

Introduction

The Criminal Justice Analysis Center, established in 2018, analyzes crime data to support insight into criminal justice trends in North Carolina. This research relies on reports that are voluntarily submitted by law enforcement agencies to the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s National Incident-Based Reporting System. In 2022, 408 North Carolina agencies submitted at least one incident to NIBRS, up from 402 in 2020. Those agencies’ jurisdictions covered 97% of the state’s population in each year.[1]

In NIBRS, crimes are divided into three categories:

- crimes against persons, harm to individuals;
- crimes against property, attempts to unlawfully obtain money, goods, or some other benefit; and
- crimes against society, prohibited behaviors such as drug use and prostitution.[2]

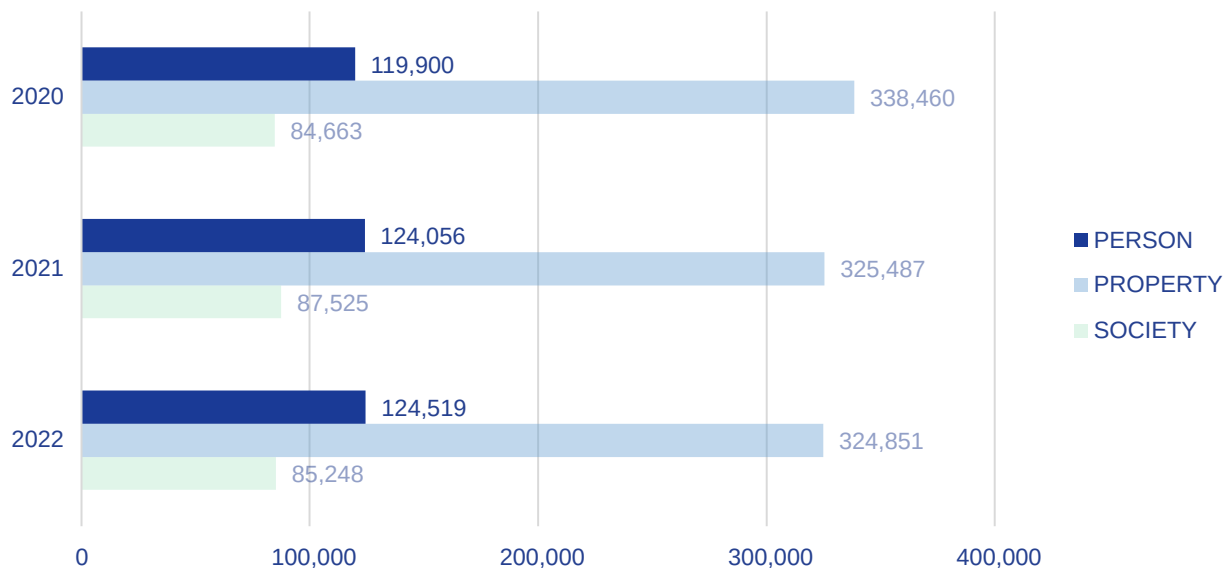
This report will present data on crimes against persons (henceforth “person crimes”) reported in North Carolina in 2022. It will also identify trends over the years 2020-2022. The data in this report was retrieved in March 2024.

Criminal Incidents

A criminal incident as defined by the FBI consists of “one or more offenses committed by the same offender, or group of offenders acting in concert, at the same time and place.”[3] In 2022, there were over 500,000 such incidents reported.

Since 2020, about 24% of incidents have included person crimes, while 64% included property crimes and 17% crimes against society. About 4% of incidents included crimes from more than one category. The percentage including person crimes has slightly increased over this period, from 23% to 24%, while the percentage including crimes against property slightly decreased.

Figure 1: North Carolina NIBRS Incidents Reported, 2020-2022



[1] Original publication revised 8/20/24.

[2] 2023.0 National Incident-Based Reporting System User Manual. Federal Bureau of Investigation—Criminal Justice Information Services Division; 2023.

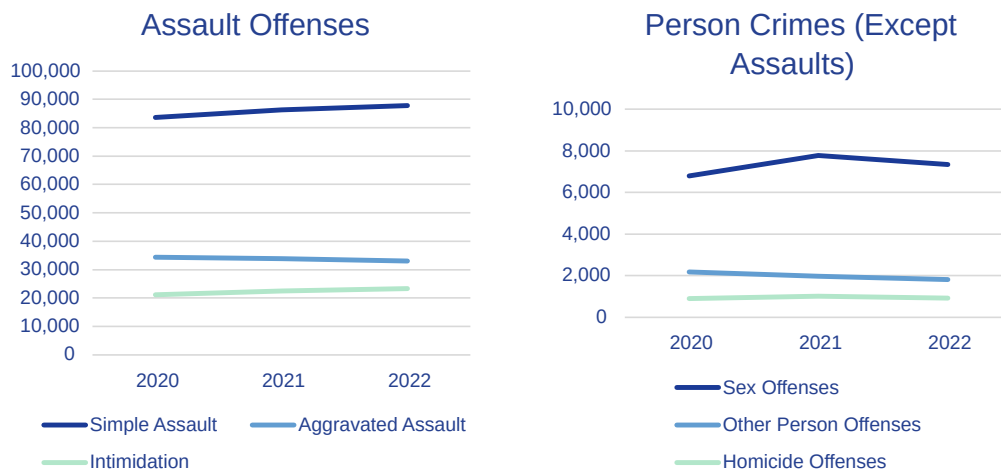
[3] Ibid.

Person Crimes

The remainder of this report will concern person crimes. The analysis will be based on the number of victims. As such, the numbers given in the report and represented in the figures will be counts of victims. If the analysis uses offense categories, then in each category, victims are counted once per incident. For example, if someone was a victim of both an assault and a sex offense in the same incident, they are counted in both categories. However, if someone was a victim of two different sex offenses in the same incident, they are counted only once. Additionally, if the same person was victimized in two separate incidents, they are counted twice. In total, we count 153,262 victims of person crimes in 2022.

Figure 2 shows the number of victims of person crimes in North Carolina from 2020 to 2022 by the type of offense. As assault offenses are by far the largest category of person crimes, they are shown separately in the graph on the left. The right graph shows homicides, sex offenses and other person offenses (consisting of kidnapping/abduction and human trafficking).

Figure 2: Person Crimes in North Carolina, 2020-2022



Overall, person crimes have increased over this period, primarily driven by a rise in assault offenses. NIBRS defines three distinct assault offenses: aggravated assault, simple assault and intimidation.[4] The counts of simple assault and intimidation victims rose by 5% and 10% respectively. However, the number of aggravated assaults declined by 4% over the same period. [A1] [A2] The numbers of homicides and sex offenses both rose in 2021, then declined somewhat in 2022, while the number of other person offenses declined in both years.

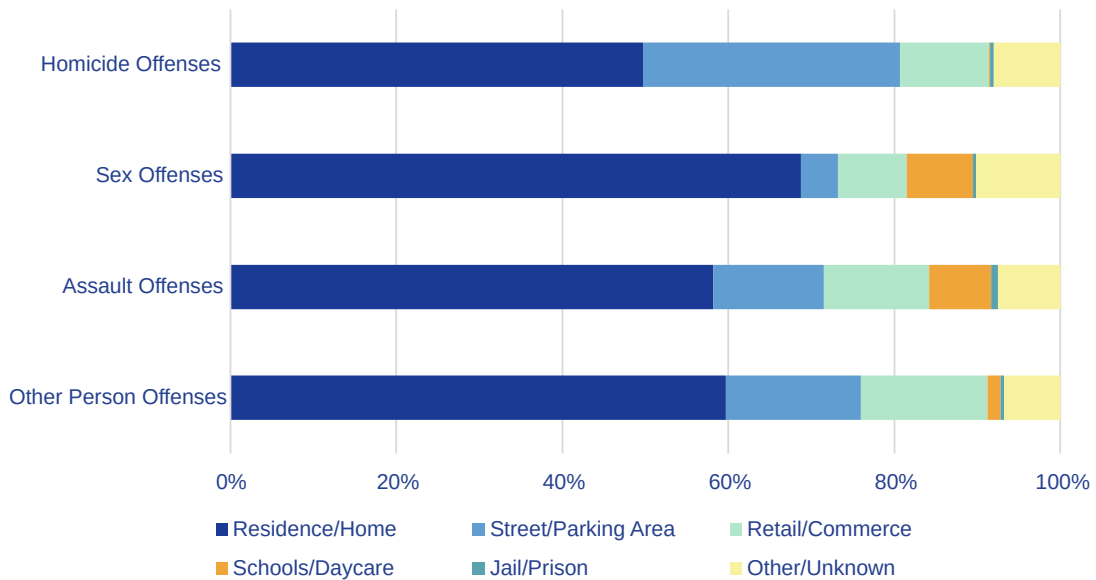
Locations

Figure 3 below shows the locations where person crimes occurred in 2022. The most common location for person crimes was in a residence. This was especially true of sex offenses, 69% of which occurred in homes. By comparison, only 4% of sex offenses occurred in locations classified as streets or parking areas (including highways, roads, alleys, sidewalks and parking lots), whereas about 31% of homicides were committed there.

[4] In aggravated assault, the offender uses or displays a dangerous weapon, or the victim is severely injured, or there is the risk or intent of severe injury. A simple assault is a physical attack that does not meet the conditions for aggravated assault. Intimidation consists of "threatening words and/or other conduct without displaying a dangerous weapon or subjecting the victim to an actual physical attack." (NIBRS User Manual)

Schools and daycares accounted for about 7% of assaults and 8% of sex offenses, but only one of 921 homicides and less than 2% of other person offenses.

Figure 3: Locations of Person Crimes in 2022



As location data in NIBRS is associated with offenses rather than victims, a victim of multiple offenses within one incident could be connected to multiple locations. If the offenses were also of the same type, then only one location was counted.[5]

Victim-Offender Relationship

Figure 4 shows the relationships of victims to offenders for each type of crime.[6] When multiple offenders committed a crime against a single victim, the closest relationship is used. An offender is someone who is reported to have committed an offense. They have not necessarily been arrested and charged with a crime.

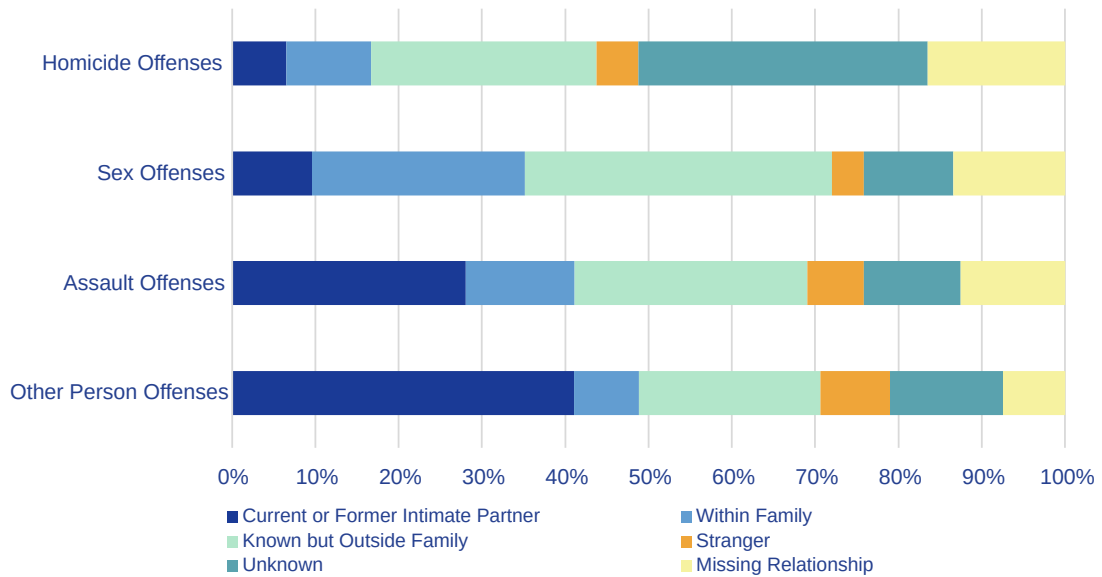
Relationships were less often known in homicides versus the other offense groups. When a relationship was known, in both homicide and sex offenses, the offender was most often known to the victim but outside their family. Sex offenses had the greatest share of victims who were family members of an offender, at 26%.

In assault offenses, current or former intimate partner was the most common relationship category, at about 28% -- slightly greater than the share of victims whose offenders were categorized as known but outside the family. For other person offenses, over 40% of the relationships fell in the current or former intimate partner category.

[5] There were only two cases in which the same person was the victim of two offenses of the same type in the same incident but associated with two different location categories. In each of these cases, the offenses in question were rape and either sodomy or sexual assault with an object. As the latter two offenses are now recoded to rape by the FBI, we chose to use the location associated with the rape offense.

[6] Current or Former Intimate Partner" includes the categories of spouse, common-law spouse, boyfriend/girlfriend, ex-spouse and ex-relationship. "Within Family" includes the categories of parent, sibling, child, grandparent, grandchild, in-law, stepparent, stepchild, stepsibling, and other family member. "Known but Outside Family" includes all other categories when a relationship is reported besides stranger and unknown.

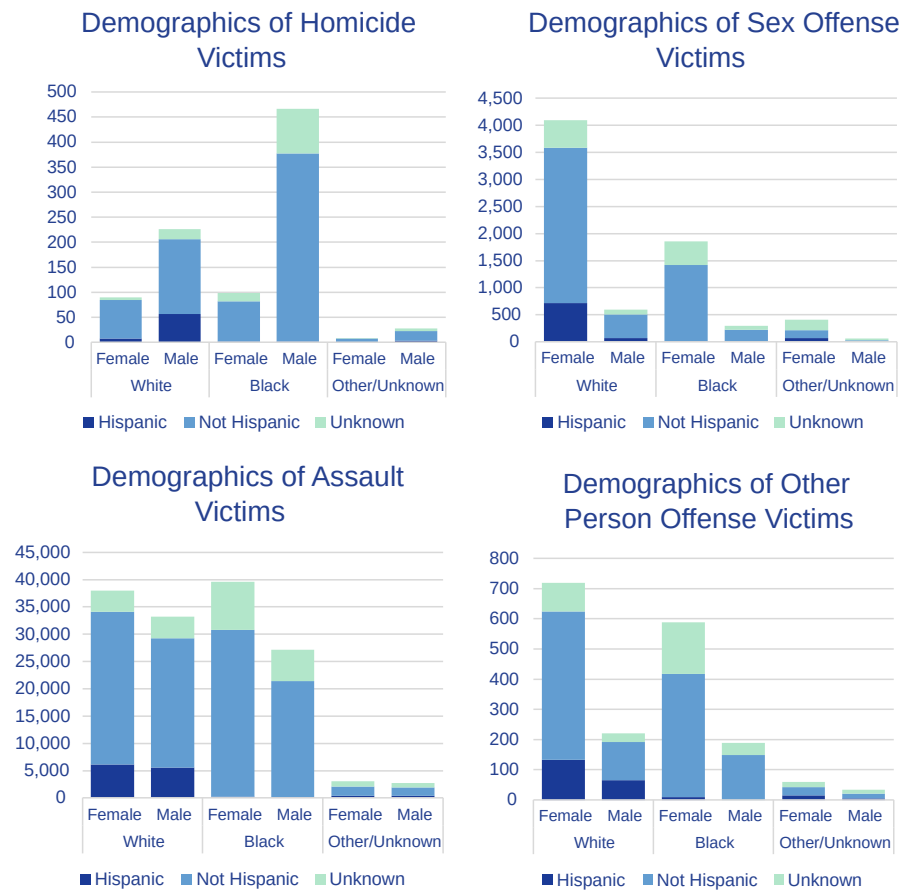
Figure 4: Relationships of Victims to Offenders, 2022



Demographics of Victims

Figure 5 shows counts of victims by race (white, Black or other/unknown), gender and ethnicity (Hispanic, not Hispanic or unknown) for each type of person crime. Note that since NIBRS data is reported by law enforcement, the data here may represent officers' perceptions rather than the victims' self-identification. The 447 victims of unknown gender, making up less than 1% of victims in each offense type, are not shown.

Figure 5: Demographics of Person Crime Victims, 2022



The majority of homicide victims were male, while in all other categories, female victims were more common. Additionally, most homicide victims were Black, while white victims (including those identified as Hispanic) were the plurality or majority in the other categories. However, in all categories the percentage of Black victims was greater than the Black percentage of the population.[7] The percentage of victims identified as Hispanic varied from 8% in homicide offenses to 13% in other person offenses.

Ages of Victims

The graphs in this section show the age distribution of victims of each offense type, broken down by specific offenses. Exact ages were reported for over 98% of victims. However, due to possible data quality issues, the oldest 1% of those were excluded.

Figure 6 shows the ages of homicide victims in 2022. The peak is at age 20. Victimization decreases above that age, with the median homicide victim being 30 years old. 12% (109) were below the age of 18.

Figure 6: Ages of Homicide Victims, 2022

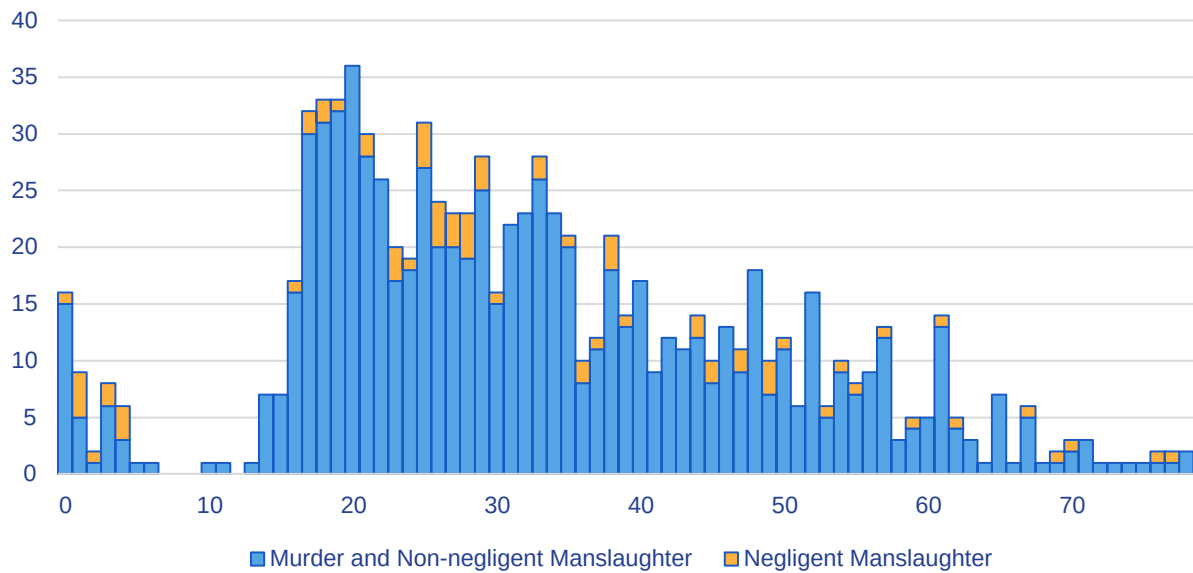


Figure 7 shows the ages of sex offense victims in 2022. When one person was a victim of both incest and statutory rape in the same incident, they are counted under incest. Rape includes offenses reported as sodomy or sexual assault with an object; if the same person was the victim of multiple of these in the same incident, they were counted only once. All other combinations of offenses are mutually exclusive. Victims of sex offenses were younger than those in other categories, with the median and most common age being 15.

Fondling accounted for over half of the cases for victims under 16, while rape represented a greater share of offenses against older victims. Incidents involving only statutory rape accounted for 13% of victims under 18. Even excluding these, the median age was 16.

[7] The Census Bureau estimates that 22% of North Carolinians identified solely as Black or African American in 2022. (<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/NC/PST045222>, accessed March 2024) Meanwhile, Blacks accounted for 61% of homicide victims, 29% of sex offense victims, 46% of assault victims, and 43% of other person offense victims.

Figure 7: Ages of Sex Offense Victims, 2022

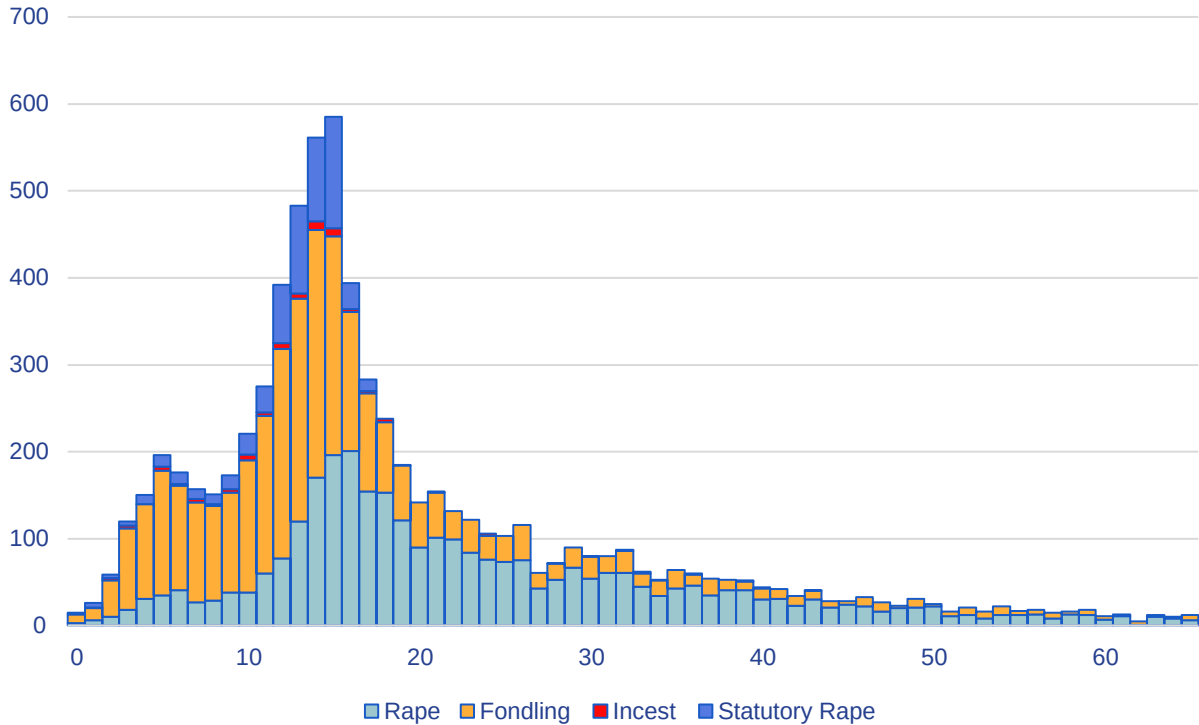


Figure 8 shows the ages of victims of assaults. The median age of an assault victim was 31. This was also the median age of victims of aggravated assault and simple assault. Intimidation victims skewed slightly older, with a median age of 34.

Figure 8: Ages of Assault Victims, 2022

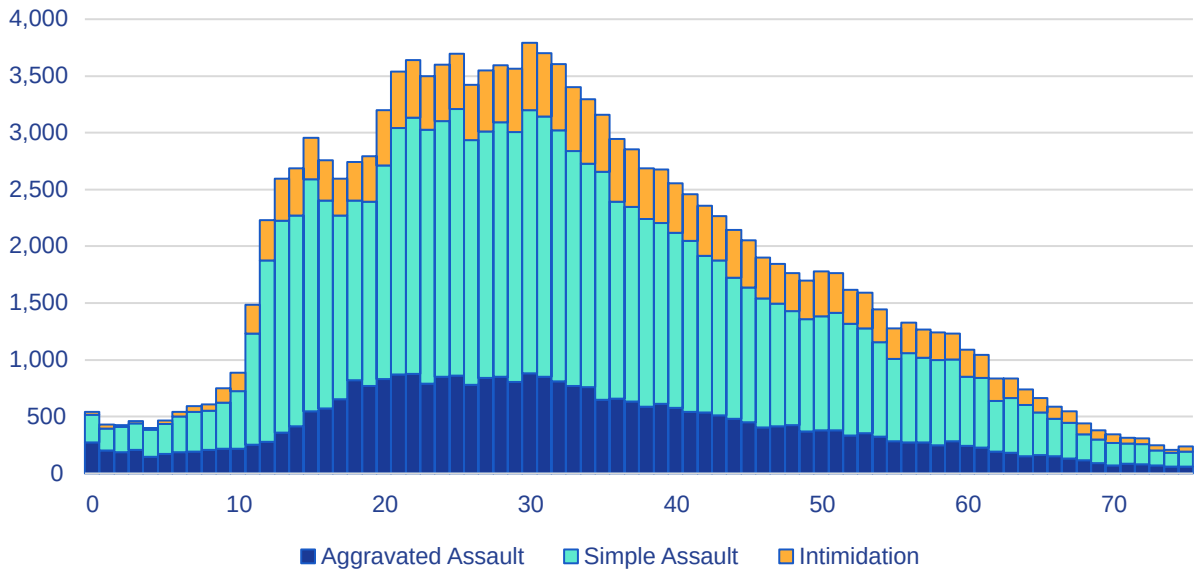
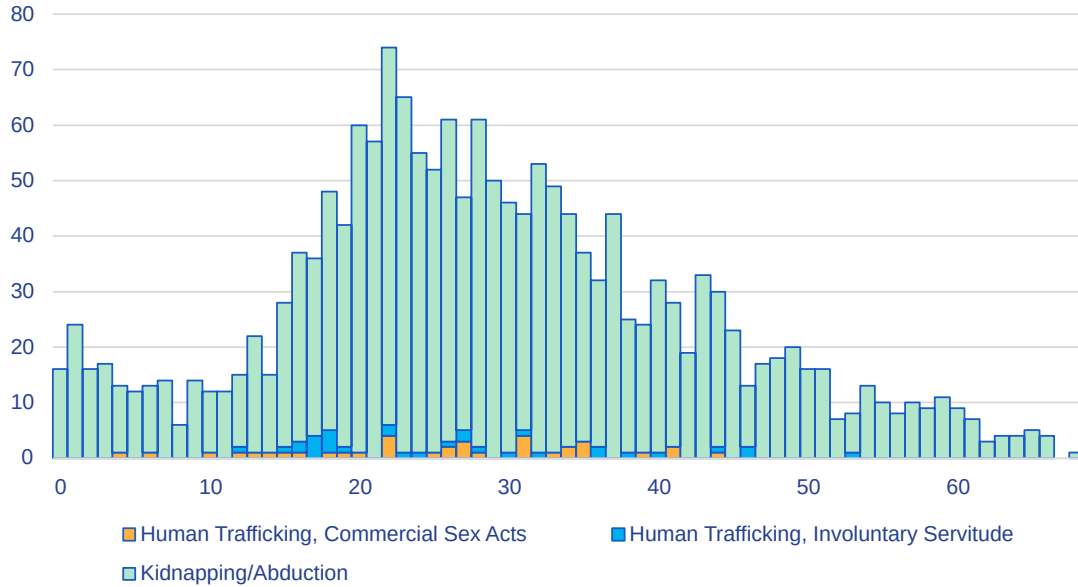


Figure 9 shows the ages of victims of kidnapping/abduction and human trafficking. Victims of multiple offenses in the same incident were counted once.[8] Only 76 victims of human trafficking were reported in 2022, of which seven had unknown ages. The median reported ages were 26.5 for commercial sex acts, 24 for involuntary servitude and 28 for kidnapping/abduction.

[8] The order of precedence for the offenses was Human Trafficking, Commercial Sex Acts; then Human Trafficking, Involuntary Servitude; and finally Kidnapping/Abduction.

Figure 9: Ages of Other Person Offense Victims, 2022

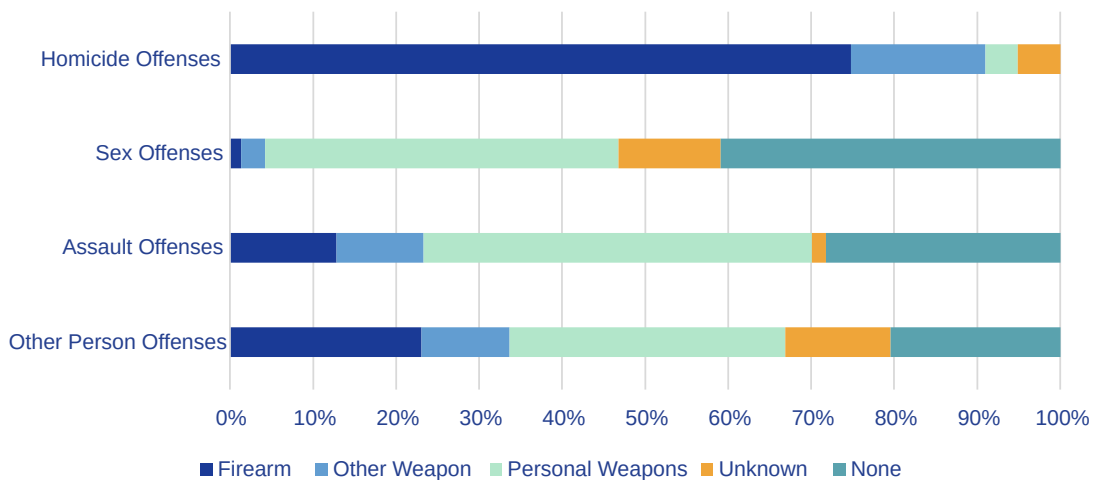


Weapons

Figure 10 shows the types of weapons used in each type of person crime in 2022. When multiple weapons were involved, only one was counted; firearms took precedence over other weapons, then personal weapons (for example, hands, fists and feet), then unknown weapons. Additionally, when the only weapon or force reported was asphyxiation, the offense was categorized as involving unknown weapons. The counts used were the number of victims associated with an offense in which a given weapon type was involved. Thus, in cases where there were multiple victims, it is possible that the weapon was not used against all victims.

Over 90% of homicides involved a weapon of some sort, and firearms were used in over 70%. By contrast, only 4% of sex offenses involved a known weapon other than personal weapons, with less than 2% reported to involve a firearm. Guns were used in 13% of assaults and 23% of other person offenses, with an additional 11% of each involving other weapons. Below, additional data is presented on assaults over three years.

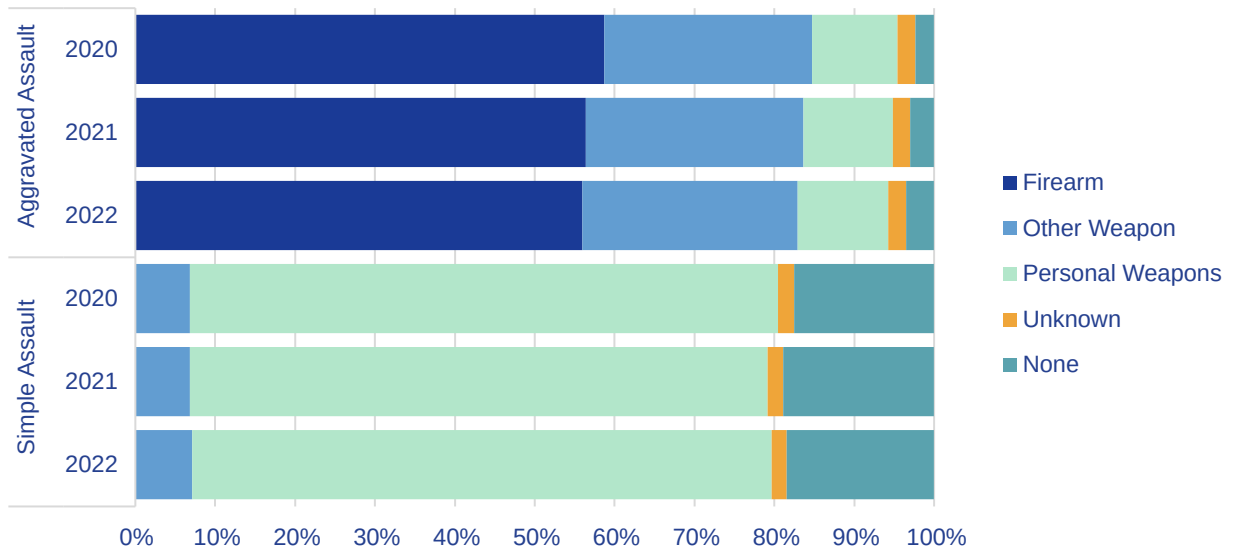
Figure 10: Weapons Used in Person Crimes, 2022



Among aggravated assaults, most cases involved a firearm (see Figure 11). However, as the total number of aggravated assaults declined, the prevalence of guns also declined from 59% in 2020 to 56% in 2022. Thus, the number of gun assaults decreased from 20,125 to 18,482.

Among simple assaults, between 72% and 74% involved personal weapons; 7% each year involved [A1] other weapons. (Note that all specific weapon classifications besides personal weapons are invalid for simple assault.) Finally, about 3% of aggravated assaults and 18% of simple assaults were reported as involving no weapons at all.

Figure 11: Weapons Used in Assaults, 2022



Conclusion

Overall, the number of person crimes increased between 2020 and 2022. Homicides and sex offenses dropped in 2022 but remained above the levels seen in 2020. The total number of assaults rose, but aggravated assaults have dropped, as have other person offenses.

In our analysis of the data based on crime type, we found the following:

- The most common location for person crimes was at a residence.
- In most cases, at least one offender knew the victim.
- Black people were overrepresented among victims of person crimes.
- The median age of victims was between 15 and 31 depending on the type of crime.
- The rate of firearm use varied greatly across crime types, with over 70% of homicides but less than 2% of sex offenses involving a firearm.

This analysis is limited by the fact that it includes only criminal incidents reported to NIBRS by law enforcement. While agencies reporting to NIBRS now account for 97% of North Carolina’s jurisdictional population, we know that many crimes are not reported to law enforcement. Additionally, we cannot guarantee that the reports are entirely free of errors.

Endnote

*This report was originally published June 2024 and revised August 2024.