Detailed North Carolina Statewide & County-Level Criminal Charging Data
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We previously reported on North Carolina state and county-level criminal charging data. In our earlier report (here) we provided data on charges, charged defendants and charged cases for felonies and misdemeanors, and broke misdemeanors down into non-traffic and traffic offenses. In this report, we present more detailed information about the nature of the felony and misdemeanor charges brought in North Carolina in 2019. For felony offenses, we provide data at the state and county level on, among other things, the number of non-violent and violent felony charges, and separate out drug charges. At the misdemeanor level, we parse the data into still more categories, including breakdowns for, among other things, DWI and related charges, non-DWI traffic charges, ordinance violations, and non-violent and violent misdemeanor charges. There is a lot to unpack in our new spreadsheet. In this report, we present some of the top line results. A spreadsheet with the data is available here.
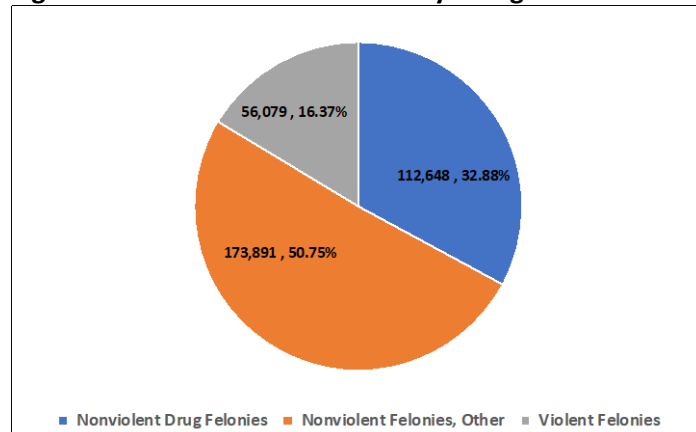
Statewide Data—Felonies
Our analysis shows that violent crimes constitute a relatively small percentage of all charged crimes, for both felonies and misdemeanors. In 2019, there were 342,618 felony charges statewide. Only 16.4% of those charges were for violent crimes; 83.6% were for nonviolent offenses. Felony drug crimes make up almost 33% (112,648 charges) of total felony charges. Even when felony drug charges are removed from the analysis, violent offenses constitute only 24.4% of the remaining felony charges. As described below, we took a

STATEWIDE IN 2019

16.4% OF ALL FELONY CHARGES WERE FOR VIOLENT OFFENSES; 83.6% WERE FOR NONVIOLENT OFFENSES

liberal approach to categorizing offenses as violent or nonviolent. For example, even though burglary does not include an element of violence, we categorized it as violent on the reasoning that such a categorization best aligns with the seriousness that judicial system stakeholders and citizens attach to that offense. We took a similar approach with other felony offenses, and we describe our categorization rules below.

Figure 1: Breakdown of 2019 Felony Charges

Legend: Nonviolent Drug Felonies; Nonviolent Felonies, Other; Violent Felonies

56,079 , 16.37%
112,648 , 32.88%
173,891 , 50.75%

With respect to violent felony charges, only 14 offenses, shown in Table 1 below, had over 1,000 charges statewide. Armed robbery tops that list, with 5,176 charges, followed by indecent liberties with 4,621 charges. Table 2 below presents the most commonly charged nonviolent felonies. Obtaining property by false pretenses tops that list. It is followed by two breaking or entering offenses—felony breaking or entering and breaking or entering a motor vehicle—with 14,388 and 13,941 charges respectively. We categorized drug offenses as nonviolent felonies, and several of those crimes show up in Table 2. Because Chapter 90 drug felonies constitute so many of the charged felonies in 2019, we include Table 3 below, showing the most commonly charged drug offenses. As shown there, maintaining a dwelling was the most charged drug felony (12,679 charges), followed by possession of methamphetamine (11,816 charges).

Table 1. Most commonly charged violent felonies—2019

Violent Felony Charge	Number
Armed Robbery	5,176
Indecent Liberties	4,621
Assault by Strangulation	3,306
Armed robbery, conspiracy	2,562
Assault with a deadly weapon inflicting serious injury	2,118
Common law robbery	2,083
Second-degree kidnapping	2,057
Assault with a deadly weapon with intent to kill inflicting serious injury	1,738
Assault with a deadly weapon with intent to kill	1,568
Breaking or entering, terrorize or injure	1,551
Discharging a weapon on occupied property	1,535
First-degree burglary	1,323
Assault inflicting serious bodily injury	1,285
Discharging a weapon into occupied dwelling or moving vehicle	1,240

Table 2. Most commonly charged nonviolent felonies—2019

Nonviolent Felony Charge	Number
Obtaining property by false pretenses	22,297
Felony breaking or entering	14,388
Breaking or entering a motor vehicle	13,941
Maintaining a dwelling, etc. (controlled substances)	12,679
Possession of Methamphetamine	11,816
Felony larceny (after breaking or entering)	11,334
Possession of a firearm by a felon	11,217
Felony larceny (after breaking or entering)	8,501
Felony possession of stolen goods	7,533
Possession of cocaine	7,245
Identity theft	6,688
Possession with intent to sell or deliver marjiuana	6,338
Possession of a stolen motor vehicle	5,458
Felony larceny of a motor vehicle	5,451
Felony possession of a Schedule II controlled substance	5,295

Table 3. Most commonly charged Chapter 90 drug felonies—2019

Chapter 90 Felony Charges	Number
Maintaining a dwelling, etc. (controlled substance)	12,679
Possession of methamphetamine	11,816
Possession of cocaine	7,245
Possession with intent to sell or deliver marijuana	6,338
Possession of Schedule II controlled substance	5,295
Trafficking in opium or heroin	5,152
Possession of heroin	5,025
Possession with intent to manufacture, sell or deliver Schedule II controlled substance	4,813
Possession with intent to sell and deliver cocaine	4,791
Possession of Schedule I controlled substance	3,141
Possession of controlled substance at jail/prison	3,014
Trafficking in methamphetamine	2,742
Possession with intent to manufacture, sell or deliver methamphetamine	2,621
Possession of marijuana	2,457

Statewide Data—Misdemeanors

In 2019 there were 1,647,942 total misdemeanor charges statewide. Of those charges, only 6.66% (109,762 charges) were for violent misdemeanor offenses. The remaining charges were for DWI and related offenses (75,063 charges) and nonviolent misdemeanor charges (1,463,117). Within the latter group of charges—nonviolent misdemeanors—non-DWI related traffic misdemeanors constitute the lion's share of that total (1,095,027 charges). The remaining charges are for ordinance crimes (11,657) and other nonviolent misdemeanors. The most common specifically designated ordinance charges were for open container of alcohol, failure to provide proof of fare, and begging.
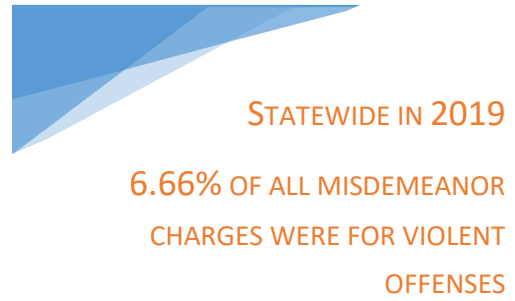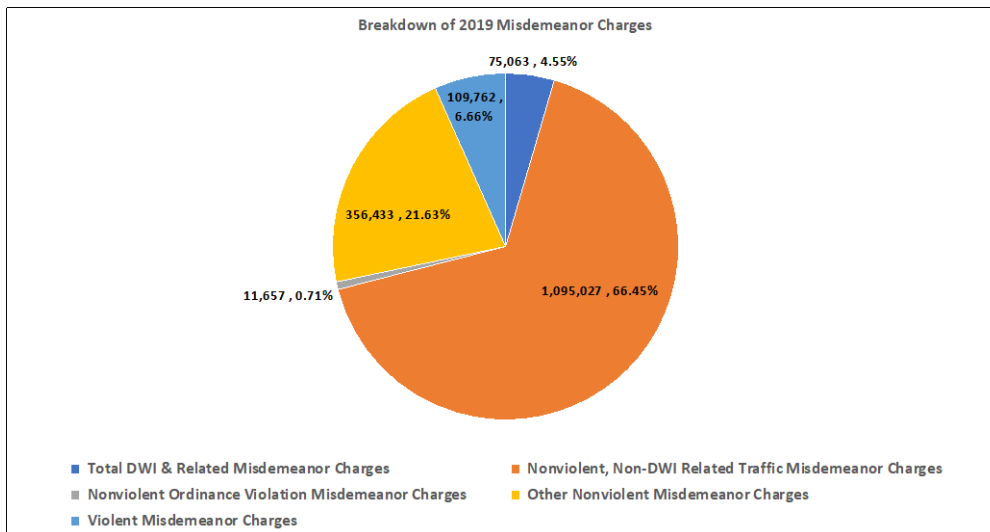
STATEWIDE IN 2019

6.66% OF ALL MISDEMEANOR CHARGES WERE FOR VIOLENT OFFENSES

Figure 2. Breakdown of 2019 Misdemeanor Charges

Breakdown of 2019 Misdemeanor Charges

- 75,063 , 4.55%
- 109,762 , 6.66%
- 356,433 , 21.63%
- 11,657 , 0.71%
- 1,095,027 , 66.45%

Legend:
- Total DWI & Related Misdemeanor Charges
- Nonviolent, Non-DWI Related Traffic Misdemeanor Charges
- Nonviolent Ordinance Violation Misdemeanor Charges
- Other Nonviolent Misdemeanor Charges
- Violent Misdemeanor Charges

Tables 4, 5, and 6 below show the most commonly charged violent misdemeanors, nonviolent non-traffic misdemeanors, and non-DWI traffic misdemeanors. Misdemeanor larceny tops the nonviolent misdemeanor list, with over 44,000 charges statewide, while assault on a female tops the violent misdemeanor list, with over 27,000 charges. Speeding is the most common non-DWI traffic offense with over 296,000 charges. As with felony offenses, we took a liberal approach to categorizing misdemeanors as violent crimes. For example, although communicating threats does not include an element of physical violence, we categorized it as violent on the reasoning that that approach was in line with how judicial system stakeholders and community members view that offense. More detail on our categorization rules is provided below.

Table 4. Most commonly charged violent misdemeanor offenses—2019

Violent Misdemeanor Charge	Number
Assault on a female	27,315
Simple assault	19,436
Communicating threats	18,718
Violating a domestic violence protective order	7,602
Assault with a deadly weapon	5,839
Assault and battery	4,774
Misdemeanor child abuse	4,676
Assault on a government official or employee	3,752
Assault by pointing a gun	2,788
Cyber stalking	2,276
Simple affray	2,156
Assault inflicting serious injury	1,571
Harassing phone call	1,414
Misdemeanor stalking	1,215

Table 5. Most commonly charged nonviolent, non-traffic misdemeanor offenses—2019

Nonviolent Misdemeanor Charge	Number
Misdemeanor larceny	44,667
Possession of drug paraphernalia	38,688
Possession of up to 1/2 ounce marijuana	31,287
Possession of marijuana paraphernalia	30,623
Resisting an officer	28,016
Second-degree trespass	22,701
Injury to personal property	15,925
Possession of a Schedule VI controlled substance	12,883
Possession of stolen goods	9,027
Public order, free text	8,276
Shoplifting, concealment of goods	6,916
Injury to real property	6,491
Caring concealed gun	6,473
Possession of Schedule IV controlled substance	4,808

Table 6. Most commonly charged nonviolent, non-DWI misdemeanor traffic offenses—2019

Non-DWI Misdemeanor Traffic Offenses	Number
Speeding	296,281
Expired Registration	208,971
Driving while License Revoked, Not Impaired Revocation	170,663
No Operator's License	117,789
Operating a Vehicle with No Insurance	55,126
Fictitious or Altered Title, Registration, or Plate	39,013
Reckless Driving to Endanger	29,735
Drive or Permit to be Driven Motor Vehicle No Registration	26,717
Canceled, Revoked, or Suspended Certificate or Tag	26,589
Reckless Driving - Wanton Disregard	20,976
Driving while License Revoked, Impaired Revocation	18,576
Window Tinting Violation	12,448
No Liability Insurance	11,442
Possession or Display of Altered, Fictitious, or Revoked Driver's License	5,727

County Level Data

As is often the case with criminal justice data, statewide numbers can disguise significant variability at the county level. As noted above, violent felonies constituted 16.4% of all felony charges statewide. At the county level, however, the range for that percentage was significant. At the low end, only 3.7% of all felony charges in Camden County were for violent offenses. At the high-end, 35.7% of all felony charges in Northampton County were for violent offenses. Similar variability is seen with respect to misdemeanors. At the state level, violent misdemeanors constituted 6.7% of all charged misdemeanors. But again, the range for that percentage is significant at the county level. At the low end, only 1.7% of all misdemeanor charges in Tyrrell County were for violent offenses, but at the high-end, that percentage was 16.7% in Graham County.

Our county level data also includes per capita rates for charging of violent offenses. The 10 counties with the highest per capita violent felony charging rates are shown in Table 7 below. Interestingly, these are not predominantly metropolitan counties. In fact, only one county that is in the top 10 most populous counties is on that list (Cumberland). Table 8 below shows the per capita violent felony charging rate for North Carolina's 10 most populous counties. The 10 counties with the lowest per capita violent felony rates are shown in Table 9 below. The spreadsheet accompanying this report also provides per capita charging rates for violent misdemeanor offenses.

Table 7. Counties with the highest per capita violent felony charging rate — 2019

County	2019 Violent Felonies Per 100,000 Population
Jones	1,608
Washington	1,248
Vance	1,240
Scotland	1,181
Halifax	1,034
Cumberland	1,018
Wilson	1,002
Alexander	993
Richmond	976
Hertford	968

Table 8. Per capita violent felony charging rate for North Carolina's 10 largest counties (by population) — 2019

County	2019 Violent Felonies Per 100,000 Population
Mecklenburg	752
Wake	361
Guilford	698
Forsyth	350
Cumberland	1,018
Durham	505
Buncombe	383
Union	372
New Hanover	505
Gaston	495

Table 9. Counties with the lowest per capita violent felony charging rate — 2019

County	2019 Violent Felonies Per 100,000 Population
Camden	37
Yancey	145
Ashe	184
Burke	202
Polk	209
Stokes	216
Cabarrus	221
Watauga	227
Perquimans	246
Macon	247

Methodology

As with our prior report, this analysis was conducted using the North Carolina Administrative Office of the Courts "Tally Report." Detailed notes of how we processed the data in that report are contained in our spreadsheet's "Read Me" tab. For purposes of categorizing offenses as violent and nonviolent, we categorized general crimes the same as the main offense. For example, we categorized attempted robbery as violent, like robbery. Some offenses are obviously violent, such as first-degree murder, or nonviolent, such as food stamp fraud. A table showing how we categorized other offenses is included in the "Read Me" tab in our spreadsheet. It clarifies, for example, that we categorized gang offenses as violent and disorderly conduct as nonviolent. This report includes additional detail on specific offenses, not included in the spreadsheet noted above. If you are interested in learning more about your county's experience, please reach out and we will try to help you.