

North Carolina Statewide & County-Level Criminal Charging Data

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In this report and its accompanying spreadsheet ([here](#)), we provide 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, impaired driving (DWI) and related charges, non-DWI traffic charges, ordinance violations, other non-violent misdemeanor charges, and violent misdemeanor charges. There is a lot to unpack in the new spreadsheet. In this report, we present some of the top line results.

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 212,048 felony charges statewide. Only 14.2% of those charges were for violent crimes; 85.8% were for nonviolent offenses. Chapter 90 felony drug crimes¹ make up 34.4% (72,895 charges) of total felony charges. Even when felony drug charges are removed from the analysis, violent offenses constitute only 21.7% of the remaining felony charges. As described below, we took a 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.


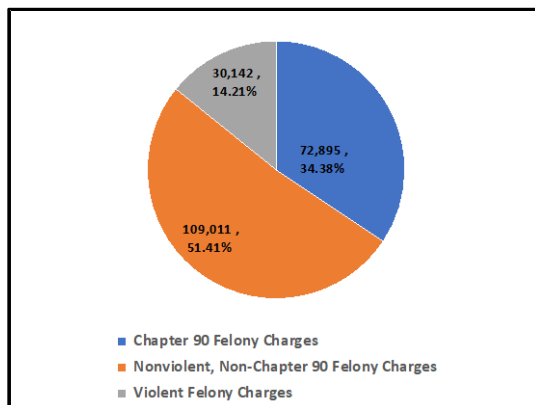

 STATEWIDE IN 2019
 14.2% OF ALL FELONY CHARGES
 WERE FOR VIOLENT OFFENSES;
 85.8% WERE FOR NONVIOLENT
 OFFENSES

Figure 1: Breakdown of 2019 Felony Charges



¹ North Carolina General Statutes, Chapter 90 (Medicine and Allied Occupations) contains the North Carolina Controlled Substances Act.

Only eight violent felony charges, shown in Table 1 below, had over 1,000 charges statewide. Armed robbery tops that list, with 2,793 charges, followed by assault by strangulation with 2,330 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—breaking or entering a motor vehicle and felony breaking or entering a building—with 8,786 and 8,504 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, possession of methamphetamine was the most charged drug felony (8,082 charges), followed by maintaining a dwelling (8,006 charges).

Table 1. Most commonly charged violent felonies—2019

Violent Felony Charge	Number
Armed robbery	2,793
Assault by strangulation	2,330
Indecent liberties	1,978
Armed robbery, conspiracy	1,376
Common law robbery	1,274
Assault with deadly weapon inflicting serious injury	1,241
Second-degree kidnapping	1,183
Breaking or entering, terrorize or injure	1,093

Table 2. Most commonly charged nonviolent felonies—2019

Nonviolent Felony Charge	Number
Obtaining property by false pretenses	14,759
Breaking or entering motor vehicle	8,786
Breaking or entering	8,504
Possession of methamphetamine	8,082
Maintaining dwelling, etc. CS	8,006
Larceny after breaking or entering	6,812
Possession of firearm by felon	6,277
Larceny	5,125
Possession of cocaine	5,108
Identity theft	4,488
Possession of stolen goods or property	4,338
Possession with intent, marijuana	4,164
Larceny of motor vehicle	3,696
Possession of stolen motor vehicle	3,674
Possession schedule II CS	3,622

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

Chapter 90 Felony Charge	Number
Possession Methamphetamine	8,082
Maintaining Dwelling, etc. CS	8,006
Possession of Cocaine	5,108
Possession with Intent, Marijuana	4,164
Possession Schedule II CS	3,622
Possession Heroin	3,456
Trafficking, Opium or Heroin	3,213
Possession with Intent, Schedule II CS	3,208
Possession with Intent, Cocaine	2,713
Possession Schedule I CS	2,191
Possession CS, Prison/Jail	2,068
Possession Marijuana	1,617
Possession with Intent, Methamphetamine	1,614
Trafficking Methamphetamine	1,611

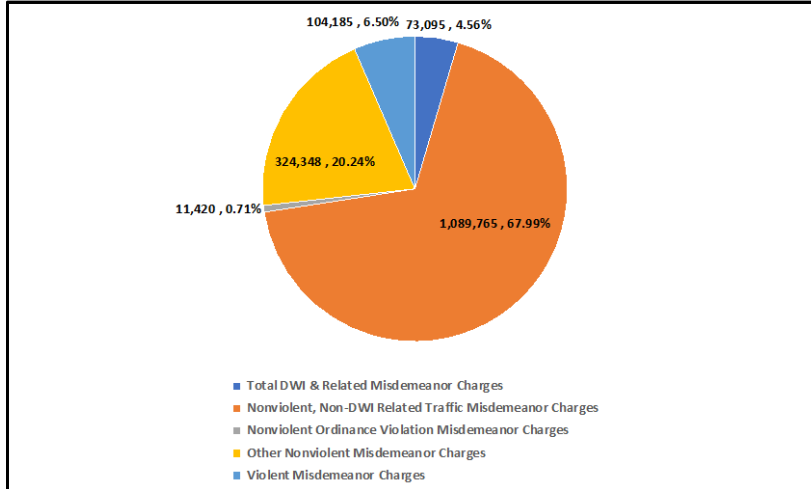
Statewide Data—Misdemeanors

In 2019 there were 1,602,813 total misdemeanor charges statewide. Of those charges, only 6.5% (104,185 charges) were for violent misdemeanor offenses. The remaining charges were for DWI and related offenses (73,095 charges) and nonviolent misdemeanor charges (1,425,533). Within the latter group of charges—nonviolent misdemeanors—non-DWI related traffic misdemeanors constitute the lion’s share of that total (1,089,765). The remaining charges are for ordinance crimes (11,420) and other nonviolent misdemeanors (324,348). The most common specifically designated ordinance charges were for open container of alcohol, failure to provide proof of fare, and begging.



STATEWIDE IN 2019
ONLY 6.5% OF ALL
MISDEMEANOR CHARGES WERE
FOR VIOLENT OFFENSES

Figure 2. Breakdown of 2019 Misdemeanor Charges



Tables 4, 5, and 6 below show the most commonly charged violent misdemeanors, nonviolent non-traffic misdemeanors, and non-DWI traffic misdemeanors. Assault on a female tops the violent misdemeanor list, with over 25,000 charges. Misdemeanor larceny tops the nonviolent, non-traffic misdemeanor list, with over 40,000 charges statewide. In the next three spots on that list are misdemeanor drug paraphernalia, marijuana paraphernalia, and marijuana possession charges; together these offenses account for 88,077 charges. Speeding is the most common non-DWI traffic offense with over 295,000 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 Female	25,724
Simple Assault	19,166
Communicating Threats	18,042
DV Protective Order Violation	7,263
Assault with deadly weapon	5,361
Assault and Battery	4,708
Child Abuse	4,249
Assault on Government Official	3,372
Assault by Pointing a Gun	2,405
Cyberstalking	2,239
Simple Affray	2,146
Assault Inflicting Serious Injury	1,447
Harassing Phone Call	1,401
Stalking	1,169

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

Nonviolent Misdemeanor Charge	Number
Misdemeanor Larceny	40,880
Possession Drug Paraphernalia	30,918
Possession Marijuana Up to 1/2 Oz.	29,433
Possession Marijuana Paraphernalia	27,726
Resisting Public Officer	25,324
Second Degree Trespass	22,364
Injury to Personal Property	14,687
Simple Possession Schedule VI CS	12,242
Possession Stolen Goods or Property	7,768
Shoplifting or Concealment of Goods	6,800
Public Order - Free Text	6,589
Injury to Real Property	5,734
Carrying Concealed Gun	5,308
Simple Possession Schedule IV CS	4,171

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

Non-DWI Misdemeanor Traffic Offenses	Number
Speeding	295,849
Expired Registration Card/Tag	208,790
DWLR Non-Impaired	169,464
No Operator's License	117,494
Operating Vehicle with No Insurance	54,977
Fictitious/Altered Title/Registration	38,754
Reckless Driving to Endanger	29,130
Drive or Allow Driving No Registration	26,641
Canceled, Revoked, Suspicious Certificate or Tag	26,562
Reckless Driving - Wanton Disregard	20,708
DWLR Impaired	18,066
Window Tinting Violation	12,412
No Liability Insurance	11,416
Possession or Display of Altered, Fictitious, or Revoked License	5,710

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 14.2% of all felony charges statewide. At the county level, however, the range for that percentage was significant. At the low end, only 3.4% of all felony charges in Polk County were for violent offenses. At the high-end, that number was 35.3% for Northampton County. Similar variability is seen with respect to misdemeanors. At the state level, violent

misdemeanors constituted 6.5% 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 16.5% 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	817
Vance	689
Washington	579
Halifax	550
Wilson	548
Scotland	543
Richmond	535
Cumberland	514
Hertford	511
Northampton	503

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
Wake	198
Mecklenburg	441
Guilford	386
Forsyth	188
Cumberland	514
Durham	272
Buncombe	223
Union	180
New Hanover	250
Gaston	248

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

County	2019 Violent Felonies Per 100,000 Population
Camden	37
Yancey	83
Burke	85
Cabarrus	106
Mitchell	107
Chowan	122
McDowell	127
Catawba	127
Stokes	129
Perquimans	134

Methodology

This analysis was conducted using the North Carolina Administrative Office of the Courts’ (NC AOC) “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.

Our identification of most commonly charged offenses in the tables above uses NC AOC offense code categories included in the Tally Report. In some cases, most often with drug offenses, that report includes potentially overlapping offense codes. For example, there is an offense code for manufacturing a Schedule VI controlled substance and one for manufacturing marijuana, which is a Schedule VI controlled substance. The Tally Report includes a number of variations of potentially overlapping offense codes. For this report, we used offense codes as presented in the Tally Report. A full list of NC AOC offense codes is available online [here](#).

This report replaces earlier ones that we provided on this topic. As noted, the core source for the data presented here is the court system’s Tally Report. That document reports district court, superior court, and total charges, with total charges being the sum of all district and superior court charges. Our previous reporting focused on total charge numbers. However, we subsequently learned that charges that begin in district court and proceed to superior court (e.g., for trial de novo) are counted in the Tally Report as *both* a district and superior court charge and that there is no way to isolate these double counted charges in the Tally Report. Concerned that using total charges inflated charging numbers, we revised our reporting to focus only on Tally Report district court charge counts. This change had little impact on previously reported misdemeanor charging but did significantly reduce felony charging numbers. Although this approach does not account for the relatively small number of charges initiated directly in superior court by indictment, we feel that this revised approach better reflects overall charging data.

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