CACJ 2025 Recidivism Study
Interpreting Recidivism Study Results: Court-Specific Reports

The Accountability Court Recidivism Analysis Report is a descriptive overview of the individual courts and a statewide report by court type. There is a third report that presents a formal evaluation comparing recidivism statistics among statewide accountability participants by court type with a statistically matched group of non-participants. The following report provides insight into interpreting the findings and addresses specific questions.

As part of the study, each court receives a descriptive analysis that includes demographics, admissions, prior criminal history, and a comparison of re-arrest statistics between terminated and graduates over two years (24 months) and three years (36 months). Because the study breaks down courts by judicial circuit and court type (Adult Drug, DUI, Mental Health, Veterans, and Family Treatment Courts), these reports often engender the most questions. The following will provide some context and understanding of court-specific issues. It is worth noting that ARS has conducted two studies on accountability court data prior to 2025. Despite the issues described below, the data quality for the current, third study, has improved significantly. For records gathered from over 150 independent courts and 50 judicial circuits, these issues are inevitable in any study.

Annual Admissions

Over the years, admission statistics have raised the most questions. In most cases, the reported statistics will undercount the actual admissions. There are two explanations.

By analyzing recidivism, the study relied on cases where the CACJ records match a valid Georgia Crime Information Center (GCIC) State Identification Number (SID). Although CACJ and court staff have improved the collection and reporting of the SID, there are still cases in which the SID is unavailable or entered incorrectly, preventing a match. For this reason, the case is excluded from the study. This matching requirement accounts for any discrepancies in annual admissions. Official CACJ publications and local court records remain the best measures of court intakes.

Like SIDs, the court has improved the collection and reporting of the participant acceptance date. However, in cases where the acceptance date is not available, it is impossible to measure the criminal history (pre-intake) and post-intake outcomes. Like SIDs, this will lead to case exclusion. This problem is particularly prevalent and understandable in Family Treatment Courts.

Missing Data (Referring Charges)

The 2025 study included more referring charges than any previous study. CACJ and court staff are entering the referring charge(s) using the GCIC official list of codes, thus streamlining the analysis

of outcome data. However, there are still missing cases that explain courts with a missing ("zero") count for the referring charge.

Demographics

The demographic data compares statewide statistics by court type (Adult Felony Drug, Veterans, etc.), including sex, race, and age. It was not possible to isolate participants of Hispanic heritage because there is no consistent standard for capturing this demographic, and results vary considerably across sites. Therefore, the other category is used for this reason.

Missing Outcome Measures (termination or graduation)

Analyzing two-year and three-year re-arrest rates poses the single most significant problem in any recidivism analysis, not just for accountability courts. For the study to accurately measure re-arrest, the participant must be in the community for several years. As an example, tracking participants for two years requires three years of data, and three-year recidivism analysis requires four years of data. These requirements appear counterintuitive. The study must ensure that participants remain in the community for two years. As an example, if all participants in 2021 entered the court in January, only two years are required. However, participants enter the court throughout the year. This explains the need to track participants for the additional year. For this reason, it is misleading to compute participant re-arrest if the analysis does not account for this requirement. In cases with missing acceptance or discharge dates, identifying a "tracking start" date only compounds the problem.

Inter-Court Comparisons

The report does not compare recidivism rates between individual courts. Inter-county or inter-state comparisons of recidivism rates can be misleading. Offender characteristics (risk) across courts play a role in community norms, prosecutorial standards, and court type. Mental Health Courts may exhibit higher recidivism rates; Family Treatment Court participants may not have criminal histories. Additionally, mature accountability courts with established treatment infrastructure may accept higher-risk, higher-need offenders than implementation courts. Formal evaluations with a scientifically established comparison group are the only way to develop program effectiveness. As a result, it is very misleading, and discouraged, to compare one Georgia Adult Drug Court to one in another jurisdiction.

Limited Sample: Issues

Analyzing court-specific recidivism rates can, in many cases, encounter courts with a limited (small) number of participants that qualify and meet the criteria above. In these courts, it is not surprising to find statistics with anomalous findings. This could include a wide disparity in percentages, for example. In another instance, there might be identical re-arrest rates at the two-year and three-year mark. This simply means that the cohort of two years did not change (i.e., new arrests) by the end of the three-year tracking period. Additionally, arrest practices might impact statistics. In some courts, with a limited sample, there might be participants in state prison, thereby eliminating their street-time and re-arrest rates.

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