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# REEVALUATING RISK: GANG INVOLVEMENT AND RECIDIVISM IN GEORGIA'S UNSUPERVISED PROBATION POPULATION

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# Abstract

Georgia routinely shifts probationers who satisfy statutory benchmarks to an unsupervised, "paper-only" status, yet little is known about how gang involvement shapes outcomes under this reduced-contact regime. Drawing on the Georgia Department of Community Supervision's (DCS) statewide database, this study analyzes 5,137 probationers who transitioned to unsupervised status between January 1, 2019, and December 31, 2024, and observes their arrest records through the end of 2024. Descriptive and comparative statistics reveal a bifurcated risk pattern. Non-gang probationers, who constitute 99 percent of the cohort, demonstrate a low rearrest rate (14 percent) and predominantly misdemeanor recidivism (62 percent). In contrast, the small subset of gang-validated Security Threat Group (STG) probationers is nearly twice as likely to reoffend (26 percent), and 64 percent of their rearrests are felonies. Timing analyses reveal that STG misdemeanors peak approximately nine months after transition, whereas STG felonies emerge roughly fourteen months later; non-STG violations cluster uniformly near the one-year mark. Because statutory regulations prohibit active supervision once a case becomes administrative, the findings underscore the need for passive, data-driven oversights, such as tiered record checks and automated alerts, and voluntary, community-based supports tailored to the higher-severity, later-emerging risks associated with gang affiliation. This study informs risk-stratified policy adjustments that preserve the efficiency of unsupervised probation for the vast majority of clients while addressing the concentrated public-safety threat posed by gang-validated probationers.

# Introduction

Georgia's statutory framework directs the Georgia Department of Community Supervision (DCS) to move eligible probationers from active to administrative (unsupervised) status once they satisfy specific benchmarks. To qualify, an individual must have completed at least two years of active supervision, not be in warrant status or in violation of probation conditions, have no convictions for sex offenses or under the Georgia Street Gang Terrorism and Prevention Act, and have no outstanding restitution obligations. This mechanism eases caseloads, reduces costs, and, for most people, poses minimal risk to public safety. Yet, as this research argues, the same efficiencies may mask a concentrated risk among a small subgroup of probationers validated as members of Security Threat Groups (STGs). Existing research, by (Pyrooz 2013, 2020), (McShane 2003), and (Sweeten 2012), consistently associates gang involvement with higher rates and greater severity of reoffending, but the vast majority of that work examines people under active supervision or those returning from incarceration. Far less is known about what happens to gang-validated probationers once active oversight is removed. This study responds to that gap by examining a statewide Georgia cohort of probationers who transitioned to unsupervised status between 2019 and 2024 and tracking arrest outcomes through the end of 2024. In line with social control and differential association theories, preliminary evidence suggests a bifurcated risk curve: most non-gang clients succeed, while the small STG subset is both more likely to fail and more likely to fail at the felony level. These patterns raise foundational questions about how to calibrate passive monitoring and voluntary supports for a population barred, by statute, from traditional face-to-face supervision.

The policy stakes are considerable. Across the United States, recidivism remains common, especially in the period immediately following a change in legal status (release from prison, transfer to community supervision, or shift from active to administrative probation). In a large Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) cohort study of people released from state prisons in 2005, 68% were rearrested within three years, 79% within six years, and 83% within nine years, with a substantial share of first arrests occurring early in the follow-up period (Alper, Durose, & Markman, 2018). Although prison-release cohorts differ from probation cohorts, these findings underscore a durable pattern: the hazard of failure is front-loaded and the earliest months and years matter most. More targeted work on community supervision mirrors this timing. For example, among individuals on felony probation in Oregon who were rearrested within three years, 69% were arrested within the first year; this suggests that the earliest phase of supervision is decisive for success or failure (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2020). This timing dynamic is critical for Georgia's unsupervised model: if serious failures among STG clients tend to materialize after a long period of compliance, passive strategies must be designed to detect rather than inadvertently conceal late-emerging risk.

The Georgia context sharpens these national lessons. The DCS uses a risk-assessment process and statutory filters to determine eligibility for unsupervised placement. As the current dataset shows, most non-STG probationers positioned for administrative status remain arrest-free, and when they do fail, the majority of their new arrests are misdemeanors. In contrast, the small number of STG-designated probationers who move to unsupervised status exhibit an arrest rate nearly twice that of

non-STG peers, and when they fail, their new arrests are disproportionately felonies. This divergence is not merely academic. It implies that, without changes to monitoring and support strategies, a small but high-impact subset of unsupervised cases can drive outsized public-safety costs.

Supervision policy also operates within a wider ecosystem. Nationally, supervision violations continue to account for a large share of prison admissions 44% in 2021, despite declines during the COVID-19 period and subsequent reforms (Council of State Governments Justice Center {CSG}, 2024). Georgia has posted notable progress in reducing admissions for supervision violations, aided by practice changes such as virtual check-ins that improved compliance (CSG, 2024). These experiences demonstrate that policy and practice reforms can meaningfully reduce revocations and incarceration pressure; they also suggest that carefully tailored oversight for higher-risk administrative cases is plausible without reverting to blanket intensification for everyone.

The theoretical framework for this evaluation is straightforward. Social control theory predicts that weaker bonds to prosocial institutions (family, work, school) increase the likelihood of offending, while differential association theory emphasizes the normalizing influence of deviant peer networks (Hirschi, 1969; Sutherland & Cressey, 1978). Gang involvement by definition signals weaker conventional ties and denser pro-crime networks; removing active supervisory controls may therefore amplify the criminogenic features of those networks, even when individuals have otherwise "earned" administrative status (Bonta & Andrews, 2017). The central test, then, is empirical and practical: quantify how risk actually differs under unsupervised conditions, identify when (and for whom) risk results in rearrest, and outline passive, legally

compliant strategies that preserve the benefits of administrative supervision for most clients while mitigating concentrated risk among the few.

This study's contribution is twofold. First, it offers the first Georgia-specific look at arrest outcomes for a statewide cohort of probationers moved to unsupervised status, disaggregated by STG designation and by offense severity over time. Second, it translates those findings into implementable interventions, tiered record checks keyed to empirically observed risk windows, low-burden digital nudges, and voluntary, community-based supports that can be codified without contravening the statutory limits on active supervision. The broader aim is to help Georgia, and by extension, other jurisdictions with similar legal constraints, align supervision intensity with risk, strengthen equity safeguards, and focus scarce resources where they can prevent the most harm.

# Literature Review

Determining whether individuals linked to gangs who are placed on unsupervised probation reoffend more frequently than their non-affiliated counterparts carries critical historical and contemporary ramifications for community safety. Historically, gangs have been synonymous with elevated recidivism, sustained by tightly knit social and criminal ties (Pyrooz, 2020). In response, legislators, police agencies, and corrections professionals spent much of the twentieth century devising strategies to curb gang power both on the streets and within custodial settings as violence escalated.

Unsupervised probation became a way to alleviate some of the burden on correctional resources by offering a less intensive level of supervision while still monitoring offenders assessed as low-risk. Research indicates that gang members have a much higher recidivism rate, even when receiving standard supervision, because of the strong affiliations they have in criminal activities (Pyrooz, 2020). Consequently, this inquiry is vital because it exposes a continuing gap between rehabilitative ambitions and public safety imperatives. Tailored responses ranging from focused gang-disengagement initiatives to specialized supervision models must be developed and executed through collaboration among corrections agencies, police, policymakers, neighborhood organizations, and social service partners to generate sound policies and practices. Failure to address this disparity risks eroding the legitimacy and credibility of community supervision systems over time.

While the recent enhancements in some tools for risk assessment and data-driven strategies in probation are positive developments, the challenge of correctly targeting risk factors and deploying limited resources remains (Flewellen & Powell, 2024).

Understanding how gang affiliations affect the rate of recidivism when offenders are on unsupervised probation will be critical to drafting policies that will reduce crime and enhance public safety.

**Defining and Measuring Recidivism**

Recidivism, a cornerstone metric in criminology and corrections, is broadly defined as a return to criminal behavior after a prior justice contact, but its operationalization varies by outcome (rearrest, reconviction, reincarceration), population, and follow-up period differences that materially shape results and policy interpretation (Alper, Durose, & Markman, 2018). Rearrest is the most inclusive indicator and thus often yields the highest rates, whereas reconviction and reincarceration are narrower but sensitive to charging, plea-bargaining, and sanctioning practices (Alper et al., 2018). In community supervision, the picture is further complicated by technical violations, which are non-criminal behaviors that can still trigger sanctions; therefore, comparisons must be like-for-like in terms of definitions (CSG, 2023, 2024). Notably, violations (technical and new offenses) made up roughly 44% of state prison admissions in 2021, underscoring how supervision policy decisions impact prison populations (CSG, 2024).

Because this evaluation focuses on arrest outcomes after transition to unsupervised status, it is insulated from variability in revocation practices while remaining sensitive to local enforcement conditions. Large-scale benchmarks provide context: the Bureau of Justice Statistics' nine-year follow-up of 401,288 people released from state prisons in 2005 observed 68% rearrest within three years and 83% within nine (Alper et al., 2018). In probation-specific analyses, the earliest period of community

placement is disproportionately consequential (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2020).

**Timing and Hazard of Failure**

A durable empirical regularity is the front-loaded hazard of failure: the probability of a first event is highest early and then tapers (Alper et al., 2018; USSC, 2016). In Oregon felony probation cohorts, among those rearrested within three years, 69% were arrested in year one, highlighting the outsized importance of the first 12 months (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2020). Time to fail analyses of returning citizens similarly show concentration of events in the early reentry window (Rhodes et al., 2018). Preventive effort, therefore, yields the highest returns early in the follow-up period, and it is especially important when individuals move to administrative status with minimal routine contact (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2020).

**Probation Outcomes and the Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) Framework**

The RNR framework synthesizes three principles of effective community corrections: Risk—match supervision and services to risk level; Need—target dynamic criminogenic needs; and Responsivity—deliver interventions in ways that fit client abilities and contexts (Andrews & Bonta, 2010; Gendreau, Smith, & French, 2006). Over-supervising low-risk clients can inadvertently increase failure through disruption and criminogenic peer exposure (Lowenkamp, Latessa, & Holsinger, 2006). Conversely, cognitive-behavioral interventions that target thinking patterns and problem-solving consistently reduce recidivism when delivered to higher-risk clients (Wilson, Bouffard, & Mackenzie, 2005; Latessa, Listwan, & Koetzle, 2014).

For jurisdictions using unsupervised probation, RNR still applies.  Administrative status should be reserved for clients with low expected marginal benefit from continued

in-person contact (Andrews & Bonta, 2010). Low supervision does not mean no support: passive safety nets (scheduled record checks, warrant feeds, automated alerts) and removing barriers to voluntary services can preserve efficiency while honoring need and responsivity principles for small subgroups that retain elevated risk (CSG, 2023, 2024).

**Gangs, Social Networks, and Recidivism**

Gang involvement remains a significant predictor of higher recidivism and greater offense severity, even when age and prior criminal history are taken into account.  This is largely because gang membership reinforces ties to criminal peers and weakens bonds to prosocial institutions (Hirschi, 1969; Sutherland & Cressey, 1978; Pyrooz, Sweeten, & Piquero, 2013). Social-network research shows that risk and harm concentrate within relatively small, tightly knit networks, which can amplify exposure to serious violence and weapon-involved offending (Papachristos, Braga, & Hureau, 2012). At the same time, studies document that disengagement from gangs is possible but often fragile, with intermittent returns to offending during the transition period (Pyrooz et al., 2013). When face-to-face oversight is removed, as in administrative supervision, the loss of external structure may matter most for those whose internal controls and prosocial ties remain underdeveloped (Hirschi, 1969).

**Severity and Trajectory**

Evidence across jurisdictions indicates that when gang-involved individuals fail, they are more likely to do so at the felony level, plausibly reflecting networked access to serious criminal opportunities and enhanced institutional attention (Papachristos et al., 2012; Pyrooz et al., 2013). For system design, this argues for calibrated safeguards capable of detecting qualitatively different risk among a small subset without defaulting to blanket intensification for the majority (CSG, 2023).

**Unsupervised Probation: Efficiency, Law, and Practice**

Unsupervised probation preserves accountability while reserving scarce officer time for people with higher expected returns from contact (CSG, 2023). Within statutory limits that prohibit routine in-person supervision, viable levers are passive (criminal-history sweeps, warrant feeds, automated alerts) and voluntary (referrals, digital nudges, community programming). Where data show that most non-gang clients remain arrest-free and that failures skew toward misdemeanors, low-burden, low-frequency checks are justified (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2020). Where a small STG subgroup exhibits elevated risk and a higher felony share, front-loaded but compliant safeguards are warranted (CSG, 2024).

**Digital Nudges and Voluntary Supports**

Light-touch behavioral interventions, especially reminder texts and simple goal-setting prompts, can improve court and supervision compliance at modest cost, making them attractive complements to administrative models (Barnes, Hyatt, & Sherman, 2017). Short, skills-focused cognitive-behavioral boosters (problem-solving, emotion regulation) and credible-messenger mentoring are promising opt-in supports,

while employment and training partnerships with local employers and technical colleges strengthen the prosocial bonds that social-control theory identifies as protective (Hirschi, 1969; Wilson et al., 2005).

**Equity, Labeling, and Algorithmic Risk**

Gang designations and risk scores can inadvertently amplify racial disparities if they mirror historic enforcement patterns or rely on criteria with differential error rates across groups (CSG, 2023). Equity-minded administrative regimes should publish disaggregated dashboards on alert frequency, hits, and outcomes; audit automated sweeps for differential false-positive rates; and ensure that any added passive monitoring for STG-designated clients is matched by increased *access* to voluntary supports (CSG, 2024). Because exposure to serious violence concentrates in specific networks and places, network-informed and place-based supports can be targeted without casting overly broad nets (Papachristos et al., 2012; Braga, Papachristos, & Hureau, 2014).

**Methodological Considerations for Interpreting Findings**

The findings should be interpreted with several methodological cautions in mind. Eligibility rules for administrative status (time clean and absence of disqualifying conditions) generate a positively selected sample; individuals shifted to administrative supervision are already more compliant than typical probationers, which can depress observed failure rates and mask within-group diversity (USSC, 2016; CSG, 2023). Within that context, any residual risk signal among STG-designated clients who nevertheless qualify for administrative status warrants particular attention (CSG, 2024). Moreover, the STG status itself is validated using multiple indicators (e.g., self-

admission, tattoos, associations), and some misclassification is unavoidable. Where sample size permits, sensitivity analyses such as excluding borderline cases or applying alternative definitions are advisable (CSG, 2023).

Analytically, risk is not constant over time, so time to fail analyses are useful to pinpoint when risk concentrates and for whom (Rhodes et al., 2018). Competing events, such as probation discharge, incarceration on other matters, or out-migration, truncate exposure and should be handled explicitly via censoring with clearly defined at-risk denominators (Rhodes et al., 2018). Finally, county-level variation in policing, court backlogs, and economic opportunity affects both arrest risk and service uptake and should be explicitly accounted for (CSG, 2024).

**Evidence-Informed Strategies Compatible with Administrative Limits**

Within the constraints of administrative supervision, several evidence-informed strategies can be deployed in tandem. Agencies should adopt a tiered record-check cadence aligned with the known hazard windows, with monthly sweeps for STG-designated clients during months 1–14, followed by quarterly checks through year two. For non-STG clients, quarterly checks should be conducted through month 12, after which the review frequency should shift to semi-annual or annual reviews (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2020; CSG, 2024). Arrest feeds should be integrated with case-management systems so that any hit generates same-day alerts and a standardized review/referral workflow (CSG, 2023). At the same time, expand voluntary, high-yield supports short, opt-in CBT boosters, credible-messenger mentoring, substance-use treatment referrals, and job-placement pipelines linked to trade unions and technical colleges (Wilson et al., 2005; Latessa et al., 2014). When early, low-level events occur

among higher-risk subgroups, use focused, time-limited outreach to interrupt escalation without reverting to prohibited active supervision (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2020). Finally, embed equity audits and transparency by publishing disaggregated metrics, periodically revalidating STG status, and including community partners in the governance of passive-monitoring protocols (CSG, 2023, 2024).

**Links to the Present Study**

The literature anchors this study in four linked propositions. First, baseline safety: most non-STG clients placed on administrative status remain arrest-free, and when failures do occur, they are disproportionately misdemeanors (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2020; CSG, 2023). Second, concentrated severity: among the smaller subgroup designated as STG, failures are more likely to involve felony offenses, resulting in an outsized public-safety impact per failure (Papachristos et al., 2012; Pyrooz et al., 2013). Third, time to fail: events cluster in the first 12–14 months after transition; within the STG subgroup, misdemeanor incidents tend to surface earlier while felony incidents peak later (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2020; Rhodes et al., 2018). Finally, these patterns motivate operational adjustments, such as front-loaded passive monitoring, low-burden digital nudges, and accessible voluntary services, which are implemented with equity safeguards to remain within statutory limits while reducing risk (Barnes et al., 2017; CSG, 2024).

**Summary**

The literature converges on a coherent picture: risk is diverse and front-loaded; gang involvement is a persistent, severity-shifting predictor; and administrative supervision can remain efficient and safe when paired with calibrated passive oversight and voluntary, equity-attentive supports (Andrews & Bonta, 2010; Pew Charitable Trusts, 2020; CSG, 2024).

# Research Design & Methodology

The DCS routinely moves low-risk probationers to unsupervised status to ease caseload pressure. However, gang affiliation is a well-documented predictor of recidivism. This research utilized quantitative analysis to answer the research question: *Do gang-affiliated probationers placed on unsupervised status commit new offenses at a higher rate than non-gang-affiliated probationers?* This evaluation adhered to the following logic model:

| Inputs | Activities | Outputs | Initial Outcomes | Intermediate Outcomes | Long-Term Outcomes |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| • Statewide DCS database covering all probationers that were placed on unsupervised probation from 1/1/19 to 12/31/24, with an observation window from the date placed on unsupervised until 12/31/2024<br><br>• Gang-validation records based on "reasonable officer" criteria<br><br>• SQL expertise<br><br>• Criminological frameworks (Social Control & Differential Association theories)<br><br>• OCGA 42-8-40 confidentiality compliance | • Extract cohort meeting DCS eligibility for unsupervised status (completing at least two years of active supervision, not currently in warrant status or in violation of the conditions of probation, no convictions for sex offenses, no convictions under the Georgia Street Gang Terrorism and Prevention Act, and no outstanding restitution obligations)<br><br>• Define study cohort & eligibility filters<br><br>• Conduct descriptive statistics<br><br>• Interpret findings through criminological theory<br><br>• Draft policy-focused report & briefing materials | • Clean analytic dataset<br><br>• Statistical tables, visualizations & trend analysis<br><br>• Executive summary & policy brief highlighting actionable recommendations | • Evidence on the relationship between gang affiliation and new felony arrests among individuals on unsupervised status<br><br>• Increased awareness among DCS leadership of risk differentials<br><br>• Data-driven talking points for legislative and media inquiries | • Revised unsupervised probation eligibility guidelines that account for gang status<br><br>• Enhanced risk-screening protocols in the case management system<br><br>• Targeted pilot interventions (e.g., hybrid or stepped-up contact) for gang-validated individuals | • Reduced felony rearrests among unsupervised gang-affiliated probationers<br><br>• Optimized supervision costs without sacrificing public safety<br><br>• Evidence-informed statewide policy on unsupervised probation placement |

This research focuses on two key variables: Security Threat Group (STG) validation (gang membership) and committing a new offense while on unsupervised probation status. The DCS employs a "reasonable officer" standard to validate gang membership, which can be initiated or completed by any sworn officer and used for law enforcement safety and prosecuting offenses under the Georgia Gang Act. This process includes validation criteria such as self-admission, tattoos, hand signs, and other gang-related evidence, which align with the Georgia Bureau of Investigation's criteria for uploading to the Georgia Criminal Street Gang Database.

Unsupervised probation, also referred to as non-reporting probation under O.C.G.A. § 17-10-1, is a legislatively mandated strategy intended both to reduce active caseloads and to serve as a reward for individuals who demonstrate sustained compliance. The statute requires that eligible individuals be transitioned to unsupervised status unless there is reasonable cause to continue active supervision. Eligibility criteria include completing at least two years of active supervision, not being currently in warrant status or violation of the conditions of probation, having no convictions for sex offenses, no convictions under the Georgia Street Gang Terrorism and Prevention Act, and no outstanding restitution obligations.

This research utilizes DCS's statewide data from all probationers placed on unsupervised probation from January 1, 2019, to December 31, 2024. The observation window for new arrests extends from the date of unsupervised probation start to December 31, 2024.

As the primary independent variable, gang affiliation reflects whether a

probationer on unsupervised status was validated as a gang member during their supervision term. Next, as the primary dependent variable or outcome, a new offense represents whether a person was arrested for a new offense after being placed on unsupervised status. The independent and dependent variables are divided, with answer options of "yes" or "no." Finally, this study examines demographic trends, including age, race, and gender.

Essential research techniques include statistical analysis to assess the relationship between the variables. Specifically, whether gang affiliation impacts arrests among people placed on unsupervised status, a simple analysis of descriptive statistics will evaluate relationships between gang affiliation and future criminal behavior while controlling for demographic characteristics, such as age, race, and gender. Structured Query Language (SQL), a programming language used to manage and retrieve information from relational databases, was used to extract data from the Department's statewide database for this analysis.  A limitation of the study is the absence of data after probation expires, which limits the ability to assess the long-term criminal behavior of gang members.

This research seeks to focus on the ways gang affiliation can impact the likelihood of individuals reoffending. Data related to the dynamics of movement from supervised to unsupervised probation could contribute to enhanced supervision strategies and efforts to address gang-related crime.

The study examines a large dataset collected over several years, providing a comprehensive look at how unsupervised probation works for individuals with gang connections (Flewellen & Powell, 2024). The hope is that these insights will offer

practical value in shaping more effective approaches to promote improved outcomes for

those transitioning from supervised to unsupervised settings (Flewellen & Powell, 2024).

# Results

This study provides a comprehensive profile of Georgia probationers who transitioned to unsupervised status between 2019 and 2024, tracking their outcomes through the end of that period. With a sizable cohort of 5,137 individuals, the analysis reveals a population that is predominantly male (70%) and racially split between Black (54%) and White (45%) probationers, with a small proportion (1%) categorized as Other. The typical participant is in their mid-thirties and remains on unsupervised probation for roughly 5.5 years.

These baseline characteristics establish an essential context for understanding subsequent findings on recidivism, offense severity, and time-to-rearrest elaborated in the broader results. They also underscore the need for supervision models that account for demographic realities, particularly the over-representation of Black males, and that tailor risk-reduction strategies to a mid-career adult cohort facing lengthy administrative supervision terms. Ultimately, the dataset provides a solid foundation for evaluating current unsupervised probation policies and designing targeted interventions to mitigate reoffending among the state's community-supervised population.

Grounded in the premise that unsupervised gang-involved probationers will reoffend more often than their non-gang peers, the findings point toward markedly elevated recidivism among gang members. Prior research, particularly the series of studies by (Pyrooz et al. 2012, 2013, 2020) and (McShane 2003), has long highlighted the distinctive challenges that push gang-affiliated individuals back into crime. These hurdles include persistent immersion in illicit networks, powerful pressures to honor gang loyalties, and scarce opportunities for meaningful social reintegration.

The results indicate that people with gang ties who receive only administrative, "paper-only" supervision register substantially higher new offense rates than similarly situated probationers lacking such affiliations. Decades of empirical evidence have already identified gang participation as a robust statistical marker of recidivism.

Prior researchers have relied on models that adjust for age, criminal history, and socioeconomic standing to isolate gang status as an independent predictor (Flewellen & Powell, 2024). These approaches consistently demonstrate that membership remains a significant predictor of recidivism, even after controlling for confounding factors. The present study replicates and extends this strategy by focusing explicitly on unsupervised probationers, a subgroup that is seldom explored. Contemporary literature leans heavily on supervised populations; consequently, little is known about whether diminishing oversight magnifies risk uniquely for gang-affiliated clients. Addressing this gap is critical because unsupervised caseloads represent a sizeable share of probation populations, yet assumptions about their safety rest on limited statistical footing.

The broader implications are substantial. Evidence pointing to pronounced risk among unsupervised gang members would underscore the urgency of specialized responses (Flewellen & Powell, 2024). Traditional probation templates, based on minimal monitoring for perceived low-risk offenders, may prove ill-suited for this cohort. Alternatives, such as enhanced field contacts, focused cognitive-behavioral groups, credible-messenger mentoring, or tightly coordinated community programs, could replace "set-and-forget" models (Flewellen & Powell, 2024).

Such findings would reinforce social control theory's claim that weak attachments to conventional institutions increase the propensity for criminal behavior (Flewellen &

Powell, 2024). For gang-involved clients, frail bonds to family, employment, or schooling leave few buffers against reoffending. Differential association theory remains noteworthy as well: sustained exposure to peers who condone crime normalizes and perpetuates offending trajectories (Sutherland & Cressy, 1978). Recognizing those mechanisms clarifies why the mere removal of direct supervision fails to deter gang-connected probationers.

**Overall Sample**

This research draws on the DCS's statewide data for all probationers placed on unsupervised probation between January 1, 2019, and December 31, 2024. The observation period for identifying new arrests spans from the start date of each individual's unsupervised probation through December 31, 2024. A total of 5,137 individuals met the study's criteria. The demographic composition of this sample is 54% Black, 45% White, and 1% identifying as Other. The gender distribution shows that 70% of the sample is male and 30% is female. The average age among the sample is 36 years, and the average duration on unsupervised probation is 1,791 days.

## Demographic Profile of Overall Sample



**Gender**

30% Fem...   70% Male

**Avg Days on Unsupervised**

1791

**Race**

54% Black   45% White

1% Other

**Age**

36
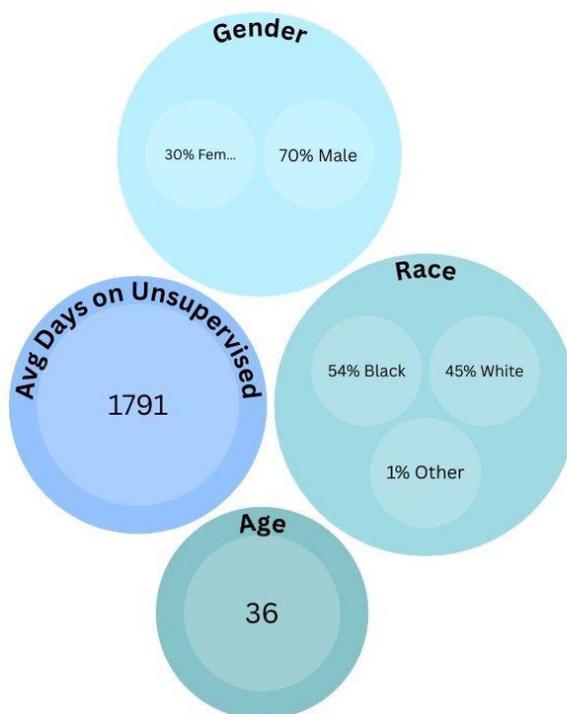
**Non-STG Sample**

A total of 5,084 individuals met the non-STG inclusion criteria for this study. The demographic composition of this sample is 54% Black, 45% White, and 1% identifying as Other. The gender distribution shows that 70% of the sample is male and 30% is female. The average age among the sample is 36 years, and the average duration on unsupervised probation is 1,792 days.

# Demographic Profile of Non-STG Sample
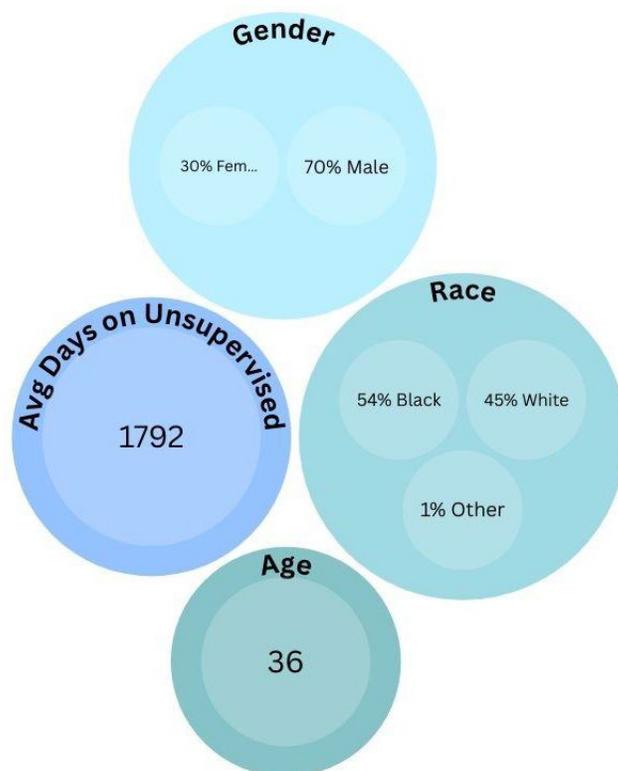


**Non-STG with an Arrest**

Of the 5,084 individuals who met the non-STG inclusion criteria for this study, 686 (14%) had an arrest during the observation period. Of these new arrests, 253 individuals (38%) were arrested for a felony offense and 433 (62%) were arrested for a misdemeanor offense.

## Non-STG with an Arrest (14%)



Felony
38%

Misdemeanor
62%
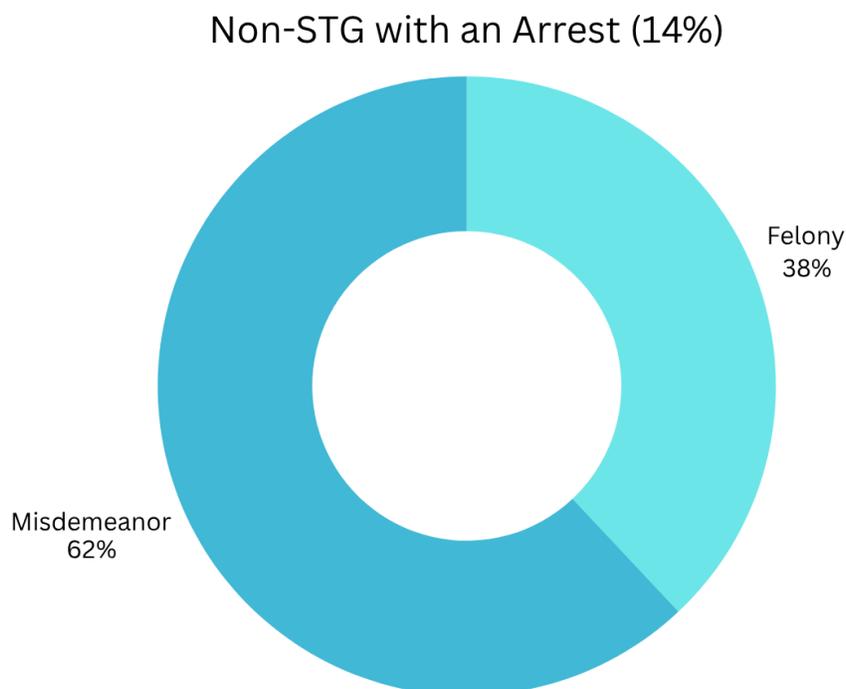
The data indicates that Georgia's process for transitioning lower-risk probationers to unsupervised status is largely effective: 86 percent of the 5,084 non-STG probationers remained arrest-free during the study period. Among the 14 percent (686 individuals) who did reoffend, most new charges were for misdemeanors. Specifically, 433 of the arrests (62 percent of all recidivists, or roughly 8.5 percent of the entire cohort) were misdemeanors, while 253 arrests (38 percent of recidivists, or about 5 percent of the cohort) were felonies.

Although the overall failure rate is low, the fact that more than one-third of rearrests involved felony offenses indicates that a small but meaningful subset of this "low-risk" group can still escalate to serious crime. This pattern suggests that agencies might consider supplementing unsupervised status with periodic record checks or automated alerts for the handful of individuals whose histories or emerging behaviors

indicate a higher risk of felony involvement. For the majority who return on misdemeanors, brief, targeted interventions such as cognitive-behavioral "booster" sessions or administrative sanctions may be sufficient to prevent further escalation. Tracking felony recidivism alongside overall rearrest rates will ensure that the predominance of minor violations does not obscure public-safety gains.

**Profile of Non-STG with an Arrest**

The demographic composition of non-STG with a new arrest is 64% Black, 34% White, and 2% identifying as Other. The gender distribution shows that 78% of the sample is male and 22% is female. The average age among the sample is 34 years.



Demographic Profile of Non-STG
with New Offense
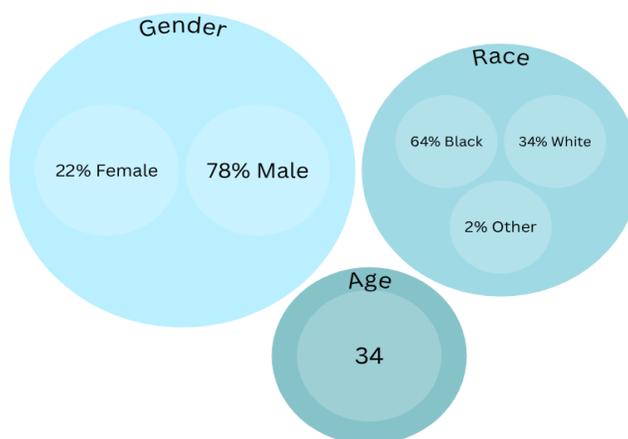
The non-STG probationers who incurred a new arrest form a relatively young, male-dominated, and racially imbalanced subset of the overall unsupervised population. With an average age of just 34 years, they are still in the prime working-age range,

suggesting that employment stability, family responsibilities, and peer influences likely play pivotal roles in their post-supervision outcomes. The fact that nearly four out of five rearrested individuals are men (78 % male versus 22 % female) mirrors broader criminal justice trends. It reinforces the need for gender-responsive services, particularly those focused on anger management, substance abuse, and vocational readiness, tailored to male probationers.

Race-wise, the disparity is significant. 64% of rearrested non-STG probationers are Black, compared with 34% White and 2% Other. This over-representation of Black probationers relative to their share of the general population suggests that structural factors could play a role. Factors such as neighborhood disadvantage, policing patterns, and differential access to reentry resources may be influencing outcomes well beyond individual risk levels. For policymakers, this underscores the importance of culturally competent interventions, equity-focused resource allocation, and community partnerships in predominantly Black neighborhoods to address the systemic drivers of recidivism.

Taken together, these patterns point to three practical conclusions. First, reentry programming should prioritize employment and skills training for adults in their early thirties, a life stage at which economic stability can significantly impact desistance. Second, supervision agencies should adopt gender-specific approaches that address the criminogenic needs most prevalent among men, while not neglecting the smaller but significant female subgroup. Third, to reduce racial disparities, agencies must pair individual-level supports with broader community-level investments, such as mentoring programs, credible-messenger initiatives, and partnerships with organizations that serve

Black probationers, thereby addressing both personal and structural factors contributing

to reoffending.

**Non-STG Time to Fail**

The average number of days from the start date of unsupervised probation until

arrest was 351 days overall. When examined by offense type, the average was 359

days for felony arrests and 348 days for misdemeanor arrests.
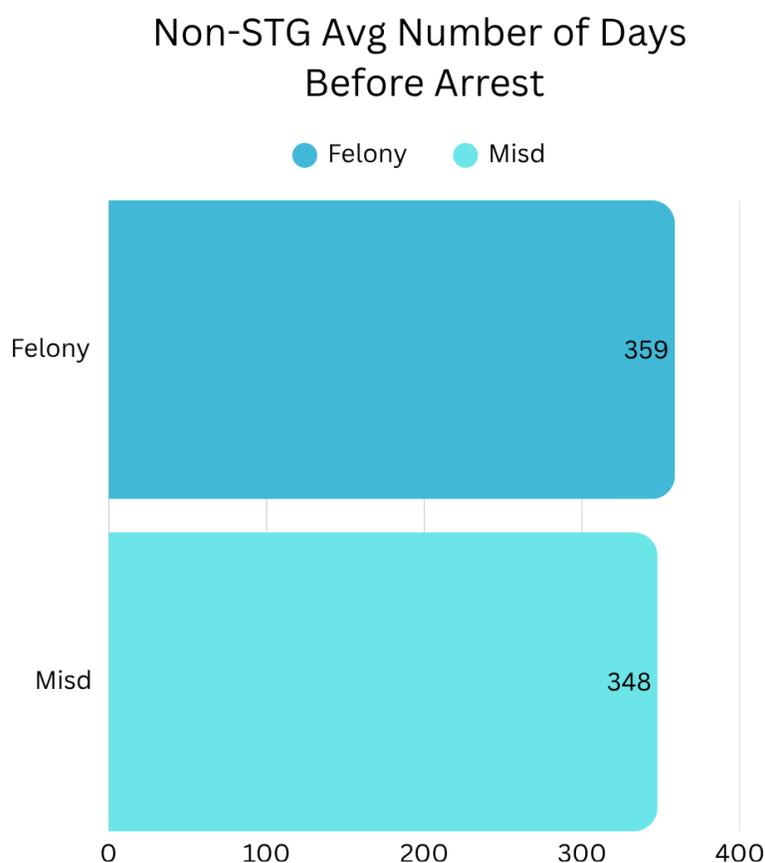


The timing data suggest that, on average, unsupervised probation failures occur

within roughly a year of transitioning to administrative status, regardless of the

seriousness of the new offense. The slight difference between felony and misdemeanor

cases, 359 days versus 348 days, suggests that individuals who ultimately commit more

serious crimes do not remain violation-free substantially longer than those who return on lesser charges. Two practical implications follow. First, the first 10–12 months after placement on unsupervised probation represent the most critical window for preventive interventions, such as automated record checks, reminder letters, or brief motivational enhancement contacts. Second, because felony offenders do not exhibit a noticeably longer "run-up" before reoffending, front-loading risk-management strategies early in the unsupervised period, rather than tapering them over time, may help intercept the small subset poised to escalate to more serious criminal behavior.

**STG Sample**

The sample size for this group is 53 individuals. While this may seem small, it is essential to recognize that the eligibility criteria for unsupervised probation under O.C.G.A. 17-10-1 significantly restrict the number of individuals with an STG designation who qualify. By law, probationers must be transitioned to unsupervised status unless there is good cause to maintain active supervision. To qualify, individuals must have completed at least two years of active supervision, not be in warrant status or violation of probation conditions, have no convictions for sex offenses, have no convictions under the Georgia Street Gang Terrorism and Prevention Act, and have no outstanding restitution obligations. In addition, district attorneys may be more likely to oppose the movement of STG-designated individuals to unsupervised probation due to the political climate's heightened focus on gang activity. The Department's integrated risk assessment instrument further limits eligibility, as it heavily weights gang affiliation and assigns higher risk scores to gang members than to their non-STG counterparts. This practice reduces the likelihood that STG-designated individuals will be classified as

"low risk" and, consequently, decreases their chances of receiving unsupervised probation.

Within this group, 81% are Black and 19% are White. The gender distribution is predominantly male, with 94% male and only 6% female. The average age is 35 years. On average, individuals in this group have been on unsupervised probation for approximately 1,693 days. These demographics confirm the STG cohort is a small, highly concentrated sub-population of predominantly young Black males who have already spent extensive time in administrative status before the study period closed.

Demographic Profile of Overall Sample

Gender

6% Fema... 94% Male

Avg Days on Unsupervised

1693

Age

35

Race

81% Black 19% White
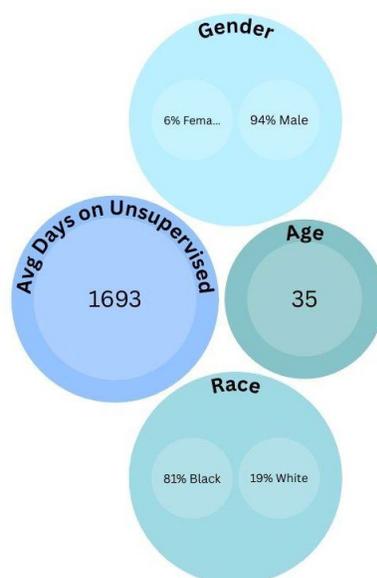
**STG with an Arrest**

Of the 53 individuals (26%) who met the STG inclusion criteria for this study, 14 had an arrest during the observation period. Of these new arrests, nine individuals (64%) were arrested for a felony offense, and 5 (36%) were arrested for a misdemeanor offense.
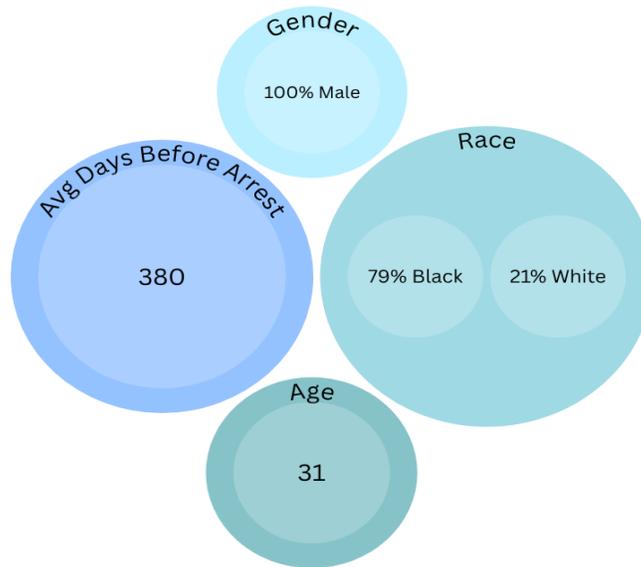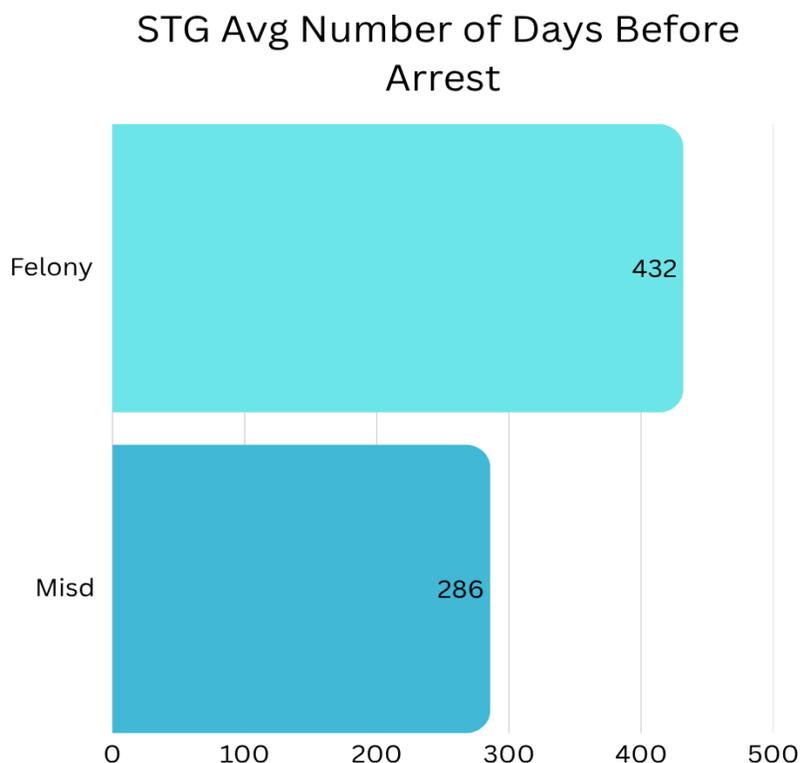
STG with an Arrest (26%)
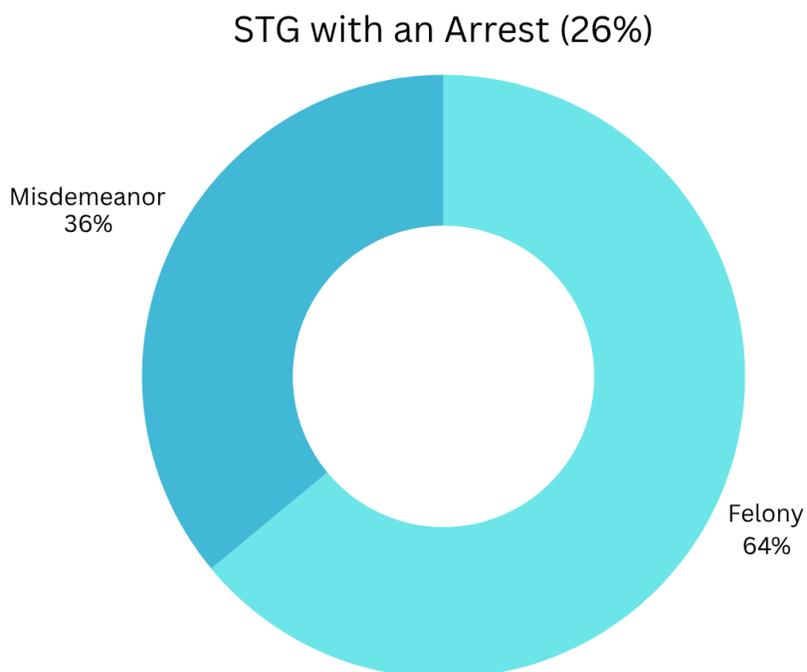


Just over one quarter of the STG-designated probationers reoffended during the study window: 14 of 53 individuals (26%) incurred a new arrest. The seriousness of those rearrests is striking. Nearly two-thirds of the violations, 9 of the 14 cases (64%), were felonies, resulting in only five misdemeanor arrests (36%). In other words, when this small, carefully screened STG group does fail, it is far more likely to do so at the felony level rather than for lower-level misconduct. These numbers suggest that standard administrative monitoring may not fully address the residual risk associated with gang affiliation. Targeted safeguards such as periodic record checks, automated check-ins, or brief intervention programs focused on felony-escalation prevention could help intercept the relatively small but high-impact subset of STG probationers who remain prone to serious reoffending.

**Demographic Profile of STG with New Arrest**

The demographic composition of STG with a new arrest is 79% Black and 21% White. The gender distribution indicates that the sample is entirely male. The average age among the sample is 31 years. The average number of days from the start date of unsupervised probation until arrest was 380 days overall. When examined by offense type, the average was 432 days for felony arrests and 286 days for misdemeanor arrests.

## Demographic Profile of STG with New Arrest

Gender
100% Male

Avg Days Before Arrest
380

Race
79% Black    21% White

Age
31

## STG Avg Number of Days Before Arrest



The STG probationers who reoffended form a narrowly defined, high-risk profile. Every one of the rearrested individuals is male, and four out of five are Black (79 % Black versus 21 % White), underscoring both the gendered nature of gang involvement and the racial disparities that persist in criminal justice outcomes. At an average age of 31, these probationers are somewhat younger than the broader STG pool (35 years) and the non-STG cohort (36 years), suggesting that younger gang-validated clients are especially prone to relapse once close supervision ends.  The timing data sharpens this picture. On average, an STG probationer was arrest-free for about one year (380 days) before reoffending; however, the pattern diverged by offense severity. Misdemeanor cases surfaced sooner, approximately nine months (286 days), whereas felony cases took approximately 14 months (432 days) to materialize. This split implies that low-level misconduct may serve as an early warning sign, while more serious offending tends to

emerge later if underlying risk factors remain unaddressed.

Together, these findings highlight three key implications. First, prevention efforts should begin immediately after transition to unsupervised status and extend beyond the first year, because felony risk peaks later than misdemeanor risk. Second, gender-responsive programming is essential, given that all rearrested STG probationers are male. Third, the racial concentration of rearrests points to the need for culturally competent, community-based supports, particularly in predominantly Black neighborhoods, to disrupt the social and economic drivers that link young Black men, gang affiliation, and serious reoffending.

**Non-STG Vs STG Arrest Data Comparison**

A comparison of arrest data between non-STG and STG individuals reveals a notable difference in outcomes. Among non-STG individuals, 14% had a new arrest, whereas 26% of STG-designated individuals experienced a new arrest. These findings indicate that those with an STG designation are nearly twice as likely to be arrested again compared to their non-STG counterparts.

## Arrest Data Comparison
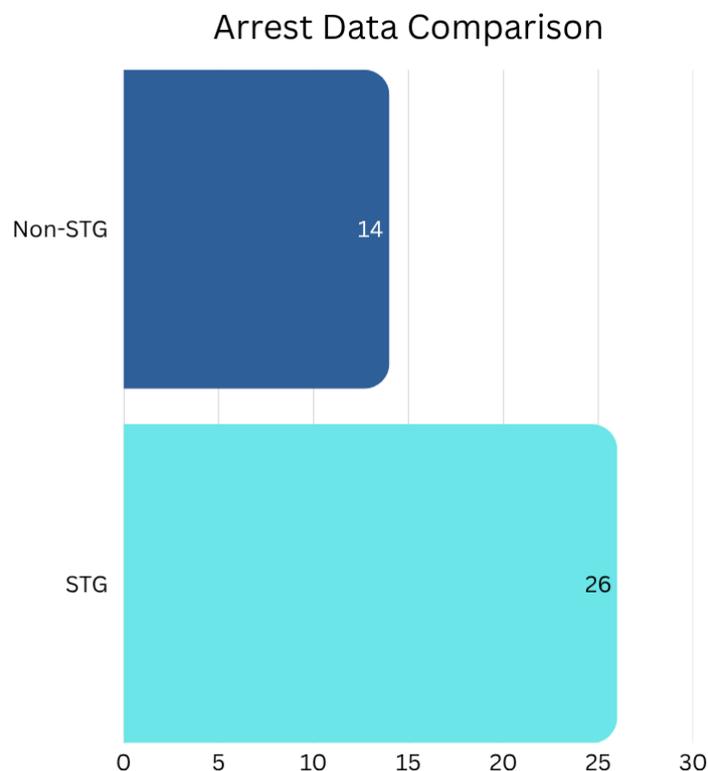


This disparity suggests that the criminogenic influences associated with gang membership persist even after a probationer has met the statutory benchmarks for administrative supervision. For policymakers, these findings highlight the need for additional safeguards such as periodic record checks, field contacts, or targeted cognitive-behavioral "booster" sessions when transitioning STG clients to unsupervised probation. It also supports weighting gang affiliation more heavily in risk-assessment tools. It underscores the importance of partnerships with community-based programs that can help weaken the social ties that fuel gang-related recidivism.

A comparison of crime severity shows a significant difference between non-STG and STG individuals. Among non-STG individuals who were arrested, 38% had a felony arrest, compared to 64% of STG-designated individuals. This means that STG-designated individuals are 26% more likely to have a new felony arrest than their

non-STG counterparts. Thus, when gang-validated individuals reoffend, they are far more likely to do so at a higher severity level, amplifying public-safety consequences.

## Crime Severity Data Comparison
### Felony Arrest

| Group | Value |
|-------|-------|
| Non-STG | 38 |
| STG | 64 |
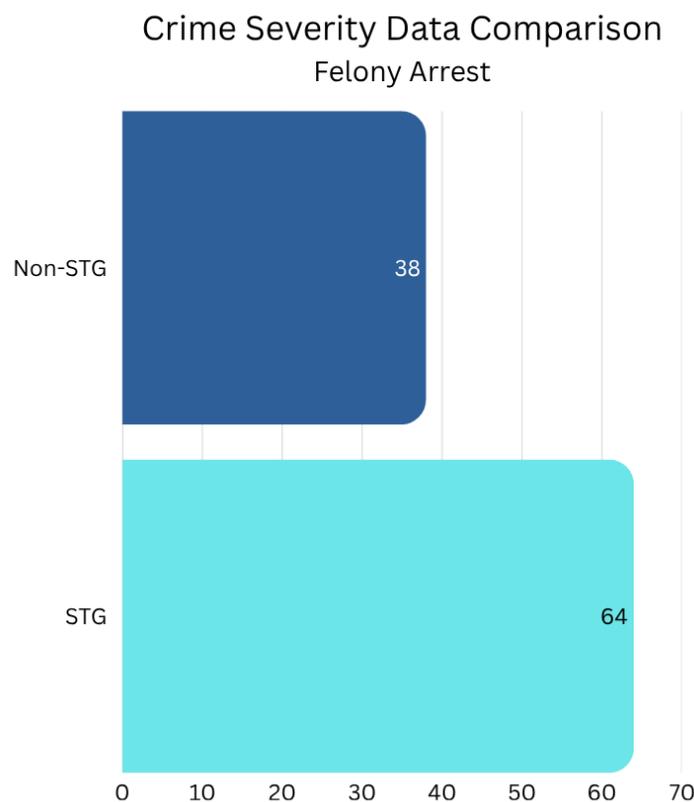
For supervision agencies, the implication is twofold. First, traditional administrative monitoring may be adequate for most non-STG clients; however, it is insufficient for the smaller STG subgroup, which warrants stricter risk-management measures, such as more frequent record checks, rapid-response field visits, or longer retention on active supervision. Second, because STG violations tend to be felonies, even a modest rise in their rearrest rate can generate disproportionate social costs; targeted interventions that disrupt gang ties and provide intensive cognitive-behavioral or vocational programming could yield significant public-safety dividends.

A comparison of misdemeanor arrests reveals that 62% of non-STG individuals arrested had a misdemeanor offense, compared to 36% of STG-designated individuals. This shows that non-STG individuals are 26% more likely to have a misdemeanor arrest than their STG counterparts. Non-STG rearrests are predominantly misdemeanors (62%), whereas just 36 % of STG rearrests fall in this category. The lower misdemeanor share for STG clients implies they may bypass lower-level offending and escalate directly to more serious crimes, highlighting the need for earlier, targeted disruption strategies.

## Crime Severity Data Comparison
### Misdemeanor Arrest

| Group | Value |
|-------|-------|
| Non-STG | 62 |
| STG | 36 |
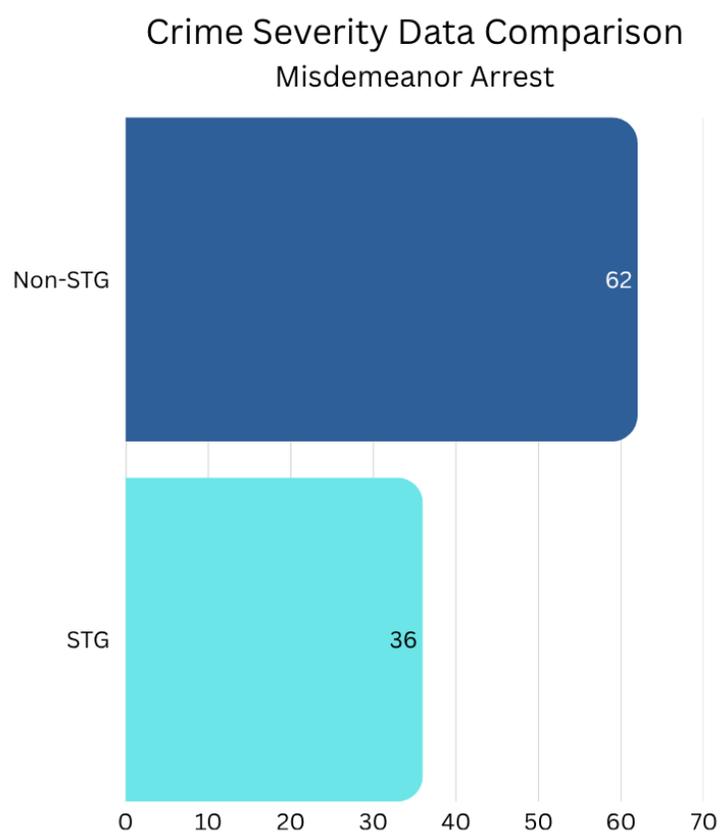
The misdemeanor/re-offense pattern underscores a qualitative difference in how the two groups relapse. When non-STG probationers reoffend, their violations are typically minor: 62 percent of their new arrests are misdemeanors. By contrast, only 36 percent of STG rearrests are at the misdemeanor level, a 26-percentage-point gap that mirrors the higher felony share found for gang-validated clients. This disparity suggests that STG-designated probationers are less likely to be arrested for lower-level misconduct and more likely to escalate straight to serious crime. For supervision agencies, the implication is that early warning signs may be subtler or occur outside formal detection channels, making proactive, front-loaded interventions essential for gang-validated clients. Deploying strategies such as brief check-ins, targeted cognitive-behavioral "booster" sessions, or community-based mentoring within the first year of administrative status could help disrupt the trajectory before it culminates in a felony. In short, the lower misdemeanor rate among STG clients suggests not better behavior but a tendency to bypass petty offending en route to more severe criminal activity, warranting tailored, early-stage risk management measures.

An analysis of the average number of days from the start of unsupervised probation until arrest shows notable differences between non-STG and STG individuals. For non-STG individuals, the overall average time before arrest was 352 days, with an average of 359 days before a felony arrest and 348 days before a misdemeanor arrest. In comparison, STG-designated individuals averaged 380 days on unsupervised probation before any arrest, 432 days before a felony arrest, and 286 days before a misdemeanor arrest. This means STG-designated individuals remain on supervision an average of 8% longer than non-STG individuals before any arrest and 20% longer

before a felony arrest. However, they spend 21% fewer days on supervision before a misdemeanor arrest compared to their non-STG counterparts.

## Avg Number of Days Before Arrest

● Felony  ● Misd
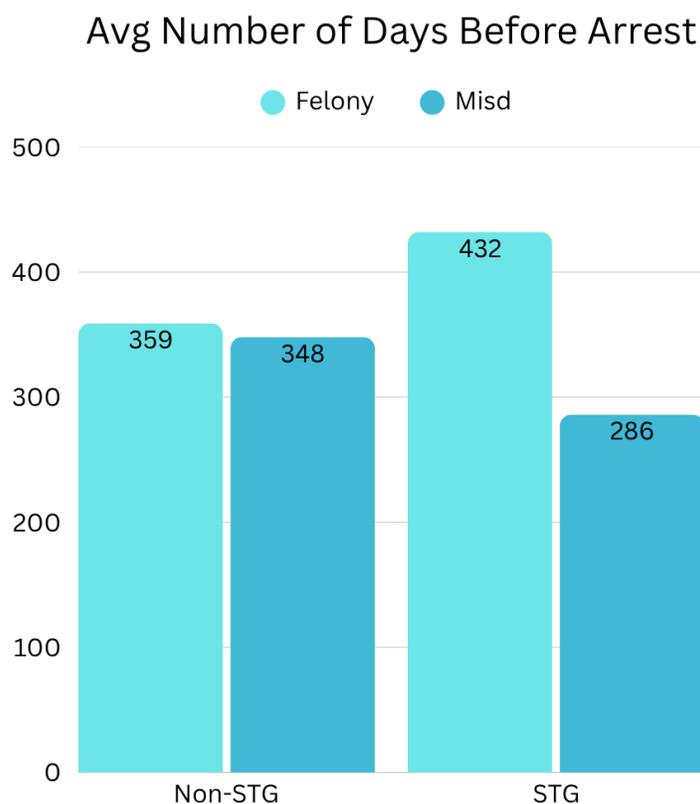


Taken together, these results portray a bifurcated risk pattern. STG-designated probationers are less prone to early, low-level violations, yet once they do reoffend, they are more likely to commit serious crimes. This aligns with Differential Association Theory: dense pro-crime peer networks may normalize felony conduct, shortening the path from compliance to severe offending. At the same time, the prolonged felony run-up and the overall higher rearrest rate underscore Social Control Theory, namely, weaker bonds to lawful institutions among gang-involved clients mean that the removal of active supervision erodes external controls without sufficient internal restraints.

The timeline to rearrest reveals sharply different risk trajectories for gang-validated and non-gang probationers. Non-STG clients who fail do so, on average, about a year after moving to administrative status (352 days), and the gap between their felony and misdemeanor cases is minimal, suggesting a relatively stable risk profile regardless of offense severity. STG clients, by contrast, follow a bifurcated pattern: they stay violation-free nearly 8% longer overall, and more than 20% longer before a felony, than their non-STG peers, yet they surface on misdemeanors about two months sooner. In practical terms, this implies that minor infractions by STG probationers may serve as an early warning signal, while their felony risk peaks well past the first year of unsupervised status.

For supervision agencies, two policy implications stand out. First, front-loaded, low-intensity contacts (record checks, text reminders, automated check-ins) during the initial nine months could intercept the early misdemeanor spike among STG clients. Second, because serious offending tends to emerge later for the same group, risk-management measures should not be tapered too quickly; extending automated monitoring through at least the 14-month mark would better align with the observed felony-escalation window. Conversely, for non-STG probationers whose misdemeanor and felony timelines are virtually identical, a uniform, one-year monitoring strategy may be sufficient. Overall, differentiating the timing and intensity of supervision by STG status can help agencies allocate resources more efficiently while targeting the distinct risk curves each group presents.

# Discussion & Practical Implications

The results confirm a distinctly two-track risk profile that becomes even more prominent when one considers that traditional active supervision of unsupervised probation cases is not permitted. Most non-STG probationers remain law-abiding, while the small STG subgroup is almost twice as likely to reoffend and far more prone to severe, felony-level crime. Once a case shifts to unsupervised status, officers lose the options of office visits, field checks, and electronic monitoring. Therefore, agencies that still plan to place STG-designated probationers on unsupervised supervision must transition from traditional field oversight to a data-driven model. Robust criminal-history sweeps, warrant feeds, and geofenced intelligence alerts, therefore, become the backbone of oversight, and any delay or blind spot in record integration could leave authorities unaware that an STG client has escalated to serious offending.

A tiered sweep schedule offers a pragmatic way to focus analytic resources where public-safety stakes are highest. Monthly statewide arrest and warrant checks during the first fourteen months of unsupervised status for STG clients align with the nine-month spike in their misdemeanor arrests and the fourteen-month peak in felony arrests, after which quarterly sweeps are sufficient. For non-STG individuals, quarterly sweeps in the first year and semi-annual or annual sweeps thereafter mirror their flatter risk curve and lower likelihood of serious reoffending. Because compulsory contacts are off-limits, behavior-change efforts must rely on voluntary participation and light-touch "digital nudges." Text or email reminders about upcoming job fairs or expungement clinics reinforce prosocial bonds identified by Social Control Theory. Meanwhile, brief smartphone video modules on cognitive-behavioral skills and chats with lived-

experience and peer-support mentors provide STG clients with an optional but readily available support pathway.

Equity safeguards are critical because nearly all STG recidivists are young Black men. Publishing quarterly dashboards that disaggregate sweep frequency, alert hits, and subsequent sanctions by race, age, and gender will help prevent algorithmic bias and ensure the passive regime does not exacerbate existing disparities. The prohibition on active supervision also elevates the importance of cross-system collaboration. Criminal justice stakeholders can expedite data sharing through digital-notification agreements. Local nonprofits can target outreach to neighborhoods with higher concentrations of STG rearrests. Employers or trade unions can post vacancies on a QR-code resource hub distributed at case closure. These partnerships expand the menu of voluntary supports without violating legal boundaries.

# Conclusion

This evaluation confirms that Georgia's unsupervised probation model delivers substantial public-safety value for the vast majority of non-STG probationers, 86 percent of whom remain arrest-free throughout the observation window. However, it also exposes a concentrated felony risk among the tiny subset of STG-designated clients, which persists despite years of clean supervision and the stringent statutory hurdles they must clear to reach unsupervised status. The prohibition of active supervision of individuals on unsupervised probation elevates the importance of sophisticated, passive oversight and voluntary, community-based support structures.

By implementing tiered, high-frequency record checks for STG clients during the first 14 months, leveraging digital nudges to reinforce prosocial bonds, and partnering with community organizations to supply credible mentors and employment pipelines, the Department can leverage the positive attributes of unsupervised probation while still mitigating the disproportionate risk posed by gang-validated probationers. Transparent dashboards and equity audits will help ensure these passive measures do not unintentionally widen racial disparities.

Future research should test the predictive validity of enhanced passive-alert algorithms, assess client uptake of voluntary interventions, and explore whether incremental reductions in felony recidivism among STG clients offset the administrative costs of intensified data monitoring. In the meantime, Georgia's experience offers a blueprint for other jurisdictions facing similar statutory constraints: combine rigorous data analytics with low-burden digital supports to deliver supervision that is both legally compliant and risk-responsive.

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