

GANGS IN NORTH CAROLINA

An Analysis of N.C. GangNET Data

**Governor's Crime Commission
N.C. Department of Public Safety
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In its capacity as the research arm of the Governor's Crime Commission, the Criminal Justice Analysis Center (CJAC) has conducted research and analysis of criminal gang activity in North Carolina for the past 15 years. The first comprehensive statewide assessment of gang activity was published in 2000 with multiple reports since that time. Over the past 20 years, GCC has administered numerous local and statewide grants to combat the presence of criminal gangs by targeting prevention, intervention and suppression, as well as law enforcement and community gang awareness and training initiatives. The N.C. General Assembly allocated funding to the GCC to bolster these efforts in fiscal years 2008 and 2009. Further, Session Law 2008 – 187 Section 7 provided that GCC update the General Assembly of statewide levels of gangs and gang members in annual reports (See Appendix 1). This report has been prepared in order to meet the legislative requirements.

Method of Gang Data Collection

Prior to 2008, GCC reports on gang activity relied exclusively on surveys conducted through more than 400 law enforcement agencies across North Carolina. Due to many issues in the consistency and quality of responses, it was determined that the standardized information contained within the N.C. GangNET system would provide a more accurate interpretation of gang involvement in communities. While no method of data collection is entirely complete and comprehensive, the N.C. GangNET system offers the most robust data across jurisdictions with a standardized criteria for validating those who meet specified definitional characteristics of a gang member.

N.C. GangNET is a Web-based set of databases that exist in three nodes: the western node located with the Charlotte Mecklenburg Police Department that replicates up to the central node located at the State Bureau of Investigation Fusion Center; the eastern node located with the Durham County Sheriff's Office that also replicates to the central node; and the N.C. Division of Adult Correction (DOC), a user whose data, until 2011, was bridged to the central node via the eastern node team. Bridging the Correction information into NC GangNET is essential because most of these individuals will at some point be released into our communities, where it will be important for law enforcement to understand their potential relationships with local gangs.



The N.C. GangNET program was originally funded by GCC in 2003 to assist the Durham County Sheriff's Office and the Durham Police Department in collecting gang-related information. It provided a centralized criminal gang intelligence database to aid in identifying and tracking gang members and their activity in Durham County. The software was originally developed for the military to track potential terrorists, but has been adapted and utilized by many states and federal law enforcement agencies to track gang member activities by showing common linkages between people, automobiles and locations. In 2013, changes in the N.C. GangNET database

will be implemented to benefit law enforcement personnel who enter data into the system. It is being consolidated by GCC and the Department of Public Safety into one central node and dedicating staff positions as training officers and serving as liaisons to law enforcement and correctional users of the system. Also, the system is uniting with several other states through a project initiated by a federal grant to the Maryland High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area project.



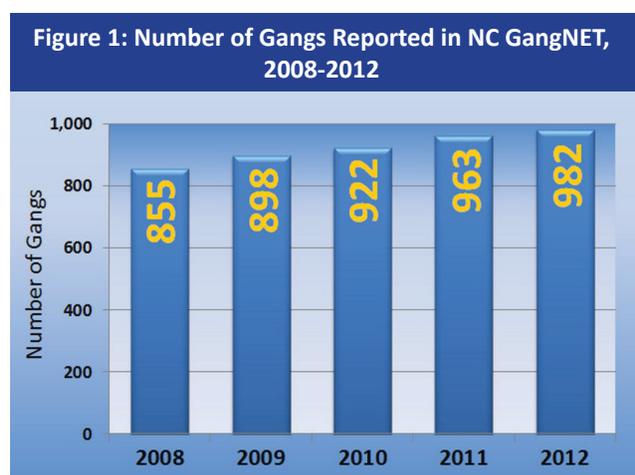
The CJAC utilizes data as it currently exists in the N.C. GangNET central database. A brief history and explanation of the N.C. GangNET data reveals its strengths and weaknesses. Primary strengths of this data include that more than 230 agencies provide information on gang members operating in 59 counties inclusive of our most populous counties. The system provides a standardized method for entering data that validates gang membership and their individual connections with other validated gang members, associates and non-validated suspected gang members. N.C. GangNET's strict definitional criteria for the validation of a gang or gang member makes these data preferable when addressing the demographic and geographic descriptors of North Carolina gangs and their members.

The foremost weakness is that not all law enforcement agencies across the state currently use the N.C. GangNET database. Without the full participation of all law enforcement and correctional agencies, the data is incomplete. Secondly, the database was designed to track gang members at an individual level. As a result, aggregate data on gangs must be derived from the system by manipulating the data. Another key weakness is that even though the system is a law enforcement intelligence database, it is governed by laws that prohibit the information being shared or used as evidence in the prosecution of crimes. Many agencies do not enter juvenile gang members in the system (youth aged 15 and under) because of the restrictions related to disclosing juvenile offense data. Additionally, since the system maintains validated gang members for five years from their last contact, there are cases where individuals no longer reside in North Carolina but are not expunged from the system. There are also limitations in the data gathered, such as a valid home address, multiple dates of birth, correct race or ethnicity, and the agency entering the person may be in a different county than where the individual actually resides. This example provides a unique issue in that one county may have no participation in N.C. GangNET but because a gang member has been documented as living in that county, a count for the non-participating county will appear in an aggregate listing of gang members by county of residence. Another limitation is that while some of the N.C. Division of Adult Correction 'Security Threat Group' information has been bridged from their prison data into N.C. GangNET, no community corrections or probation information on 'Community Threat Groups' has yet been included. Another potential weakness is that with officer promotions and changes in enforcement responsibilities, the need for ongoing marketing of and training and certification in N.C. GangNET use is imperative to keep new personnel trained in the use of the system.

2012 NC GangNET Data

A review of previous CJAC reports reveal that gang activity has been present in North Carolina communities since well before the topic was first researched in 1997. This was before many communities and law enforcement agencies were willing to accept or acknowledge the existence of gangs in their area. Today the GCC serves as an information resource to these communities. GangNET data helps to produce a snapshot of gang activity in the state. The picture continues to be somewhat unclear, primarily due to the lack of participation in N.C. GangNET by some law enforcement agencies across the state.

The reasons for not participating include both limitations of personnel available to enter information into the N.C. GangNET system and not having investigators trained to recognize and document gang members. This is not due to limited access to law enforcement gang training, N.C. GangNET training or to access to the N.C. GangNET system. Both training in the use of the system and access to the GangNET system have been made available to law enforcement through funding from the GCC. Additionally, there is a level of resistance among many state and local agencies to submit information into N.C. GangNET on juvenile gang-involved youths (in youth ages 15 and under), which prevents an accurate understanding of the criminal gang activities of this important demographic group. Given these caveats, the gang data for the state as of Jan. 15, 2013, is provided below.



Gangs

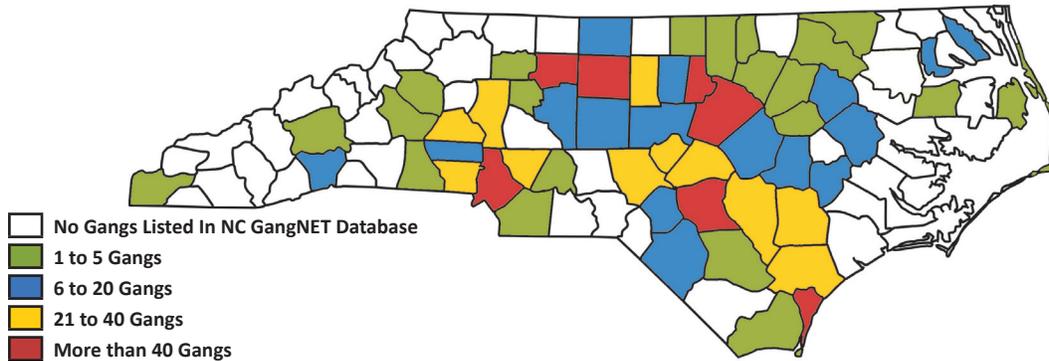
Information retrieved from 2012 NC GangNET data reveals 982 gangs reported in 55 counties across the state as noted in Figure 1. An additional 23 gangs were reported within the Division of Correction's prison system.

It should be noted that any discussion of the number of gangs in a state, county or jurisdiction can be complicated by definitions. Traditionally, the term 'gangs' indicates umbrella names for a gang such as Crips, Bloods and others. The term 'sets' would be the local operational body with a specific name such as 'Rolling 60's Crip' or 'Sex Money Murder.' 'Rolling 60's Crip' would be a local set falling under the banner of a Crip gang-related set. Likewise, 'Sex Money Murder' (SMM) would be a local set falling under the banner of a Blood gang-related set. With that being said, while all sets fall under a particular 'gang' banner by definition according to Article 13A of the North Carolina Street Gang Suppression Act, each set fits that definitional criteria for a gang and thus is treated as an individual gang. While 'set' is used to describe local entities of traditional Black gangs (Bloods, Crip, Folk, People, etc.), Hispanic gangs (MS-13, Sureño, Norte-14, etc.) use the term 'clique' and hybrid gangs tend to use the term 'crew.' While these terms all represent the local operational grouping of specific umbrella gangs, the gang members of each (set, clique, and crew) find distinct meaning for the term they use.

The Division of Correction provides an additional listing of gang members in 23 'Security Threat Groups,' which is the term used by its reporting system to designate a gang. It does not report individual sets, cliques or crews but only the 23 umbrella organizations. Thus these groups would have names such as Bloods, Crips, Hells Angels, United Blood Nations, MS-13 and Aryan Brotherhood.

The map of gangs reported in North Carolina for 2013 (in Figure 2 at the top of the following page) indicates that counties with larger numbers of gangs tend to be located along the interstate highways or drug corridors of the state. A listing of each county and the number of gangs reported in the N.C. GangNET system can be found in *Appendix 2*. Several of the counties that show either no or few gangs entered in N.C. GangNET are known to have gang presence and activity through either communications with officers in those jurisdictions and/or media reports. The N.C. GangNET system is now being managed by GCC and the Department of Public Safety. With this administrative change, greater efforts will be made to identify gang participation. Encouraging new participants and/or greater participation by agencies in the system will be a priority.

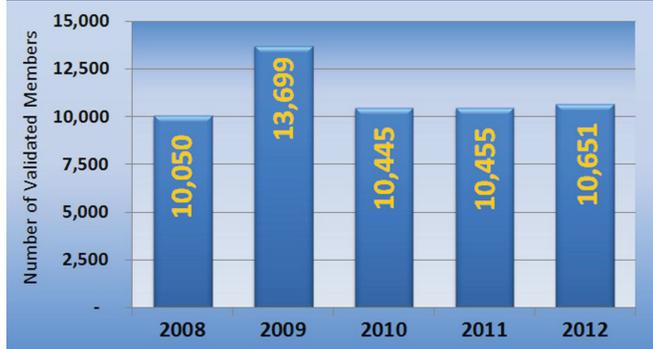
Figure 2: Counties with Gangs Reported in the NC GangNET Database, 2013



Gang Members

Some data inconsistencies exist due to errors in entry such as a single name with multiple birthdates and absence of race or gender information. These inconsistencies account for some of the data not being consistent with total gang members. The total for validated gang members currently in the N.C. GangNET system is 10,651, as shown in Figure 3. Data indicates 10,164 male and 490 female gang members. There are an additional 2,681 non-validated suspected gang members or affiliates in the system, of which 2,269 are male and 412 are female. Total suspected gang activity, as reflected in N.C. GangNET, is 13,332 (12,394 males; 902 females).

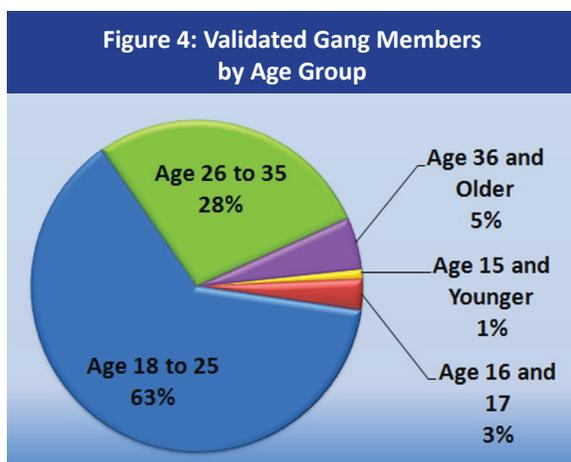
Figure 3: Number of Validated GangMembers Reported in NC GangNET, 2008-2012



Attempting to compare the number of gang members in previous GCC reports with this year's reported levels of gang membership is problematic. As N.C. GangNET gained in popularity between 2003 and 2007, a great number of gang investigators sought to have their information on gang members entered into the system to share and view information from other jurisdictions. This meant that the system was rapidly populated. As part of the rules governed under 28 CFR Part 23 compliance, when a person in an intelligence database has not had any new activity entered for five years, that data is to be expunged from the system. As a result, each year a number of validated gang members from past years drop out of the system as new gang members are being entered. The GCC has not tracked the volume of validated gang members expunged due to five years of inactivity in the system; thus it is difficult to determine how large the rise in validated gang membership in the system is in any given year. Figure 3 above,



depicts the number of validated gang members over each of the past five years. A large disparity shows in the number of validated gang members in the system in 2009. Since N.C. GangNET was not developed to generate aggregate reports on numbers of gangs or gang members, these data are the product of programming code applied to the data to produce counts. The spike in 2009 was likely due to programming language that included both validated gang members and suspected gang members in the gang member category.



Age of Validated Gang Members

Without jurisdictions entering juvenile gang members information on individuals 15 years of age and younger, the ability to determine the level of juvenile involvement in gangs relies on data entered in the North Carolina Juvenile Online Information Network (NC-JOIN) or anecdotal information from gang investigators, gang prevention and intervention program staff. This report has little ability to provide a clear picture of juvenile gang involvement. With N.C. GangNET now residing with GCC and the Department of Public Safety, an effort should be made through the DPS's Division

of Juvenile Justice, as a sister agency, to allow juvenile gang information collected in NCJOIN to be replicated in NC GangNET. Since the system is governed as a 'right to know and need to know' database and is not used for any primary labeling of juveniles, it would serve as an effective tool for officer information and for the safety of officers and the public.

As can be gleaned from the data below, the highest validated gang member involvement in the age group of 18 to 25 years is followed by the 26 to 35 year old category. Above, Figure 4 illustrates that the age group of 16 to 25 year olds make up 66 percent of the validated gang members in the system. That same age grouping made up 71 percent of the validated gang members in the March 2012 GCC report and 73 percent of those reported in the March 2011 report. The age group of 26 to 35 years has risen from 20 percent in the March 2011 report to 28 percent in this year's data. These data could indicate a trend to an aging population of gang-involved individuals.

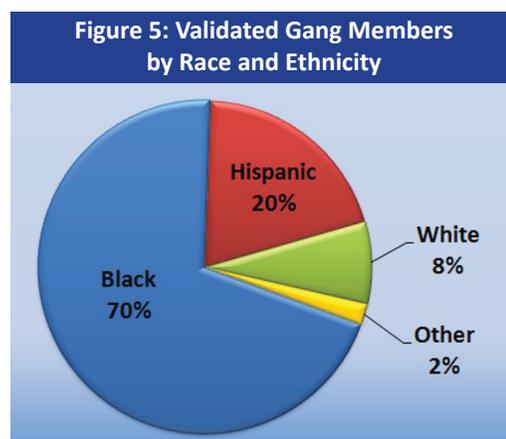
• 15 years old and younger	79
• 16 and 17 years old	337
• 18 to 25 years old	6,681
• 26 to 35 years old	3,048
• 36 years old and older	522

Race/Ethnicity of Validated Gang Members

The demographic breakdown of race and ethnicity provides some interesting data. There continues to be a disproportionate representation of Black and Hispanic involvement as validated gang members as is shown in Figure 5.

• Black	7,471
• Hispanic	2,113
• White	831
• Asian	121
• Other	131

This disproportionate representation may be due to socioeconomic variables unique to these communities. The data emphasizes the need for gang prevention, intervention and suppression programs targeted to the needs of these populations.



Summary

The CJAC had expected to see a leveling off of the increased counts of gangs across the state as more agencies developed specialized gang units and gang investigators and as more agencies began using N.C. GangNET. This seems to be evident from the data collected. There is a realization that the data presented in this report are an under representation of the extent of gangs and gang members; however, it is a good portrayal of the gang situation in North Carolina. There are major agencies that have not entered data in the N.C. GangNET system for extended periods. This could be because these agencies have entered all identified gangs and gang members and little new intelligence has become available. It could also be attributed to personnel changes within their gang units — such as their certified GangNET operator leaving the unit — or any number of other reasons. N.C. GangNET is not a perfect system for developing statewide gang data, but it exceeds any other methodology because N.C. GangNET relies on data entered by the active gang investigators across the state and requires multiple steps to validate an individual as a gang member. With N.C. GangNET now transitioning to GCC, a concerted effort to inform gang investigators on training and the value of the system for both officer and public safety is paramount.



Demographic data, such as those offered in this report, are important to provide a picture of where and at whom to direct funding if and when it becomes available. It would be wise to continue efforts to deter and prevent young people under age 18 from joining gangs. The most efficient method of accomplishing this would be to provide gang prevention programs in schools, identify the youth who are most at-risk for joining gangs, and focus more intensive prevention programs on them. More programs aimed at intervention and suppression should be directed at the current gang members that are age 18 and over. Innovative programs and the evidence-based programs outlined in the report of the Governor’s Gang Task Force should be implemented. Continued suppression via standard law enforcement and prosecutorial use of existing laws to intervene and suppress criminal activities are advised.

As was noted in GCC’s summary of the March 2012 report, additional efforts should concentrate on using the data provided to focus additional efforts on the communities most affected by gang involvement. In North Carolina, data indicates that a gang member is most likely to be a black male under the age of 30 who resides in a more populous county in close proximity to a major highway. There are some pockets of Asian gang membership in the Charlotte area; it would make sense to develop some programs that focus on this population. Likewise, there are a significant number of Hispanic gang members across the state. The most difficult problem confronting the development of programs for this population is that the term ‘Hispanic’ represents a large, culturally diverse group. The single largest area of concern would be to identify the causes of the disproportionate involvement of young black men in gangs. Understanding the complexities that have created this social phenomenon would likely provide the information necessary to develop meaningful programs for this community.

The N.C. GangNET system continues to evolve. The system is now housed within the Department of Public Safety and is managed by designated staff at GCC. This move promotes the ability to consolidate training and certification of users, offers a single point of contact for users and provides a portal into regional information sharing through several states. With the purchase of a new dedicated server and the most current GangNET software, North Carolina will be positioned to better identify and understand the levels of gang presence and the problems associated with gangs.

Appendix 1

Text of the Session Law indicating the responsibility of the GCC to produce an annual report on gang activity: Session Law 2008-187, Page 21.

2008 Technical Corrections Act

SECTION 7. The Governor's Crime Commission shall develop the criteria for eligibility for funds appropriated for gang prevention and intervention. The criteria shall include a matching requirement of twenty-five percent (25%), one-half of which may be in in-kind contributions, and presentation of a written plan for the services to be provided by the funds. Funds shall be available to public and private entities or agencies for juvenile and adult programs that meet the criteria established by the Governor's Crime Commission. The Commission shall identify the cities and towns that do not have full-time parks and recreation staff, and provide targeted outreach and information to public and private agencies, and non-profit organizations, in those cities, towns, and unincorporated areas about their eligibility for these funds.

The Governor's Crime Commission shall report to the Chairs of the House of Representatives and Senate Appropriations Committees and the Chairs of the House of Representatives and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees on Justice and Public Safety by April 15, 2009, on this program. The report shall include all of the following:

- (1) The grant award process.
- (2) A description of each grant awarded.
- (3) The performance criteria for evaluating grant programs.
- (4) A list of State grants awarded in the 2008 grant cycle.

The Governor's Crime Commission shall review the level of gang activity throughout the State and assess the progress and accomplishments of the State, and of local governments, in preventing the proliferation of gangs and addressing the needs of juveniles who have been identified as being associated with gang activity.

The Governor's Crime Commission shall develop recommendations concerning the establishment of priorities and needed improvements with respect to gang prevention to the General Assembly on or before March 1 of each year.

Appendix 2

Gangs in N.C. GangNET sorted by county number of gangs and county (Column headers match colors used in *Figure 2: Counties with Gangs Listed in N.C. GangNET Database.*)

1 to 5 Gangs Reported		5 to 20 Gangs Reported		20 to 40 Gangs Reported		More than 40 Gangs Reported	
County	Gangs Reported	County	Gangs Reported	County	Gangs Reported	County	Gangs Reported
Brunswick	1	Chowan	6	Lee	21	Durham	41
Buncombe	1	Randolph	6	Moore	22	New Hanover	42
Burke	1	Davidson	7	Duplin	23	Cumberland	49
Cleveland	1	Orange	7	Iredell	23	Forsyth	57
Dare	1	Wayne	7	Alamance	24	Mecklenburg	59
Davie	1	Hoke	8	Cabarrus	27	Guilford	90
Halifax	1	Henderson	9	Catawba	28	Wake	98
Union	1	Lenoir	9	Sampson	29		
Vance	1	Pasquotank	9	Gaston	35		
Washington	1	Lincoln	10	Harnett	38		
Wilson	1	Chatham	11	Pender	40		
Yadkin	1	Rockingham	12				
Caldwell	2	Robeson	14				
Northhampton	2	Edgecombe	15				
Person	2	Johnston	17				
Nash	3	Pitt	18				
Stanly	3						
Bladen	4						
Cherokee	5						
Franklin	5						
Granville	5						
No Gang Members Reported in N.C. GangNET							
Alexander		Columbus		Macon		Stokes	
Alleghany		Craven		Madison		Surry	
Anson		Currituck		Martin		Swain	
Ashe		Gates		Mitchell		Transylvania	
Avery		Graham		Montgomery		Tyrrell	
Beaufort		Greene		Onslow		Warren	
Bertie		Haywood		Pamlico		Watauga	
Camden		Hertford		Perquimans		Wilkes	
Carteret		Jackson		Richmond		Yancey	
Caswell		Hyde		Rowan			
Clay		Jones		Scotland			

Note: The lack of gang activity indicates that information related to a gang member residing in that county was not recorded. As cited earlier in the report, there are a number of reasons gang activity may or may not be reported for a specific area.

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