

Prisoner Reentry in Georgia

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research for safer communities



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Executive Summary

This report describes the process of prisoner reentry in Georgia by examining the trends in incarceration and prisoner releases in the state, the characteristics of the state's returning prisoners, the geographic distribution of returning prisoners, and the social and economic climates of the communities that are home to the highest concentrations of returning prisoners. This report does not attempt to evaluate a specific reentry program or empirically assess Georgia's reentry policies and practices. Rather, the report consolidates existing data on incarceration and release trends and presents a new analysis of data on Georgia prisoners released in 2002. The data used for this report were derived from several sources, including the Georgia Department of Corrections, the Georgia State Board of Pardons and Parole, and the U.S. Census Bureau. Highlights from the report are presented below.

Incarceration and Release Trends. Georgia's incarceration and release trends are similar to those observed at the national level. Between 1982 and 2002, the Georgia prison population more than tripled, increasing from 13,884 to 46,534 people. The per capita rate of imprisonment in Georgia rose from 219 to 538 per 100,000 residents in the state between 1980 and 2000, an increase of over 150 percent. Georgia's release patterns reflect these admission and population trends: 16,124 prisoners were released from Georgia prisons in 2002, more than one and a half times the number released in 1982 (N = 9,748).

Characteristics of Prisoners Released in 2002. The majority of released prisoners were male (89 percent) and black (66 percent). The average age at release was 34 years. The largest percentage of prisoners (36 percent) had been serving time for property offenses. Drug offenses were the second most common offense (29 percent). The average time served was 1.8 years. While the majority of prisoners represented new court commitments, a notable percentage (41 percent) were incarcerated for parole and probation violations. The majority report no medical illness or history of mental illness; however, 70 percent have histories of drug use. Educational attainment is also quite low.

Release and Supervision Policies and Practices. In 2002, the majority (79 percent) of all exiting prisoners were released to a period of supervision. The percentage of supervised and unsupervised released prisoners has remained relatively stable over time, fluctuating about 17 percent between 1982 and 2002.

Geographic Distribution of Released Prisoners. Eight counties—Fulton, Cobb, DeKalb, Clayton, Richmond, Chatham, Muscogee, and Dougherty—received 43 percent of prisoners who returned to the state of Georgia. Twelve percent of released prisoners returned to Fulton County alone; no other county is home to more than 7 percent of releases. County-specific analyses in Fulton and Dougherty revealed that most released prisoners returned to the central cities of these counties, where unemployment is higher than in the rest of the county and city, and where large shares of the population live in poverty and in single parent, female-headed households. Within the central city of Atlanta, releases are most heavily concentrated in 5 of

the city's 104 zip code areas, and within the city of Albany, releases are most heavily concentrated in 3 of the city's 13 zip code areas.

Introduction

This report examines prisoner reentry in Georgia. Prisoner reentry—the process of leaving prison and returning to society—has, with good reason, become a pressing issue both in Georgia and across the nation. Rising incarceration rates over the past quarter century have resulted in more and more prisoners being released from prison each year. Nationwide, an estimated 630,000 prisoners were released from state and federal prisons in 2001, a fourfold increase over the past two decades.¹ Thus, released prisoners, their families, and the communities to which they return are having to cope with the challenges of reentry on a much greater scale than ever before.

And the challenges of reentry are many. More prisoners nationwide are returning home having spent longer terms behind bars,² exacerbating the already significant challenges of finding employment and reconnecting with family. Prisoners today are typically less prepared for reintegration, less connected to community social structures, and more likely to have health or substance abuse problems than in the past. In addition to these personal circumstances, limited availability of jobs, housing, and social services in a community may affect the returning prisoner's ability to successfully reintegrate.³

These challenges affect more than returning prisoners and their families; they can also have serious implications for the communities to which prisoners return. Two-thirds of the nation's prisoners released in 1996 returned to major metropolitan areas across the country—up from 50 percent in 1984.⁴ Within central cities, released prisoners are often concentrated in a few neighborhoods.⁵ These high concentrations of returning prisoners generate great costs to those communities, including potential increases in costs associated with crime and public safety, greater public health risks, and high rates of unemployment and homelessness. Developing a thorough understanding of these characteristics of returning prisoners and the challenges they face is an important first step in shaping public policy toward improving the safety and welfare of all citizens.

In many ways, the dimensions and challenges of prisoner reentry observed on the national level are mirrored in the state of Georgia. Incarceration increased dramatically in Georgia in recent decades. Between 1982 and 2002, the Georgia prison population more than tripled, increasing from 13,884 to 46,534 people. At the same time, the per capita rate of imprisonment in Georgia rose from 219 to 552 per 100,000 residents in the state between 1980 and 2002, an increase of over 150 percent. Admissions to Georgia prisons also increased over this period: in 1980, 11,737 individuals were admitted to Georgia's prisons, and by 2000, annual admissions had grown to 17,231—a 47 percent increase. As with the growth in

¹ Paige M. Harrison and Jennifer C. Karberg, *Prison and Jail Prisoners at Midyear 2002* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2003).

² James P. Lynch and William J. Sabol, "Prisoner Reentry in Perspective," *Crime Policy Report*, vol. 3 (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, 2001).

³ For an in-depth discussion of prisoner reentry nationwide, see Jeremy Travis, Amy L. Solomon, and Michelle Waul, *From Prison to Home: The Dimensions and Consequences of Prisoner Reentry* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press, 2001).

⁴ Lynch and Sabol, "Prisoner Reentry in Perspective."

⁵ *Ibid.*

imprisonment, Georgia has also experienced a dramatic growth in the number of people being released from prison. In 1982, only 9,748 individuals were released from the state's prisons. Twenty years later, 16,124 individuals were released to the community from Georgia's prisons, a 65 percent increase. The vast majority (95 percent) of those released from Georgia prisons in 2002 returned to communities in Georgia. Eight counties—Fulton, Cobb, DeKalb, Clayton, Richmond, Chatham, Muscogee, and Dougherty—received 43 percent of prisoners who returned to the state of Georgia. Twelve percent of released prisoners returned to Fulton County alone; no other county is home to more than 7 percent of releases. Analyses in Fulton and Dougherty counties, as well as in the city of Atlanta, revealed that most released prisoners returned to areas in which unemployment is high and shares of the population live in poverty and in single-parent female-headed households.

Government leaders, corrections officials, local organizations, and service providers are keenly aware of the reentry challenges experienced by states and communities across the country, and they have begun to use both research and programmatic knowledge to address them. This emphasis on issues pertaining to prisoner reentry prompted the National Governor's Association to launch the Prisoner Reentry State Policy Academy. Established in the summer of 2003, the goal of the Academy is to help governors and other state policymakers develop and implement effective prisoner reentry strategies that reduce costly recidivism rates. Seven states—Georgia, Idaho, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Jersey, Rhode Island, and Virginia—have been selected to participate in the policy academy. Activities include an in-state policy workshop, two policy academy meetings, and customized technical assistance, including the production of this report. The purpose of the report is to present information on prisoner reentry in one document that can be used to inform state officials and policymakers as they develop strategies to address prisoner reentry in Georgia.

This report describes prisoner reentry in Georgia by examining the state's incarceration, admission, and release trends over time; describing the characteristics of prisoners released from Georgia prisons; examining the geographic distribution of those released prisoners across the state; and describing the social and economic climates of communities that are home to the highest concentrations of returning prisoners. This report does not attempt to evaluate a specific reentry program, nor does it empirically assess Georgia's reentry policies and practices. Rather, the report consolidates existing data on incarceration and release trends and presents a new analysis of data on Georgia prisoners released in 2002.

About the Data

The data used for this report were derived from several sources. Longitudinal data describing incarceration and reentry trends in Georgia and the nation were derived from the Georgia Department of Corrections (GDC) and the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics. The GDC data were generated by the Offender Tracking Information System (OTIS), a database shared by the GDC and the Georgia State Board of Pardons and Parole, and provided by the Office of Planning and Analysis of the GDC. Community-level data used to develop the maps of reentry and related demographic and socioeconomic status data by zip code areas were derived from 2000 U.S. Census data and Melissadata.com.

The GDC provided data on the population of inmates released from Georgia prisons in calendar year 2002. In cases in which the GDC released an individual more than once in 2002 (in most cases this would occur when a the person was released from prison, returned to prison for a violation of the conditions of his or her release, and was then released again), only the individual's first release is included in most analyses. The exceptions are the analysis of the total number of releases in 2002 in chapter 1, and in some calculations of the average time served. These exceptions are footnoted within the text.

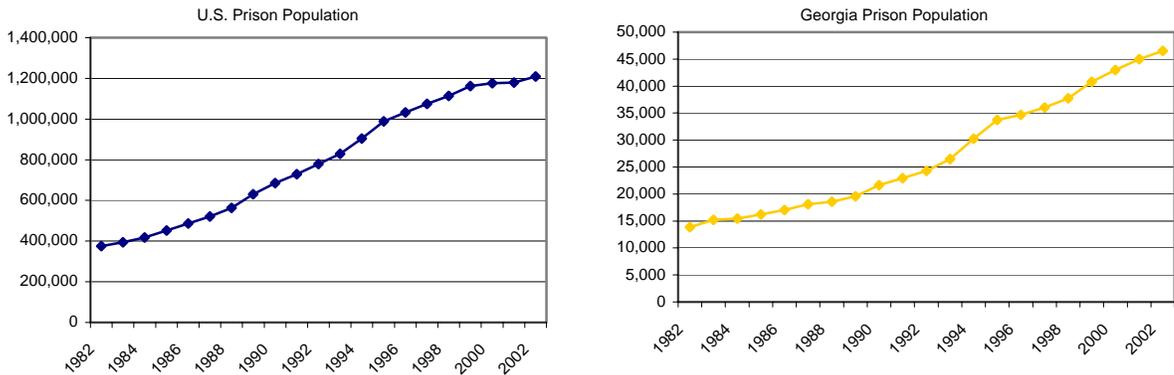
CHAPTER 1

Incarceration and Release Trends in Georgia

In order to understand the reentry phenomenon in Georgia, it is first necessary to examine prison admission and release trends in the state. This section provides an overview of recent incarceration history in Georgia and describes some basic changes in the state's prisoner population and release cohorts. This context will help frame the reentry issue and will provide background for the discussion of the needs and challenges of returning prisoners that follows later in this report.

PRISON POPULATION ON THE RISE

Figure 1. U.S. and Georgia State Prison Populations, 1982–2002



Source: Offender Tracking Information System (OTIS), Georgia Department of Corrections and Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles, provided by Office of Planning and Analysis, GDC.

The Georgia prison population has grown tremendously over the past two decades, reflecting the rise in prison populations nationwide.⁶ Between 1982 and 2002, the Georgia prison population more than tripled, increasing from 13,884 to 46,534 people (figure 1).⁷ By the end of calendar year 2000, Georgia had the ninth highest prison population in the United States⁸

⁶ Between 1925 and 1973, the per capita rate of imprisonment in the United States remained relatively constant at about 110 per 100,000 residents. Since then, the rate of imprisonment increased steadily each year (A. Blumstein and A.J. Beck, "Population Growth in U.S. Prisons, 1980–1996," in *Prisons*, edited by M. Tonry and J. Petersilia [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999]). By year-end 2001, the number of sentenced prisoners per 100,000 U.S. residents was 470—over four times the rate of imprisonment that had been maintained during the early part of the 20th century (Paige M. Harrison and Allen J. Beck, *Prisoners in 2001*, Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin [Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 2002]).

⁷ Georgia Department of Corrections.

⁸ Allen J. Beck and Paige M. Harrison, *Prisoners in 2000*, Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 2001).

and had an incarceration rate of 550 prisoners per 100,000 residents.⁹ Georgia's prison population continued an upward trend through 2002, while the nation's prison population was tapering off a bit. The Georgia Department of Corrections attributes the continued growth in its prison population to mandatory sentencing laws and tough parole policies (see the sidebar "Sentencing Law Overview" on page 9).¹⁰

As the prison population has increased in Georgia, so too has spending on corrections. Between fiscal years 1982 and 2003, total expenditures for GDC increased 297 percent (as adjusted for inflation),¹¹ rising from \$128,867,604¹² to \$975,444,054.¹³ Georgia currently has 39 institutions (including transition centers, county correction institutions, state prisons, and private prisons) housing adult prisoners sentenced by the state.¹⁴ Average daily capacity for all inmate facilities increased from 12,151 in 1980 to 47,748 in 2003.

⁹ These population figures are based on custody counts and include prisoners with a sentence of more than one year (Beck and Harrison, *Prisoners in 2000*).

¹⁰ Georgia Department of Corrections, *Annual Report 2002*.

¹¹ These calculations were based on the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Consumer Price Index, <http://www.bls.gov/cpi>.

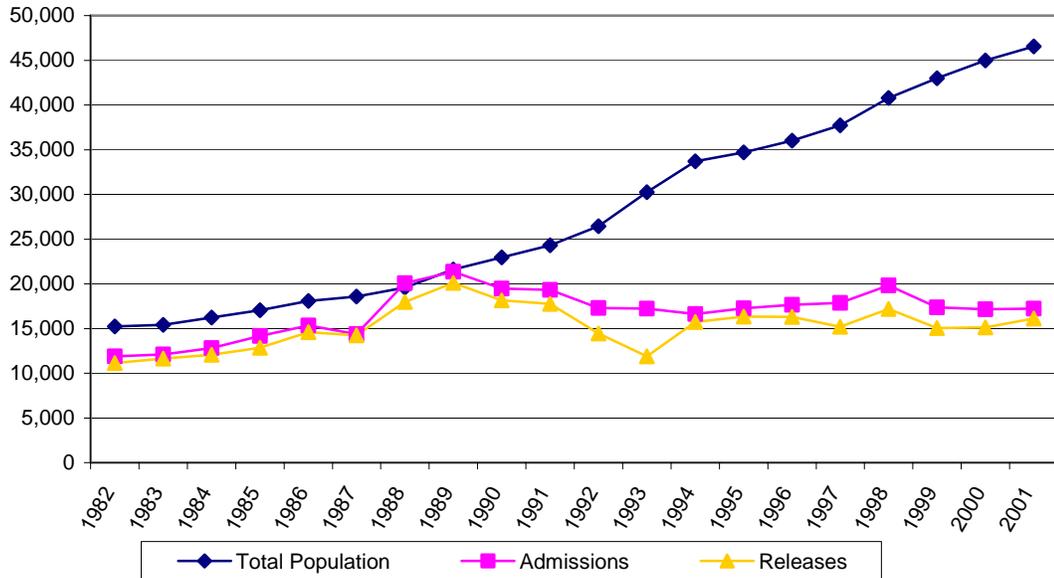
¹² Georgia Department of Corrections. \$128,867,604 is \$245,717,015 in 2003 dollars.

¹³ Georgia Department of Corrections.

¹⁴ The Georgia Department of Corrections assigns prisoners to one of its 39 institutions based on a diagnostic evaluation that considers the inmate's length of sentence, nature of the crime, criminal history, sex offenses, escape history, violent behavior history, medical/psychiatric status, and history of drug/alcohol use. Transitional centers house work-release prisoners who have regular contact with the community; medium security facilities focus on work programming; and maximum security facilities house prisoners who are escape risks, have a history of violence in prison, or were convicted of heinous crimes. (Heinous crimes generally include the offenses of murder, rape, armed robbery, or kidnapping, committed under any number of circumstances.)

ADMISSION AND RELEASE TRENDS

Figure 2. Georgia Prison Population, Admissions, and Releases, 1982–2002



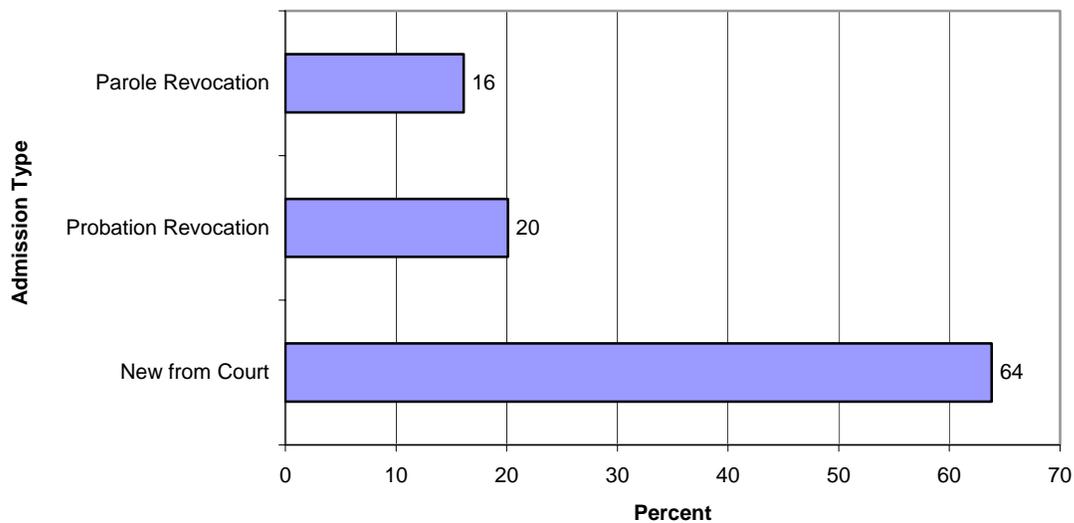
Source: Offender Tracking Information System (OTIS), Georgia Department of Corrections and Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles, Provided by Office of Planning and Analysis, GDC.

Note: Releases represent all those persons released from state prison, even if under the age of 18.

Over the past two decades, the Georgia prison population has continued a consistent upward trend, while admission and release trends have fluctuated, although ultimately increasing by 47 percent and 65 percent, respectively. As can be seen in figure 2, prison admissions increased significantly in the late 1980s, most likely due to the war on crime, which resulted in increased arrests for drug-related crimes as well as tougher sentences for drug offenders. These policing and sentencing policies resulted in a serious jail and prison overcrowding crisis for the state, prompting the parole board to shorten lengths of stay for many inmates during this period (note the increasing number of releases from prison between 1988 and 1990). Beginning in 1992, the GDC began a massive prison expansion effort that ultimately doubled its capacity, which may explain why releases began tapering off in the early 1990s. With the implementation of Truth in Sentencing in 1994, prisoners began serving longer sentences, causing the total prison population to increase while the admissions and release trends were comparatively stable and have remained so for the better part of this past decade.

By 2002, the greatest share of admissions to Georgia prisons was for new court commitments (64 percent) (figure 3); the remaining 36 percent was for parole and probation revocations.¹⁵ Of those committed for new crimes, the distribution of offense types in Georgia (based on 2001 data) differs from national trends (as reported by the Bureau of Justice Statistics for 2001).¹⁶ Forty-nine percent of sentenced state prisoners nationwide were convicted for violent offenses and 19 percent were convicted for property offenses, while in Georgia, 21 percent were convicted for violent offenses and 35 percent were convicted for property offenses (see figure 4). The percentage of sentenced state prisoners convicted for drug offenses for both the nation in 2001 and Georgia in 2002 are closer in magnitude, at 20 percent and 28 percent, respectively.¹⁷

Figure 3. Admissions to State Prison by Admission Type, 2002 (N = 17,231)



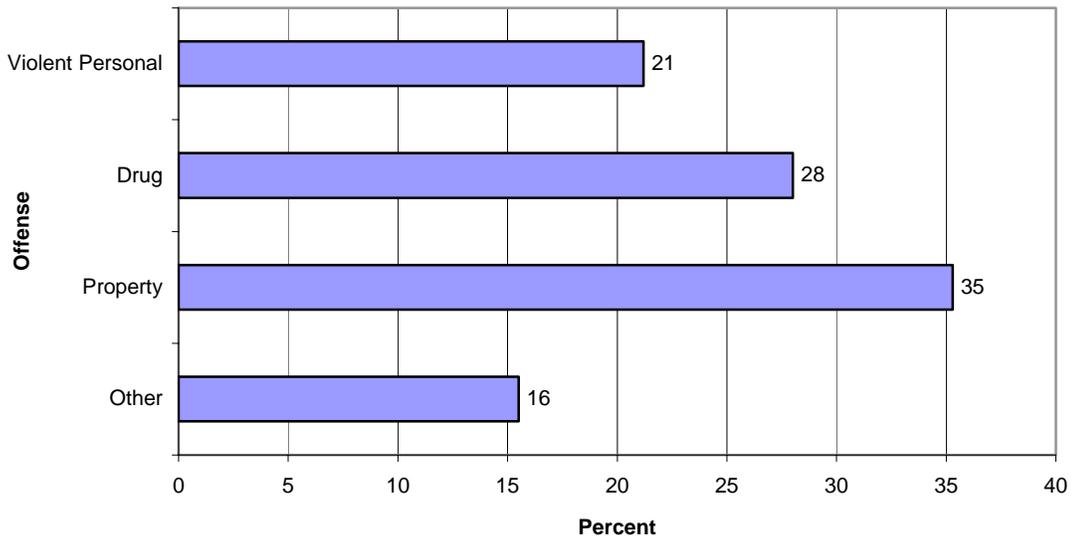
Source: Offender Tracking Information System (OTIS), Georgia Department of Corrections and Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles, provided by Office of Planning and Analysis, GDC.

¹⁵ These numbers closely resemble national admission rates. In 1997, approximately 62 percent of sentenced inmates entering prison were new court commitments, and just over one-third were parole or other conditional release violators (Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Correctional Populations in the United States, 1997* [Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2000]).

¹⁶ Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Summary Findings* (<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/prisons.htm>).

¹⁷ In Georgia, the “drug” category includes sale and possession.

Figure 4. Admissions to State Prison by Offense Type, 2002 (N = 17,231)



Source: Offender Tracking Information System (OTIS), Georgia Department of Corrections and Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles, provided by Office of Planning and Analysis, GDC.

Note: The "Other" category includes nonviolent personal crimes, habitual traffic violator/DUI, and sex offenses.

Sentencing Law Overview

In March 1994, Georgia implemented truth in sentencing legislation, which requires that serious violent offenders serve 100 percent of their sentence and provides that they are no longer eligible for parole. Prior to the implementation of truth in sentencing, offenders were given indeterminate sentences and their release was governed by parole guidelines: "many classes of violent offenders released from prison served between 50 and 75 percent of their imposed sentences, while other offense groups such as property and drug offenders served about half or less of their imposed sentences."¹⁸

¹⁸ W. J. Sabol, R. Rosisch, K. M. Kane, D. P. Kirk, and G. Dubin, *The Influences of Truth in Sentencing Reforms on Changes in States' Sentencing Practices and Prison Populations*, Research Report (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, 2002), 49.

CHAPTER 2

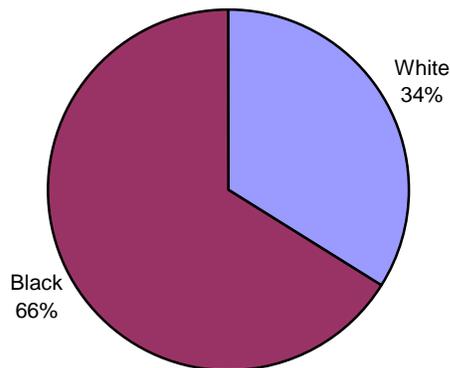
Characteristics of Georgia's Released Prisoners

In order to better understand prisoner reentry in Georgia, it is important to examine the characteristics of the population being released from Georgia prisons each year. This section describes the cohort released from the Georgia Department of Corrections in 2002, examining basic demographics, reasons for incarceration, time served, recidivism, education, and physical and mental health conditions.

DEMOGRAPHICS

In the 2002 calendar year, the GDC released 16,088¹⁹ men and women from prison. The demographic composition of this 2002 release cohort reflects the composition of the Georgia prison population: the majority was male²⁰ (89 percent) and black²¹ (66 percent) (figure 5). The percentage of black prisoners released from incarceration during 2002 well exceeded the percentage of blacks residing in the state, indicating that they are disproportionately represented in the Georgia prison population. While blacks represent only 29 percent of the general population in Georgia, they represented two-thirds of prisoners released during 2002. The percentage of white prisoners released from GDC is much lower than the percentage of white individuals in the Georgia population; whites represent 63 percent of the Georgia population and 34 percent of prisoners released during 2002.

Figure 5. Race of Released Prisoners, 2002 (N = 16,088)



Source: Offender Tracking Information System (OTIS), Georgia Department of Corrections and Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles, provided by Office of Planning and Analysis, GDC.

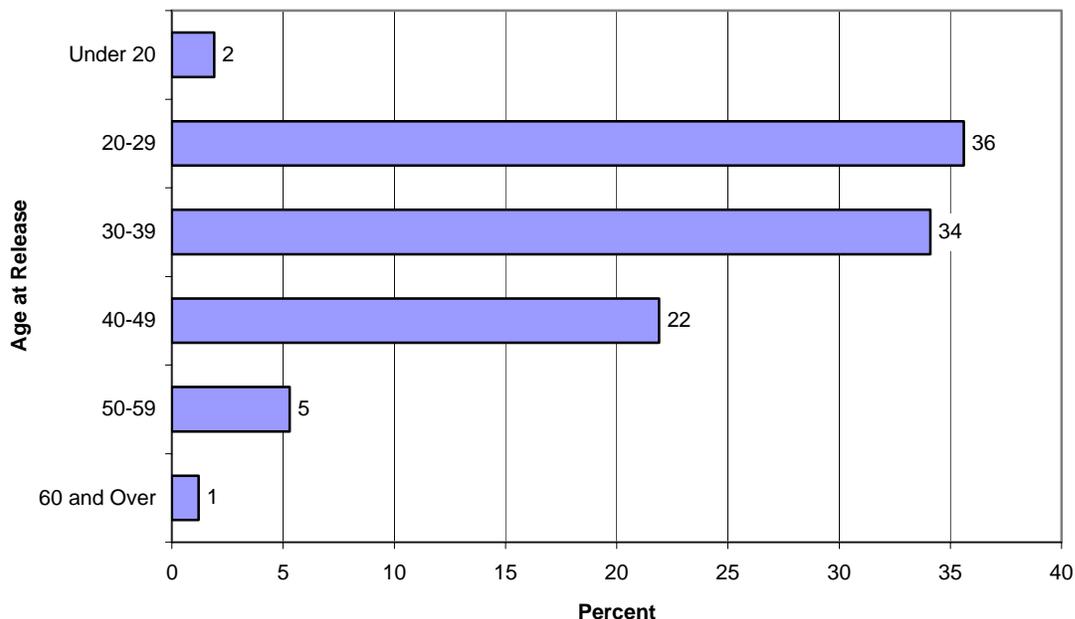
¹⁹ This number excludes less than 1 percent (N = 36) of prisoners who were released from custody more than once during calendar year 2002. Typically, these prisoners were released in 2002, committed either a new sentence violation or technical violation and were sent back to prison, and then were released again during the same year. For those prisoners who were released more than once, we report data collected prior to their first release date, and we exclude all subsequent release data.

²⁰ For every female released in Georgia during 2002, eight males were released.

²¹ Race categories also included Native American (0.1 percent), Asian (0.1 percent), and other (0.2 percent). The majority of both male (67 percent) and female (55 percent) prisoners released were black. Of the sample, 1.2 percent have a Hispanic background (any race). All state-level demographic data are taken from the 2000 U.S. Census.

Most prisoners were relatively young at the time of their release, with 38 percent under age 29 and 72 percent under age 39; the youngest prisoner released in 2002 was 17 years old, and the oldest was 81 years old (figure 6). The average age of those released in 2002 was 34 years.

Figure 6. Age of Released Prisoners, 2002 (N = 16,088)

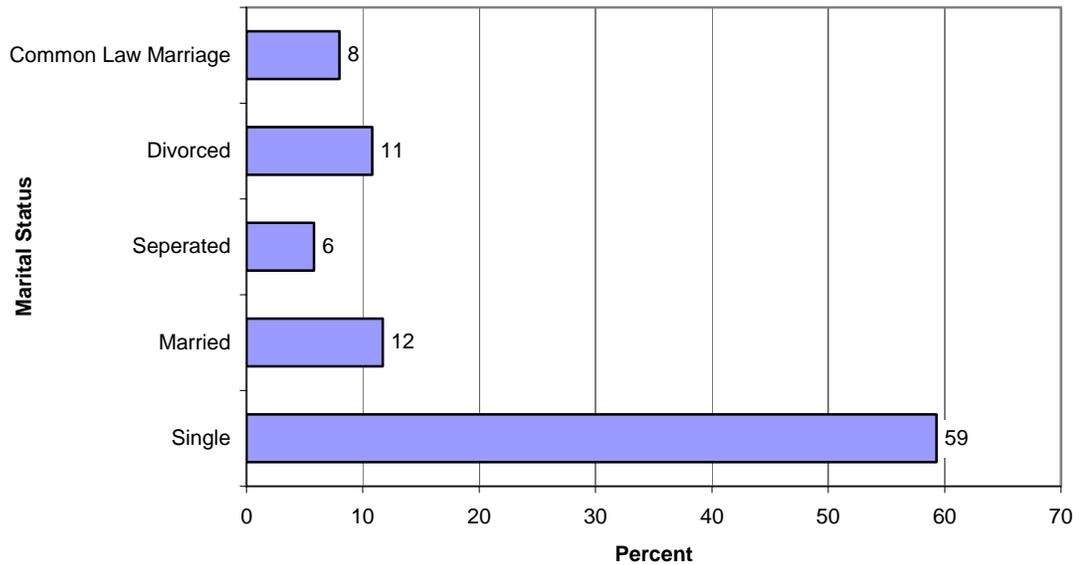


Source: Offender Tracking Information System (OTIS), Georgia Department of Corrections and Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles, provided by Office of Planning and Analysis, GDC.

At the time of their admission, over three-quarters of all prisoners released during 2002 (77 percent) reported that they were not married (figure 7).²² This finding was consistent for both females (80 percent) and males (77 percent). Only 12 percent of prisoners were married when they entered prison, and it is possible that some prisoners may have divorced while incarcerated. At the time of their admission, 62 percent of released prisoners also reported having at least one child (figure 8). Of released prisoners with children, the average number of children is 2.3.

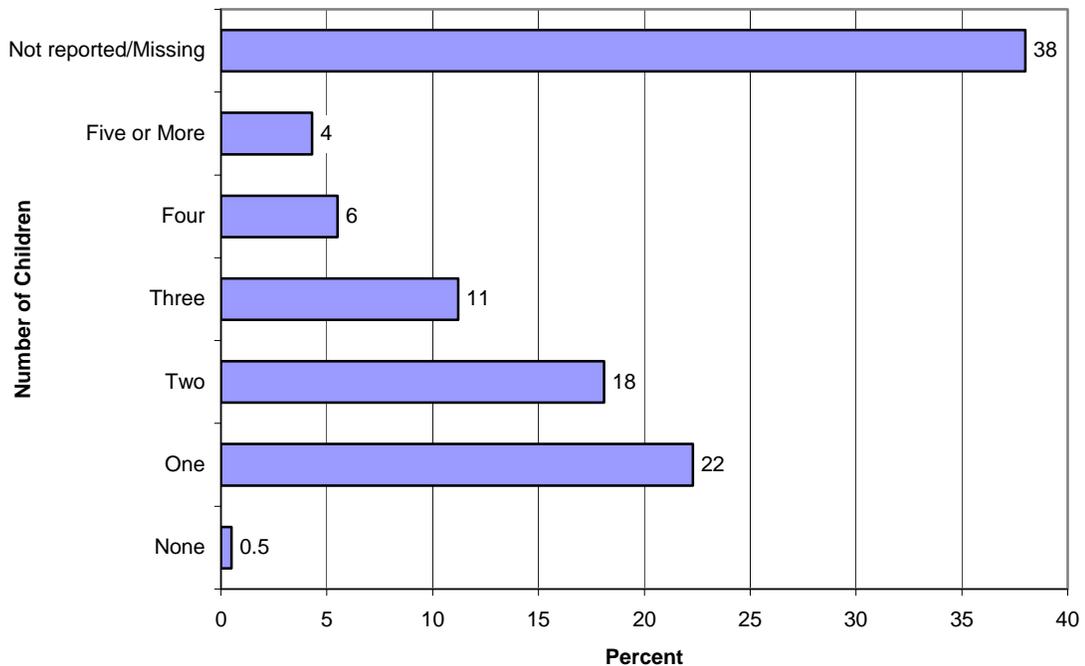
²² Marital status of released prisoners: single (59 percent); married (12 percent); separated (6 percent); divorced (11 percent); common law (8 percent); widowed (1 percent); not reported, unknown, or missing (3 percent).

Figure 7. Marital Status of Released Prisoners, 2002 (N = 16,088)



Source: Offender Tracking Information System (OTIS), Georgia Department of Corrections and Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles, provided by Office of Planning and Analysis, GDC.

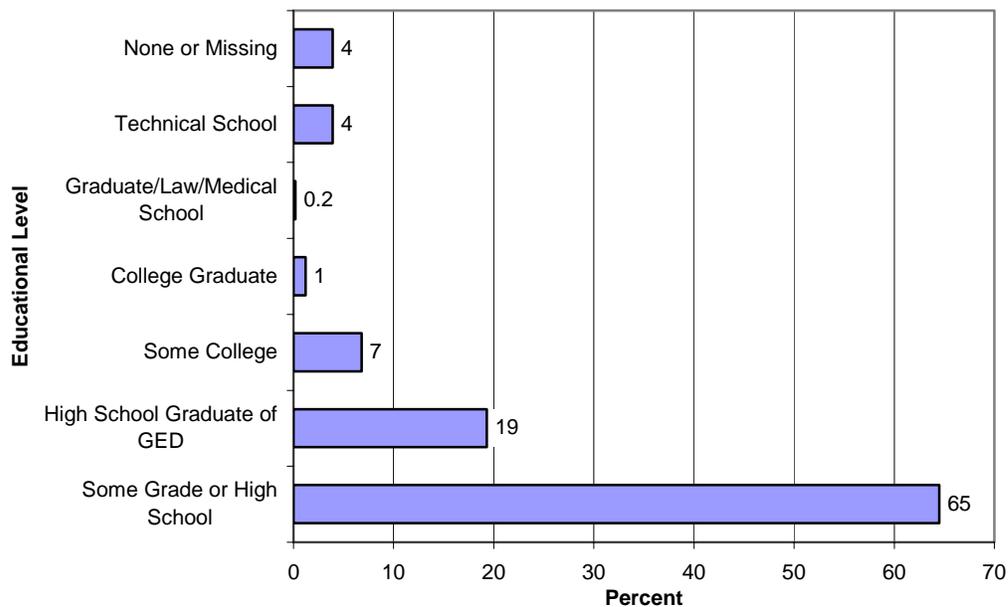
Figure 8. Number of Children of Released Prisoners, 2002 (N = 16,088)



Source: Offender Tracking Information System (OTIS), Georgia Department of Corrections and Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles, provided by Office of Planning and Analysis, GDC.

The education level at the time of admission for the 2002 release cohort ranged from some grade school to graduation from college or graduate school, with 27.5 percent completing high school/GED or higher education (figure 9). Georgia educational prison programming and its relevance to an inmate’s successful reintegration is discussed in more detail later in this report.

Figure 9. Educational Attainment at Time of Admission of Released Prisoners, 2002 (N = 16,088)



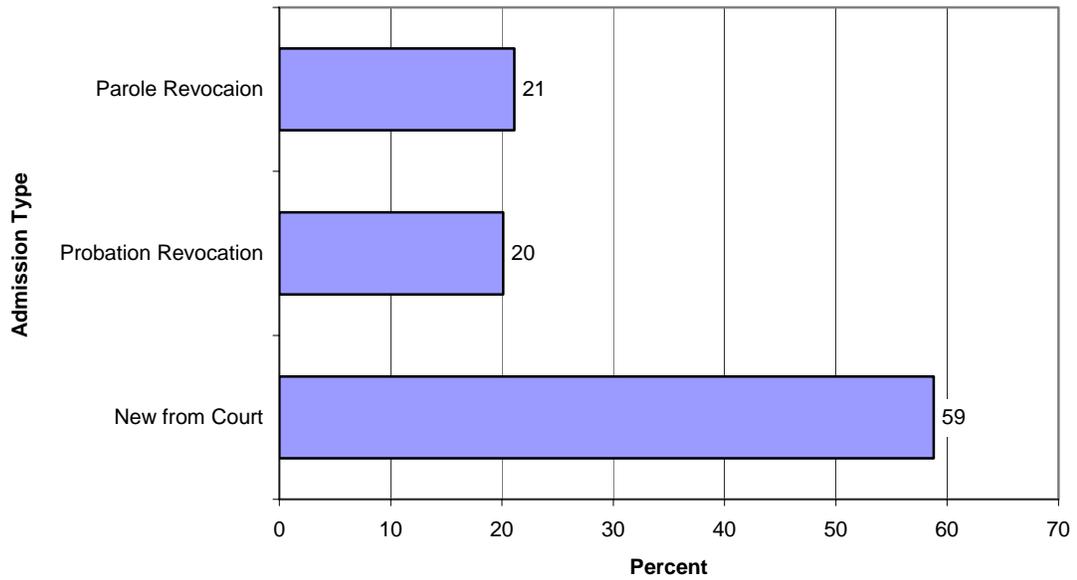
Source: Offender Tracking Information System (OTIS), Georgia Department of Corrections and Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles, provided by Office of Planning and Analysis, GDC.

WHY THEY WERE IN PRISON

Fifty-nine percent of prisoners released during 2002 were admitted into the Georgia correctional system through new sentence admissions. Remaining admissions were for probation violations (20 percent) and parole violations (21 percent) (figure 10).²³ The largest percentage of Georgia prisoners who were released in 2002 had been serving time for property offenses (36 percent), followed by drug offenses, which include both drug sales and possession (29 percent) (figure 11).

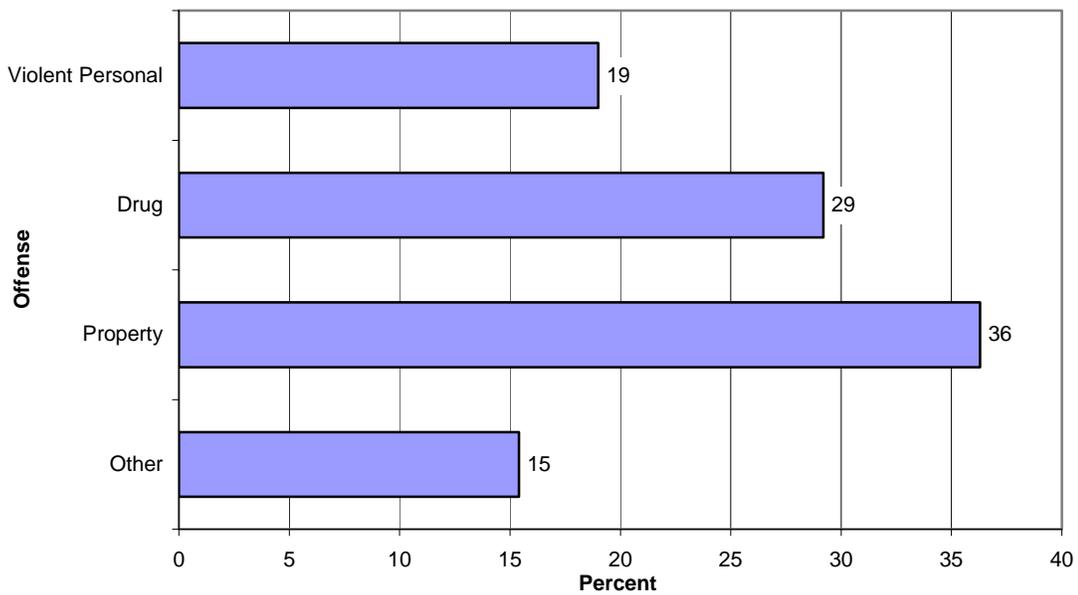
²³ The difference between Figures 10-11 versus Figures 3-4 is that the former refers to all those admitted to prison in 2002, while the latter represents the admissions reasons and offenses for those *released* in 2002.

Figure 10. Admission Type of Released Prisoners, 2002 (N = 16,088)



Source: Offender Tracking Information System (OTIS), Georgia Department of Corrections and Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles, provided by Office of Planning and Analysis, GDC.

Figure 11. Most Serious Conviction Offense of Released Prisoners, 2002 (N = 16,088)

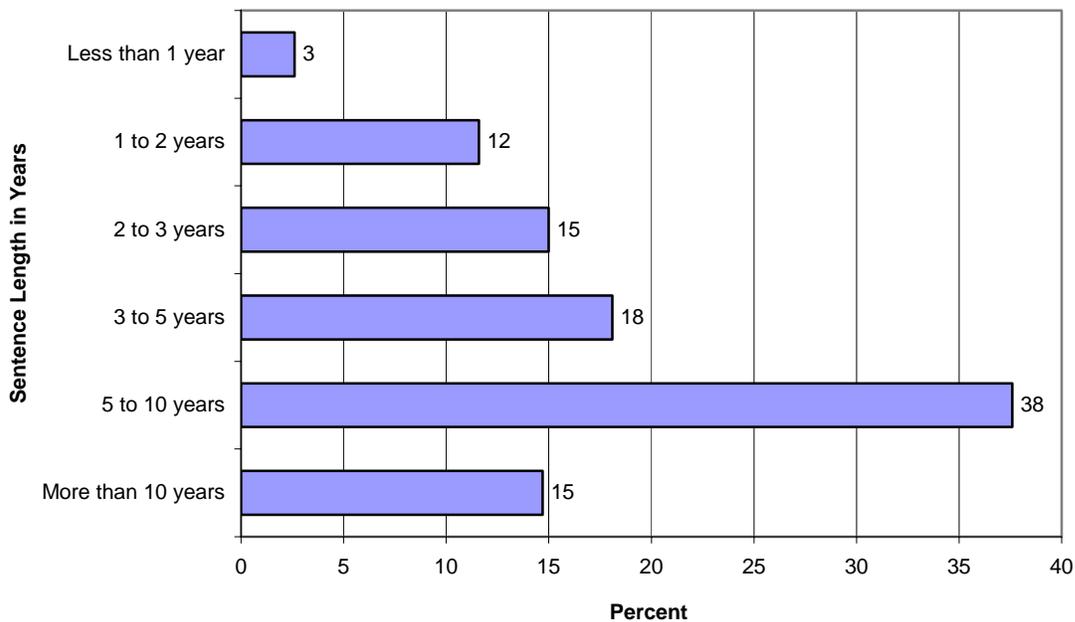


Source: Offender Tracking Information System (OTIS), Georgia Department of Corrections and Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles, provided by Office of Planning and Analysis, GDC.

HOW LONG THEY WERE IN PRISON

Prisoners released in 2002 had been sentenced to an average of six years in the Georgia correctional system (figure 12).²⁴ The average length of actual time served, however, was just under two years, and 45 percent of prisoners released in 2002 served less than one year (figure 13).²⁵ On average, these released prisoners served 58 percent of their sentence, with 49 percent serving half or more of their maximum sentence length in prison (figure 14).²⁶

Figure 12. Sentence Length of Released Prisoners, 2002 (N = 16,088)



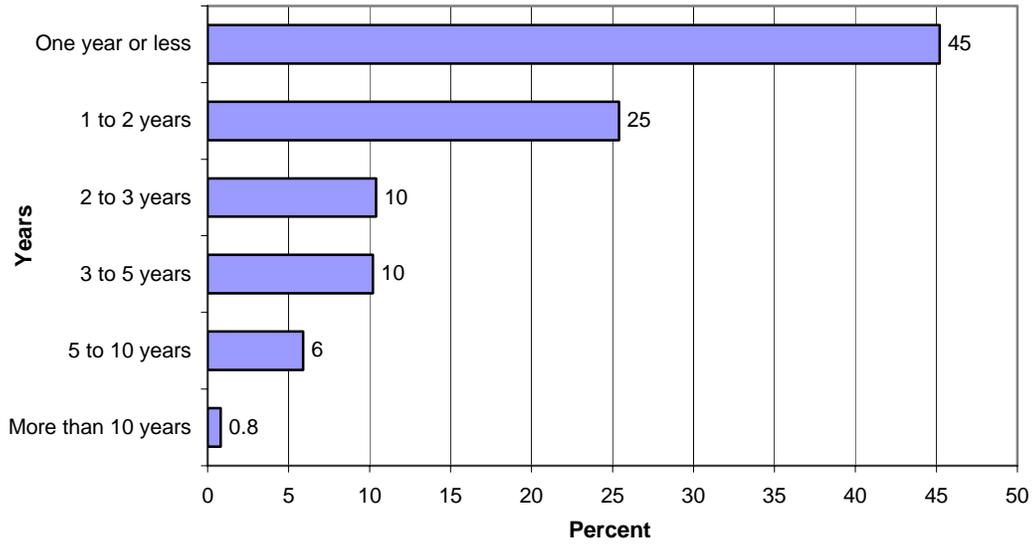
Source: Offender Tracking Information System (OTIS), Georgia Department of Corrections and Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles, provided by Office of Planning and Analysis, GDC.

²⁴ Sentences of more than 10 years include life sentences, life without parole, and death sentences.

²⁵ This statistic does not include county jail time served. This represents time served from date of admission to prison.

²⁶ Prisoners who served more than 100 percent of their sentence often served time in prison, went back to court on appeal and had their sentence reduced, and consequently are released after having served more than the sentence length on appeal. For example, a person who had a 10-year sentence serves 7 years, then goes back to court on appeal and the sentence is reduced to 5 years. The prisoner is released having now served more than 100 percent of his sentence.

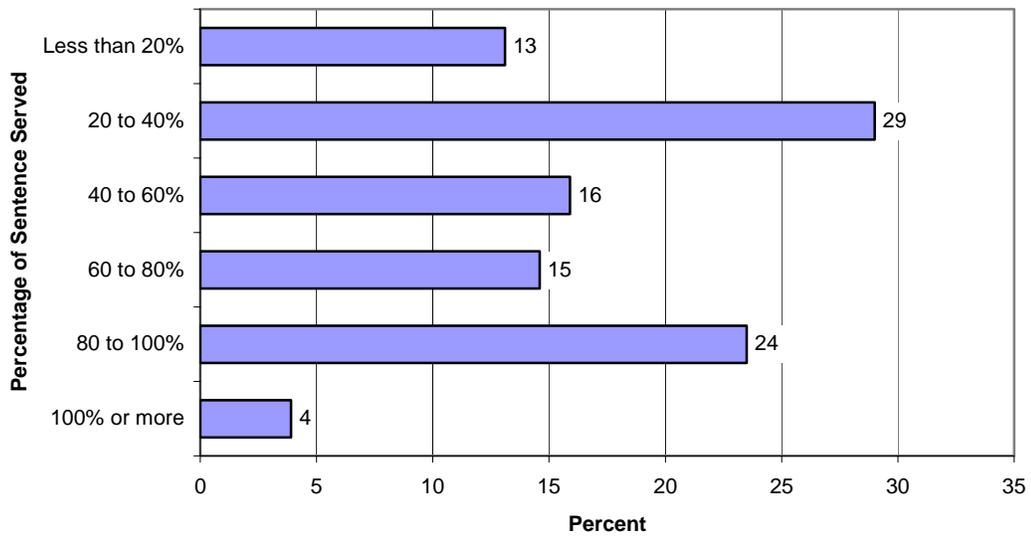
Figure 13. Time Served by Released Prisoners, 2002 (N = 7,209)



Source: Offender Tracking Information System (OTIS), Georgia Department of Corrections and Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles, Provided by Office of Planning and Analysis, GDC.

Note: The N for this set of analyses is a little less than half of the larger sample of those released in 2002. In order to calculate an accurate statistic for time served, only those prisoners who were sentenced for one offense (as opposed to multiple convictions) were included in the analysis. By way of example, in the database a person may have served time in prison for robbery, then served 10 years probation, and then be arrested for DUI, receiving a two-year sentence. In this instance, the datafile would indicate that the prisoner was convicted of robbery (the original crime of conviction) but received only a two-year sentence. Using only those prisoners who were serving time for just one type of offense eliminates this confusion.

Figure 14. Percentage of Sentence Served by Released Prisoners, 2002 (N = 7,111)



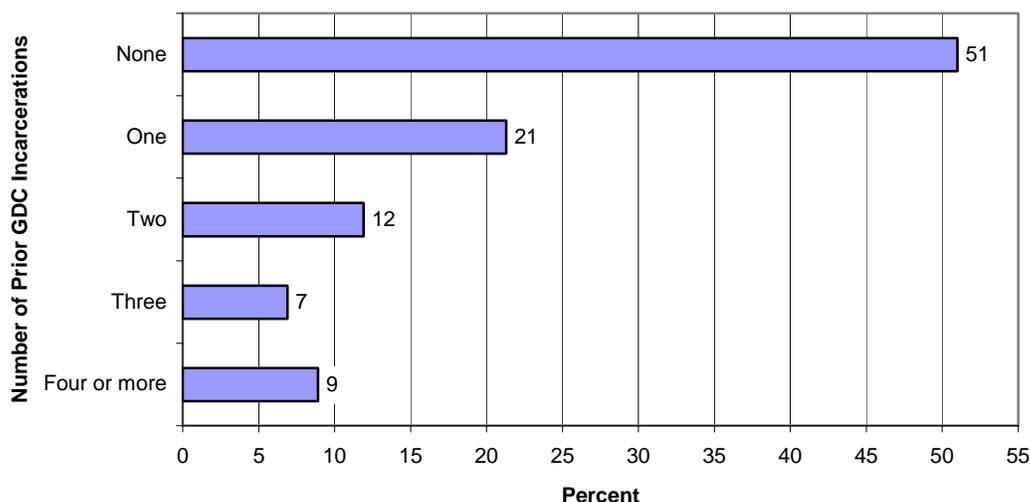
Source: Offender Tracking Information System (OTIS), Georgia Department of Corrections and Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles, provided by Office of Planning and Analysis, GDC.

CRIMINAL HISTORY AND THE REVOLVING DOOR

Cycling in and out of prison is common among released prisoners, whether they are returned to prison while under parole supervision or not. A study by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) found that 52 percent of prisoners released in 1994 are returned to prison for new sentences or technical violations within three years of their release.²⁷ Another BJS study found that, among state *parole* discharges nationwide in 2000, 42 percent were returned to prison or jail and 9 percent absconded within three years.²⁸ Georgia's recidivism statistics compare very favorably to these national studies, with a smaller share of returns to prison over time: the GDC found that 36 percent of prisoners released in 2000 returned to prison within three years of their release.²⁹

These recidivism statistics are reinforced by information on the share of released prisoners who have been previously incarcerated. While just over half of the prisoners released during 2002 (51 percent) were serving time in a Georgia correctional facility for the first time, the remainder had previously served time there at least once before. Of those prisoners who had been previously incarcerated in Georgia, 21 percent had been incarcerated once before and 12 percent had been incarcerated twice before their most recent incarceration. Sixteen percent of released prisoners had been incarcerated three or more times (figure 15).

Figure 15. Prior GDC Incarcerations of Released Prisoners, 2002 (N = 16,088)



Source: Offender Tracking Information System (OTIS), Georgia Department of Corrections and Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles, Provided by Office of Planning and Analysis, GDC.

²⁷ Patrick A. Langan and David J. Levin, *Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 1994*, Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 2002).

²⁸ Timothy Hughs and Doris James Wilson, *Reentry Trends in the U.S.* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2003).

²⁹ This includes prisoners released for all reasons (parole, max out). Returns included parole revocations, new sentences, and all other reasons that would place a person in prison. The 36 percent statistic represents a decrease from what historically has been close to 40 percent (email correspondence with John Prevost, Georgia Department of Pardons and Paroles, May 25, 2004). More recent statistics, while not comparable to national studies, indicate that 10 percent of Georgia's released prisoners in 2002 returned to prison within one year of their release, and another 4 percent returned to prison within 18 months of their release (Urban Institute analysis of GDC 2002 release cohort data).

MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH CHALLENGES

Many prisoners suffer from co-occurring and chronic mental and physical health disorders that make it difficult for them to transition from prison to free society.³⁰ A 2002 report to Congress on the physical and mental health conditions of soon-to-be-released prisoners by the National Commission on Correctional Health Care found that tens of thousands of prisoners are released to communities every year with communicable and chronic diseases that are left largely untreated.³¹ The Georgia Department of Corrections reports that its prisoner population, in addition to increasing in number, is growing older and also is in poorer health. In Georgia, of those prisoners released in 2002, 10 percent had a well-controlled chronic illness,³² and another 14 percent had a fairly or poorly controlled chronic illness (figure 16).³³ With respect to mental illness, 12 percent of those prisoners released in 2002 had been served by outpatient treatment or a supportive living unit while incarcerated and an additional 9 percent had a prior mental health history but are well now (figure 17).³⁴ The Georgia Department of Corrections reports that the percentage of prisoners with mental illness is increasing at a steady rate of 1 percent per year.³⁵

A specific area of heightened concern is the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in prison populations. Nationally, in 2000, 2.2 percent of state prisoners were HIV positive, and the overall rate of confirmed AIDS cases among the nation's prison population was four times the rate in the U.S. general population (0.52 percent versus 0.13 percent).³⁶ Georgia statistics are similar: a 2002 study by the Bureau of Justice Statistics found that 2.1 percent of inmates in Georgia's state prisons were known to be HIV positive.³⁷ However, when examining the prevalence of HIV among Georgia's *release* population, the percentage increases—almost 3 percent of the 2002 release population in Georgia tested HIV positive.³⁸

³⁰ Laura Maruschak and Allen Beck, *Medical Problems of Inmates, 1997*, Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report, NCJ 181644 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 2001).

³¹ National Commission on Correctional Health Care, *The Health Status of Soon-to-Be-Released Inmates: A Report to Congress*, Volume 1 (Washington, DC: National Commission on Correctional Health Care, 2002).

³² No evidence of end-organ damage (e.g., diabetes, asthma, hypertension).

³³ Evidenced by end-organ damage.

³⁴ Compared with the general population, prisoners experience higher rates of mental illness. According to a 1997 national survey, 10 percent of state prisoners reported having a mental illness, compared with 2 percent of the general population. An additional 14 percent of state prisoners reported having a learning or speech disability, 14 percent a hearing or vision problem, and 12 percent a physical condition (Maruschak and Beck, *Medical Problems of Inmates, 1997*). At midyear 2000, an estimated 191,000 prisoners in state prisons (16.2 percent) self-reported some form of mental illness, one in every eight state prisoners was receiving some mental health therapy or counseling service, and almost 10 percent were receiving psychotropic medications (including antidepressants, stimulants, sedatives, tranquilizers, or other antipsychotic drugs) (Allen Beck and Laura Maruschak, *Mental Health Treatment in State Prisons, 2000*, Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 2001).

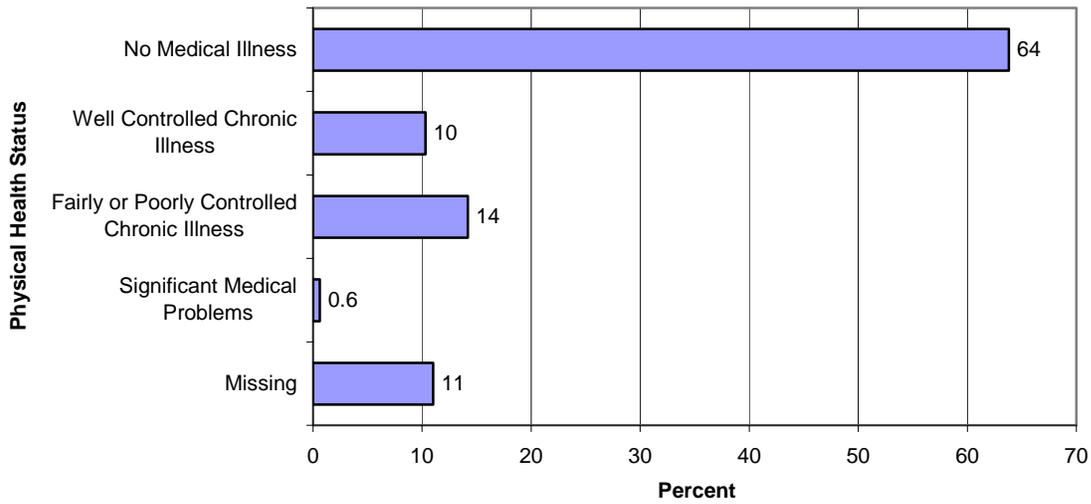
³⁵ Georgia Department of Corrections, *Annual Report 2002*.

³⁶ Laura Maruschak, *HIV in Prisons, 2000*, Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin, NCJ 196023 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 2002). According to the Centers for Disease Control, Georgia had the ninth highest cumulative number of AIDS cases among its state residents as of December 2002 (Centers for Disease Control, Division of HIV/AIDS Prevention, Basic Statistics, <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/stats.htm#international>). The cumulative number of AIDS cases in Georgia reported through December 2002 was 26,008, a rate of 17.2 per 100,000 residents. (The cumulative number of AIDS cases reported through December 2002 for the United States was 859,000, a rate of 15.0 per 100,000 people. The estimated number of people living with AIDS in Georgia at the end of 2002 was 12,683 compared with 384,906 for the nation (Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, State Health Facts Online, <http://statehealthfacts.kff.org>).

³⁷ Laura Maruschak, *HIV in Prisons, 2000*.

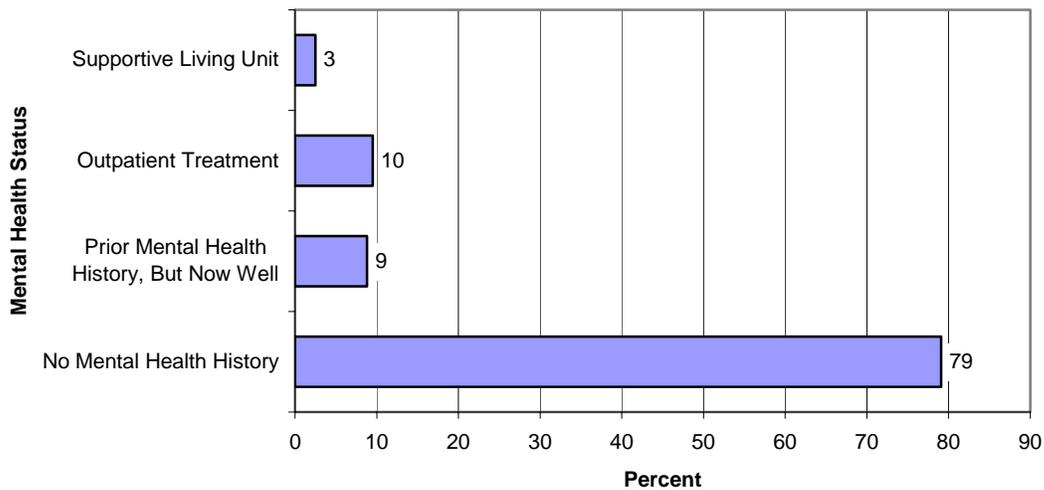
³⁸ Urban Institute analysis of GDC 2002 release cohort.

Figure 16. Physical Health Status of Released Prisoners, 2002 (N = 16,088)



Source: Offender Tracking Information System (OTIS), Georgia Department of Corrections and Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles, provided by Office of Planning and Analysis, GDC.

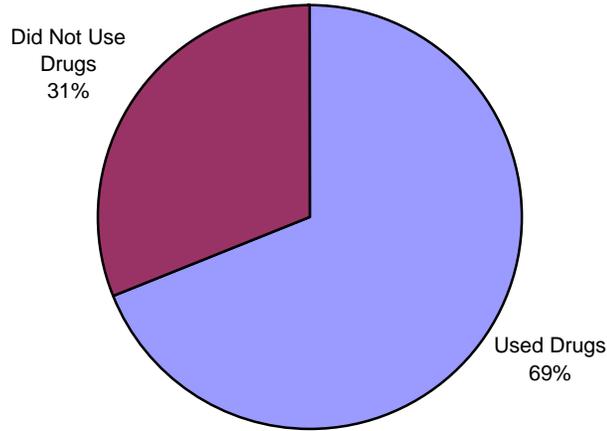
Figure 17. Mental Health Status of Released Prisoners, 2002 (N = 16,088)



Source: Offender Tracking Information System (OTIS), Georgia Department of Corrections and Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles, provided by Office of Planning and Analysis, GDC.

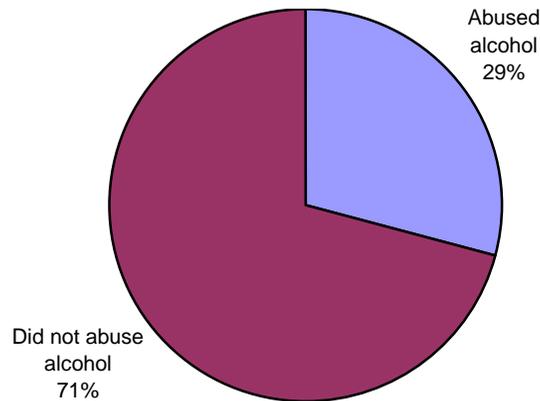
Extensive histories of substance use only serve to exacerbate these mental and physical health conditions. Sixty-nine percent of prisoners released in 2002 were found to have drug-related problems,³⁹ and 29 percent were found to have alcohol-related behavior problems (figures 18 and 19).⁴⁰

Figure 18. Drug Use History of Released Prisoners, 2002 (N = 16,088)



Source: Offender Tracking Information System (OTIS), Georgia Department of Corrections and Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles, provided by Office of Planning and Analysis, GDC.

Figure 19. Alcohol Use History of Released Prisoners, 2002 (N = 16,088)



Source: Offender Tracking Information System (OTIS), Georgia Department of Corrections and Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles, provided by Office of Planning and Analysis, GDC.

³⁹ The diagnostic counselor identifies this behavior problem during the diagnostic process at intake and indicates any evidence of drug experimentation, abuse, or addiction. Behavior problem classifications include drug experimenter (no evidence of regular use but has used drugs), drug abuse (evidence of habitual narcotic and other drug use), and narcotic addict (narcotic addiction).

⁴⁰ The diagnostic counselor identifies this behavior problem during the diagnostic process at intake and indicates any evidence of alcohol abuse or alcoholism. Behavior problem classifications include alcoholic (medically determined to be an alcoholic or offender admits to being an alcoholic) and alcohol abuse (record of using alcohol to the extent that it creates problems or offender admits abuse of alcohol).

EDUCATION AND PROGRAMMING

Historically, prison programs have played an important role in American corrections. Prison administrators and others have long believed that providing educational and vocational programs in prison increases the likelihood that prisoners will return to the community with greater success. Recent research supports this rationale, showing that a range of prison-based programming can contribute to positive postrelease outcomes for prisoners, including reduced recidivism. In addition to prison-based programming, community services for released prisoners have also shown to increase the likelihood of successful reintegration and decrease the recidivism rate of returning prisoners.⁴¹

In Georgia, 16 percent⁴² (N = 2,628) of those released in 2002 participated in prison programming of at least one kind (figure 20).⁴³ The majority of these prisoners (65 percent) participated in a variety of substance abuse programming. All prisoners with a substance abuse offense or a history of substance abuse must participate in an alcohol and drug risk reduction program. In addition to this mandated program, the Department offers a series of substance abuse programs that target prisoners with severe substance abuse and addiction problems.⁴⁴

A small share of the prisoners released in 2002 (under 2 percent) were enrolled in academic education, including literacy/remedial reading, GED,⁴⁵ and special education.⁴⁶ Georgia prison education services include part-time teachers, video and self-paced programs, and distance learning. In addition to academic programs, the GDC provides educational opportunities for prisoners who have been assessed as needing special education services. These services are provided at 79 GDC sites statewide. The GDC also offers job training at 53 GDC sites and formal education in 24 different vocations at 16 GDC sites; these programs are designed to enhance prisoner employability upon release as well as to develop an internal work force.

The GDC also offers counseling services designed to change prisoners' behaviors, addressing such issues as cognitive skills, family violence, victim impact, and parenting. Programs are also being developed that address the needs presented by a growing population of elderly prisoners. In addition, prisoners convicted of sex crimes meet with counselors on a regular basis to focus on what a sex offense is and how to break the cycle of offending, covering such

⁴¹ Sarah Lawrence, Daniel P. Mears, Glenn Dubin, and Jeremy Travis, *The Practice and Promise of Prison Programming*, Research Report (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, 2002); Gerald Gaes, Timothy S. Flanagan, Laurence L. Motiuk, and Lynn Stewart, "Adult Correctional Treatment," in *Prisons*, edited by Michael Tonry and Joan Petersilia (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 361–426.

⁴² According to GDC sources, this low percentage may be the result of underreporting; a more realistic estimate of prisoners who participate in prison programming is closer to 25 to 35 percent of the total population. GDC in-prison programming data were collected beginning in 1995, and these data are subject to limited reporting. The 2002 cohort may include prisoners who participated in prison programming prior to 1995 and/or prisoners who participated in programs after 1995 that were not recorded in the GDC database.

⁴³ The GDC has upwards of 170 programs available to prisoners.

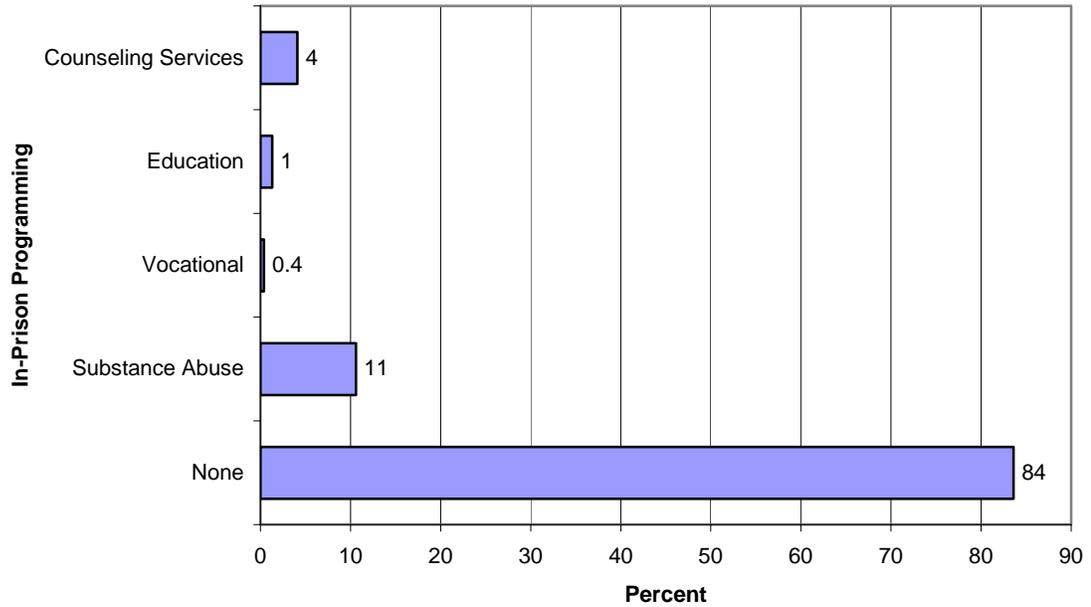
⁴⁴ These substance abuse programs are offered in four of the state prisons (Johnson, Pulaski, Scott, and Homerville) and the Bainbridge Probation Substance Abuse Treatment Center.

⁴⁵ In fiscal year 1999, the GDC reports that over 3,600 GED tests were administered, a substantial increase from approximately 1,900 tests administered in fiscal year 1997 and from 3,200 in fiscal year 1998.

⁴⁶ For comparison, in fiscal year 2002, 13 percent of prisoners (N = 6,200) were enrolled in academic education, including literacy/remedial reading, GED, and special education (Georgia Department of Corrections, *Annual Report 2002*).

topics as sexual aggression, victim awareness, and relapse prevention.⁴⁷ Of those prisoners released in 2002, 4 percent participated in at least one of these programs.

Figure 20. Prison Programming Experiences of Released Prisoners, 2002 (N = 2,628)



Source: Offender Tracking Information System (OTIS), Georgia Department of Corrections and Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles, provided by Office of Planning and Analysis, GDC.

⁴⁷ Georgia Department of Corrections, <http://www.dcor.state.ga.us>.

CHAPTER 3

Prisoner Release and Supervision Policies and Practices

The first year after release is a critical period during which released prisoners are susceptible to reoffending, emphasizing the importance of postrelease supervision.⁴⁸ Postrelease supervision typically serves two primary functions with regard to preventing recidivism: (1) promoting the successful reintegration of prisoners into society and (2) monitoring released prisoners for public safety purposes. The Field Operations Division of the Georgia Board of Pardons and Parole embraces both roles, using community programs and services to promote successful reintegration into the community and employing supervision functions to ensure that released prisoners are maintaining drug- and crime-free lifestyles. This chapter provides an overview of how Georgia's prisoners are released and supervised in the community.

HOW PRISONERS ARE RELEASED IN GEORGIA

Georgia prisoners are released through one of three mechanisms: parole board action, expiration of sentence, or court order (figure 21).⁴⁹ The most common release mechanism employed in Georgia is through parole board action: of those prisoners released in 2002, 65 percent were released by the parole board. The Georgia Board of Pardons and Parole, within constraints of the law, determines whether a prisoner may be released to parole before the expiration of his or her sentence. There are several offenses and circumstances that disqualify an inmate from parole.⁵⁰ Aside from these exceptions, parole board release applies to prisoners who have served a part of their sentence and will serve the balance of their incarceration period while on parole and/or probation.

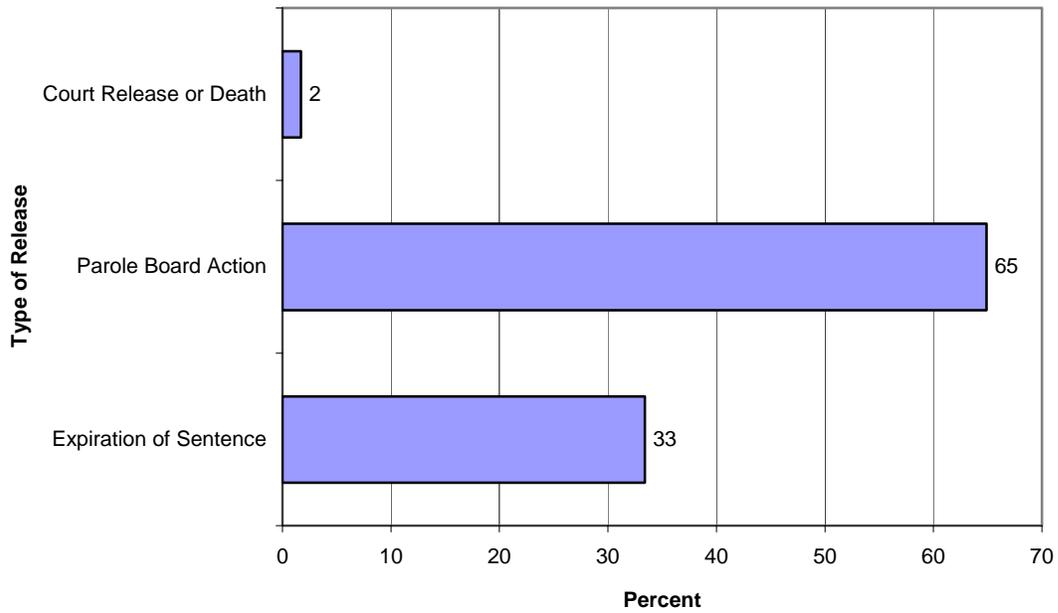
One-third of prisoners released in 2002 “maxed out” and were released to no supervision at all, or were released to the community to then serve the probation portion of their split sentence. The share of those released by parole board action versus expiration (two-thirds versus one-third) has fluctuated over time, with a notable drop in parole board actions in the mid-1990s (figure 22).

⁴⁸ Patrick A. Langan and David J. Levin, *Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 1994*, Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 2002).

⁴⁹ Court-ordered releases represented fewer than 2 percent of all 2002 releases. In addition, fewer than 1 percent of 2002 releases (N = 114) were considered “released” because they died (due to natural causes, accidents, suicide, and HIV infection and/or AIDS, for example) while incarcerated; this figure includes four death penalty executions.

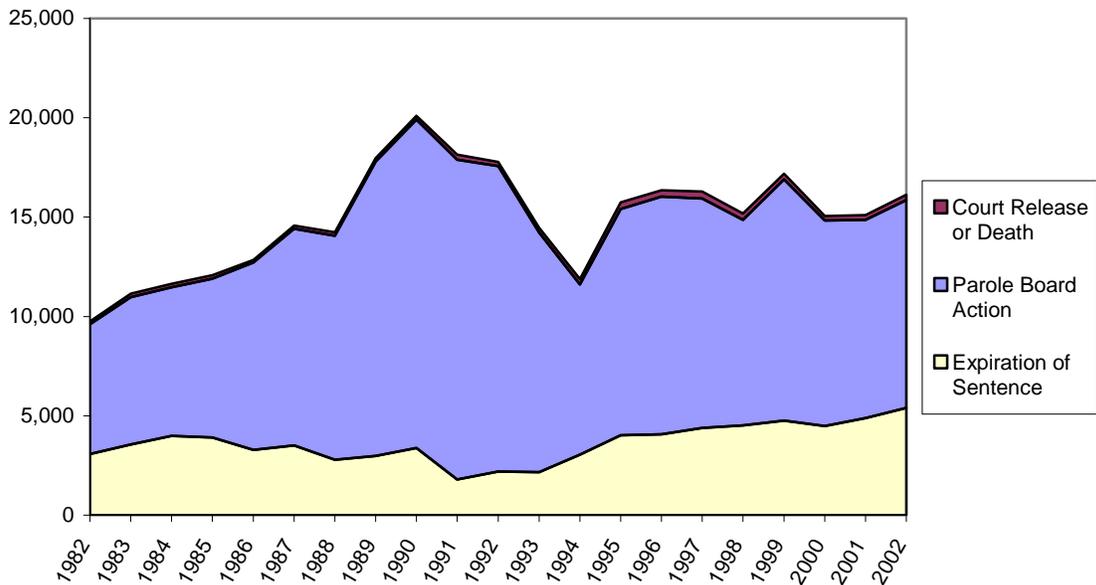
⁵⁰ A person serving a non-life sentence for murder, rape, armed robbery, aggravated sodomy, kidnapping, aggravated child molestation, and aggravated sexual battery committed on or after January 1, 1995, is not eligible for parole and must serve the sentence in its entirety. A person serving a life sentence for a first conviction of these offenses is eligible for parole consideration after 14 years. Second convictions are life without parole. Life sentences for drug crimes are eligible for parole consideration after serving seven years. A person convicted of drug sales and sentenced under the recidivist statute (fourth conviction) is ineligible for parole, even if the sentence is life (http://www.pap.state.ga.us/parole_consideration.htm).

Figure 21. Type of Release, 2002 (N = 16,088)



Source: Offender Tracking Information System (OTIS), Georgia Department of Corrections and Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles, provided by Office of Planning and Analysis, GDC.

Figure 22. Releases from State Prison by Release Mechanism, 1982–2002

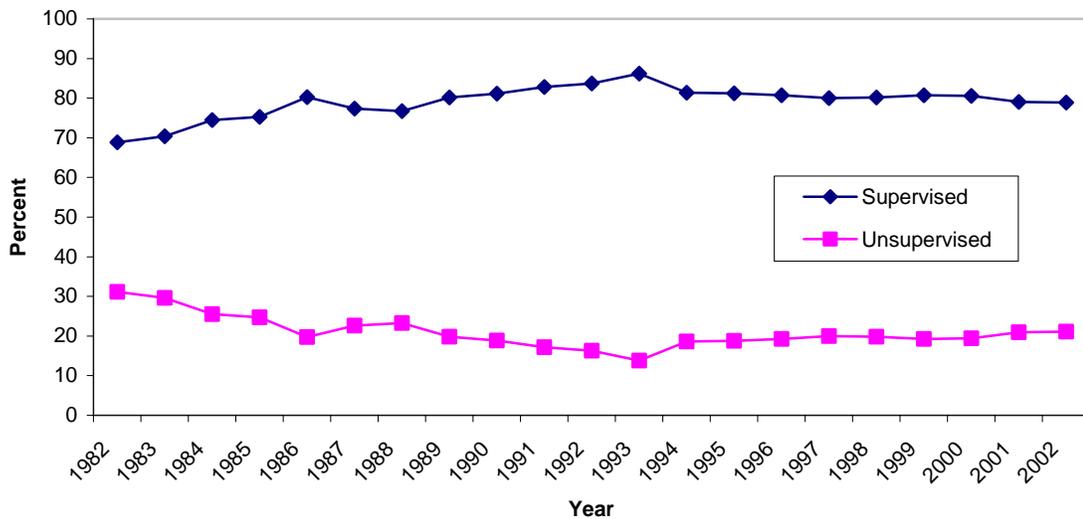


Source: Offender Tracking Information System (OTIS), Georgia Department of Corrections and Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles, provided by Office of Planning and Analysis, GDC.

PROMINENCE OF POSTRELEASE SUPERVISION

The Georgia Board of Pardons and Parole, specifically the Field Operations Division, has jurisdiction over those prisoners released to a period of parole. The Board defines parole supervision as “the process of prevention and deterrence of criminal behavior by assisting the offender through a structured transition from incarceration, to a law abiding, self-sufficient place in the community.”⁵¹ Over time, the ratio of supervised to unsupervised releases has remained relatively stable, fluctuating only about 17 percent between 1982 and 2002 (figure 23). The majority of prisoners released in 2002 (79 percent) were released to a period of parole supervision (figure 24).⁵²

Figure 23. Percentage of Prisoners Released in Georgia, by Supervision, 1982–2002

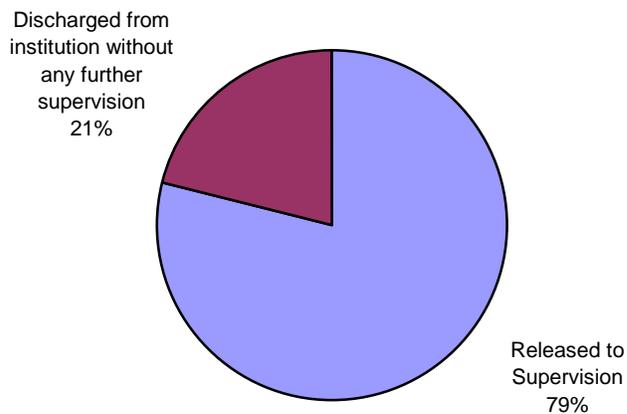


Source: Offender Tracking Information System (OTIS), Georgia Department of Corrections and Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles, provided by Office of Planning and Analysis, GDC.

⁵¹ State of Georgia, *Field Operations Manual*, chapter 3.

⁵² In addition to those released to parole, this statistic also includes offenders not paroled but with probation to follow.

**Figure 24. Percentage of Prisoners Released in Georgia, by Supervision, 2002
(N = 16,088)**



Source: Offender Tracking Information System (OTIS), Georgia Department of Corrections and Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles, provided by Office of Planning and Analysis, GDC.

In 2002, 363 parole officers supervised over 19,000 parolees serving a period of supervised release, a ratio of 53 parolees per parole officer, on average. The primary objective of the Field Operations Division (FOD) is to safely transition released offenders into the community. The FOD's approach to parole supervision balances offender treatment/self-help and surveillance/enforcement strategies to achieve effective and efficient public safety outcomes. For each parolee, an individual case plan identifies and addresses their level of risk in the community, as well as their needs.

The supervision level assigned to a parolee upon release is based on his or her initial automated risk assessment score. For this instrument, risk is defined as the likelihood that the releasee will be arrested for a misdemeanor or felony while on parole. Cases are scored as either "high" or "standard," which determines the level of active supervision and the frequency of surveillance (monthly or every other month).

For prisoners released to a period of parole supervision, there are six conditions of release. Parolees must (1) help develop and comply with their intervention plan. They must (2) not violate the law, notify their parole officer if arrested, and are subject to warrantless searches. They (3) may not possess a weapon, (4) cannot leave the state of Georgia or abscond from parole supervision, and (5) must pay child support, restitution, and all relevant fees. Finally, if they are not employed and do not possess a high school diploma or equivalent degree, they (6) must attend school. Special conditions of parole may also be assigned as they relate to mental health, substance abuse, the use of motor vehicles, and sex offenses.

Graduated sanctions for parole violators have been in place since 1991. These sanctions were recently modified in 2003 in an effort to formalize positive feedback practices for parolees behaving prosocially, and resulted in a graduated sanctions guide called the Behavior Response and Adjustment Guide (BRAG). This guide recommends responses to parolee's positive and negative behaviors, which are graded on a low-medium-high continuum. For

example, a parolee who has demonstrated employment and residential stability for 12 months (a “medium positive” behavior) might receive a letter of recognition, a supervision level reduction, and/or a one-year compliance certificate. A parolee who has tested positive on a drug test, found to possess a weapon, or been arrested for a violent misdemeanor or DUI (“high negative” behaviors) might be placed on electronic monitoring, be assigned to an outpatient program, or be detained locally.

On average, released prisoners are under parole supervision for just over two years. There is, however, no fixed length of time that a released prisoner is supervised. The Board has wide discretion to release a prisoner to a period of parole at almost any time after the prison sentence is imposed. The Board is required to notify the Judge and District Attorney if it chooses to release a prisoner before he or she has served less than one-third of the prison sentence. Thus, the amount of time on parole depends on the prisoner’s sentence length and on when the board releases that prisoner to community supervision.⁵³

Parole is revoked when a parolee violates a condition of release and/or commits a crime. When parole is revoked, there are rules that determine the next parole date. If the person is revoked on technical violations only, he or she is reconsidered for parole again after serving 6 to 12 months in prison. The time served for a technical parole revocation varies based on the circumstances of the violation and the person’s overall conduct while on parole. The parole officer’s comments and the prisoner’s criminal and parole history can also influence the parole board’s decision. If the prisoner’s parole is revoked based on the commission of a new offense, the type and severity of the new offense determines the future release date. If there is sufficient time remaining on the sentence, many prisoners whose parole was revoked will be reparaoled; however this is contingent on any number of factors, as described above. For parolees discharged in fiscal year 2003, 52 percent successfully completed their period of parole, and 25 percent had their parole revoked.⁵⁴

⁵³ Parole officers can request that the Board commute a sentence if a parolee has completed two or more years of supervision with a good record. These requests are not made frequently.

⁵⁴ An additional 21 percent were unacceptable completions that included parolees in jail for new crimes of technical violations, absconders, and those parolees not in jail but with pending charges.

CHAPTER 4

Geographic Distribution of Released Prisoners

The community context of prisoner reentry can have an important influence on postrelease success or failure. It stands to reason that ex-prisoners returning to communities with high unemployment rates, increased poverty, high crime rates, and few services may be more likely to relapse and recidivate.⁵⁵ This chapter presents findings from a geographic analysis of returning prisoners by county, and specifically examines the reentry distribution in the greater Atlanta metropolitan area (the city of Atlanta and Fulton, Cobb, DeKalb, and Clayton counties) as well as the city of Albany and surrounding Dougherty County.

REENTRY IN GEORGIA AND THE GREATER ATLANTA METROPOLITAN AREA

During 2002, 95 percent (N = 15,227) of all men and women released from Georgia prisons returned to communities in Georgia. Eight counties (Fulton, Cobb, DeKalb, Clayton, Richmond, Chatham, Muscogee, and Dougherty) accounted for 43 percent of returning prisoners (figures 25 and 26).⁵⁶ Twelve percent of released prisoners (N = 1,785) returned to Fulton County; no other county is home to more than 7 percent of releasees (figure 27).⁵⁷ Three of the eight counties with the highest percentage of returning prisoners—Cobb, DeKalb, and Clayton—are immediately adjacent to Fulton County and the city of Atlanta.

Nine percent (N = 1,315) of those released returned to the city of Atlanta and were further concentrated within five zip code areas within or immediately adjacent to the city boundary (figures 28 and 29). The five zip code areas that had the highest rates of returning prisoners are characterized by increased numbers of families living in poverty, higher than average unemployment, and increased numbers of female-headed households, as compared with the Fulton County and Atlanta city averages (table 1).⁵⁸

The 4,035 GDC released prisoners who returned to Fulton, DeKalb, Clayton and Cobb counties generally reflect the characteristics and experiences of the 2002 release cohort as a whole.⁵⁹ However, a greater percentage of the prisoners who returned to these four counties were black (90 percent compared with the cohort's 66 percent), a greater percentage

⁵⁵ Stephen D. Gottfredson and Ralph B. Taylor, "Community Contexts and Criminal Offenders," in *Communities and Crime Reduction*, edited by Tim Hope and Margaret Shaw (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1988).

⁵⁶ The eight counties to which the greatest percentage of released prisoners returned represent 37 percent of the state's total population. Georgia's population in 2002 was 8,186,453 (U.S. Census).

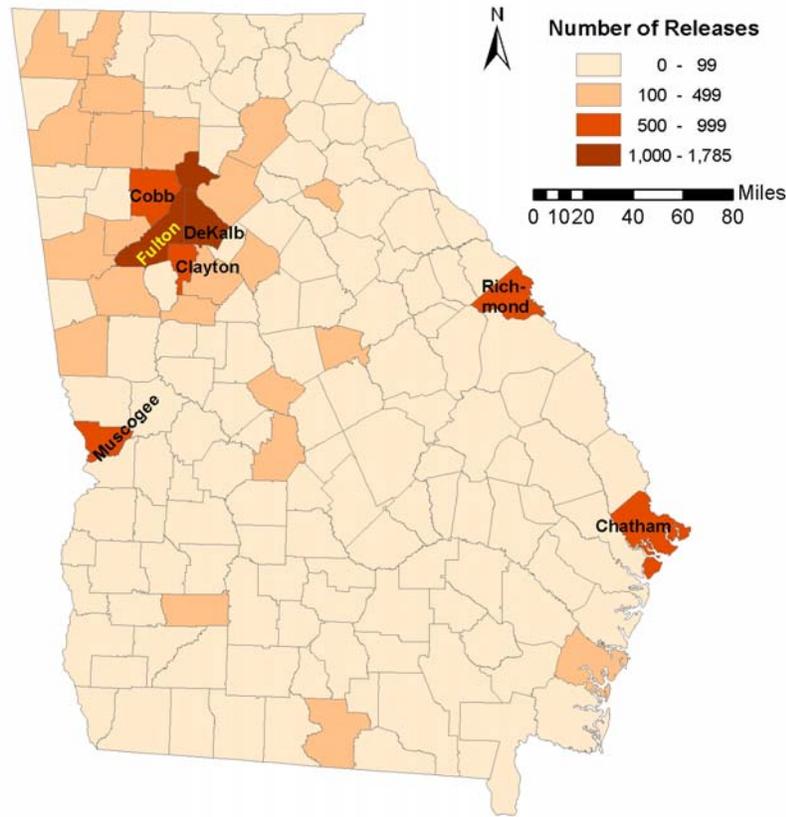
⁵⁷ There are 159 counties in Georgia.

⁵⁸ It is important to note that zip code area 30336 is mostly an industrial/business area, with 833 businesses compared with 238 residents. For this zip code, there are only 57 people in the labor force, 59 occupied houses, and 34 families, which may account for some anomalies in the Census data for this area. Census zip code data are not without limitations. These data are "generalized area representations" of Post Office zip codes based on Census blocks, and so do not represent an exact match (see <http://www.census.gov/geo/ZCTA/zcta.html>) to data from the SF3 Census tables, which are estimates based on a sample. In addition, a users' note for the Census employment data explains that these data are overestimated and flawed (see http://factfinder.census.gov/metadoc/employ_note.pdf).

⁵⁹ Characteristics include sex, number of prior incarcerations, average age, marital status, prison release mechanism, offense type, drug related behavior, alcohol related behavior, mental health status, time served in prison, and percentage of sentence served in prison.

completed some grade or high school education (83 percent compared with the cohort's 65 percent), and a greater percentage had been new court commitments at the time of their incarceration (73 percent compared with the cohort's 59 percent).

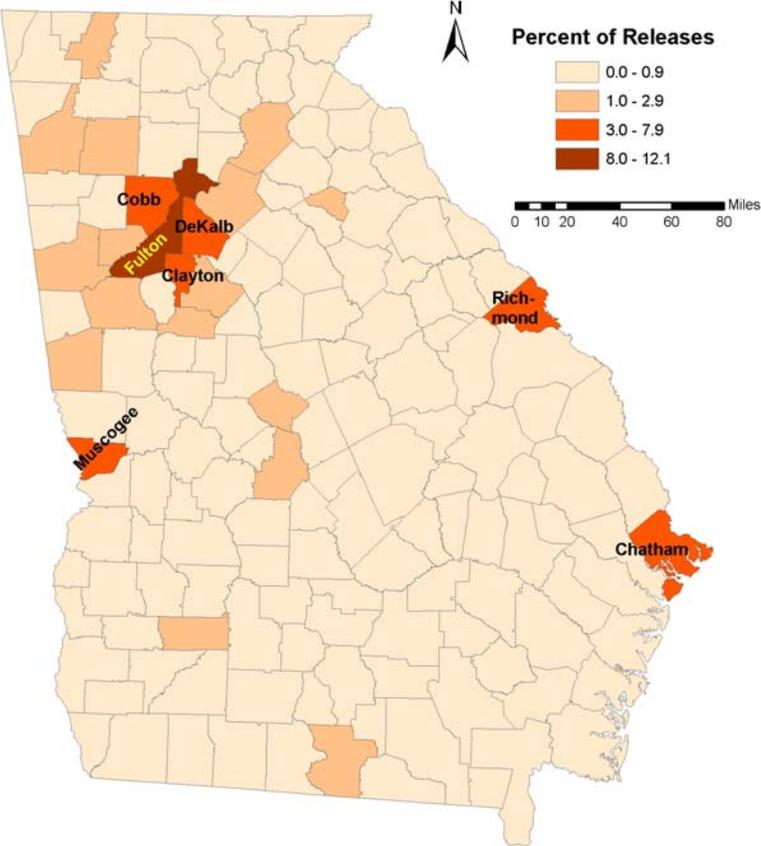
Figure 25. Number of Prisoner Releases by Georgia County, 2002



Sources: Offender Tracking Information System (OTIS), Georgia Department of Corrections, provided by Office of Planning and Analysis, GDC. Address level data provided by the Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles

Note: Total releases to GA = 15,227; 434 (or 2.9%) are not shown on the map because of incomplete addresses.

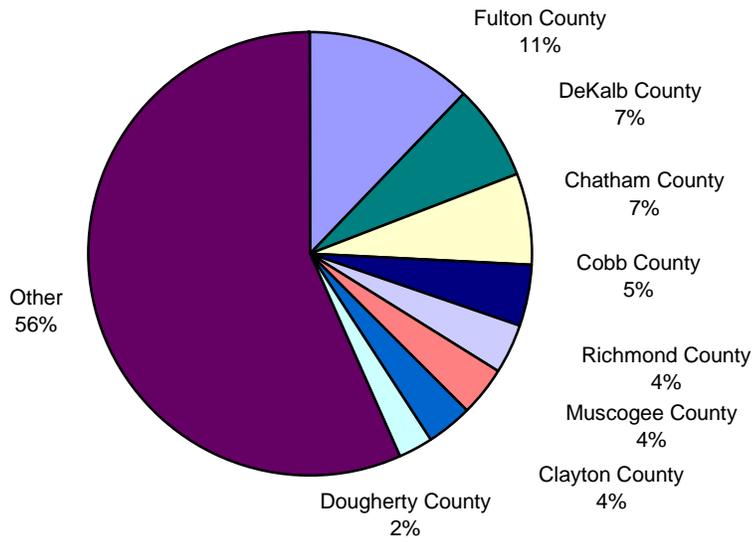
Figure 26. Percentage of Prisoner Releases by Georgia County, 2002



Sources: Offender Tracking Information System (OTIS), Georgia Department of Corrections, provided by Office of Planning and Analysis, GDC. Address level data provided by the Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles.

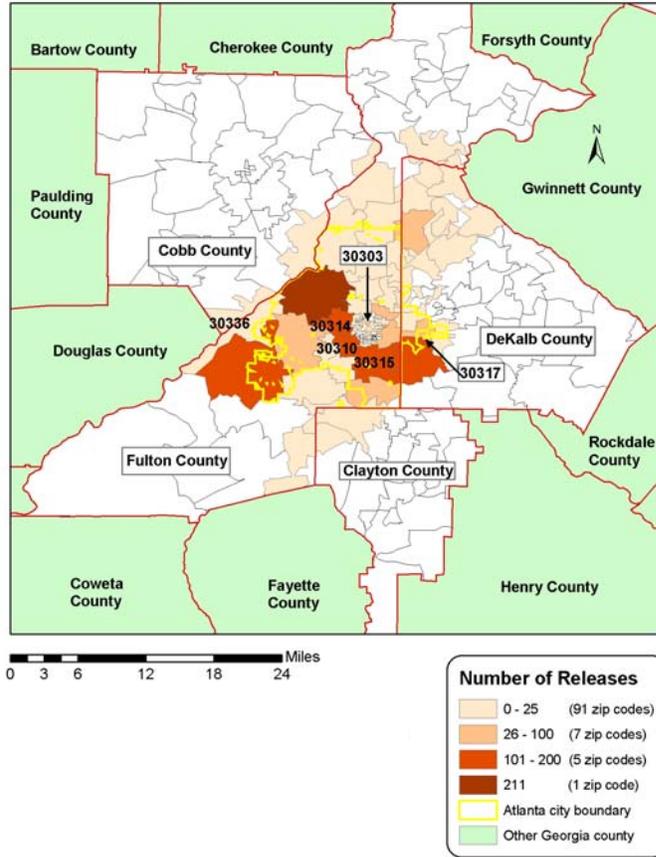
Note: Total releases to GA = 15,227; 434 (or 2.9%) are not shown on the map because of incomplete addresses.

Figure 27. Percentage of Prisoner Releases by County, 2002



Sources: Offender Tracking Information System (OTIS), Georgia Department of Corrections, provided by Office of Planning and Analysis, GDC. Address level data provided by the Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles.

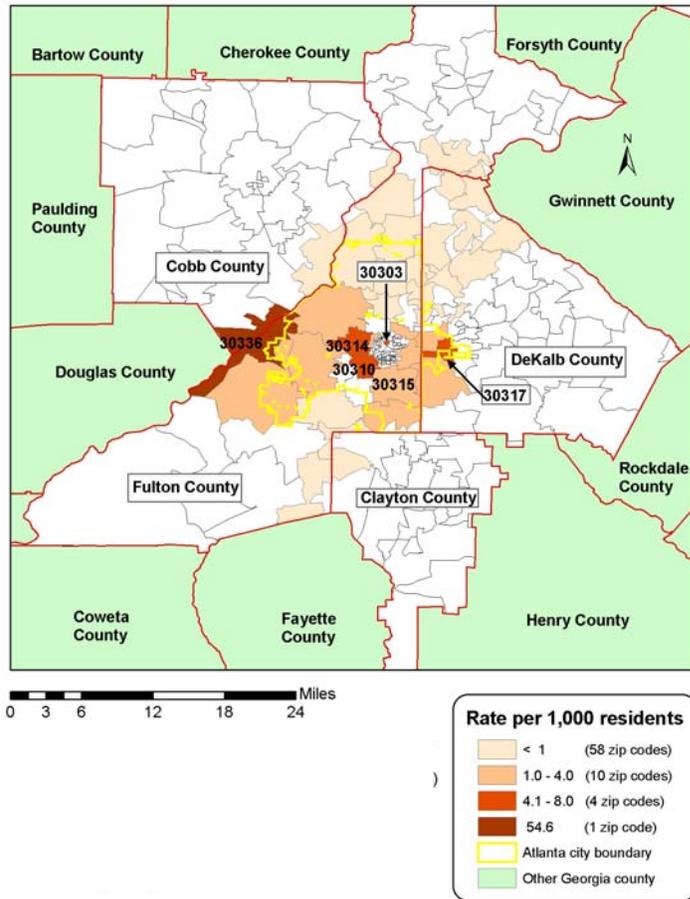
Figure 28. Number of Prisoner Releases to Atlanta, Georgia, by Zip Code, 2002



Sources: Offender Tracking Information System (OTIS), Georgia Department of Corrections, provided by Office of Planning and Analysis, GDC. Address level data provided by the Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles.

Note: Of the 1,587 people returning to Atlanta, 105 (7 percent) are not shown on the map because of incomplete addresses. Of the 104 Atlanta zip codes, 26 zip codes (86 people) are for P.O. boxes or are unique zip codes created for commercial addresses.

Figure 29. Prisoner Releases to Atlanta, Georgia—Rate per 1,000 Residents by Zip Code, 2002



Sources: Offender Tracking Information System (OTIS), Georgia Department of Corrections, provided by Office of Planning and Analysis, GDC. Address level data provided by the Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles.
 Note: Of the 1,587 people returning to Atlanta, 105 (7 percent) are not shown on the map because of incomplete addresses. The rates for 31 out of the 104 Atlanta zip codes (101 people) are not shown on the map because their populations are not available. Twenty-six zip codes are for P.O. boxes or are unique zip codes created for commercial addresses.

Table 1. Five High Concentration Areas in Fulton County and the City of Atlanta, by Demographic, 2002

Zip code area	Number of returning prisoners	Population	Rate per 1,000	Female-headed households (%)	Families below poverty level (%)	Unemployment (%)
Fulton County, Georgia						
30336	13	238	54.6	32.2	100	0
30303	30	3,744	8.0	9.8	44.6	14
30310	158	33,598	4.7	37.8	25.3	7.9
30314	123	27,181	4.5	63.3	32.7	15.7
30317	63	13,981	4.5	37.3	20.5	7.3
Fulton County	1,785	816,006	2.2	23	12.4	6
DeKalb County	1,053	665,865	1.6	25.5	7.8	3.9
City of Atlanta	1,587	416,474	3.8	26.3	21.3	9

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 (<http://www.factfinder.census.gov>).

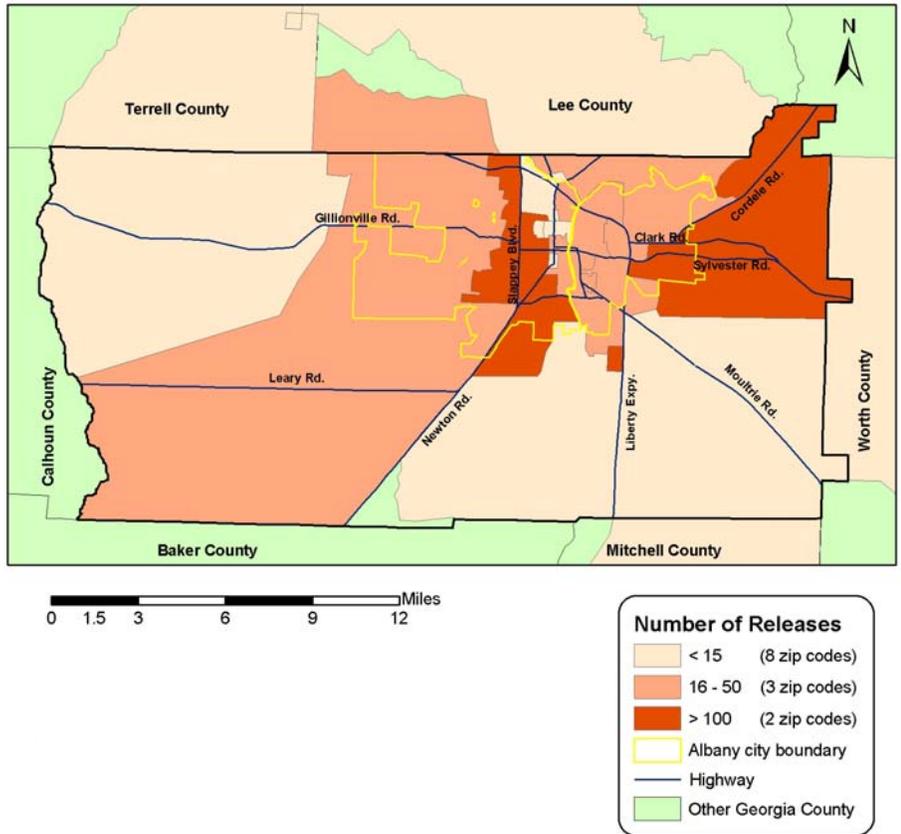
REENTRY IN DOUGHERTY COUNTY AND ALBANY CITY

While only 2 percent of prisoners released in 2002 returned to Dougherty County, prisoner releases within this county were mapped to help inform the efforts of Georgia's Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative (SVORI), of which the city of Albany in Dougherty County is a site.

Albany had the sixth highest number of releases in Georgia (Atlanta was first, Savannah second, Columbus third, Decatur fourth, and Marietta fifth). Of the 345 prisoners released to Dougherty County, a total of 336 releasees returned to the city of Albany and were further concentrated within three zip code areas within or immediately adjacent to the Albany city boundary (figures 30 and 31). Two of the three zip code areas that had the highest rates of returning prisoners (31701 and 31705) are characterized by greater shares of families living in poverty, higher than average unemployment rates, and a higher percentage of female-headed households, as compared with the Dougherty County and Albany city averages (table 2). Zip code 31707 was lower than the city and county averages on all three dimensions. This is likely explained by the fact that, while zip code 31707 has a relatively high *number* of returning prisoners, its rate of 1.2 returning prisoners per 1,000 residents is actually much lower than the citywide average of 4.4.

The 345 GDC releases who returned to Dougherty County generally reflect the characteristics and experiences of the 2002 release cohort as a whole, including gender, average age, marital status, prison release mechanism, offense type, substance abuse behavior, and mental health status. There are, however, a number of notable exceptions. A greater percentage of the prisoners who returned to this county were black (89 percent compared with the cohort's 66 percent), a greater percentage had at least one prior incarceration upon entry to prison (58 percent compared with the cohort's 49 percent), a greater percentage were not married (86 percent compared with the cohort's 77 percent), a greater percentage had completed some grade or high school education (89 percent compared with the cohort's 65 percent), and fewer had entered prison as new court commitments (42 percent compared with the cohort's 59 percent). In addition, for the cohort as a whole, the two most common offense types were property and drug offenses, compared with the two most common offense types for releases to Dougherty County, which were violent personal and property offenses. The releases to Dougherty County also spent on average a longer period in prison (2.3 years compared with the cohort's 1.8 years) and served a greater percentage of their sentence (78 percent compared with the cohort's 58 percent).

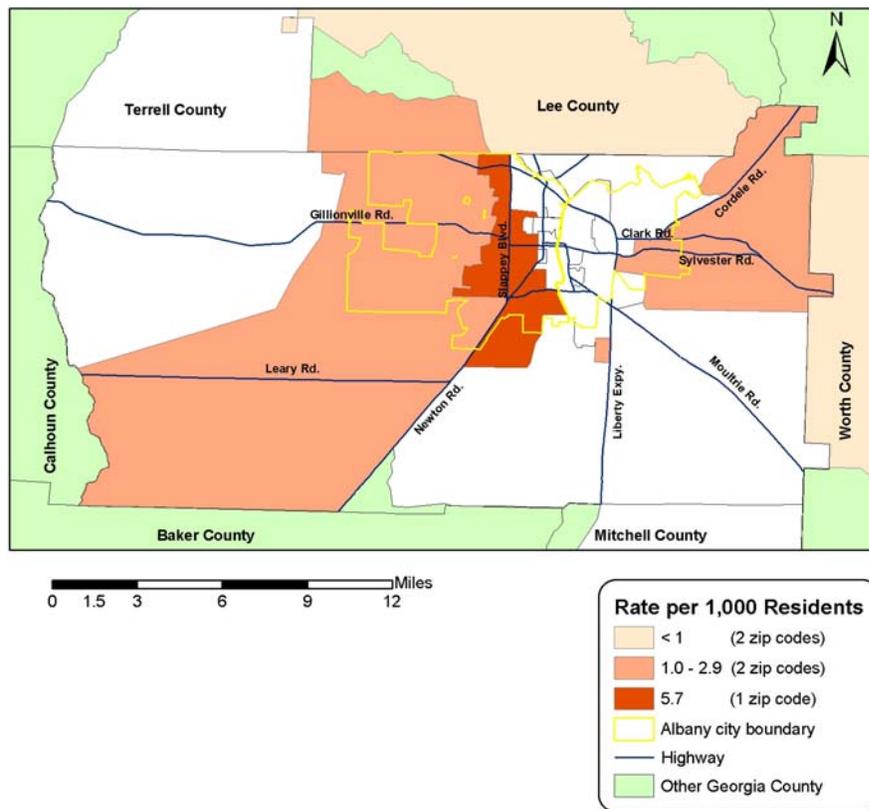
Figure 30. Number of Prisoner Releases to Dougherty County, Georgia, by Zip Code, 2002



Sources: Offender Tracking Information System (OTIS), Georgia Department of Corrections, provided by Office of Planning and Analysis, GDC. Address level data provided by the Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles.

Note: Of the 345 people released to Dougherty County, 14 (or 4 percent) are not shown on the map because of incomplete addresses

Figure 31. Prisoner Releases to Dougherty County, Georgia—Rate per 1,000 Residents, by Zip Code, 2002



Sources: Offender Tracking Information System (OTIS), Georgia Department of Corrections, provided by Office of Planning and Analysis, GDC. Address level data provided by the Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles.
 Note: Of the 345 people released to Dougherty County, 53 (or 15 percent) are not shown on the map because of incomplete addresses or because the population for a zip code was not available.

Table 2. Three High Concentration Areas in Dougherty County and Albany City, by Demographic, 2002

Zip code area, Dougherty County, Georgia	Number of returning prisoners	Population	Rate per 1,000	Female- headed households (%)	Families below poverty level (%)	Unemployment (%)
31701	127	22,419	5.7	37.3	30.8	8.5
31705	112	38,667	2.9	34.2	24.5	7.1
31707	50	41,502	1.2	21.2	8.2	2.9
Dougherty County	345	96,065	3.6	29.9	19.6	5.8
Albany City	336	76,939	4.4	31.7	21.5	6.5

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 (<http://www.factfinder.census.gov>).

CHAPTER 5

Looking Forward

Over the past two decades, the growth in prison populations nationwide has translated into more and more people being released from prison and reentering society. The state of Georgia has experienced similar incarceration and release trends, and thus faces the reentry challenges that accompany such growth. Between 1982 and 2002, the Georgia prison population more than tripled, a growth recently fueled by property offenders and new court commitments. The number of people released from Georgia prisons reflects these rising admissions and population trends: in 2002, 16,124 prisoners were released from Georgia prisons, more than one and a half times the number released in 1982. The majority of these released prisoners were single black males, with an average age of 34. The largest percentage of prisoners had been serving time for property offenses, followed by drug offenses, and the average time served was 1.8 years.

The highest percentage of prisoners released in Georgia returned to Fulton County, and specifically the city of Atlanta. Zip code-level analyses indicate that returning prisoners are even more concentrated within a few community areas within Atlanta. An examination of demographic data for these areas indicates that they are economically disadvantaged compared with the city average. It is likely that these community characteristics have an effect on reentry success or failure. Thus, from a reentry planning perspective, it is important to consider the community context of prisoner reentry. Are jobs available in or near the communities to which prisoners return? What is the availability of affordable housing in these areas? What is the prevalence of assets, such as faith-based institutions, versus risks, such as open-air drug markets? It is also useful to understand whether services for ex-prisoners are located within or in close proximity to these neighborhoods with high rates of returns, and whether prisoners returning to Atlanta are able to access these resources.

Another important facet of prisoner reentry is the family context of the reintegration experience. That more than half of the 2002 returning prisoners left children behind while incarcerated highlights the importance and challenge of family reunification upon a person's release from prison. Families may be a strong source of support to returning prisoners, while others have their own histories of substance use and criminal activity that may make them negative influences for returning prisoners. Understanding the family context of prisoner reentry is thus critical in reentry planning efforts.

Returning prisoners in Georgia, like those nationwide, have many needs as they begin the process of reintegration. Health problems and issues of dependency on drugs and/or alcohol are likely to pose significant reentry challenges to the state's returning prisoners—challenges that could seriously affect the ease of transition to life on the outside. For those released in 2002, for example, a large percentage of prisoners (70 percent) had a history of drug-related behavior. Mental and physical health conditions of returning prisoners also have important public health implications, specifically related to the spread of infectious disease to the general population and the added strain on the health care system.

We also know that the likelihood of recidivating is high. Half of released prisoners in Georgia had served prior terms in prison, and many had violated their parole at some point in their criminal careers. These extensive criminal histories do not bode well for maintaining crime-free lifestyles, and they can also create barriers to employment, housing, and eligibility for food stamps and other forms of public assistance, and can limit opportunities for civic participation. Thus, it is paramount that state officials, service providers, and community stakeholders approach the reentry issue comprehensively, considering the many dimensions of the reentry experience and tapping the numerous resources that could provide assistance to returning prisoners and their families.

It is clear that the challenges of reentry in Georgia are great, but so are the opportunities. Successful reentry is critical for ensuring public safety, reducing the costs of incarceration, and promoting the well-being of individuals, families, and communities.