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# **On the Road to \$1 Billion in Vehicles Stolen:**

The Data Trends Behind Colorado's Motor Vehicle Theft Crisis

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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### 2022 Criminal Justice Fellows

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## ABOUT COMMON SENSE INSTITUTE

**Common Sense Institute** is a non-partisan research organization dedicated to the protection and promotion of Colorado's economy. CSI is at the forefront of important discussions concerning the future of free enterprise in Colorado and aims to have an impact on the issues that matter most to Coloradans. CSI's mission is to examine the fiscal impacts of policies, initiatives, and proposed laws so that Coloradans are educated and informed on issues impacting their lives. CSI employs rigorous research techniques and dynamic modeling to evaluate the potential impact of these measures on the Colorado economy and individual opportunity.

## TEAMS & FELLOWS STATEMENT

CSI is committed to independent, in-depth research that examines the impacts of policies, initiatives, and proposed laws so that Coloradans are educated and informed on issues impacting their lives. CSI's commitment to institutional independence is rooted in the individual independence of our researchers, economists, and fellows. At the core of CSI's mission is a belief in the power of the free enterprise system. Our work explores ideas that protect and promote jobs and the economy, and the CSI team and fellows take part in this pursuit with academic freedom. Our team's work is driven by data-driven research and evidence. The views and opinions of fellows do not reflect institutional views of CSI. CSI operates independently of any political party and does not take positions.

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## Introduction

Despite the complexity of the issues surrounding motor vehicle theft, there is a crystal-clear trend in the Centennial state. Theft rates continue to rise, and Colorado maintains its unenviable distinction as the number one state in America for car theft. Common Sense Institute (CSI) Criminal Justice Fellows Mitch Morrissey and George Brauchler explore the data and trends through the first six months of 2022.

CSI's March 2022 report and analysis of 2021 crime data revealed that Colorado's motor vehicle theft rate had climbed 32%, ranking it the highest in America. In the first six months of 2022, the number of motor vehicle thefts, and the overall motor vehicle theft rate have each continued to increase.

In their 2020 report on motor vehicle theft, the Colorado Auto Theft Prevention Authority stated that, "...motor vehicle suspects operated with virtual impunity".<sup>i</sup> Based on the findings in this report, it appears that Colorado has failed to implement effective policies to change that reality.

## Key Findings

- Colorado continues to lead the nation in motor vehicle theft. Ranked #1 in America in 2021, in the first 6 months of 2022 (January – June), the motor vehicle theft rate increased another 17.2%.
- At the current rate of 4,007 thefts per month, motor vehicle thefts are on pace to exceed 48,000 for the year—an all-time high. The estimated total value of these stolen vehicles is between \$468.1M and \$848.3M, on the road to nearly \$1B.
- Arrests are not keeping pace with theft. The arrest rate per motor vehicle theft is 9.4%, down from 15.5% in 2019.
- Cars are being stolen from those who can least afford it.
  - 85.6% of vehicle thefts are vehicles valued at \$24,999 or less.
  - 63.5% of vehicle thefts are vehicles valued at \$14,999 or less.
- So far in 2022, four Colorado cities rank in the top ten in the United States for motor vehicle thefts (out of 185 cities), including Denver (2), Aurora (3), Westminster (8), and Pueblo (9). These four cities combined, account for 53.3% of the vehicles stolen statewide in the first quarter of 2022.
- According to Commander Mike Greenwell with MATT, "97 percent of the people who have been arrested in the last three years for auto theft have multiple arrests for auto theft."
- The number of secondary offenses related to motor vehicle theft has increased more than six-fold since 2008. Drug crimes involving motor vehicle theft have increased 1,110%, violent crimes involving motor vehicle theft 521%, and property crimes involving motor vehicle theft 583%.
- More motor vehicles are stolen from Denver International Airport than any other location in Colorado and account for nearly 3% of all motor vehicles stolen statewide.

## Key Statistics

### Colorado leads the nation in auto thefts

- Since 2019, Colorado's monthly motor vehicle theft rate has increased 120.6%. The auto theft rate ranked Colorado number one in the nation.
- In the first six months of 2022 (January – June), the trend has continued, and the motor vehicle theft rate has increased 17.3%.
  - Criminals stole 24,044 motor vehicles in the first six months, 3,463 more than the same period in 2021.
  - The monthly theft rate is now 68.56 vehicles per 100,000 persons.
- The number of secondary offenses related to motor vehicle theft has increased more than six-fold since 2008. Drug crimes involving motor vehicle theft have increased 1,110%, violent crimes involving motor vehicle theft 521%, and property crimes involving motor vehicle theft 583%.

### The cost of crime

- The 2022 total estimated value of stolen vehicles is between \$468.1M and \$848.3M, a significant increase over 2021.
- The 2022 estimated increase in the total value of vehicles stolen from 2021 is between \$143.3M and \$256.9M.
- With a stolen vehicle recovery rate of 67.2%, loss estimates have increased year over year in the range of \$55.5M to \$99.6M.

### Where cars are stolen

- According to the FBI's most recent data, four Colorado cities rank in the top ten in the United States for motor vehicle thefts (out of 185 cities), including Denver (2), Aurora (3), Westminster (8), and Pueblo (9). These four cities combined, account for 53.3% of the vehicles stolen statewide in the first quarter of 2022.
- There are four states with more than one city in the top 25 cities for motor vehicle theft, Colorado has 7, Washington (4), Oregon (3) and Minnesota (2).
- More motor vehicles are stolen from Denver International Airport than any other location in Colorado and account for nearly 3% of all motor vehicle thefts statewide.
- Motor vehicle thefts occur more in low-income communities, thus presumably impacting low-income households' disproportionately.

### Arrests are not keeping pace with theft

- In 2021, there were 4,002 arrests for motor vehicle theft. In 2022, Colorado is on pace for 4,538 arrests.
- Car thieves are outpacing law enforcement. Arrests for motor vehicle theft increased 13.4%, while the increase in the number of motor vehicles thefts increased 17.3%. The arrest rate per motor vehicle theft is only 9.4%, down from 15.5% in 2019.

- The motor vehicle theft rate per 100,000 (vehicles/people) is highest in Adams County at 259.1, followed by Denver (211.9), and Pueblo (105.6).

### What is being stolen

- 85.6% of vehicle thefts are vehicles valued at \$24,999 or less.
- 63.5% of vehicle thefts are vehicles valued at \$14,999 or less.

In 2021, the top ten vehicle makes and models stolen in Colorado (per the Colorado Auto Theft Prevention Authority) are:<sup>iii</sup>

- 2005 Chevrolet Silverado Truck
- 2004 Ford F-250
- 2000 Honda Civic
- 1997 Honda Accord
- 2017 Hyundai Sonata
- 2015 Kia Optima
- 2005 GMC Sierra
- 2017 Kia Sportage
- 2006 Ford F-350
- 2017 Hyundai Tucson

### Colorado Continues to have the Highest Motor Vehicle Theft Rate in the U.S.

According to the National Insurance Crime Bureau, Colorado led every state in America in its motor vehicle theft rate and was in the unenviable position of having the highest rate in the nation<sup>ii</sup>. Based on the increase through the first half of 2022, it appears likely that Colorado will retain the number one spot for car thefts again this year, see table 1.

Rank	State	2021 Theft Rate	2020 Theft Rate
1	Colorado	661.21	502.12
2	Washington D.C.	650.00	562.98
3	California	511.05	475.24
4	New Mexico	475.50	426.19
5	Oregon	471.16	385.08
6	Washington	461.91	368.46
7	Missouri	426.75	453.63
8	Nevada	426.75	365.84
9	Oklahoma	359.33	371.28
10	Texas	320.04	318.52

### Colorado Motor Vehicle Theft 2008 – 2022 (June)

Thieves steal motor vehicles for profit, convenience, and to commit additional crimes. Research based on census tracts and block groups shows that areas with lower median household incomes tend to have higher auto theft rates.<sup>iii</sup> Motor vehicle theft disproportionately impacts working class Coloradans. Colorado’s criminal laws were changed in 2014 to decrease the penalties for stealing motor vehicles most likely owned by working class Coloradans.

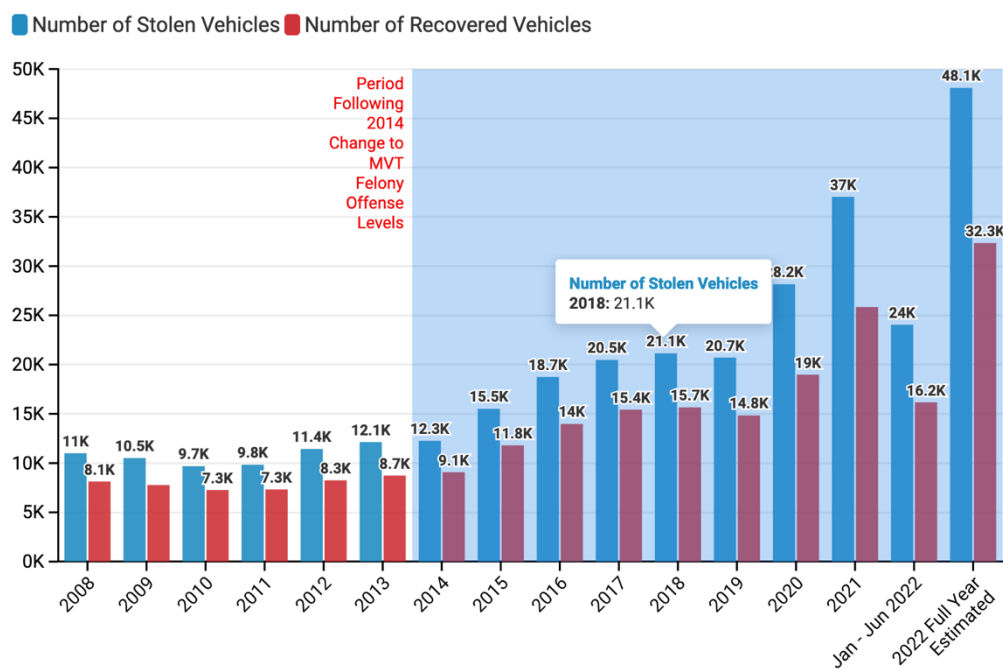
The number of motor vehicles stolen and recovered since 2008, is shown in Figure 1 below. After 2010, the number of thefts increased. Increases continued from

2015 through 2019, the period immediately after the 2014 statutory reductions to motor vehicle theft penalties passed.

In 2020, the number of thefts skyrocketed. According to the Auto Theft Intelligence Coordination Center’s (ATICC) 2020 Special Report – Contributing Factors Behind the Rise in Colorado Motor Vehicle Thefts, “the 2020 spike in vehicle thefts in Colorado coincided with policy changes at the state level, which were designed to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. These changes encompassed not only crime reporting protocols, but the manner in which law enforcement agencies and the courts prioritized auto theft crimes and processed offenders.<sup>iv</sup>

2022 thefts include only the first six months of the year; at its current pace, motor vehicle thefts will exceed 48,000—an all-time high in Colorado. According to the 2021 Colorado Department of Revenue Annual Report, there are 6,724,042 registered vehicles in Colorado<sup>vi</sup>. 48,000 motor vehicle thefts represent 0.71% of all motor vehicles in the state in a single year.

**Figure 1: Number of Motor Vehicles Thefts and Recovered**



Criminals increase in the number of vehicle thefts is greater than the increase in the number of vehicles recovered, resulting in an overall decreased percentage of stolen vehicles recovered. In 2022, the percentage of recovered stolen vehicles was 67.2%, down from 76.2% only 3 years ago, see figure 2.

**Figure 2: Percentage of Motor Vehicles Thefts Recovered**

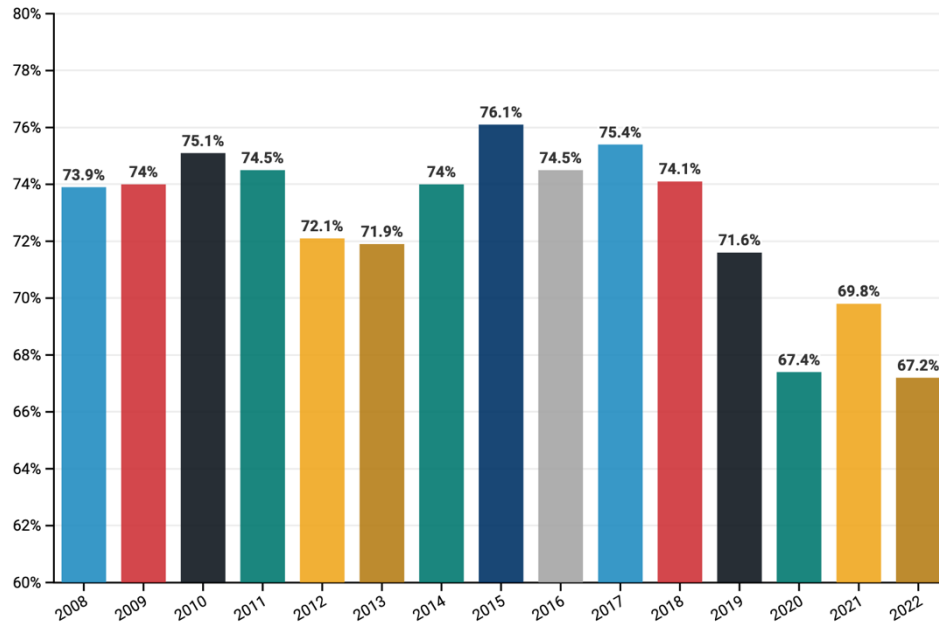


Table 2 shows the motor vehicle theft crime rate by county in the first six months of 2022. The highest vehicle theft rate per 100,000 persons was in Adams County, followed closely by Denver County. The lowest occurred in Douglas County. The largest increase in motor vehicle theft rate occurred in Denver (51%), followed by Pueblo County (46.9%) and Adams County (44.3%). Among the largest counties, Boulder (-11.5%) and Mesa (-9.9%) were the only counties in which the motor vehicle theft rate declined relative to the first six months of 2021.

In comparing a measure of wealth distribution—the ratio of high to low income to poverty rate—to motor vehicle theft rates, there is a marked tendency for higher theft rates to occur where the ratio is lowest (Adams, Pueblo, and Denver counties). The lowest theft rates tend to occur where the ratio is higher (Douglas, Larimer, and Boulder counties). Less wealthy areas are more susceptible to motor vehicle theft. Presumably, lower income households are impacted more.

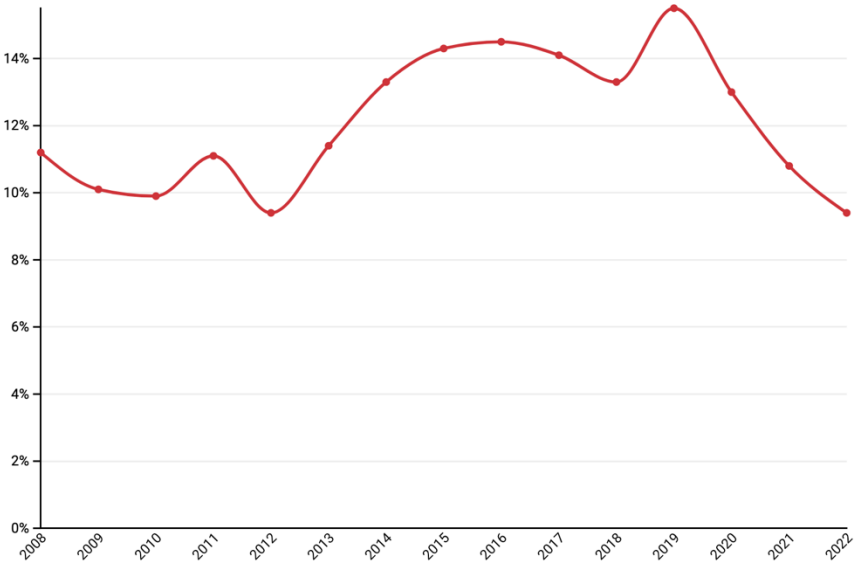


Table 2: Motor Vehicle Crime Rate Versus Income Distribution		
Motor Vehicle Theft	MV Theft Crime Rate Jan-June 2022	Ratio of High to Low Income to Poverty Rate
Adams	216	1.54
Arapahoe	38	2.92
Boulder	21.7	5.03
Broomfield	50.2	7.95
Denver	176.6	2.07
Douglas	14.5	10.66
El Paso	37.7	1.88
Jefferson	63.4	4.79
Larimer	16.5	3.27
Mesa	21.5	1.33
Pueblo	87.9	0.84
Weld	46.7	1.73

### Arrest Rate Related to Motor Vehicle Theft

Car thieves are outpacing law enforcement. The impressive increase in law enforcement’s arrest rate of car thieves (13.4%) was exceeded by the increase in automobile theft rate (17.2%). The resulting arrest rate related to motor vehicle thefts has fallen to 9.4% in 2022, down from 15.5% in 2019, see figure 3.

**Figure 3: Colorado Arrest Rate Related to Motor Vehicle Theft**



## Motor Vehicle Thefts in Colorado Cities Compared to Other U.S. Cities

The FBI reports the number of crimes for U.S. cities that submit data. The latest quarterly report is 2022-Q1. CSI converted the number of vehicle thefts into vehicle theft rates based on population for each reporting city. Table 3 shows how 12 Colorado cities rank in comparison to the 185 total cities that reported crime data. Cities ranked in the top ten are highlighted in yellow. Denver ranks number 2 in motor vehicle thefts, down from 1<sup>st</sup> in 2021. Denver (2), Aurora (3), Pueblo (9), and Westminster (8) held four of the top ten spots nationwide for vehicle theft in 2022-Q1.

	Denver	Aurora	Colorado Springs	Lakewood	Pueblo	Thornton	Westminster	Arvada	Greeley	Centennial	Boulder	Fort Collins
2021	1	2	37	6	8	21	5	28	61	58	73	150
2022	2	3	38	15	9	21	8	28	12	53	138	161

Table 4 below, show the top ten ranked cities for motor vehicle theft in the U.S. Washington has three cities in the top ten and Oregon has two.

Rank	State	City
1	Washington	Tacoma
2	Colorado	Denver
3	Colorado	Aurora
4	Oregon	Portland
5	Wisconsin	Milwaukee
6	Washington	Vancouver
7	Washington	Kent
8	Colorado	Westminster
9	Colorado	Pueblo
10	Oregon	Gresham

To combat the rise in motor vehicle thefts, on July 11, 2022, the City of Aurora, passed new mandatory jail time minimums for people convicted of stealing cars<sup>vii</sup>. First time offenders face a mandatory minimum 60-day jail sentence. For “repeat offenders,” the mandatory minimum jail sentence is 120 days in jail. This only applies to misdemeanor charges, not felony crimes that have aggravating factors such as the use of a weapon or assault. A person charged with motor vehicle theft who fails to appear in court, faces a mandatory 10 days in jail. Fines paid by

defendants will be used to pay victims to retrieve their cars from impound lots. The ordinance changes also include tougher penalties for stealing essential vehicle parts, including, the engine, transmission, front fender, hood, any door, front or rear bumper, rear quarter panel, deck lid, tailgate, hatchback, trunk floor pan, cargo box of a pickup, frame or supporting structure(s), cab of a truck, body of passenger vehicle, airbag or airbag assembly, wheel or tire, catalytic converters, or any other part of a motor vehicle that is comparable in design or function to any of the parts that have been listed, or that have been labeled with a unique traceable identification number, by the manufacturer of the motor vehicle part. The perpetrator shall be fined a sum not more than \$2,650 or imprisoned for up to 364 days, or both such fine and imprisonment. Each day an offense continues shall constitute a separate offense.

### Motor Vehicle Theft Rate in Denver Neighborhoods in 2022

The number of vehicle thefts in Denver neighborhoods is shown in table 5. With 668 motor vehicle thefts through August 2022, thieves steal more motor vehicles from Denver International Airport than any other single location in Colorado. The Wellshire neighborhood—with 5 thefts—has the lowest motor vehicle theft rate in Denver (1.49) per thousand residents. The location of these neighborhoods is shown in figure 4.

Table 5: Motor Vehicle Theft Rates in Denver Neighborhoods					
Top-ten Highest Motor Vehicle Theft Rates, by Denver Neighborhood in 2022			Top-ten Lowest Motor Vehicle Theft Rates, by Denver Neighborhood 2022		
	Thefts per 1,000 People	Incidents		Thefts per 1,000 People	Incidents
DIA*	558.9	668	Wellshire	1.49	5
Central Park	36.82	649	Indian Creek	5.41	19
Five Points	32.91	486	Barnum West	5.8	34
Northeast Park Hill	30.93	281	Washington Park	6.57	48
Lincoln Park	31.3	189	Fort Logan	5.58	49
Central Business District (CBD)	44.46	180	Harvey Park South	6.22	55
Unreported Neighborhood		157	South Park Hill	6.67	61
Globeville	42.52	151	North Park Hill	6.08	64
Sun Valley	28.51	41	Harvey Park	5.67	72
Auraria	42.42	35	Mar Lee	5.93	81
Source: Denver Post Crime Report <sup>viii</sup>					
* DIA has approximately 900 residents.					

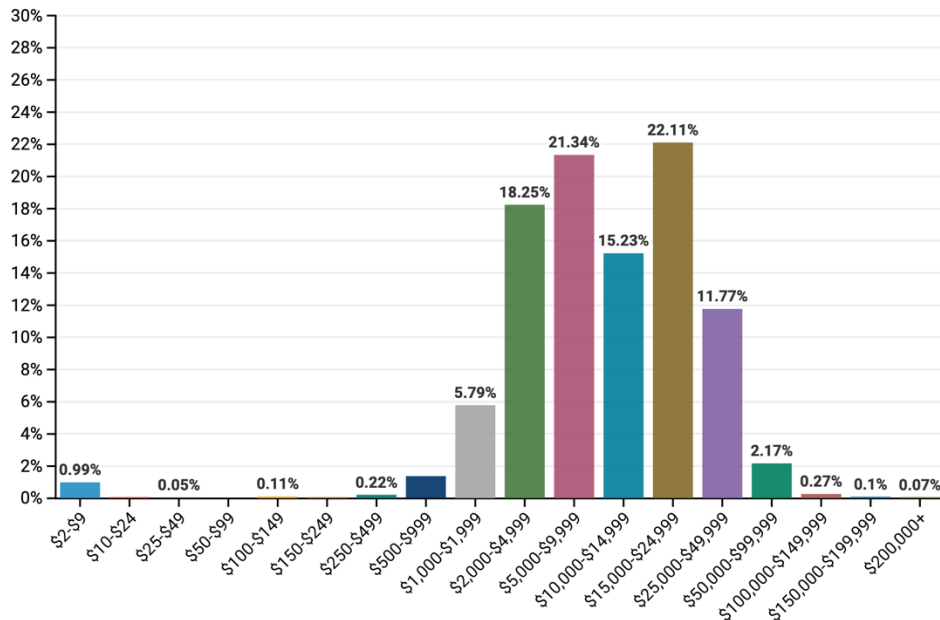
**Figure 4: Map of Denver Neighborhoods**



### Value of Motor Vehicle Thefts

Thieves target less expensive motor vehicles. 85.6% of all stolen motor vehicles in Colorado are valued at \$24,999 or less. Figure 5 shows the percentage of motor vehicle thefts by value. The largest share of stolen vehicles is valued between \$15,000 and \$24,999, followed closely by vehicles valued between \$5,000 and \$9,999. The distribution of stolen vehicles by value is likely due to lower valued cars having less sophisticated crime prevention equipment and the fact that vehicles lose their value very quickly, the demand for parts from older vehicles is greater because they have a higher occurrence of malfunction requiring replacement parts, and perhaps most notably, penalties for motor vehicle theft are less severe for lower value vehicles.<sup>ix</sup>

**Figure 5: Percentage of Motor Vehicle Thefts by Value**



### Total Value of Vehicles Stolen and Increased Insurance Costs

The annual total value of stolen vehicles in Colorado is approaching \$1 billion. In 2022, the value of 48,000 motor vehicles stolen is estimated to be between \$468.1M and \$848.3M. Based on a recovery rate of 67.2%, the estimated value of vehicles not recovered ranges between \$153.6M and \$278.3M, an increase from 2021 between \$55.5M and \$99.6M.

Owners of stolen vehicles that are not recovered, and have comprehensive insurance on their vehicles, can be reimbursed by their insurance companies for the full cash value of the vehicle less the deductible. Often the full cash value insurance reimbursement does not fully cover the cost of replacing the stolen vehicle unless the insured has full replacement cost auto insurance.<sup>x</sup> After filing a vehicle theft insurance claim, most insurance companies will review the police report to determine where the vehicle was stolen. If the vehicle was stolen in a high-risk zone and the zone happens to be where the insured resides or works, the insured can expect an increase in their vehicle insurance premium moving forward. According to the American Academy of Actuaries, the basic causes of loss (expense) in the insurance system that impact premium levels are auto accidents resulting in personal injury, auto accidents resulting in property damage, weather-related claims (flood or hail), and theft of vehicles or vehicle components.<sup>xi</sup>

Colorado, with the highest rate of motor vehicle theft in the nation, is considered to be a 'Hot-Spot' by insurance companies. According to the National Insurance Crime Bureau's 2020 Hot-Spot report, the Denver, CO Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) (Denver-Aurora-Lakewood) was the third ranked Hot-Spot, and the Pueblo MSA was ranked 7<sup>th</sup>.<sup>xii</sup> Accordingly, insurance companies will adjust premiums upwards

for all consumers in these zones, regardless of whether they have had a vehicle stolen.

### Secondary Offenses Related to Motor Vehicle Thefts

Motor vehicle thefts are frequently related to secondary or follow-on offenses. Table 6 shows the percentage of types of secondary offenses over time. "All property crimes" is the largest category, while the share of drug crimes has nearly doubled since 2008.

Table 6: Type of Secondary Offenses in Percent Over Time								
	2008	2010	2012	2014	2016	2018	2020	2022 Est.
Violent Crime	2.80%	2.81%	2.13%	3.00%	3.19%	3.61%	2.08%	2.39%
Other Crimes Against Person	3.22%	3.25%	4.54%	4.15%	3.26%	3.01%	2.37%	1.79%
All Property Crimes	84.38%	86.03%	83.32%	78.33%	73.58%	74.95%	79.59%	79.28%
Drug Crimes	8.53%	6.76%	8.42%	12.65%	16.75%	15.80%	13.40%	14.18%
Other Society Crimes	1.07%	1.15%	1.59%	1.86%	3.22%	2.64%	2.56%	2.36%

As shown in figure 6, secondary offenses have been rising along with motor vehicle thefts.

**Figure 6: Secondary Offenses Related to Motor Vehicle Thefts**

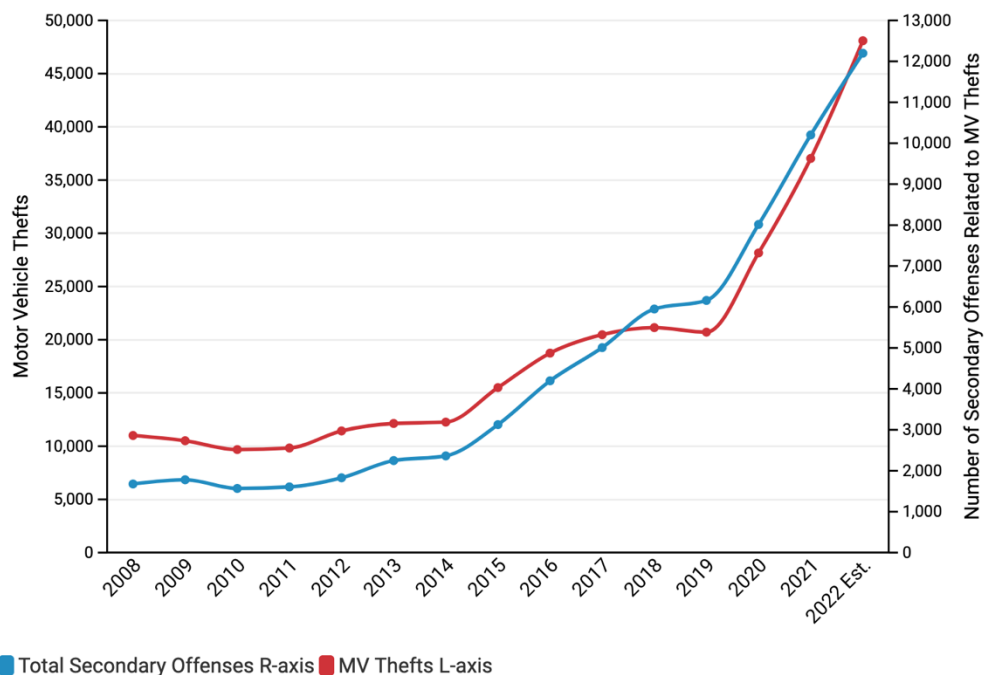


Table 7 shows the number of secondary offenses by category over time. The number of secondary offenses has increased more than six-fold since 2008. Drug crimes involving a motor vehicle theft have increased 1,110%, violent crimes involving motor vehicle theft 521%, and property crimes involving motor vehicle theft 583%. Reducing motor vehicle thefts would arguably decrease the number of secondary offenses.

**Table 7: Secondary Offenses Related to Motor Vehicle Thefts**

	Violent Crime	Other Crimes Against Person	All Property Crimes	Drug Crimes	Other Society Crimes	Total Secondary Offenses	MV Thefts
2008	47	54	1,415	143	18	1677	11,004
2009	63	70	1,476	145	26	1780	10,512
2010	44	51	1,349	106	18	1568	9,684
2011	35	47	1,389	117	17	1605	9,828
2012	39	83	1,523	154	29	1828	11,435
2013	70	101	1,849	204	25	2249	12,135
2014	71	98	1,851	299	44	2363	12,262
2015	75	110	2,367	497	78	3127	15,505
2016	134	137	3,088	703	135	4197	18,745
2017	126	145	3,757	829	151	5008	20,474
2018	215	179	4,460	940	157	5951	21,140
2019	155	168	4,653	1,010	174	6160	20,710
2020	167	190	6,380	1,074	205	8016	28,158
2021	220	213	8,097	1,407	265	10202	37,033
2022 Est.	292	218	9670	1730	288	12198	48,088
% Chg. 2008-2022	521.3%	303.7%	583.4%	1109.8%	1500.0%	627.4%	337.0%

## Penalties for Motor Vehicle Theft

Below is an overview of potential penalties for motor vehicle theft, however penalties vary depending on jurisdiction across the state. A person commits aggravated motor vehicle theft in the first degree if he or she knowingly obtains or exercises control over the motor vehicle of another without authorization or by threat or deception, (and other circumstances).<sup>xiii</sup> A person commits aggravated motor vehicle theft in the second degree if he or she knowingly obtains or exercises control over the motor vehicle without authorization or by threat or deception and none of the aggravating factors outlined in section 2 of CO Rev Stat § 18-4-409 are present.<sup>xiv</sup>

The value of the vehicle stolen determines the severity of the potential penalty assessed to the offender. The value of most vehicle thefts is between \$1,000 and \$19,999. In table 8, the number and percentages of aggravated motor vehicle theft cases that fit within the first and second-degree category are presented. Because there are many vehicles for which the value is not recorded, the totals shown are less than the number of vehicles stolen.

The number of first-degree (class 4 felony) cases has increased to 25% of the total aggravated motor vehicle theft cases, and the share of class 5 felony cases has dropped to 74.5%. The share of second-degree class 5 felony cases has also increased while the share of class 6 felony cases has decreased slightly.

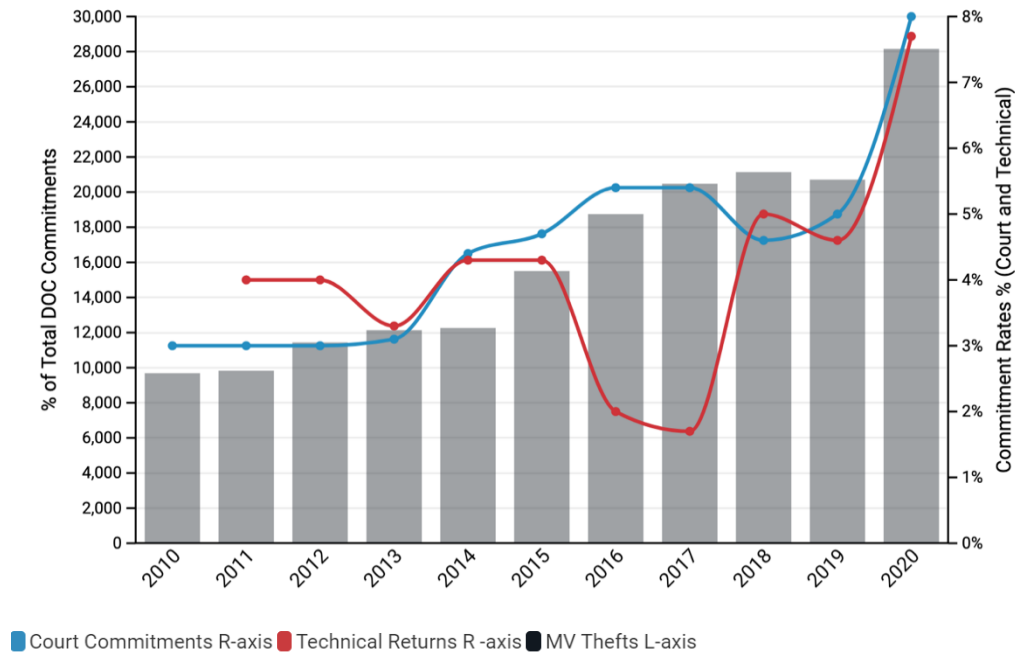
## Admissions Data Related to Motor Vehicle Theft

<b>Table 8: Penalties for Motor Vehicle Theft, Number of Motor Vehicle Thefts Within Each Category</b>										
Aggravated Motor Vehicle Theft in 1 <sup>st</sup> Degree <sup>xv</sup>										
			Number of Vehicles in Category				Percent of Vehicles in Category			
	Upper \$ Threshold	Lower \$ Threshold	2019	2020	2021	2022	2019	2020	2021	2022
Class 3 Felony	No Limit	\$100,000	69	74	147	93	0.4%	0.3%	0.4%	0.4%
Class 4 Felony	\$99,999	\$20,000	3096	4273	6922	5361	16.9%	17.1%	20.8%	25.0%
Class 5 Felony	\$19,999		15105	20677	26159	15992	82.7%	82.6%	78.7%	74.5%
Total			18270	25024	33228	21446	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Aggravated Motor Vehicle Theft in 2nd Degree										
			Number of Vehicles in Category				Percent of Vehicles in Category			
	Upper \$ Threshold	Lower \$ Threshold	2019	2020	2021	2022	2019	2020	2021	2022
Class 5 Felony		\$20,000	3165	4347	7068	5454	17.3%	17.4%	21.3%	25.4%
Class 6 Felony	\$19,999	\$1,000	13967	19394	24869	15369	76.4%	77.5%	74.8%	71.7%
Class 1 Misdemeanor	\$999		1138	1283	1291	623	6.2%	5.1%	3.9%	2.9%
Total			18270	25024	33228	21446	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Figure 7 shows the percentage share of motor vehicle theft to total commitments into the Colorado Department of Corrections. It also shows new commitments and technical returns. Data is only available through 2020. It shows a congruency between the increasing rate of motor vehicle thefts and the increasing rate of commitments.



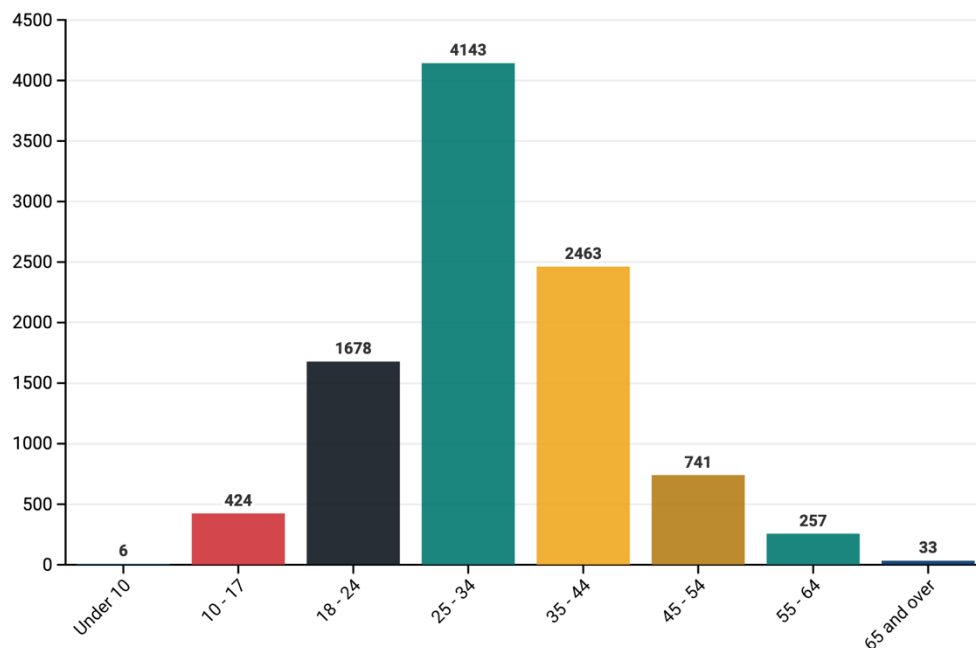
**Figure 7: Colorado Department of Corrections Percent of MV Theft Commitments and MV Thefts per Year**



### Age of Motor Vehicle Theft Offenders

The age distribution of motor vehicle theft offenders is shown in figure 8. The largest share, 42.5% of offenders are between 25 and 34 years old. Offenders under the age of 18 account for 4.4 percent of total offenders.

**Figure 8: Age of Motor Vehicle Theft Offenders**



### Concluding Remarks & Recommendations

Motor vehicle theft is treated as a “low level” crime by Colorado’s criminal justice system. Unless there are significant changes in the way the car theft epidemic is tackled, the quality and safety of Colorado will continue to decline. Property is a fundamental right on par with life and liberty — one which needs to be valued by state and local leaders through laws and policies designed to protect it. Colorado must focus on the reality that property crimes—including motor vehicle thefts—are not victimless crimes. In every instance of motor vehicle theft, an individual or family suffers serious economic harm, and sometimes physical injuries. The stolen vehicle was an asset to the owner for work, education, family, and the requirements of daily life. Insurance rarely covers the full cost of replacement. For the thief, a stolen vehicle can become a means to commit other crimes.

Colorado’s car theft data shows an undeniable and alarming trend in our community. Denver is at the national forefront of motor vehicle theft and Coloradans who can least afford it are forced to endure great economic hardship, emotional distress, and time-consuming inconvenience. The cost of motor vehicle theft is born by all Coloradans through increased insurance premiums, even if they have not had a vehicle stolen. By immediately prioritizing property crime and penalizing it commensurate with its impact on victims, and the community, policymakers have an opportunity to undercut the success of criminals and greatly reduce this entry-level crime.

Recommendations:

- End the revolving door of jail by denying personal recognizance bonds without prosecutor approval to anyone pending a car theft prosecution, or who has previously been convicted of car theft.
- Deny probation eligibility for a second or subsequent conviction for motor vehicle theft, absent consent of the prosecutor.

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<sup>i</sup> [Colorado Auto Theft Prevention Authority | Colorado State Patrol - CSP](#)

<sup>ii</sup> [NICB Report Finds Vehicle Thefts Continue to Skyrocket in Many Areas of U.S. | National Insurance Crime Bureau](#)

<sup>iii</sup> Walsh, J.A. and R.B. Taylor (2007)/ Miethe and Meier (1994)

<sup>v</sup> [ATICC SPECIAL REPORT - FACTORS BEHIND RISING MVT 2017 THRU 2020\[11499\].pdf](#)

<sup>vi</sup> [Colorado Department of Revenue 2021 Annual Report](#)

<sup>vii</sup> <https://www.auroragov.org/common/pages/DisplayFile.aspx?itemId=18724822>

<sup>viii</sup> [Denver Motor Vehicle Thefts, by neighborhood: Denver Crimes \(denverpost.com\)](#)

<sup>ix</sup> [https://www.coloradopolitics.com/opinion/brauchler-how-many-car-thefts-is-weiser-cool-with/article\\_88049dbc-1146-11ed-a0ba-b7126521cfbc.html](https://www.coloradopolitics.com/opinion/brauchler-how-many-car-thefts-is-weiser-cool-with/article_88049dbc-1146-11ed-a0ba-b7126521cfbc.html)

<sup>x</sup> [Actual Cash Value Vs. Replacement Cost Auto Insurance \(carchex.com\)](#)

<sup>xi</sup> [PowerPoint Presentation \(actuary.org\)](#)

<sup>xii</sup> [NICB 'Hot Spots': Auto Thefts Up Significantly Across the Country | National Insurance Crime Bureau](#)

<sup>xiii</sup> **Universal Citation:** [CO Rev Stat § 18-4-409 \(2016\)](#)

(1) As used in this section, unless the context otherwise requires:

(a) "Motor vehicle" means all vehicles of whatever description propelled by any power other than muscular, except vehicles running on rails.

(b) "Vehicle identification number" means the serial number placed upon the motor vehicle by the manufacturer thereof or assigned to the motor vehicle by the department of revenue.

(2) A person commits aggravated motor vehicle theft in the first degree if he or she knowingly obtains or exercises control over the motor vehicle of another without authorization or by threat or deception and

(a) Retains possession or control of the motor vehicle for more than twenty-four hours; or

(b) Attempts to alter or disguise or alters or disguises the appearance of the motor vehicle; or

(c) Attempts to alter or remove or alters or removes the vehicle identification number; or

(d) Uses the motor vehicle in the commission of a crime other than a traffic offense; or

(e) Causes five hundred dollars or more property damage, including but not limited to property damage to the motor vehicle involved, in the course of obtaining control over or in the exercise of control of the motor vehicle; or

(f) Causes bodily injury to another person while he or she is in the exercise of control of the motor vehicle; or

(g) Removes the motor vehicle from this state for a period of time in excess of twelve hours; or

(h) Unlawfully attaches or otherwise displays in or upon the motor vehicle license plates other than those officially issued for the motor vehicle.

(3) Aggravated motor vehicle theft in the first degree is a:

(a) Class 5 felony if the value of the motor vehicle or motor vehicles involved is less than twenty thousand dollars;

(a.5) Class 4 felony if the value of the motor vehicle or motor vehicles involved is twenty thousand dollars or more but less than one hundred thousand dollars;

(b) Class 3 felony if the value of the motor vehicle or motor vehicles involved is more than one hundred thousand dollars or if the defendant has twice previously been convicted or adjudicated of charges separately brought and tried either in this state or elsewhere of an offense involving theft of a motor vehicle under the laws of this state, any other state, the United States, or any territory subject to the jurisdiction of the United States.

(4) A person commits aggravated motor vehicle theft in the second degree if he or she knowingly obtains or exercises control over the motor vehicle of another without authorization or by threat or deception and if none of the aggravating factors in subsection (2) of this section are present. Aggravated motor vehicle theft in the second degree is a:

(a) Class 5 felony if the value of the motor vehicle or motor vehicles involved is twenty thousand dollars or more;

(b) Class 6 felony if the value of the motor vehicle or motor vehicles involved is one thousand dollars or more but less than twenty thousand dollars;

(c) Class 1 misdemeanor if the value of the motor vehicle or motor vehicles involved is less than one thousand dollars.

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(4.5) Whenever a person is convicted of, pleads guilty or nolo contendere to, receives a deferred judgment or sentence for, or is adjudicated a juvenile delinquent for, a violation of this section, the offender's driver's license shall be revoked as provided in section 42-2-125, C.R.S.

(5) Consistent with section 18-1-202, if the theft of a motor vehicle occurs in one jurisdiction and the motor vehicle is recovered in another jurisdiction, the offender may be tried in the jurisdiction where the theft occurred, in any jurisdiction through which the motor vehicle was operated or transported, or in the jurisdiction in which the motor vehicle was recovered.

<sup>xiv</sup> [Aggravated Motor Vehicle \(Auto\) Theft in Colorado - CRS 18-4-409 \(shouselaw.com\)](https://shouselaw.com/crs-18-4-409-aggravated-motor-vehicle-theft-in-colorado/)

<sup>xv</sup> *ibid.*