

# Life Goes On: The Historic Rise in Life Sentences in America

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- Our role in examining life sentences
- Our main three concerns about life sentences in America
  1. Growth in overall numbers
  2. Out of step internationally
  3. Excluded from reforms

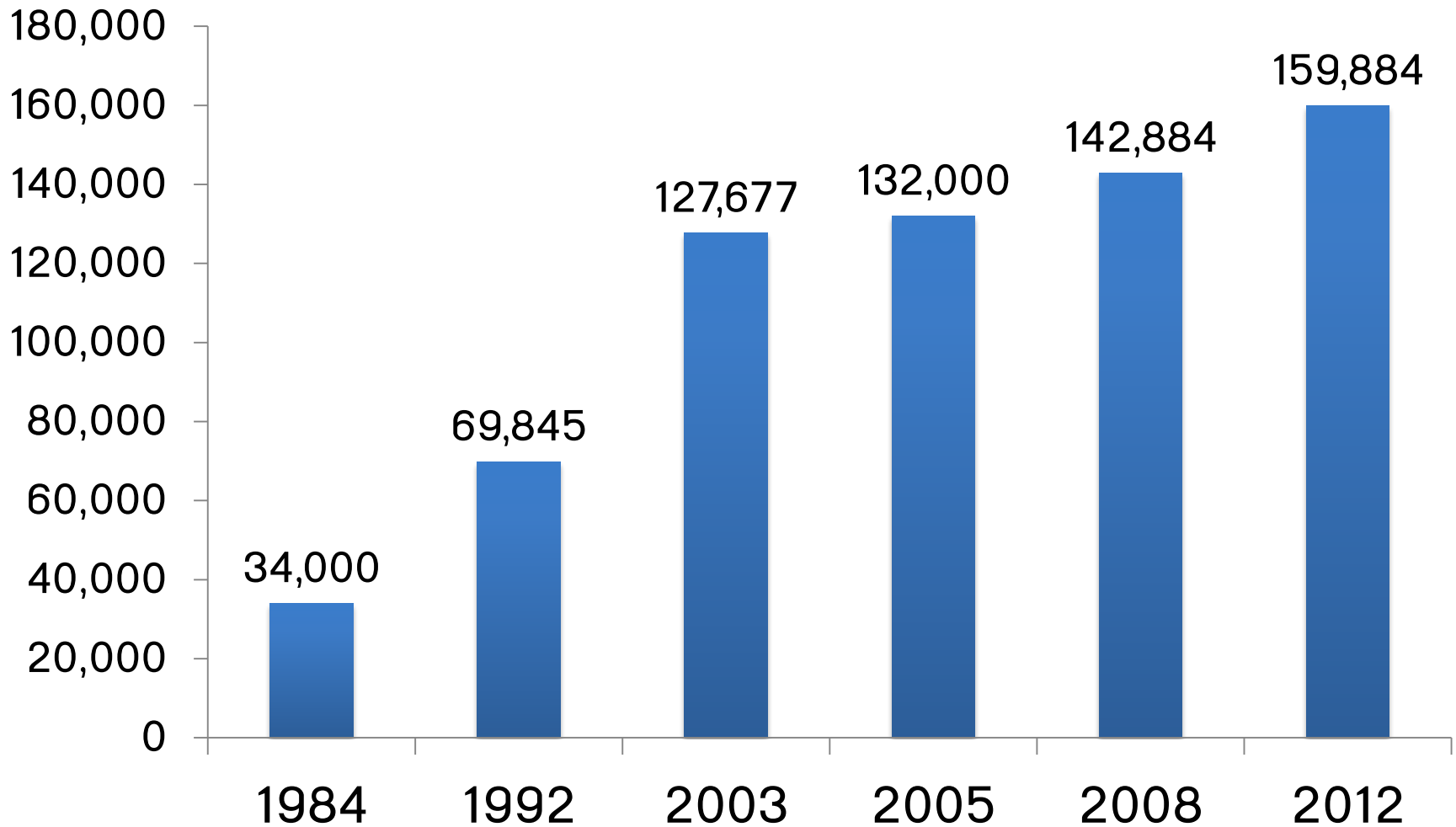
# National Picture

- As of 2012, 159,884 people were serving life sentences, representing an 11.9% rise since our last data collection in 2008
- **One in 9 people in prison is serving a life sentence**
- The rise in LWOP has been steeper than the rise in life sentences with the possibility of parole
  - 22.1% rise in LWOP; 7.6% rise in LWP
- Approximately 10,000 life-sentenced prisoners have been convicted of a nonviolent offense

# National Picture, Cont.

Population	Female	Male
Adult Life	3,491	99,084
Adult LWOP	1,596	44,986
Juvenile Life	211	7,651
JLWOP	63	2,435
GENDER TOTAL	5,361	154,156
POP TOTAL	159,520	159,520
Total %	3.4%	96.7%

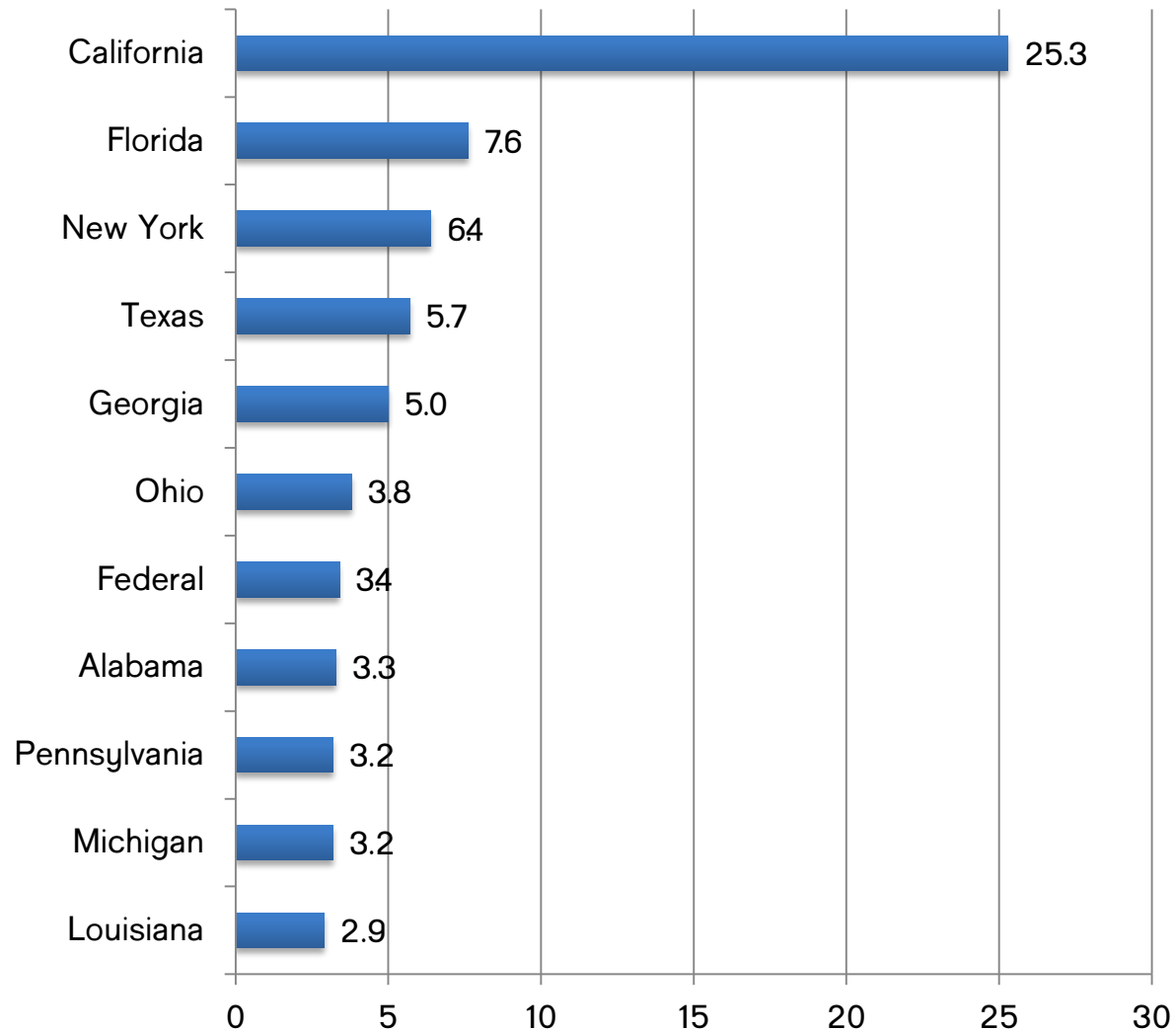
# Lifer Population Over Time



# States with the Largest Rise, 2008-2012

State	2008	2012	% Increase	# Add'l People
California	36,121	40,362	11.7%	4,241
Colorado	2,166	2,621	21.0	455
Kansas	861	1,061	23.2	200
Nevada	2,217	2,719	22.6	502
Washington	1,982	2,623	32.3	641
				6,039

# States with Most Lifers



## State Level: Lifers as % of Prison Population

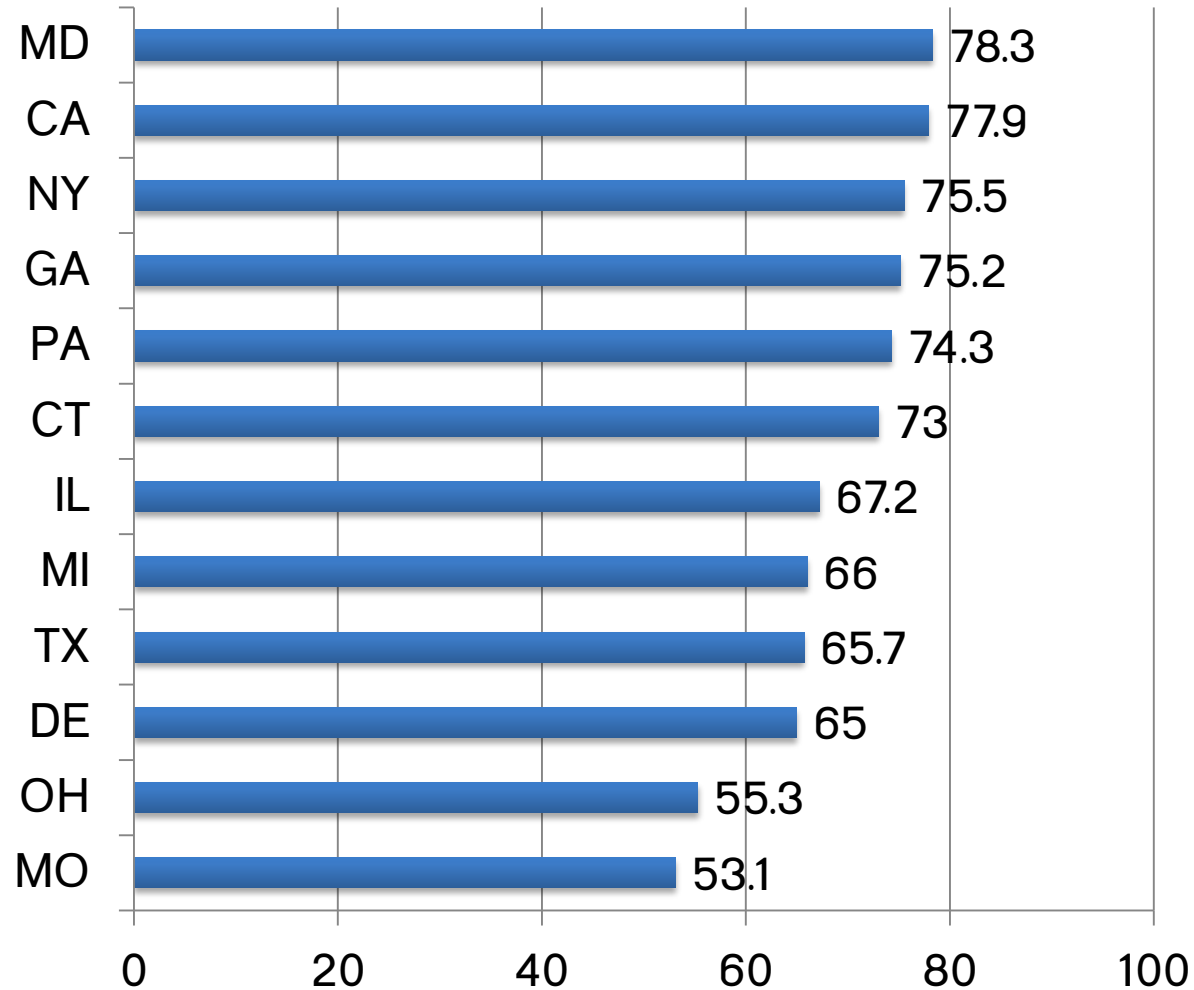
- Nationally, 10.6% of people in prison are serving life sentences
- States with the greatest percentage of lifers within their prison population are:
  - California (30.1%)
  - Nevada (21.5%)
  - Massachusetts (19.4%)
  - New York (18.8%)
  - Washington (15.4%)



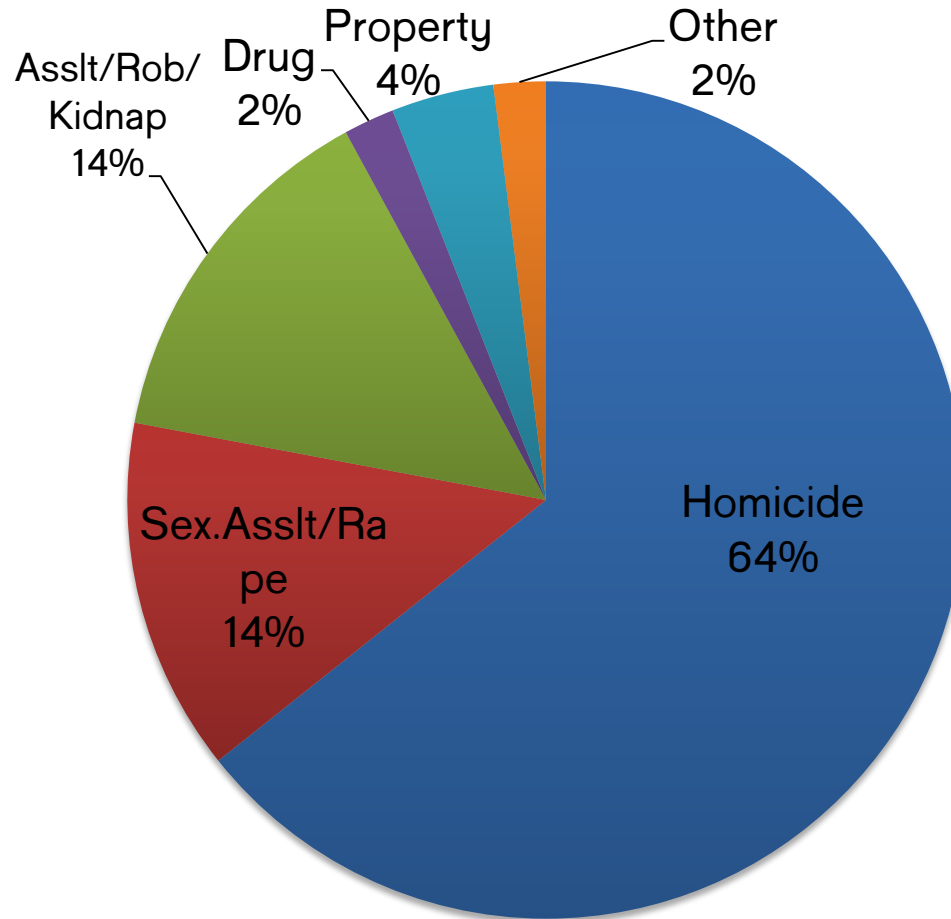
# Race & Ethnicity

- Racial disparities are significant: nearly 50% of those serving life sentences are African American; almost 2 in 3 are nonwhite
- In some states, like MD, more than 75% are black. Other notable states:
  - Georgia (72%)
  - Louisiana (73.4%)
  - Mississippi (71.5%)
  - South Carolina (64.9%)
- 16% of lifers are Latino with even higher percentages in CA (35.7%), CO (26.4%), NM (44.1%), and AZ (24.8%)

# States with Highest Percent Non-White



# Crime of Conviction



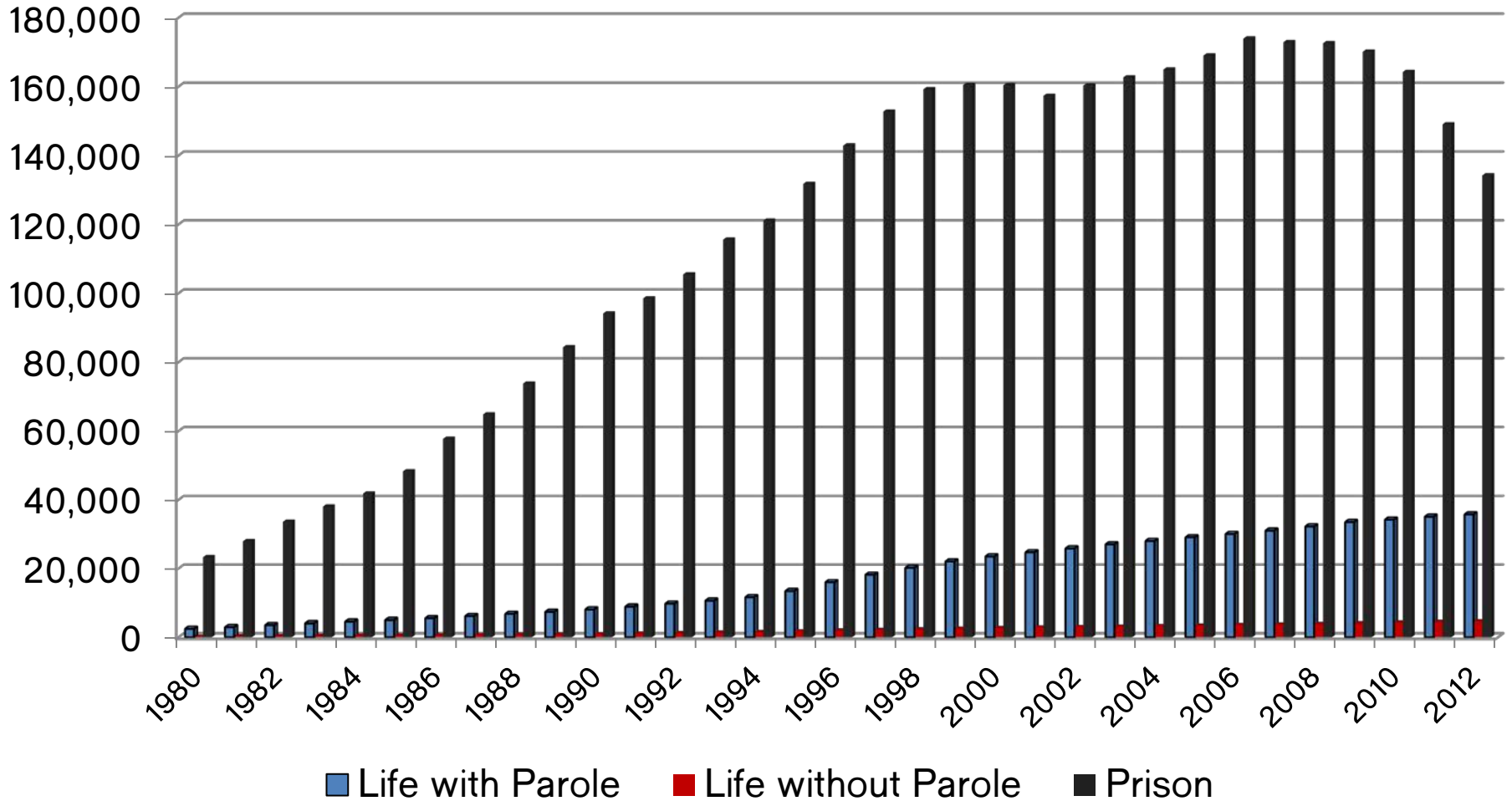
# States with More than 30% Non-Homicide

State	Percent Non-Homicide
Idaho	54.1
Washington	46.2
Alabama	39.2
Georgia	38.7
Kansas	38.1
Delaware	36.3
South Carolina	36.2
Louisiana	33.3

# Possible Causes for Continued Rise in Life Sentences

- Habitual offender laws
- Expansion of eligible offenses
- Exclusion of lifers from prison reform
- Elimination of parole
- Declining use of the death penalty

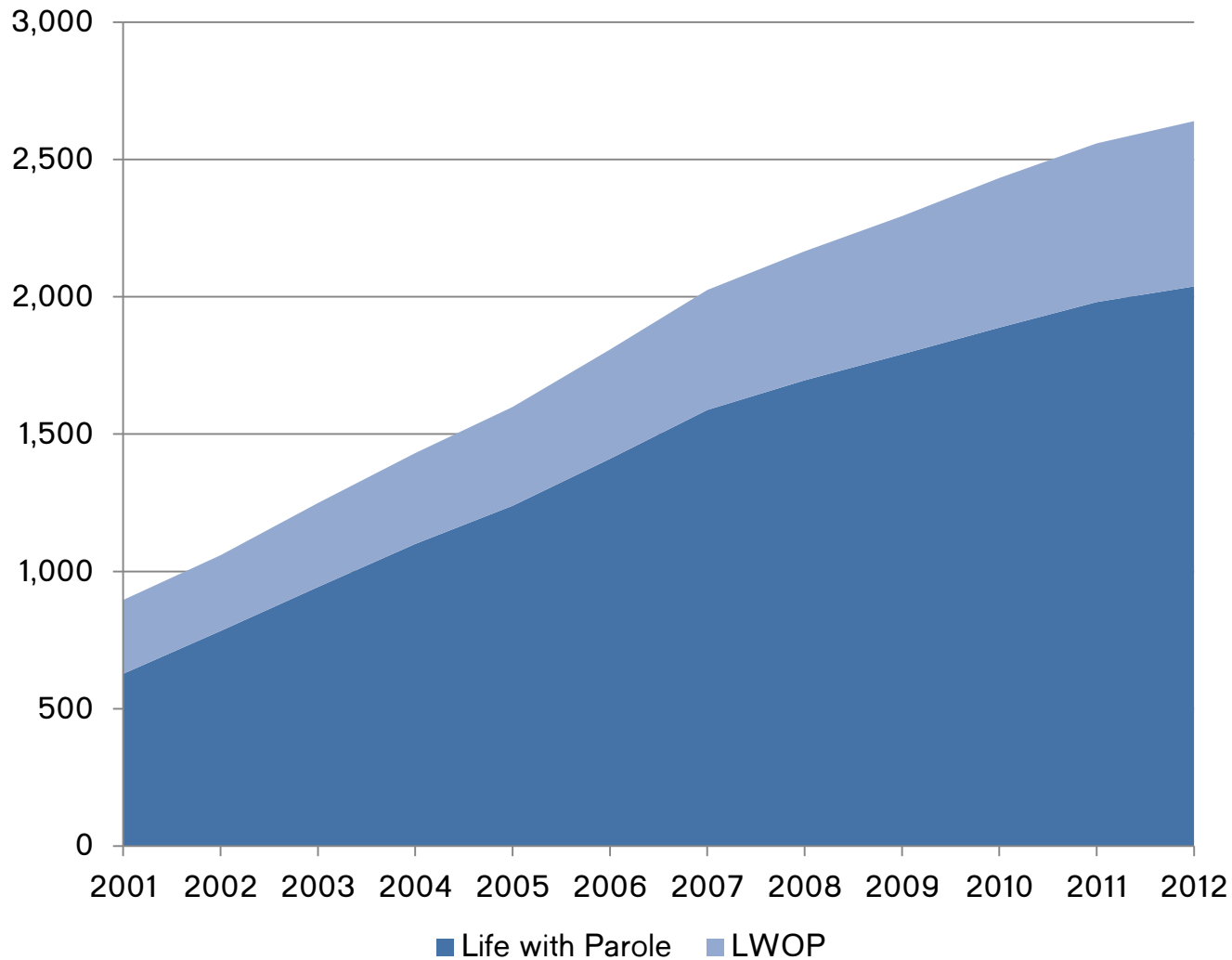
# California



# Washington

Year	LWOP Population	% LWOP Due to 3X
2000	412	18.2
2002	448	33.9
2004	500	42.8
2006	537	50.8
2008	557	58.7
2010	554	69.7
2012	637	68.1

# Colorado

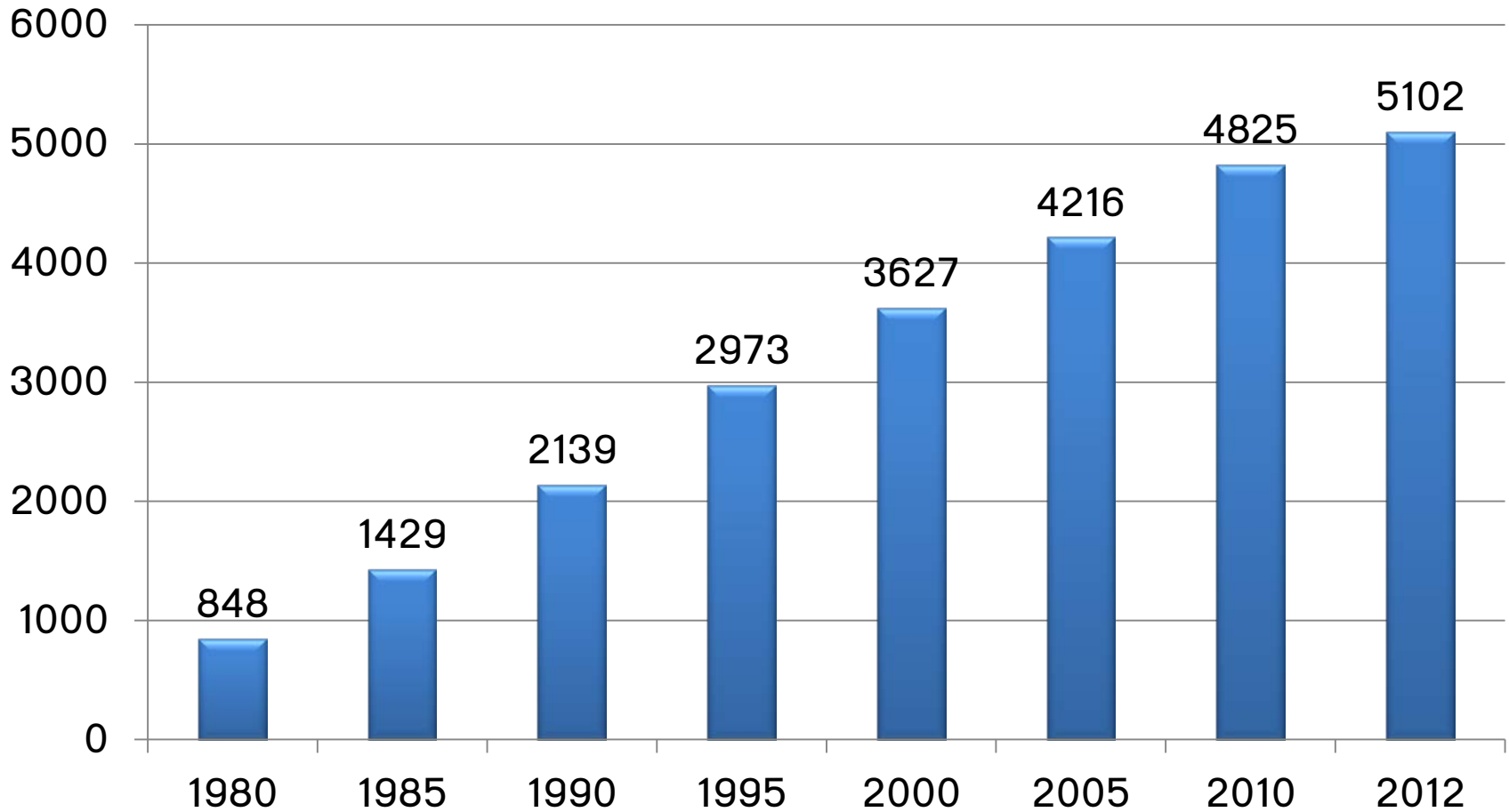




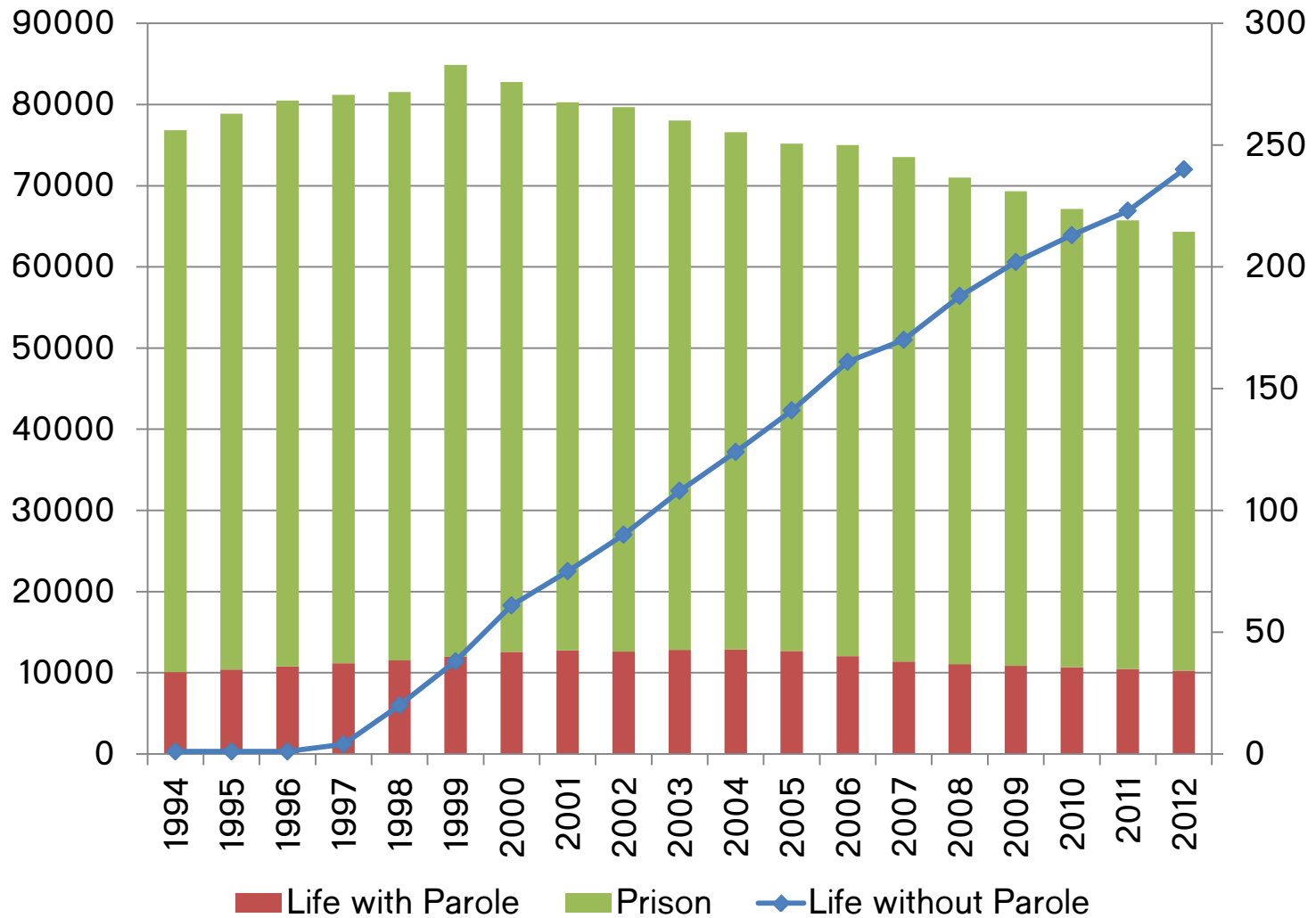
# Colorado, Cont.: Crime of Conviction

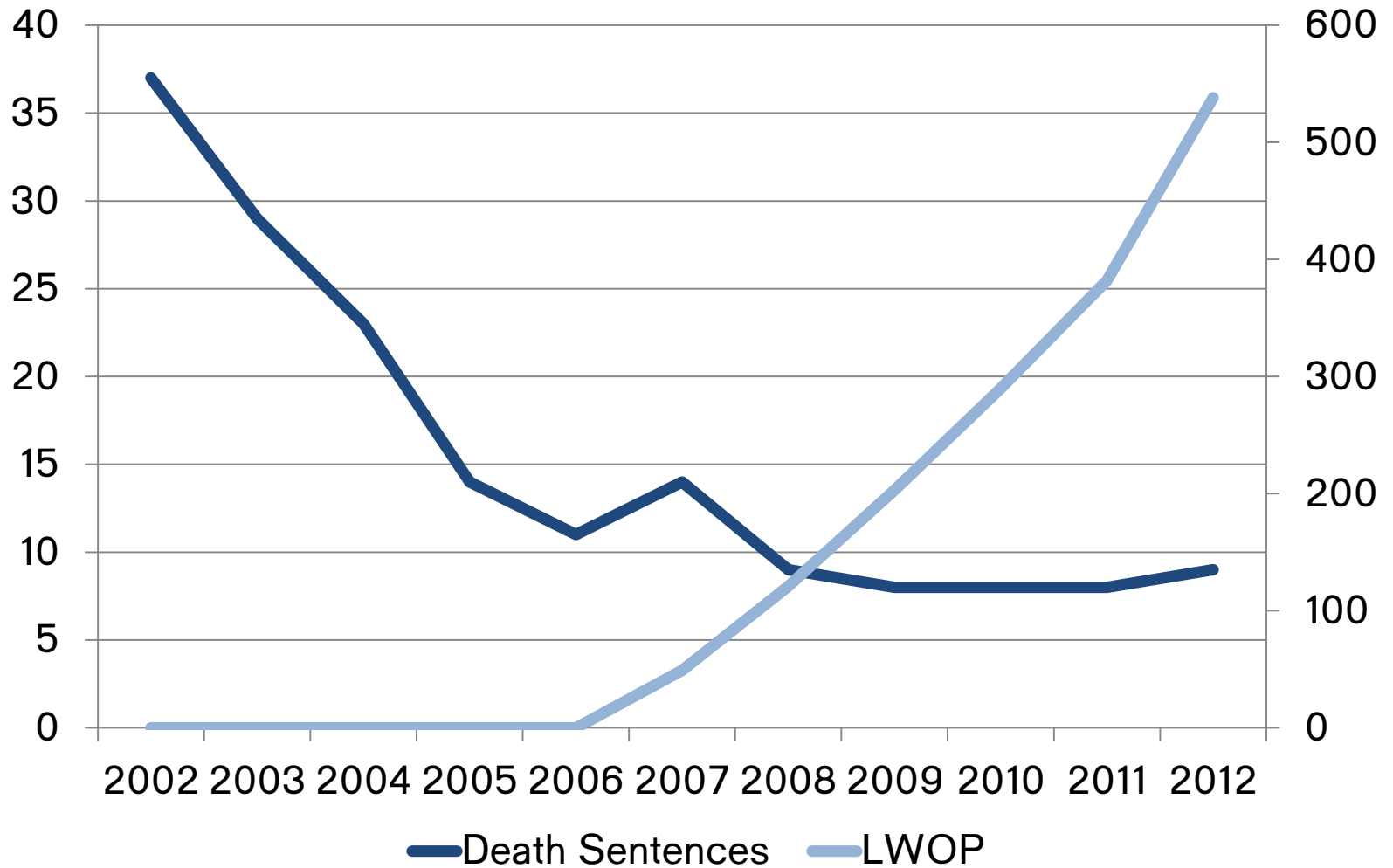
Offense	Life	LWOP
Homicide	268 (13.3)	592 (97.7)
Sex Offense	<b>1,615 (80.1)</b>	14 (2.3)
Agg. Asslt/Robb/Kidnap	68 (3.4)	0 (0.0)
Drug Offense	8 (0.4)	0 (0.0)
Property Offense	42 (2.1)	0 (0.0)
Other	14 (0.7)	0 (0.0)
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,015</b>	<b>606</b>

# Pennsylvania



# New York





- Critical moment
- Carve out opportunities
  - Nonviolent
  - Non-homicide
  - Third strikers/habitual offenders
  - Juveniles
- Working with death penalty abolitionists
- Collect data on so-called “virtual lifers”

## Additional Lifer Reports from The Sentencing Project

The Meaning of Life: Long Prison Sentences in Context (2004)

No Exit: The Expanding Use of Life Sentences in America (2009)

The Lives of Juvenile Lifers: Findings from a National Survey (2011)

[www.sentencingproject.org](http://www.sentencingproject.org)