



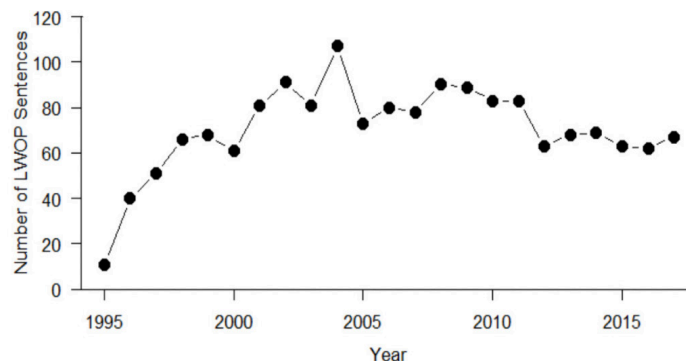
Wilson Center for Science and Justice

AT DUKE LAW | Life Without Parole Sentencing in North Carolina

In 1994, North Carolina adopted structured sentencing, making first-degree homicide automatically punishable with life without parole (LWOP) for adult defendants. This report studies patterns in 1,662 North Carolina adult LWOP sentences imposed from 1995 to 2017.

STUDY FINDINGS:

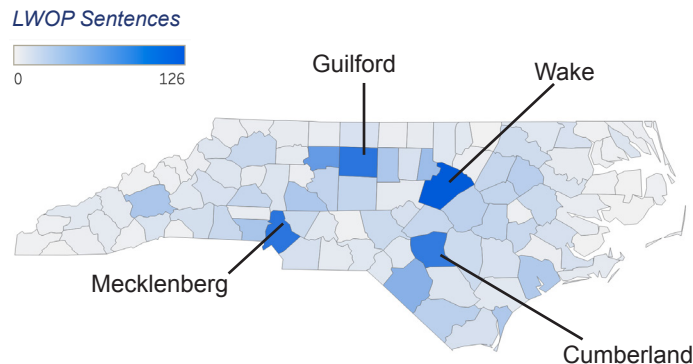
Adult LWOP Sentencing in NC, 1995-2017



- Beginning in 1995, LWOP sentences quickly increased in numbers.
- During that time, homicide rates steadily declined in NC.
- Death sentences also steadily declined in NC after 1999.

COUNTIES & PROSECUTORS:

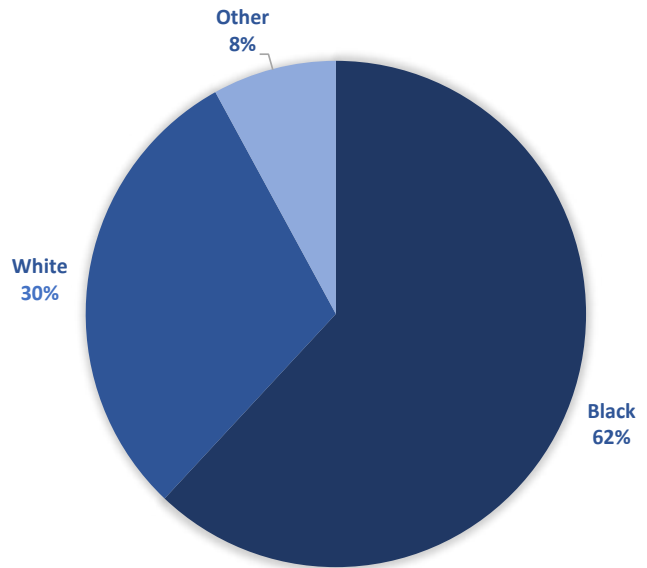
Number of LWOP Sentences in Each NC County



- 65% of NC counties have zero LWOP sentences in each year.

DEMOGRAPHICS:

Race of Persons Serving LWOP Sentences in NC



- There are 1,627 offenders currently serving LWOP sentences.
- 1,543 men and 84 women.
- 1,551 were convicted of first or second degree murder.
- 64 were convicted of violent habitual felonies.

CONCLUSIONS:

- We find that prior LWOP sentences strongly predict LWOP sentences at the county level, suggesting inertia in local prosecution practices.
- We find fewer LWOP sentences as the homicide rate increases within a county.
- We find that fewer LWOP sentences are predicted to occur as the number of black victim homicides increase in a county.
- No such relationship is found when considering the number of white victim homicides

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