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# Parole on Probation

## Parole Decision-Making, Public Opinion and Public Confidence

Robin Fitzgerald · Arie Freiberg  
Shannon Dodd · Lorana Bartels



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Robin Fitzgerald  
School of Social Science  
University of Queensland  
St Lucia, QLD, Australia

Arie Freiberg  
Faculty of Law  
Monash University  
Melbourne, VIC, Australia

Shannon Dodd  
Thomas More Law School  
Australian Catholic University  
Melbourne, VIC, Australia

Lorana Bartels  
Centre for Social Research and Methods  
Australian National University  
Canberra, ACT, Australia

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# Parole: An Uncertain Institution

## INTRODUCTION: PAROLE POPULISM IN PERILOUS TIMES

Parole and parole boards play critical roles in criminal justice systems, both in Australia and internationally. In many jurisdictions, parole—a form of conditional release of offenders sentenced to a term of imprisonment, which allows an offender to serve the whole or part of their sentence in the community, subject to conditions—has been in existence for many years. With the number of parolees and imprisonment rates increasing in many countries, parole decision-making is a crucial contributor to the size of prison populations and, more broadly, to public confidence in the operation of correctional systems. However, over recent years, parole has been frequently reviewed and the subject of intense criticism, with parole boards becoming lightning rods for public anger. This often follows a critical incident involving a parolee committing a serious offence while serving their sentence in the community (see Freiberg et al., 2018a; Rhine et al., 2017; Saunders & Roberts, 2019, for discussion in the context of the United States (US), Australia, and the United Kingdom (UK), respectively). Several highly publicised cases of parole or parole decision-making ‘failure’, including the murder of Jill Meagher by a parolee in Victoria, Australia<sup>1</sup> (see Bartels, 2013; Buglar, 2016 for discussion) and the controversial decision to release serial sex offender John Worboys on

<sup>1</sup> In September 2012, an Irish journalist, Jill Meagher, was raped and killed metres from her home in Melbourne by Adrian Bayley, who was on parole for numerous previous rapes. Her death sparked a national outcry, with over 10,000 attending a peace march in her memory (ABC Local, 2012).