to Criminal History and Records Before 2010 in Massachusetts

- Public and private employers can use initial written job application to inquire about criminal history
- CORI data were only available to statutorily required or certified employers
 - Often related to vulnerable populations like children and seniors
- Most private employers relied on consumer reporting agencies (CRAs) to conduct criminal background checks on job applicants
 - Ex-offenders, advocacy groups claimed that CRA reports were error-prone and sometimes included information legally prohibited from dissemination

The 2010-12 Massachusetts CORI Reform

- Phase I: Ban the Box reform in November 2010
 - Prohibit both public and private employers from asking about job applicant's criminal history in initial written application
- Phase II: Record-Access reform in May 2012
 - State CORI database available to all employers
 - Restricts information returned to “standard access” requests by excluding:
 - Non-conviction or non-incarcerable cases
 - Convicted misdemeanors older than 5 years
 - Convicted felonies older than 10 years
 - Must return convicted manslaughter, murder, sex offense records and any pending cases

Data Sources for Research

- MA CORI Records
 - Department of Criminal Justice Information Services
 - Universe of unsealed records through 2015:Q3
- MA Unemployment Insurance Wage Records
 - Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development, Department of Unemployment Assistance
 - Employer-provided UI quarterly earnings records of employees (2010:Q1-2015:Q3)

Table 1

CORI Demographics Compared to Massachusetts Population

All Numbers Reported as Percentages

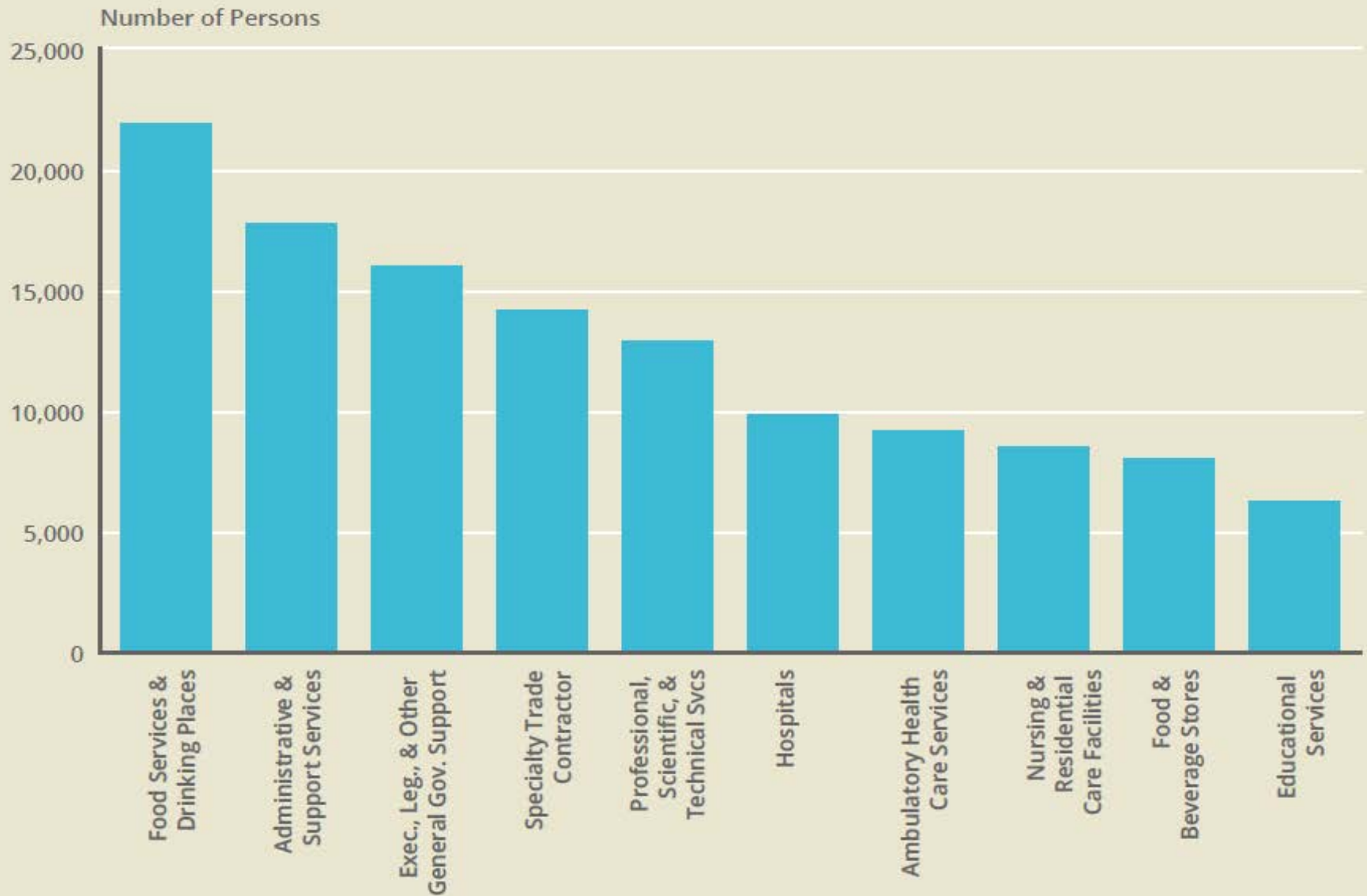
Demographic Category	Demographic Subcategory	CORI Database, 2015:Q3	Massachusetts Population, 2015 American Community Survey
Gender	Women	30.0	51.5
	Men	70.0	48.5
Race/Ethnicity	Asian	2.4	6.6
	Black	9.5	8.4
	Hispanic	12.2	11.2
	Native-American	0.1	0.5
	White	75.9	73.3

Source: Authors' calculations. Numbers within a demographic category may not sum exactly to 100 percent due to rounding. Asian, Black, Native-American, and White subcategories of Race/Ethnicity exclude Hispanics.

Figure 2

Ex-Offender Employment, Top Ten Industries

Average from 2010:Q1 to 2010:Q3 (Before Ban the Box)



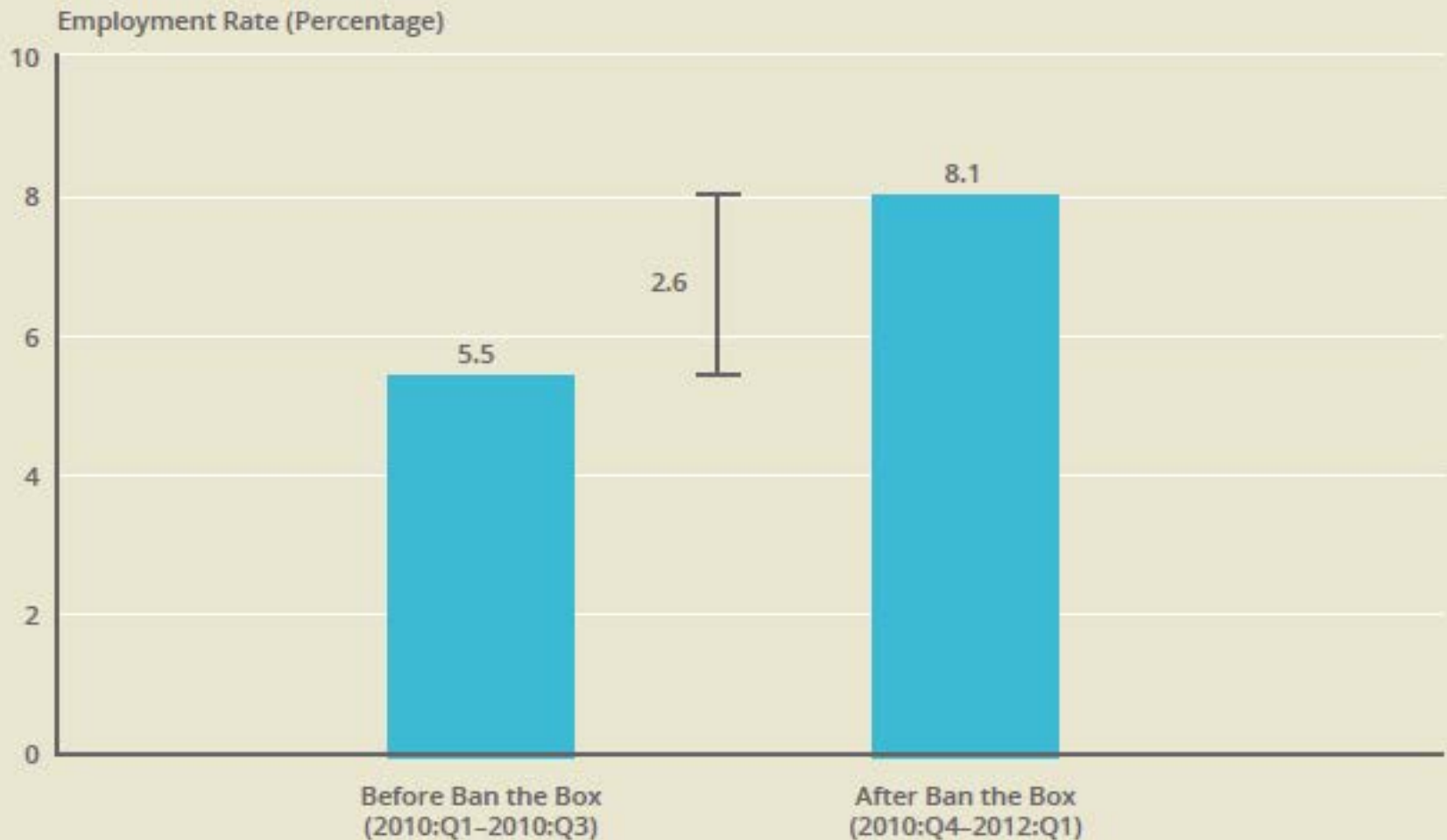
Source: Authors' calculations based on CORI database linked to Massachusetts unemployment insurance wage records.

Research Approach

- Ideally, could run true experiment where some people are randomly affected by MA CORI Reform and others are not
- Problem: not random who is and is not affected by reform
 - Non-random differences exist between non-offenders and ex-offenders, as well as among ex-offenders, that may affect employment even absent reform
- Solution: compare employment before vs. after for potentially affected vs. unaffected individuals to remove non-random group differences and obtain impact of reform

Difference in Average Employment Rate Between Individuals Without CORI Records and Individuals With CORI Records Before and After Implementing the Ban the Box Reform

Figure 3



Source: Authors' calculations.

Difference in Average Employment Rate Between Individuals Whose CORI Records Became Unsearchable and Individuals Whose CORI Record Accessibility Did Not Change Before and After Implementing the Record-Access Reform

Figure 4



Source: Authors' calculations.

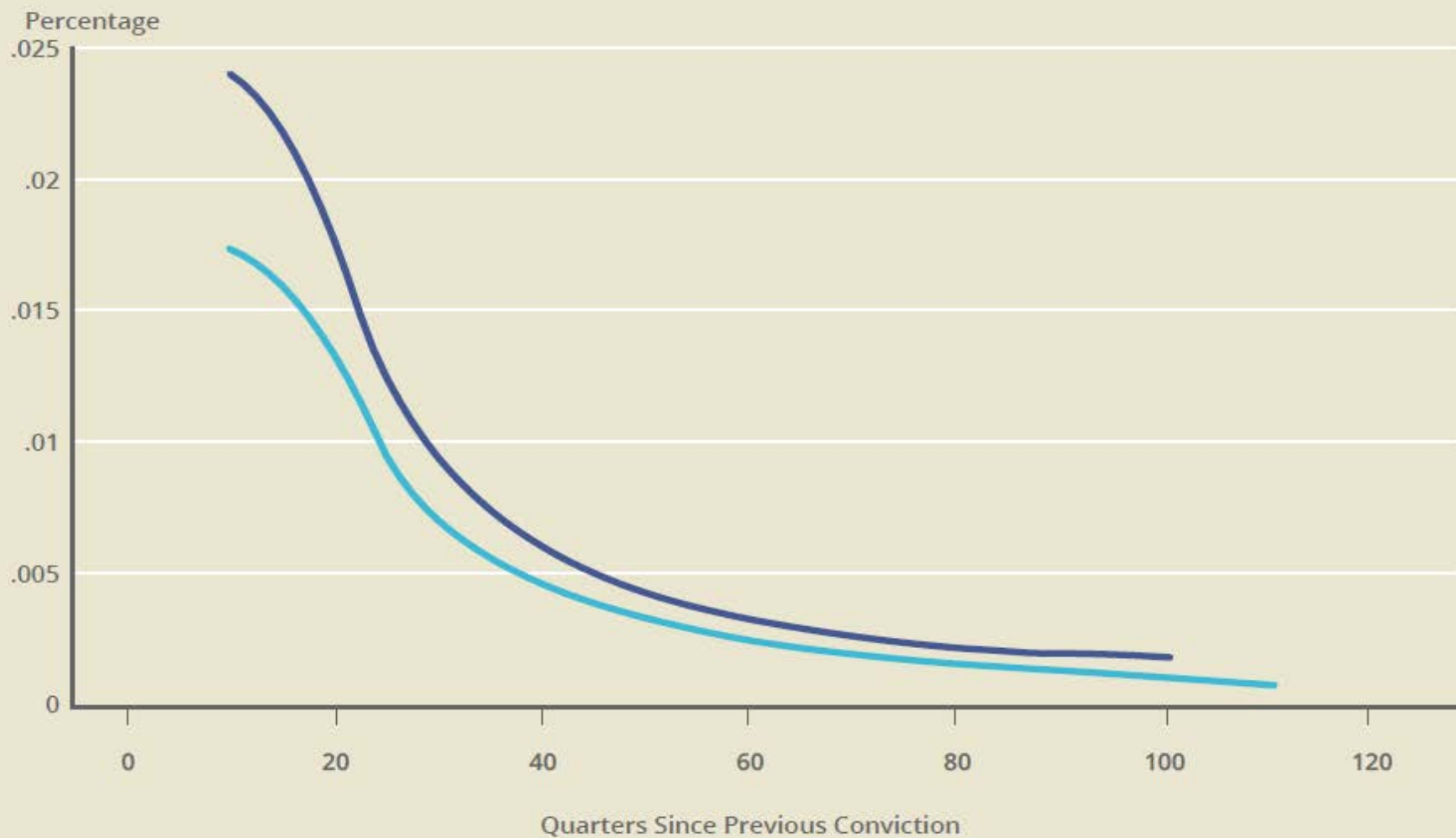
Why Negative Employment Effect?

- At least two possibilities. CORI Reform could lead to:
 - Ex-offenders searching for employment in better positions and industries given a potential increase in opportunities from employers
 - Employers changing their hiring criteria and attempting to use other observable applicant information to continue screening out ex-offenders
- However, unable to definitively prove which of these possibilities drives the results without additional information

Figure 5

Probability of Ex-Offender Recidivism Before and After Implementing the Ban the Box Reform

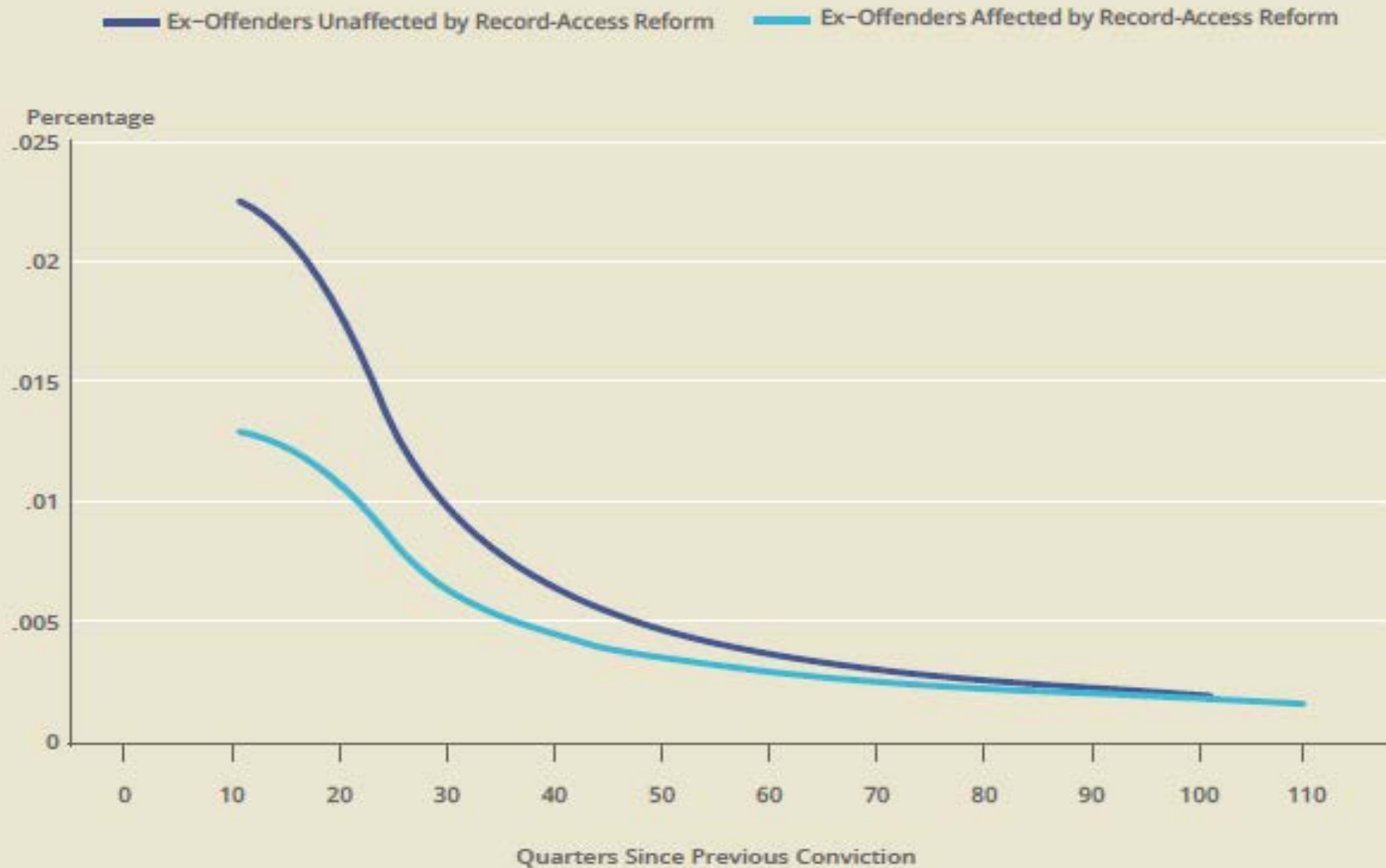
Before Ban the Box After Ban the Box



Source: Authors' calculations.

Figure 6

Probability of Recidivism for Ex-Offenders Unaffected by the Record-Access Reform versus Ex-Offenders Affected by the Record-Access Reform



Source: Authors' calculations.

Implications and Takeaways

- Ban the box and restricting employer access to criminal records are not a cure-all
- More changes are needed in order to better support the reintegration of ex-offenders into civil society
- Policymakers may also want to explore other tools to encourage employers to hire ex-offenders
 - More research is needed to understand the effectiveness of alternative policy tools