Violent Crime Trends in Georgia's Six Largest Cities

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This report focuses on violent crimes in Georgia's six largest cities. A comparison of these cities to each other and to the state as a whole is important for three reasons:

➤ **Public Perception**
Recent crime trends portray Georgia, and particularly Atlanta, as among the worst of the nation's crime hot spots. With the coming of the Olympics, we need to be able to explain why these changes occurred. Understanding these crime trends will also help better target interventions such as the Atlanta Project and the Empowerment Zone.

➤ **Regional Planning**
With long range plans focusing on the next quarter century (e.g., Vision 2020), it is important to understand the extent to which crime rates in cities are contingent on more general regional concerns.

➤ **Statewide Allocation of Resources**
Based on the identification by type of crime of problem locations across the state, policy makers can make empirically based decisions regarding allocation of state resources.

For this report, we used automated information maintained by the Georgia Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime Report program to examine the extent of and changes in violent crimes in Georgia's six largest cities between 1981 and 1992. This report includes a description of the data sources and methodological procedures employed, as well as a brief presentation of results. It also suggests some possible directions for future research.

I. UCR data in Georgia

The Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) is the national crime data collection program housed at the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The local state clearinghouse responsible for transferring the UCR data to the FBI is the Georgia Crime Information Center (GCIC), a division of the Georgia Bureau of Investigation. The state requires local police departments to send their data directly to the Georgia UCR program which, in turn, forwards the compiled information to the FBI's UCR unit.

According to the GCIC's reporting procedures, the officer involved in the investigation of a criminal offense is responsible for filing an Incident Report. These reports are usually referred to as "crimes known to the police." The recording and reporting of these reports are either summary-based or incident-based. Summary-based systems report data using monthly tabulations of incident reports. That is, police departments report the total number of crimes for each month to the GCIC. In incident-based systems, individual reports are entered into computer files by local agencies. Agencies with such

computerized systems submit their data to the GCIC in computer tapes or diskettes once a month. The GCIC makes adjustments by subtracting unfounded cases before it submits the monthly data to the FBI's UCR office. The current study used these adjusted monthly figures.

II. Methodological procedures

We obtained the Georgia's UCR data from the GCIC's UCR unit in May, 1994. The original data set contained crimes reported by law enforcement agencies across the state from 1977 to 1994. However, this study focused on incidents reported by the six largest urban police departments for the period from 1981 to 1992 because of limitations in the data set. Prior to 1981, some of the departments submitted their incident-based data for only parts of a year. Thus, 1981 was the first year in which incident-based records were fully reported by all six police departments. The year 1992 was the most recent year for which incident-based records have been adjusted.

The six city police departments selected in the study were Albany, Atlanta, Augusta, Columbus, Macon, and Savannah. These police jurisdictions were chosen for three reasons. First, they use incident-based crime reporting, which contains more information than tabular reporting of crime. Second, these jurisdictions have the largest populations and the largest police forces in the state. Third, these cities represent about half of the overall violent crime in Georgia. Our analyses also involved the comparison of violent crime rates between the six cities and the state of Georgia over these 12 years.
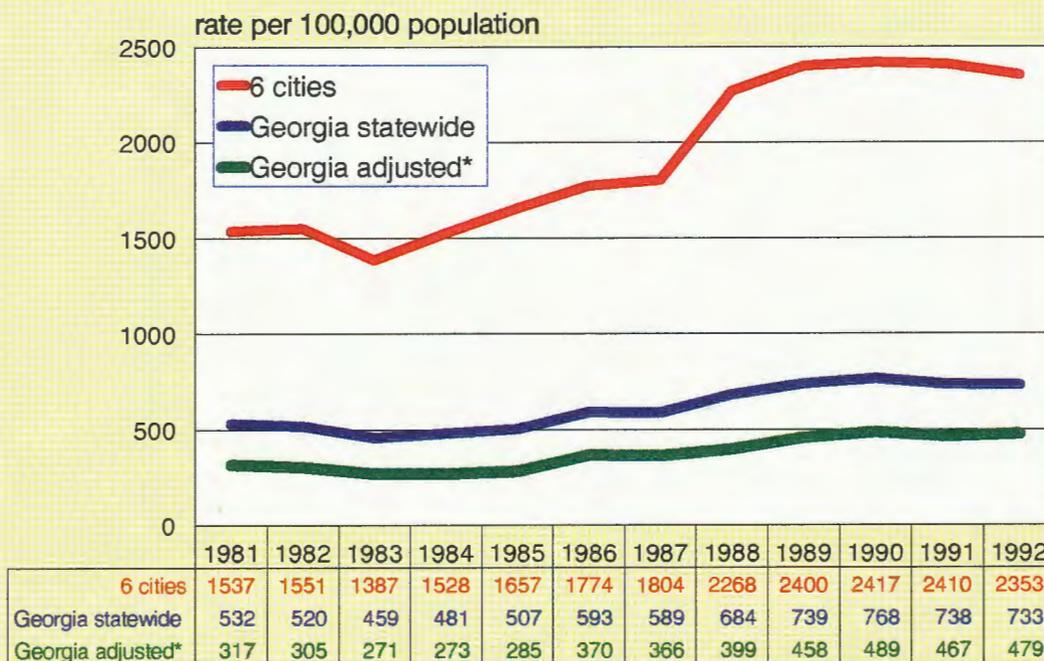
Four types of violent crimes - murder and non-negligent manslaughter, forcible rape, aggravated assault, and robbery - were included in the study. Definitions of these crimes can be found in the FBI's UCR Handbook. Crime rates were calculated by dividing the total number of crimes by the yearly population and then multiplying that figure by 100,000. Population figures were based on data from the U.S. Census for 1980 and 1990. For the non-census years, we added the average population growth to the prior year's estimate.

III. Violent crime trends in the six city police departments

The violent crime rates of the six metro police departments were first compared with the state's violent crime rates. Figure 1 presents three trends over this 12-year period: one for the six cities, one for the state inclusive of the six cities (Georgia statewide), and one for the state exclusive of the six cities (Georgia adjusted). Over the 12-year period, crime increased both in the six cities and statewide (with and without the cities). While the overall crime pattern increased in this period in the six cities and the state, the increase occurred in the 1980s and then started to level off in the early 1990s. The rate of violent crimes per 100,000 inhabitants recorded by the city police departments increased from

1,537 incidents per 100,000 in 1981 to 2,352 in 1992. This represents an overall increase of 53.1%.
The increase for the adjusted state data is 51.1% for the same period. In general, the large cities and
the state have experienced a similar upward trend in violent crimes during the study period. However,
these rates do represent very different patterns of crime and population changes over these years:
while the state had an increase of 25% in its population size and 89% in the number of violent crimes,
the six cities experienced a population decrease of 4.8% and an increase of 46% in the number of
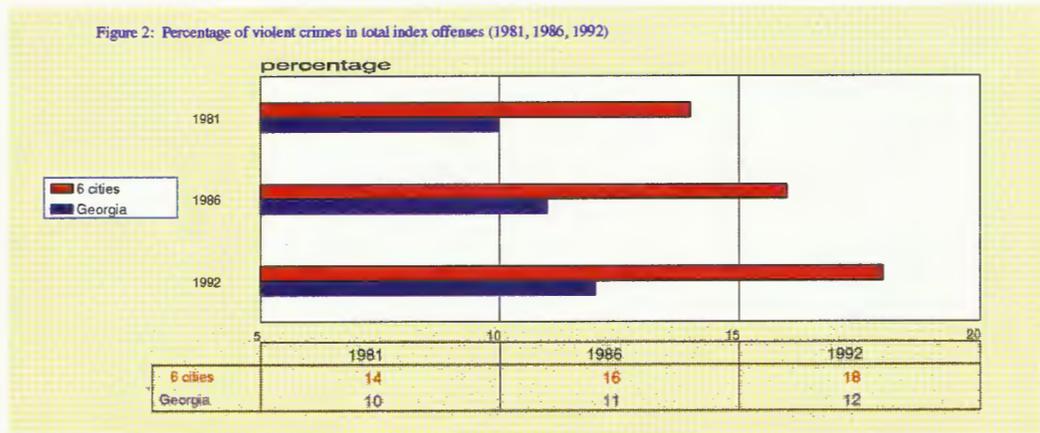violent crimes.

Figure 1: Comparison of violent crime trends between the six
city police departments and Georgia (1981-1992)

rate per 100,000 population

	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992
6 cities	1537	1551	1387	1528	1657	1774	1804	2268	2400	2417	2410	2353
Georgia statewide	532	520	459	481	507	593	589	684	739	768	738	733
Georgia adjusted*	317	305	271	273	285	370	366	399	458	489	467	479

* The Georgia adjusted statistics excluded the data from the six cities.

These trends can be further analyzed by examining the annual fluctuations between two
adjacent years. To do this, we computed the annual rate change for each year over its previous year.
In this period, the overall year-to-year fluctuations in city crime rates resulted in an average increase of
74.2 incidents per 100,000, in contrast to only 16.3 for the state. A dramatic citywide increase of 464
per 100,000 occurred, across all six cities, in 1988 (see Figure 1). As this report shows later, the rapid
growth in 1988 was accounted for mainly by crimes in the city of Atlanta.

The analysis of violent offenses and total index offenses (which consist of the four violent offenses and the three property offenses of burglary, larceny and auto theft) indicates that violent crimes accounted for only a small proportion of the total index offenses. Proportions of violent crimes in the two trends ranged from 10% to 18%, with the majority of serious crimes being property-oriented offenses (see Figure 2). The percentages of violent incidents increased slightly from 14% to 18% for the six cities and from 10% to 12% for the state. Cities had a consistently higher proportion of violent crimes than did the state.

Figure 2: Percentage of violent crimes in total index offenses (1981, 1986, 1992)

	1981	1986	1992
6 cities	14	16	18
Georgia	10	11	12

Urban violent crimes accounted for about half of the total violent offenses of the state. However, the proportion of violent crimes committed in the six cities, as compared to violent crimes in the state, declined in recent years from 51% in 1981 to 44% in 1992 (see Figure 3), indicating an increase in violent crimes outside of these six cities.

Figure 3: Percentage of city violent crimes in state's total violent offenses (1981-1992)

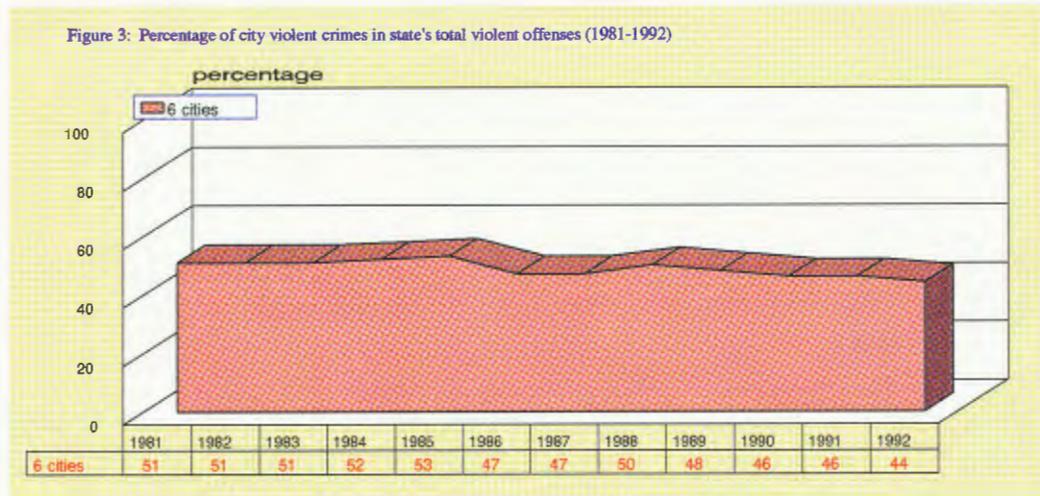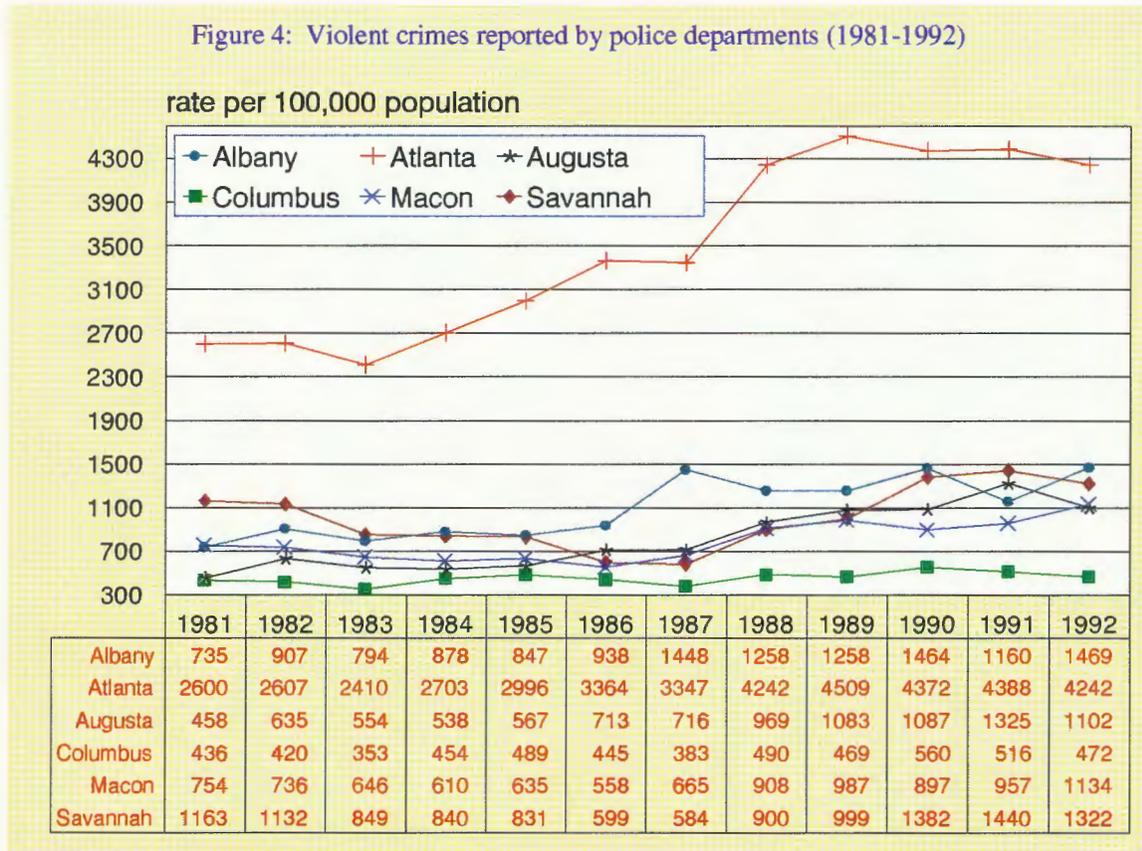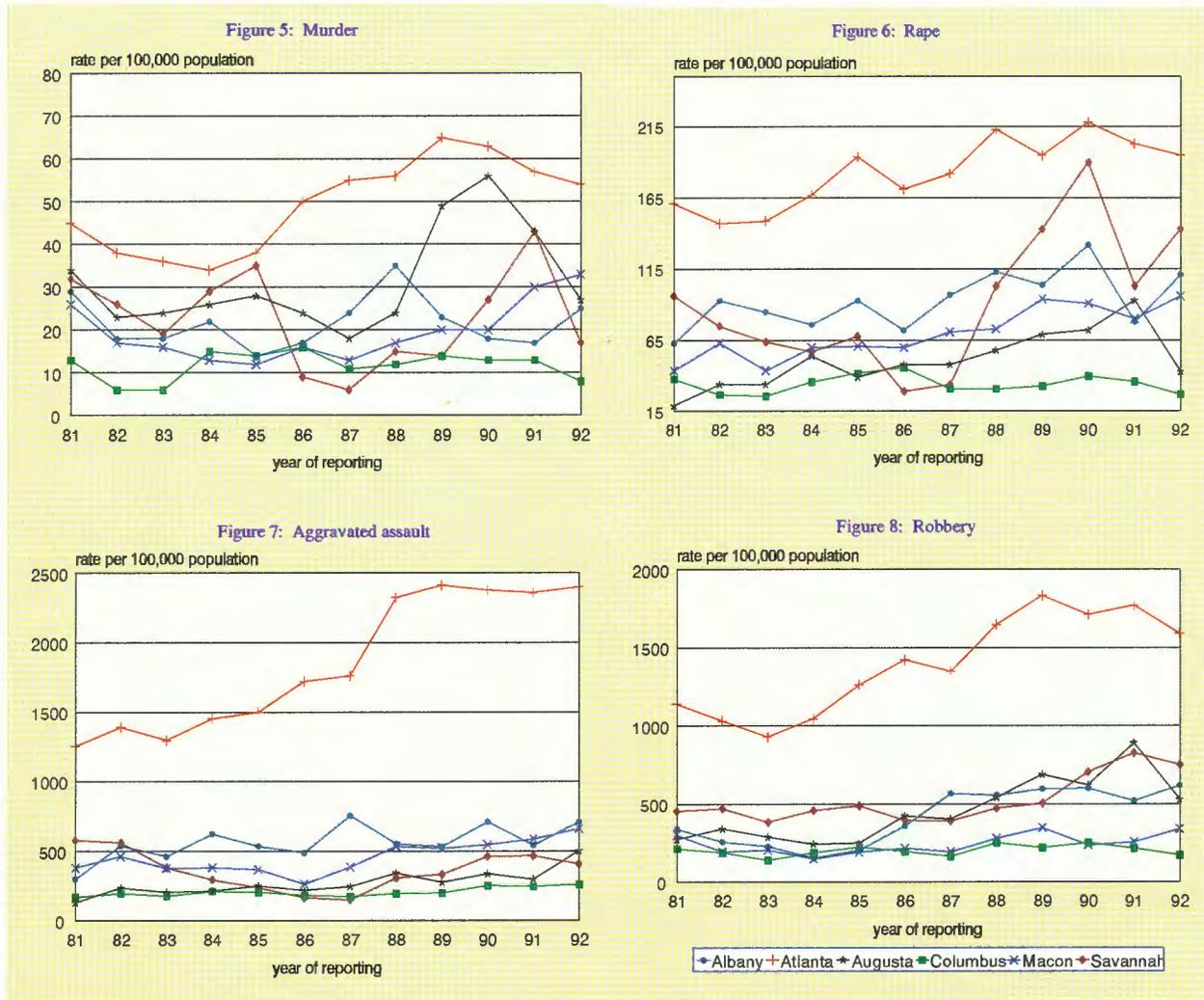|	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992
6 cities	51	51	51	52	53	47	47	50	48	46	46	44

Figure 4 illustrates the level of violent crimes reported by the six urban police departments. An examination of the trends suggests that the violent crime rate was significantly higher for Atlanta than for the other five cities. While Atlanta experienced a sharp increase in violence in 1988, other cities had only a minor increase or even a slight decline in that year. The trends also reveal that violent crime problems tended to increase in the cities of Albany and Savannah. Columbus consistently had the lowest violent crime rate of the six cities.

Figure 4: Violent crimes reported by police departments (1981-1992)

rate per 100,000 population

	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992
Albany	735	907	794	878	847	938	1448	1258	1258	1464	1160	1469
Atlanta	2600	2607	2410	2703	2996	3364	3347	4242	4509	4372	4388	4242
Augusta	458	635	554	538	567	713	716	969	1083	1087	1325	1102
Columbus	436	420	353	454	489	445	383	490	469	560	516	472
Macon	754	736	646	610	635	558	665	908	987	897	957	1134
Savannah	1163	1132	849	840	831	599	584	900	999	1382	1440	1322

Figures 5 to 8 present a detailed comparison of crime rates for each of the four types of violent crimes among the six cities. Atlanta consistently experienced a higher level of most crimes - especially rape, aggravated assault, and robbery - than did the other cities. Differences in murder rates among the six cities are small compared to those of other types of violent crimes. However, for murder, rape, and robbery the rate differences among the six cities appear to have increased over the 12-year period. These figures indicate that during the early part of the 12-year study period changes in the crime rates were relatively minor and stable, while in the latter part of this period cities with the higher crime rates experienced an even sharper growth in violent crimes.

Figure 5: Murder

Figure 6: Rape

Figure 7: Aggravated assault

Figure 8: Robbery

Albany ─┼─ Atlanta ─★─ Augusta ─■─ Columbus ─✳─ Macon ─◆─ Savannah

IV. Summary and conclusion

About half of the state's violent crimes occurred in Georgia's six largest cities. Across the past 12 years violent crime rates have increased steadily, and the percentages of reported crimes classified as violent have increased. In addition, the decreased proportion of the state's violent offenses that occurred in these six cities indicates that the rest of the state's share in the number of violent crimes has increased. These city and state trends suggest a need for a better understanding of changes in population sizes and types of crime as they affect violent crime and as they may impact criminal justice research and policy in Georgia.

This descriptive study serves as a starting point for further crime analyses. It raises several questions about possible reasons for the differences in violent crime rates in the six cities.

> ➤   Why was there a dramatic increase in reported violence in Atlanta since 1983?
> ➤   What are the reasons for the recent decline in the percentage of urban violent crimes?
> ➤   Why are there rate differences among the six cities?
> ➤   Is the concentration of violent crime better explained by regional, rather than city, characteristics?

It would be useful to use already collected data to explore possible answers to these questions. For example, variables such as violent juvenile arrests, type of crime, age of offender, and geography of crime, could be tied to educational and economic resources such as cost per pupil, student/teacher ratio, dropout rate, and household income level.

We can conduct statistical analyses to investigate the connections among these different indicators across jurisdictions over time. For example, analyses could focus on possible explanations such as changing demographic characteristics (the population getting younger), population shifts (more/fewer people), characteristics of the offense (victim-offender relationships, weapons used, drug involvement, seasonality), changes in reporting practices by police departments, changes of policing strategies (community policing), and economic factors (improving/deteriorating economy).

Finding answers to these questions may provide policy makers at the state level (e.g., the General Assembly, the Governor, the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council, Mayors, and Police Chiefs) with a better understanding of crime patterns in Georgia and how they have changed over the past 12 years. This understanding can, in turn, enhance long-range planning in the fight against crime.