

FACT SHEET

MOTOR VEHICLE THEFT in the DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC SAFETY & JUSTICE
UNIVERSITY OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Translating Research into Policy, Translating Policy into Practice

By

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Introduction

Motor vehicle theft is endemic in the District of Columbia. Between 1960 and 2003 the number of motor vehicle thefts increased fourfold from 2,003 to 9,147. This increase occurred despite the fact that in this same time-period, the city lost 210,433 residents, almost one-third of its population. Since 1977 motor vehicle thefts have also increased as a percentage of all serious crimes.

48,481 motor vehicle thefts were reported to the Washington, D.C. Metropolitan Police Department between January 1, 1998 and July 26, 2004. These thefts occurred at 8,563 different locations throughout the city.

The District of Columbia witnessed an increase in motor vehicle thefts while

nationwide these same offenses were decreasing. The overarching question is to what factors this dual anomaly can be attributed?. This **FACT SHEET** is derived from a longer Institute report, and is the first in a series of research reports examining motor vehicle theft in the District of Columbia.

Motor Vehicle theft is a complex property crime. At one end of the spectrum motor vehicle theft can be considered a gateway crime. It is among the first crimes engaged in by those who, if undeterred may escalate to the commission of other more dangerous crimes. At the other extreme, motor vehicle theft has replaced drug smuggling as a major endeavor of organized crime.¹ Intertwined is the impact of motor

¹ National Insurance Crime Bureau (NICB). *Vehicle Theft*. <http://www.nicb.org/public/publications/NICBthefteng.pdf> (May 26, 2006).

vehicle theft on communities. Motor vehicle theft is also a costly crime for the victims. The largest percentage of time missed from work by crime victims, is due to motor vehicle theft.² Twenty-two percent of motor vehicle theft victims must miss time from work. The next closest is robbery, which results in work absences of 12%.

When Motor Vehicle Thefts Occur

Month of the Year: More motor vehicle thefts occurred in November 2002 than during any other month in this 79-month period with 908 motor vehicle thefts reported to police. September 2000 had the lowest number of motor vehicle thefts during this same time period with 429 incidents reported. With the exception of 1999 and 2001 when October had the highest number of motor vehicle thefts, there was no discernable pattern in the month when motor vehicle thefts occurred over this seven-year period.

Day of the Week: More motor vehicle thefts occurred on Saturday, than on any other day of the week, with the exception of 1998. The day of the week most likely to have the second highest number of motor vehicle thefts was Sunday.

Time of Day: The sequential nature of the two highest days suggests a single overnight pattern coupling the late night period of one day with the early morning period of another day. On a daily basis, approximately 44% of all motor vehicle thefts were reported to MPD between 7:00 pm and 11:00 pm. This period represents the peak of a slope beginning during the 2:00 pm hour and increased steadily, followed by a precipitous drop-off between midnight and 4:00 am. Two minor peaks follow this decline, first at 8:00 am and again at noon.

² Schmallegger, Frank. (2006). *Criminology Today*. 4th ed. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson Education, Inc.

Table 1
**Motor Vehicle Theft in
the District of Columbia**

Year	Number
1998	6,691
1999	6,400
2000	6,124
2001	7,077
2002	8,142
2003	9,147
2004*	4,900

* Seven months only

Figure 1
Motor Vehicle Theft in the District of Columbia: Jan. 1998 – Dec. 2003

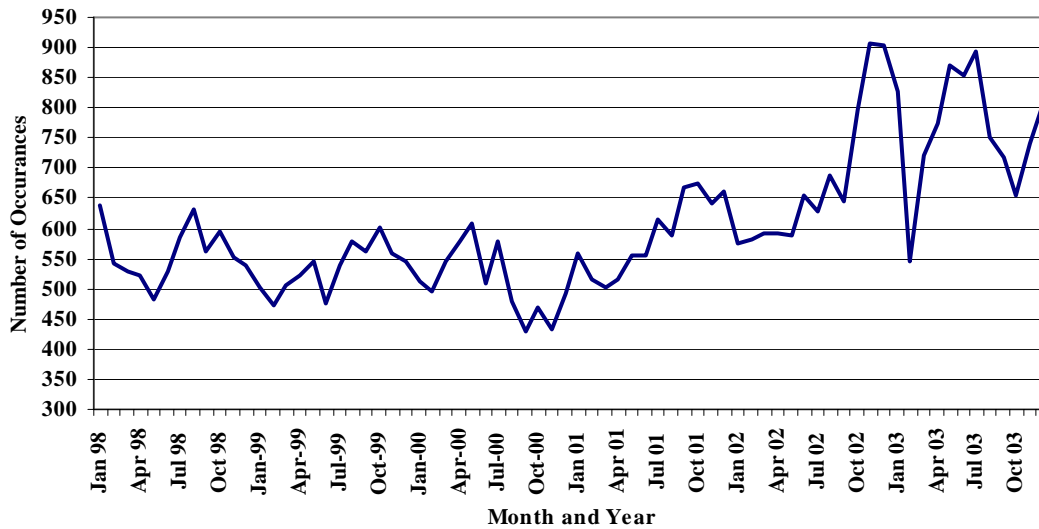


Table 2: Annual Distribution of Motor Vehicle Theft by Day of the Week
1998 – 2003

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Monday	889	938	835	1062	1132	1213
Tuesday	901	907	797	1010	1126	1096
Wednesday	885	805	788	971	1133	1237
Thursday	933	874	855	900	1098	1172
Friday	1084	820	973	958	1070	1419
Saturday	1015	1031	976	1164	1332	1531
Sunday	984	1025	900	1012	1251	1479

Figure 2
Motor Vehicle Theft by Time of Day

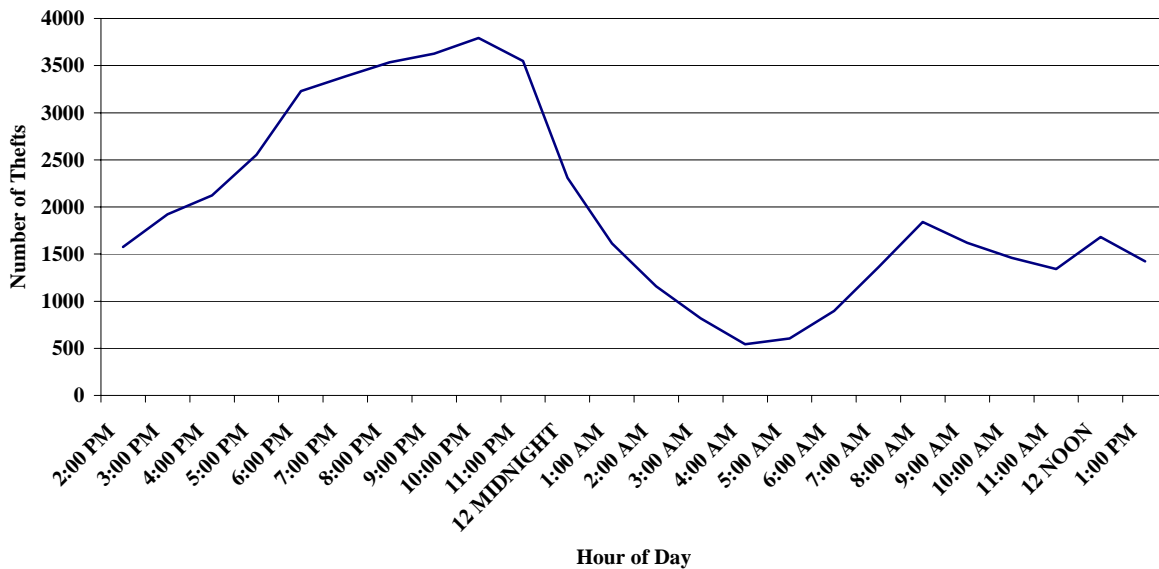
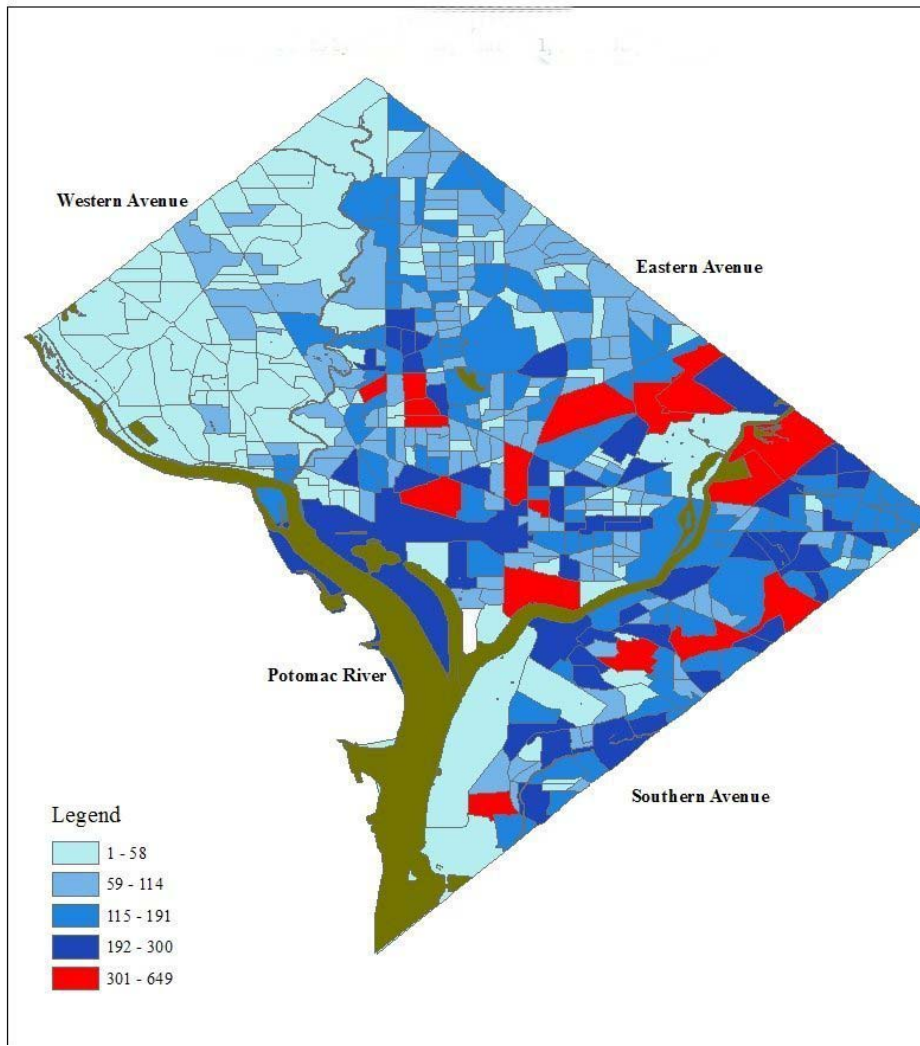


Figure 3
Auto Thefts by Block Group January 1, 1998 – July 26, 2004



Where Motor Vehicle Thefts Occur in the District of Columbia

The number of motor vehicle thefts varied throughout the city. Out of a total of 433 block groups in the District of Columbia, four block groups reported motor vehicle thefts, but did not have any residents; while one block group had residents, but no reported motor vehicle thefts .

During the 79 months covered by this study, the remaining 432 block groups reported between one and 649 motor vehicle thefts. The median number of auto thefts per block group was 87. One-half of all block groups reported between 52 and 149 motor vehicle thefts.

Fifty-percent of the block groups with motor vehicle thefts, but no residential populations fell into the upper 25% of between 150 and 649 reported motor vehicle thefts per block group.

The overwhelming majority of the block groups with motor vehicle thefts in the bottom 25% range (between 1 and 52 motor vehicle thefts) were located west of Rock Creek Park.

The Census Bureau divides the city into 433 block groups for census purposes. These block groups roughly approximate city neighborhoods.

Table 3
Top 25 Locations for Motor Vehicle Theft
January 1, 1998 – July 26, 2004

Rank	Location (By Block)	Number of Thefts
1	2300 GOOD HOPE RD SE	287
2	4200 EAST CAPITOL ST	160
3	4600 MARTIN LUTHER KING JR AVE SW	119
4	2600 BOWEN RD SE	108
5	UNIT MASSACHUSETTS AVE NE	105
6	2800 ALABAMA AVE SE	104
7	3700 HAYES STREET NE	98
8	1300 SOUTHERN AVE SE	89
9	2500 NAYLOR RD SE	85
10	1600 MARYLAND AVE NE	84
11	800 SOUTHERN AVE SE	78
12	100 MICHIGAN AVE NE	76
13	2600 NAYLOR RD SE	73
14	19TH ST SE & MASSACHUSETTS AV	68
15	600 EDGEWOOD ST NE	65
16	1900 BLADENSBURG RD NE	62
17	4100 MINNESOTA AVE NE	60
18	1400 COLUMBIA RD NW	57
	3400 BENNING RD NE	57
19	2600 DOUGLASS RD SE	56
	900 EASTERN AVE NE	56
20	2600 M L KING JR AVE SE	52
	1700 BLADENSBURG RD NE	52
	3700 JAY ST NE	52
21	300 ANACOSTIA RD SE	51

Summary Highlights

Preliminary findings suggest that neighborhoods with high numbers of motor vehicle thefts share the following characteristics:

- Population percentage was skewed towards juveniles
- Significant numbers of the population over age 25 lacked a high school diploma or GED
- Lower workforce participation among males and higher unemployment among both males and females for those in the workforce age group
- Housing units more likely to be large multi-unit buildings
- Higher vacancy rates for housing units
- Primarily a renter population rather than home owner population
- Households were primarily non-family households
- Among family households, the predominant family type was single-parent (female) with children
- Large percentage of households were below the poverty level

The complete report is available at the Institute's website at:
www.ipsj.org

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