

THE COST

OF GUN VIOLENCE THE DIRECT COST TO TAXPAYERS

Black Hollywood, gateway to the South, the home of Martin Luther King, Jr. – Atlanta is known for it all. The City of Atlanta has nearly 500,000 residents, of whom 47.6% are Black, 40.8% are White, 5.4% Latino, and 4.9% Asian.¹ A cultural Mecca and Civil Rights hub, Atlanta has long been known for its place in history, but the city has also been challenged with high rates of gun violence.

Like many cities within the nation, Atlanta experienced a surge in homicides that coincided with the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, with a 59% increase from 2019 to 2020 (from 99 incidents in 2019 to 157 in 2020).² This trend continued through 2022, when the city reached 171 homicides, before declining to 135 in 2023.^{3,4}

When someone is shot in Atlanta, there is an immediate, multifaceted, and very expensive response from an array of government agencies. The Fire Department dispatches Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs), government-contracted ambulances respond, and several Atlanta Police Department (APD) units descend on the scene. Investigators from the Fulton County District Attorney's Office also often arrive, and if the victim is declared dead on the scene, the Coroner is called. All of this is only for the shooting scene itself. For a surviving victim, there is also typically a hospitalization, which is frequently paid for by tax dollars. Rehabilitation follows

in the case of serious injury, and victim compensation is generally provided. There is also often a lengthy investigation by the Atlanta Police Department and the Fulton County District Attorney's Office, who are sometimes joined by the US Attorney. With the APD homicide clearance rate at 59.5% in 2022,⁵ a trial and a long incarceration period frequently follow. When there are multiple victims and/or suspects, these efforts and costs multiply for a single shooting incident. These are just some of the costs of each shooting in Atlanta.

The National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform (NICJR) conducted this detailed analysis to document the government expenses accompanying every fatal or nonfatal shooting in Atlanta. In tracking the direct costs per shooting incident, NICJR has deliberately used the low end of the range for each expense. This study does not include the loss-of-production costs when the victim or suspect were working at the time of the incident. Nationally, those costs have been estimated at an additional \$1–2 million for each shooting incident. This means that the calculated cost of \$1,571,246.08 for a fatal shooting in Atlanta is a conservative estimate; the real cost is likely even higher.

In the past three years, Atlanta has averaged approximately 155 shootings and 412 nonfatal shootings annually. At this rate,

each year of shootings will ultimately cost taxpayers more than \$512,430,838.00, with both immediate costs such as crime scene response and longer-term costs such as lost tax revenue and long-term incarceration. If Atlanta could reduce its gun violence rate by just 20%, that could result in government savings of about \$102,486,167.60 for every year of shootings.

In the past few years, Atlanta has invested in effective gun violence reduction strategies. Since 2021, Mayor Dickens has prioritized investing in policies and programs such as Policing Alternatives & Diversion (PAD) and School Break Safe Spaces, as well as the groundbreaking of Atlanta's inaugural Center for Diversion and Services.⁶ These endeavors aim to address the underlying systemic issues that contribute to violence.⁷ Further, the Mayor's Office of Violence Reduction (MOVR) acts as the City's dedicated hub for violence reduction and community-based intervention, orchestrating a comprehensive campaign to mitigate violence, particularly involving firearms.⁸ Employing a holistic approach, this office concentrates on prevention and intervention strategies targeting people and communities that are exposed to violence, directly involved in violent activities, or at risk for violence.⁹ While these activities are key steps in beginning to confront gun violence in Atlanta, it is also important to recognize that gun violence reduction requires sustained commitment. Even a relatively small investment in effective gun violence reduction strategies, when sustained over time, can yield significant reductions in shootings, save lives, and produce massive savings.

1. Atlanta City - Facts Census

2. ATL PD Year-End 2020 Report

3. Throughout the report, "fatal shootings" and "homicides" are not used synonymously. "Fatal shootings" refers to shooting incidents resulting in the death of the victim; "homicides" refers to all homicides in general.

4. ATL End of Year PD Report 2023

5. FBI Crime Data Explorer

6. Office of Violence Reduction | Atlanta, GA

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

THE GREATER COMMUNITY COST OF GUN VIOLENCE

There are significant community costs of gun violence beyond the direct costs included in NICJR's calculations. In addition to the direct financial burden borne by taxpayers, areas with high rates of gun violence experience the loss of community resources and decreases in property values. Businesses, community events, and other vital resources often flee from violent neighborhoods. Further, a study by the Controller for the City of Philadelphia examining the economic impact of gun violence on property values found that "a single homicide lowers sale prices by 2.3 percent in the immediate neighborhood (within 0.75 miles of the homicide)."¹⁰

Community members in neighborhoods where rates of violence are highest also bear the burden of community tension and trauma. The normalization or expectation of violence can lead to high rates of gun possession and the resolving of minor disputes with gun violence. The public health approach to violence shows that violence is a contagion that can breed in areas of social dysfunction. The National Institutes of

Health notes that "Contagious diseases and violence tend to cluster in similar ways.... There are geographic 'hot spots' for contagious diseases, such as the 2015 measles outbreak linked to Disneyland in California involving clusters of unvaccinated children. Likewise, there are geographic hot spots for violent crime on specific streets and in specific neighborhoods."¹¹

Finally, experiencing violence, witnessing violence, and having close friends or family members victimized by violence produces trauma and vicarious trauma among children. In the 1990s, the groundbreaking Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) study by the Centers for Disease Control and Kaiser Permanente revealed that children who have traumatic experiences when they are young have significantly higher rates of poor health outcomes as they age.^{12,13} Additional studies have proven that the experience of trauma negatively impacts the brain function of young people and can cause depression, behavioral challenges, academic disruption, and delinquency.

Population

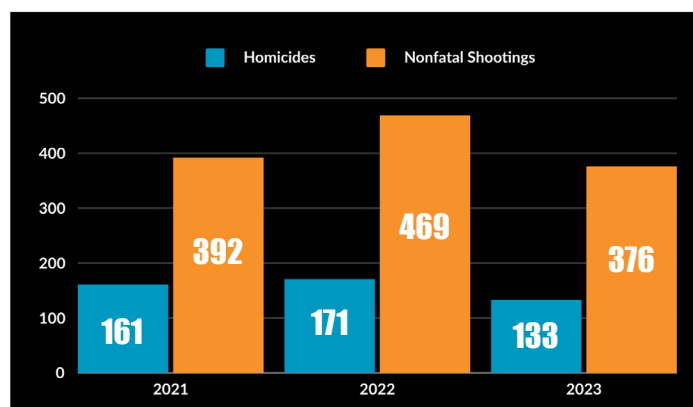
499,127



Police Force¹⁴

1,424

Homicides and Nonfatal Shootings from 2021-2023¹⁵



Homicide Clearance Rates

2022	59.5%
2021	52.8%
2020	25.9%

10. [Report on the Economic Impact of Homicides: Philadelphia Controller](#)

11. [The Contagious Spread of Violence Among US Adolescents Through Social Networks](#)

12. While the CDC-Kaiser ACEs study is not available to the public, information about the study may be found [here](#).


13. [Relationship of Childhood Abuse and Household Dysfunction to Many of the Leading Causes of Death in Adults](#)

14. Internal police data from Atlanta Police Department

15. [Weekly Crime Reports | Atlanta Police Department](#); [Atlanta, GA 2021 Gun Violence Assessment](#); [Atlanta, GA 2023 Gun Violence Assessment](#)

Atlanta, Georgia

COST BREAKDOWN




CRIME SCENE RESPONSE

The crime scene response to a fatal shooting or severe nonfatal shooting typically includes a heavy police presence, fire/EMT staff, and medical transport staff. Based on national averages, the Atlanta Police Department could deploy up to 15 officers, including patrol, homicide unit personnel, and other supervisory-level officers, to respond to a typical fatal shooting.




HOSPITAL & REHABILITATION

Once a victim has been transported to the hospital, the costs of treatment in a trauma unit, surgery, inpatient stay, and rehabilitation are exorbitant. Average costs can range from \$88,000.00 to \$144,000.00 per incident. With a little more than 40% of gunshot victims either uninsured or on Medicaid, these costs represent a tremendous strain on Atlanta's hospital network.



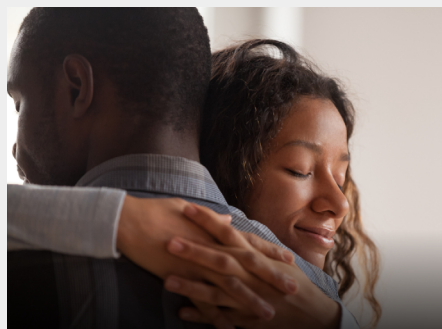
CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Justice system costs include police investigation, prosecution and defense attorneys, court personnel and judges, and the use of court facilities. Due to the consequences of a homicide conviction, these cases go to trial more often than other types of cases. Sometimes these cases involve multiple suspects with multiple court dates and separate trials. From the time of arrest, court proceedings in an injury shooting or homicide case average about two years.




INCARCERATION

Incarceration accounts for a large portion of the costs once a suspect is arrested. A stay in the Fulton County jail system costs an average of \$113,529.49 for the pretrial incarceration period. Following a trial, an inmate is incarcerated within the Georgia prison system at a cost of \$314,112.32 for those convicted of attempted murder and \$1,099,393.12 for those convicted of homicide.



VICTIM SUPPORT

Many victim support costs are covered by the Georgia Crime Victims Compensation Program. Surviving victims of nonfatal shootings and families of homicide victims can receive a maximum of \$25,000.00 in compensation to cover costs such as burial expenses, medical expenses, and counseling. Including costs such as autopsies and Social Security benefits increases the total cost for victim support to \$52,722.69.



LOST TAX REVENUE

Georgia has a state income tax rate of 3.28% and a sales and use tax of 8.9%. When a fatal or nonfatal shooting occurs, the city, county, and state lose the ability to collect both income and sales tax from the incarcerated individual(s) and/or fatal shooting victim(s). Each incident can represent lost tax revenue from a minimum of two individuals for 10 to 30 years.

THE COST Per Shooting

The governmental cost of gun violence to the City, County, and State

Fatal Shooting Cost

Nonfatal Shooting Cost

CRIME SCENE \$8,447.67

Police Response: **\$4,103.40**
Scene Cleanup: **\$2,500.00**
Fire/EMT: **\$1,844.27**



CRIME SCENE \$6,395.97

\$2,051.70: Police Response
\$2,500.00: Scene Cleanup
\$1,844.27: Fire/EMT

HOSPITAL \$88,525.00

ER/Trauma Center: **\$1,428.00**
Gunshot Surgery: **\$87,097.00**



HOSPITAL \$144,617.00

\$1,428.00: ER/Trauma Center
\$87,097.00: Gunshot Surgery
\$56,092.00: Rehabilitation

CRIMINAL JUSTICE \$62,102.71

Police Investigation: **\$15,523.52**
DA & Public Defender: **\$40,711.79**
Court Process: **\$5,867.40**



CRIMINAL JUSTICE \$9,570.27

\$4,523.04: Police Investigation
\$4,247.13: DA & Public Defender
\$800.10: Court Process

INCARCERATION \$1,212,922.61

Pretrial Incarceration: **\$113,529.49**
Prison Placement: **\$1,099,393.12**



INCARCERATION \$427,641.81

\$113,529.49: Pretrial Incarceration
\$314,112.32: Prison Placement

VICTIM SUPPORT \$52,722.69

Coroner's Office: **\$2,618.69**
Victim Compensation: **\$25,000.00**
Social Service Assistance: **\$25,104.00**
(one year of support for two families)



VICTIM SUPPORT \$37,552.00

\$25,000.00: Victim Compensation
\$12,552.00: Social Service Assistance
(one year of support for one family)

LOST REVENUE \$146,525.40

Tax Revenue: **\$146,525.40**
(both suspect & murder victim)



LOST REVENUE \$26,862.99

\$26,862.99: Income Tax
(for suspect, plus one year for injured victim)

Per **Fatal Shooting**
\$1,571,246.08



Per **Nonfatal Shooting**
\$652,640.04



CRIME SCENE

Subject:	Police Response	Fire / EMT Transport	Scene Cleanup
Source	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interview with Atlanta Police Department Internal Atlanta Police Department data per public information request 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Atlanta Fiscal Year 2023 Adopted Budget 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The National Cost of Violence: The Price Tag for Taxpayers
Notes	Initial police response to a fatal shooting scene typically includes 8 Patrol, 1 Lieutenant, 1 Major, 2 Sergeants, and 3 Detectives. They remain on the scene for 4-6 hours. Initial police response to a nonfatal shooting scene typically includes 8 Patrol, 1 Lieutenant, 1 Major, 2 Sergeants, and 3 Detectives. They remain on scene for 2-3 hours.	Fire & EMT budget: \$140,885,432.00 Total responses: 76,391 average \$140,885,432.00 / 76,391 responses = \$1,844.27 per response	Average cost among competitive vendors to clean up crime scenes involving blood: \$2,500.00

HOSPITAL

Subject:	Emergency Room / Surgery for Gunshot Victim
Source	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2020 National Trends and Cost Burden of Surgically Treated Gunshot Wounds in the US 2021 Firearm Injuries: Health Care Service Needs and Costs
Notes	Average cost of gunshot victims treated and released the same day: \$1,428 (ER base cost) Average cost of gunshot victims requiring surgery and hospital stay: \$87,097 (surgery cost) + \$56,092 (hospital stay and care) Average cost of gunshot victims requiring surgery, hospital stay, and release to outpatient care: \$144,617 (ER, surgery, rehabilitation)

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Subject:	Police Investigation	District Attorney (DA) & Public Defender (PD)	Court Process
Source	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interview with Atlanta Police Department Internal Atlanta Police Department data per public information request 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Georgia Code § 45-7-4 (2022) Judicial Salaries and Supplements Report Georgia Bar Association - Job Listings NCSC Workload Assessment Study Estimates of Time Spent in Capital and Non-Capital Murder Cases: A Statistical Analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Georgia Code § 45-7-4 (2022) Court Clerk's Office at City of Atlanta Bailiff Salary Averages - Atlanta The National Cost of Gun Violence: The Price Tag for Taxpayers
Notes	The cost of the police investigation is calculated by multiplying the average salary and benefits for officers assigned to the Investigator Homicide Unit in Atlanta by the average amount of time spent investigating fatal and nonfatal shootings. Fatal shooting \$55.84/hour x 278 hours = \$15,523.52 Nonfatal shooting \$55.84/hour x 81 hours = \$4,523.04	The cost of prosecution and defense is calculated by multiplying the average amount of time spent by attorneys working on a fatal or nonfatal shooting case by the hourly rates for those positions. Fatal shooting DA: \$57.73/hour x 418.4 hours = \$24,154.23 PD: \$46.07/hour x 359.4 hours = \$16,557.56 Nonfatal shooting DA: \$57.73/hour x 20.5 hours = \$1,183.47 PD: \$46.07/hour x 66.5 hours = \$3,063.66	The cost to the court system is calculated by multiplying the national average amount of time spent by judges and court staff by local hourly rates. Court staff rates have been combined. Fatal shooting Judge: \$60.70/hour x 44 hours = \$2,670.80 Court staff: \$72.65/hour x 44 hours = \$3,196.60 Nonfatal shooting Judge: \$60.70/hour x 6 hours = \$364.20 Court staff: \$72.65/hour x 6 hours = \$435.90

INCARCERATION

Subject:	Pretrial Incarceration	State Prison: Attempted Murder Case	State Prison: Murder Case
Source	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fulton County, GA Final Adopted Budget 2023 Daily Average Main Jail Population - Chart 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> GA Code § 16-5-21 (2022) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> GA Code § 16-5-21 (2022) GDC FY23 Annual Report
Notes	Fulton County Department of Corrections budget: \$142,706,567.00 Average daily population: 2,514 Average annual cost per inmate: \$56,764.74 Average period of pretrial incarceration: 2 years \$56,764.74/year x 2 years = \$113,529.49	Georgia Department of Corrections annual cost to house an adult: \$39,264.04 Injury shooting conviction sentence: 10 years, subtracting pretrial time served \$39,264.04 x (10 years - 2 years) = \$314,112.32	Georgia Department of Corrections annual cost to house an adult: \$39,264.04 Murder conviction sentence: 30 years, subtracting pretrial time served \$39,264.04 x (30 years - 2 years) = \$1,099,393.12

VICTIM SUPPORT

Subject:	Victim Compensation	Social Service Assistance	Medical Examiner's Office
Source	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Georgia Crime Victims Compensation Program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Basics of Georgia's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program USDA SNAP Eligibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fulton County, GA Final Adopted Budget 2022 2022 Annual Report - Fulton County Medical Examiner
Notes	The maximum award for victims of crime in Fulton County is \$25,000.00.	A severely injured shooting victim often cannot return to work immediately. Since the victim and perpetrator may be major financial contributors to their households, many families may need to apply for social services support. USDA SNAP = \$766.00 for family of 3 Georgia TANF = \$280.00 for family of 3 This study estimates 1 year of assistance. \$1,046.00/mo x 12 months x 1 family = \$12,552.00 \$1,046.00/mo x 12 months x 2 families = \$25,104.00	Fulton County FY2022 Coroner's budget: \$5,776,836.00 FY2022 autopsies conducted: 2,206 \$5,776,836.00 / 2,206 autopsies = \$2,618.69 per autopsy

LOST REVENUE

Subject:	Lost Tax Revenue: One Person Incarcerated	Lost Tax Revenue: Murder (Loss of Revenue for Two People)
Source	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tax Tables & Georgia Tax Rate Schedule 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tax Tables & Georgia Tax Rate Schedule
Notes	State income tax: 3.28% for the first \$7,000; 5.75% for the next \$23,000 Total annual income tax at \$30,000/year: \$1,552.09 Sales and use tax (county and state): 8.9% Total annual sales tax for person earning \$30,000/year and spending 1/3 of income: \$890.00 Total annual combined tax: \$2,442.09 Lost tax revenue for a 10-year sentence for attempted murder (\$2,442.09 x 10 years): \$24,420.90 If the shooting victim does not work for one year, an additional \$2,442.09 of revenue is lost. Total Lost Tax Revenue = \$26,862.99	State income tax: 3.28% for the first \$7,000; 5.75% for the next \$23,000 Total annual income tax at \$30,000/year: \$1,552.09 Sales and use tax: 8.9% Total annual sales tax for person earning \$30,000/year and spending 1/3 of income: \$890.00 Total annual combined tax: \$2,442.09 Lost tax revenue for a 30-year sentence for murder (\$2,442.09 x 30 years): \$73,262.70 If the shooting victim loses their life, an additional \$73,262.70 of revenue is lost. Total Lost Tax Revenue = \$146,525.40