

SYSTEMSTATS



North Carolina Criminal Justice Analysis Center

Governor's Crime Commission

Gangs in North Carolina - A Comparative Analysis Between 1999 and 2004

Author: Richard Hayes

In 2000 the North Carolina Criminal Justice Analysis Center of the Governor's Crime Commission published the results of a 1999 survey entitled *Perceptions of Youth Crime and Youth Gangs: A Statewide Systemic Investigation*. This issue of SystemStats represents a follow-up to portions of our original study and a glimpse into new trends. There are many differences noted in law enforcement gang intelligence to the make-up and geographical locations of our state's youth gangs. The presence of these criminally intentioned sociological entities continues to be undeniable and any standardized methods to combat them remain unresolved. However, we attempt to provide a clearer picture of the state of youth gangs in North Carolina.

In 1999, there was little knowledge of laws used to define a criminal youth gang in North Carolina. Interpretations of definitions were varied from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. Situations where different law enforcement agencies within the same county would define gangs differently existed. Prosecutors were unsure how to proceed with cases, other than to use laws aimed at individuals. However, today some communities have assistant district attorneys (ADAs) who have made gang prosecution a primary focus, utilizing existing laws and rapidly incorporating new laws to combat these domestic threat groups. Additions to the General Statutes continue to more clearly define what constitutes a criminal youth gang and the identifying features of members of such groups. Current and pending statutes are also focused on more effective prosecution of group violations.

Our original investigation was designed to measure the scope of the presence of gangs in North Carolina and the extent of law enforcement acknowledgment of the presence of gangs and their investigative and enforcement activities. This study is not as exhaustive as the previous investigation, but rather, focuses on identifying new trends and providing a description of gang members, gang activities and gang locations. It is hoped that these investigations can assist law enforcement, legislators, public education, prosecution, the courts, corrections, juvenile justice agencies, gang intervention programs and the public to better recognize the presence of these groups and unite in devising methods to deter, intervene, and prosecute criminal gang activities.

Overview of 1999 Findings

There were 332 gangs identified with 5,068 total members. However, many of these groups were listed as not having a specific name or any identifying features that would meet the criteria we used to define a criminal youth gang or threat group. Of the 332, only 97 met our criteria of the four-pronged test for a "classic street gang." The four-pronged test includes demonstration that the groups acknowledge themselves as a collective through names, dress, graffiti or other means, that they have a commitment to criminal activity, they tend to "hang out" as a group and that they recognize a selected geographic area where they tend to operate.

Acknowledgments of the *presence* of gangs seemed to be more beneficial than recognition of a *problem* for many within law enforcement administration in 2000. Many agencies did not acknowledge the existence of these entities in their communities, or simply did not answer our queries or those of other nationally affiliated studies of gang presence in communities.

Several law enforcement agencies had developed gang intelligence units and had officers attend training and certification in better recognizing, documenting, gathering intelligence, and intervening or deterring these activities. At the same time, this was not a priority for many of the jurisdictions within North Carolina.

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Survey Methodology and Response:

A saturation of surveys were sent to every law enforcement agency in North Carolina (n=514) and to all school resource officers (n=800) in the state. For jurisdictions that failed to have responses, a second survey was sent to the law enforcement agency(s) in that community. Responses were received from agencies within 56 of the 100 counties in North Carolina. Of the counties where there was no response, most were rural, lightly populated and with greater than 30 mile proximity to any larger urban communities. Notable exceptions to this are Gaston County which reported gang activity in our 1999 study and Cabbarrus County which are both close to Charlotte.

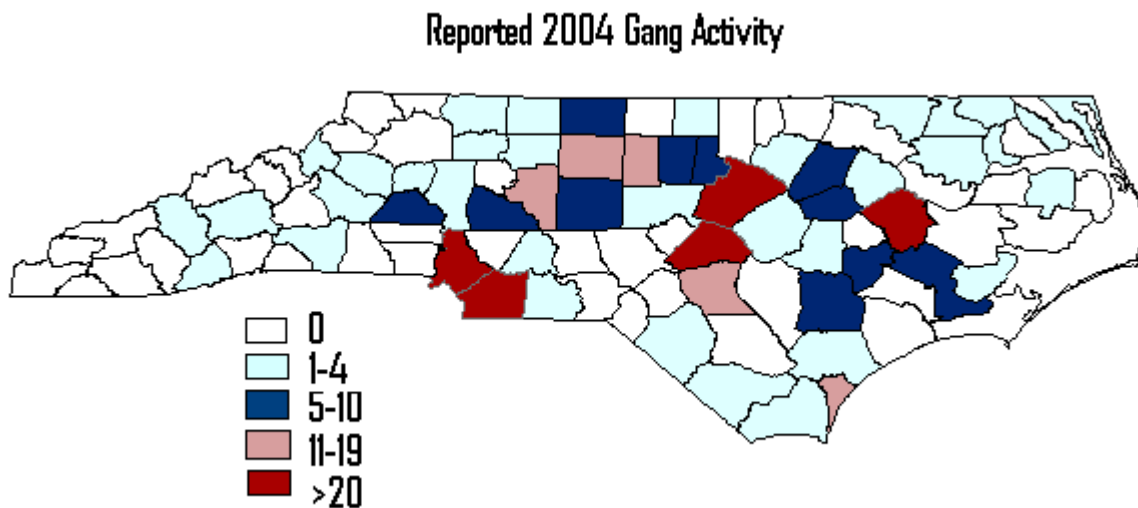
While response was not as robust as one would like in a limited mailing of a survey tool, the data does provide some reasonable insight into location, make-up and the activities of gangs in North Carolina

There were 387 gangs identified with 8,517 gang involved members in 2004. This is up from the 332 gangs and 5,068 members identified in our 1999 findings.

Where Gangs Are:

There does not seem to be any constant in predicting communities where gangs may exist. However, we do note that communities within a commute proximity of larger cities such as Raleigh or Charlotte do seem to reflect a disproportionate number of gangs.

The map below gives an indication of the distribution of gangs across North Carolina. The largest concentration of identified gangs were found in the Triangle area in Wake and Harnett counties, in the Charlotte greater metropolitan area in Mecklenburg and Union counties and in the Greenville, Pitt County area. The Triad area including Greensboro and High Point had a substantial presence of gangs as did the Fayetteville and Wilmington areas.



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Gang Make-up:

Several specific questions were asked to determine the make-up of gang membership. Age, gender and ethnic or racial background were the most significant.

Questions on age of membership yielded responses from eight years to over 50 years of age. However, entry age seemed to show some significant levels in the ages of 13 to 15 years. Activity within gangs was seen to be highest among those 16 years of age into their mid 20s. Activity of those over 25 years of age was dramatically reduced. This could be due to people aging out of these activities or, unlike California or Chicago based gangs, North Carolina's gangs have yet to mature to older and multiple generation cohorts. Further study on this issue would seem to be indicated to better understand the life cycle of gangs active in the state.

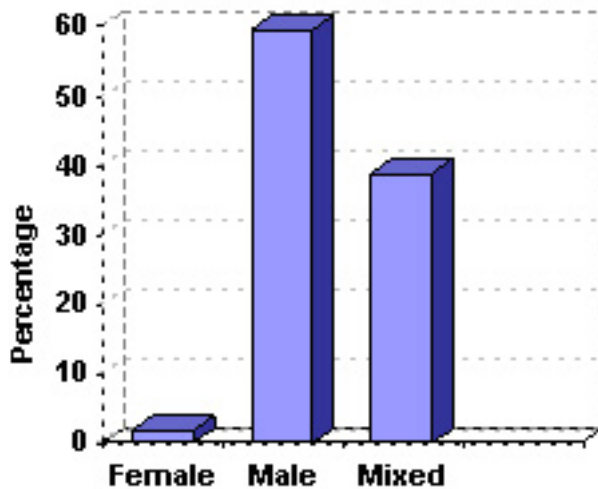
Gender of gang members seems to be becoming somewhat more influenced by females than in the previous study. There were five all female gangs identified and females were involved in as many as

60 percent of all identified gangs. However, total female membership continues to be limited. There were 177 gangs that were identified as being all male. Thus, gang involvement continues to be predominately a male driven activity.

Recognizing that gang intelligence is of paramount importance among law enforcement, it was found that there were identified leaders and hierarchical structures in 121 gangs and 131 where there did not seem to be any organized leadership structure. However, there was no information offered for 135 of the 387 identified gangs.

Ethnic or racial make-up of the gang members seems to be a preoccupation of many studies. However, data does not allow for the modeling of a stereotypical gang member. From the information gathered, there is found an over representation among Hispanic and African American youths. Asian and white youth participation tended to be less than these groups' percentages of the total population of the State. The table below provides this breakdown.

**2004 Gang Gender Make-up
(n=297)**



Ethnic/Racial Make-Up of Gangs

Ethnicity	Frequency	Percent
Not Known	75	19.4
African American	102	26.4
African American/Asian	1	.3
African American/Hispanic	3	.8
African American/White	1	.3
Asian	17	4.4
Caucasian	37	9.6
Caucasian/Asia	1	.3
Caucasian/Hispanic	2	.5
Hispanic	86	22.2
Latin	1	.3
Mixed Group	61	15.8
Total	387	100.0

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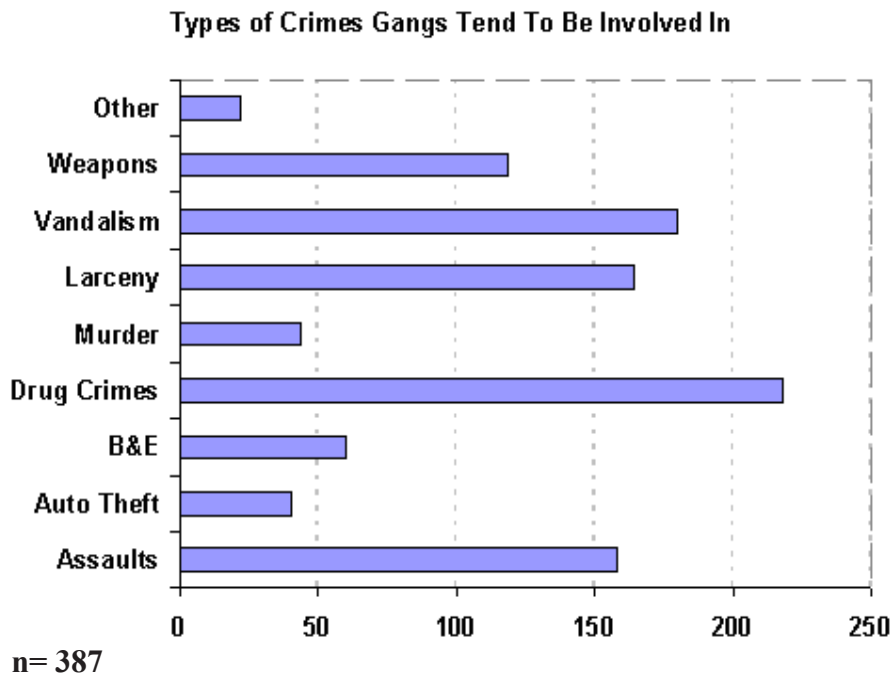
Criminal Activities of Gangs:

One of the primary components of gang identification is that the group has a commitment to some criminal activities. An inability of law enforcement to substantiate the commitment of the collective to crime does not in itself preclude the group from being identified as a gang. However, without this component, few of the laws currently in effect would be applicable to intervening in their activities. Most new laws and some of the more effective prosecutions have used some form of RICO (Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organization Act) ongoing criminal enterprise laws to show a group conspiracy. As was mentioned about leadership of gangs, many have no leadership structure or none that has been identified. The existence of an organized structure with a commitment to crime provides for a positive prosecution of group crimes.

Respondents were allowed to provide up to four types of criminal activities for which individual gangs were involved. Eight specific categories of crime provided significant responses, with a number of lesser crimes identified in sparse numbers.

Drug crimes, including the distribution and use of illicit drugs, was dominate among crimes identified with gangs. Vandalism was the second most common crime reported. This was not unexpected since a dominate activity of most gangs is graffiti painted on others' property. Larceny ranked third among noted criminal activities. Over 150 of the reported gangs were identified with the violent crime of assault. There were also 44 incidents where murder was associated with the criminal activities of reported gangs. The potential for violent activities was also apparent with 119 gangs identified as having committed weapons crimes. The bar chart below provides a graphic depiction of the criminal activities of gangs.

Of the 387 gangs identified, some level of commitment to criminal activity was reported for 298 (77%).



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Law Enforcement Response to Gangs:

Denial of gang presence was dominant among respondents in our 2000 publication. However, many law enforcement agencies have since acknowledged the presence of these criminal entities in their jurisdictions. Twenty-eight agencies reported they have officially acknowledged the presence of gangs for more than five years, an additional 21 have recognized gangs for between three to five years. There were 40 agencies that have identified an existence of gang activities for one to three years and 12 who within the previous year officially noted their existence. A total of 101 agencies reported an official departmental recognition of gangs in their jurisdictions. This indicates that the trend over the past five years has been to acknowledge the presence and the problems associated with gang activities in communities. These efforts likely are the reason why 299 of the gangs identified generally meet most classic three pronged definitions of criminal gangs.

Another important effort of law enforcement is establishing units within the agency to identify, track and collect intelligence on gangs and their activities. In 2004, 15 agencies responded that their agency had a designated unit to investigate gang activities. Many indicated that this was conducted by juvenile or criminal investigative officers. There were 88 agencies that indicated there was no specialized gang unit within their agency.

While law enforcement has made major efforts to recognize and familiarize themselves with gangs and their associated criminal activities, this study did not seek to determine if there are issues concerning our state's district attorneys in prosecuting such activities. With more recognition of criminal gangs comes the need for strong positive prosecutions and specially trained personnel. With the movement to revise laws and penalties concerning gang activities and gang involvement comes a burden on both the juvenile and adult courts to process these cases.

Comparisons of Gang Presence in Counties:

The number of gangs in our 1999 survey was listed as 332 with 5,068 identified gang members. Of these gangs, 97 were found to meet our criteria for criminal gangs. In the 2004 survey, there were 387 gangs and 8,517 gang members with 299 of the gangs fitting the criteria to be criminal gangs. While these numbers are not exhaustive, they do offer a representation of gang activity in the communities that responded to each survey.

Changes in numbers of gangs, gang involved individuals and the number of gangs that meet selected criteria to be validated as a criminal gang were noted. The number of reported gangs did go up slightly between the surveys conducted in 1999 and 2004 as did the number of gangs meeting the criteria for a criminal gang. This is likely due to the quality of the reporting data in 2004. With more law enforcement agencies acknowledging gangs in their communities there is also more intelligence on these entities and their members. Also, with associations like the North Carolina Gang Investigators Association pushing for standardized definitions of what constitutes a gang or a gang member, fewer loosely affiliated noncriminal groups seem to be classified as gangs.

Changes in gang presence being noted in the counties was both up and down. Counties such as Wake were up significantly where local law enforcement now recognize and work hard to identify gangs they previously denied having. Gaston County was one that offered responses in 1999, but gave no response in this study. Other incidents of new sheriffs or chiefs of police not acknowledging gangs their predecessors did were also found.

The data provided in the table on the next page offers a county by county indication of the numbers of gangs and gang members reported in each of our two studies.

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Comparison of Governor's Crime Commission 1999 and 2004 Gangs in North Carolina Surveys

County	Number of Gangs		Number of Members		County	Number of Gangs		Number of Members	
	2004	1999	2004	1999		2004	1999	2004	1999
Alamance	13	3	Unknown	81	Johnston	3	3	Unknown	73
Alexander	2		Unknown		Jones				Unknown
Alleghany		1		9	Lee		4		Unknown
Anson	1	1	Unknown	Unknown	Lenoir	8	5	21	20
Ashe					Lincoln				
Avery	2	2	10	11	Macon				
Beaufort					Madison				
Bertie	1		15		Martin		3		36
Bladen		4		Unknown	McDowell				
Brunswick	2	5	7	9	Mecklenburg	65	15	1739	168
Buncombe	1	13	Unknown	118	Mitchell				
Burke	1	10	12	154	Montgomery		4		89
Cabarrus	1	5	11	Unknown	Moore		3		18
Caldwell	1	2	Unknown	18	Nash	5	4	300	7
Camden					New Hanover	17	26	105	20
Carteret		2		27	Northampton	3	1	22	15
Caswell		3		18	Onslow		2		28
Catawba	3	4	60	8	Orange	6	2	165	Unknown
Chatham	2	1	Unknown	Unknown	Pamlico	2		Unknown	
Cherokee		1		10	Pasquotank	1		Unknown	
Chowan	2		20		Pender	2		9	
Clay					Perquimans				
Cleveland		4		45	Person	3		Unknown	
Columbus	1		Unknown		Pitt	26	9	835	49
Craven	6	11	10	165	Polk		3		38
Cumberland	14	23	259	2547	Randolph	7	5	180	Unknown
Currituck	1		18		Richmond		7		45
Dare					Robeson	4	8	23	17
Davidson	11	7	263	187	Rockingham	8	1	30	15
Davie					Rowan	8	12	34	32
Duplin	7	3	30	23	Rutherford	1	1	Unknown	10
Durham	10	3	1620	Unknown	Sampson		1		Unknown
Edgecombe	1	6	Unknown	295	Scotland				
Forsyth	1	17	Unknown	124	Stanly	2	3	18	58
Franklin	3	5	27	16	Stokes	1		20	
Gaston		5		35	Surry	3	1	30	Unknown
Gates	4		Unknown		Swain				
Graham					Transylvania	1		Unknown	
Granville					Tyrrell	1		Unknown	
Greene		2		16	Union	25	8	554	64
Guilford	11	18	68	144	Vance	1		20	
Halifax					Wake	39	1	1753	30
Harnett	25	4	204	Unknown	Warren				
Haywood	1	3	Unknown	110	Washington		5		16
Henderson		1		2	Watauga				
Hertford	1	1	Unknown	Unknown	Wayne	3	1	Unknown	6
Hoke					Wilkes				
Hyde					Wilson	5	3	25	Unknown
Iredell	2	7	Unknown	42	Yadkin	2	1	Unknown	Unknown
Jackson		1		0	Yancey				
					TOTALS	387	332	8517	5068

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Conclusion and Recommendations:

The presence of gangs in North Carolina is recognized by most practitioners in the law enforcement, courts and correctional professions. There continues to be some denial of the significance of the criminal activities of gangs. However, an increase in the number of identified gangs meeting selected criteria for recognition as a “criminal gang” indicates that law enforcement has come to a more uniform consensus of what constitutes such entities.

Disproportionate minority involvement in criminal gangs is also a social concern. According to the National Youth Gang Center, Hispanics make up 49 percent of gang involved youths and African Americans make up just over 30 percent nationally. The Crime Commission survey indicated that Hispanic and African Americans constituted over 50 percent of the gang involved youths in North Carolina.

While there is great concern centered on the over representation of both of these ethnicities, Hispanic youth pose additional concerns to the criminal justice system. Language barriers between law enforcement, court personnel, jail and corrections personnel all present financial concerns to local and state agencies needing bilingual employees. Programs to intervene or deter youth from entering gangs must focus on multiple cultural environments. This will also cause program overlap and duplication if programs focus on individual cultures and languages.

The involvement of females in gangs continues to generate concern as does the involvement of juveniles (ages 15 and younger) in criminal enterprises. Criminal involvement of youths has generally been a male preoccupation of those under their middle 20s in age. These criminal gangs provide a pathway for

broader inclusion of females and younger children in organized criminal activities including assaults, drug and weapon crimes and many other illegal activities.

Proposed legislation that would provide a standardized definition of a criminal gang and a schedule of penalties or enhancements to existing penalties for crimes committed for the furtherance of the gang are recommended. Additionally, a legal definition of what constitutes a “criminal gang member” would benefit prosecution of any enhancements for gang activity.

Programs that have as their focus intervention and deterrence of gang involvement among children under age 15 would be advisable. After school programs should include gang awareness education to reduce the likelihood of gang involvement. Teachers should be educated in recognition of gang type activities and warning signs. Law enforcement, even though more open than in 1999, should move to zero denial of criminal gang presence. Denial of these social entities is seen as a disservice to both the community and youths who might be deterred from such activities if their local law enforcement was proactive in combatting these groups.

Further study of programs that are working in communities in other states that could work in our communities is advised. The development of a statewide ability for law enforcement to store intelligence data on gangs and individual gang members is recommended. Law enforcement availing themselves of the training provided by such groups as the North Carolina Gang Investigators Association is encouraged. The networking, communication and cooperation of all agencies be it juvenile justice or the adult criminal system should focus on reduction of gang membership and activities.



North Carolina Governor's Crime Commission
 1201 Front Street, Suite 200
 Raleigh, North Carolina 27609

The Governor's Crime Commission was established in 1977 by the North Carolina General Assembly under G.S. 143B-479. Its primary duty is "to be the chief advisory body to the Governor and the Secretary of the Department of Crime Control and Public Safety for the development and implementation of criminal justice policy." The Crime Commission is always open to comments and suggestions from the general public as well as criminal justice officials. Please contact us and let us know your thoughts and feelings on the information contained in this publication or on any other criminal justice issue of concern to you.

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