

Vehicle Theft Arrests in Washington

Vehicle theft poses a risk to the safety of Washington residents. This report focuses on rape arrests from the Washington State Patrol (WSP) and aims to explore the demographics of those being arrested for vehicle theft.

Data Parameters

The WSP maintains a database of Washington criminal history information, or background checks, consisting of fingerprint-based records and disposition information from law enforcement agencies and courts throughout the state. Data is retrieved from the [Washington State Identification System \(WASIS\) for criminal history information](#) and the [Washington Crime Information Center \(WACIC\) for non-fingerprint hot file information](#). In conjunction with the [WSP's Automated Biometric Identification System \(ABIS\)](#), this database connects all arrests based on fingerprints, not merely by name. The following parameters were used for this brief:

- Vehicle theft is defined by [RCW 9A.56.065](#), and in terms of the present data, involves having an arresting offense record related to the theft of a vehicle. The most common vehicle theft-related arrests in the present data include possession of a stolen vehicle ([RCW 9A.56.068](#)), and taking motor vehicle without permission in the first degree ([RCW 9A.56.070](#)).
- Only individuals who were 18 years or older at the time of arrest were included.
- Due to conflicting records associated to one arrest, any arrests with multiple demographics (i.e., race, sex, birth dates) were excluded to avoid any potential incorrect assumptions and to maintain data integrity. As such, data might be underreported.
- The data is provided as arrest based, not individual based, therefore, an individual would be represented as many times as they were arrested from 1995 to 2024.

Limitations

This brief identifies a few major limitations that could impact any work that utilizes this data. These limitations include but are not limited to:

- Analyses are descriptive and non-generalizable. Any inferences and implications are limited, and results are modest. Further analyses must be completed for causal relationships to be determined.
- Administrative data and the lack of detail or richness significantly limits any conclusions yielded from this work.
- In terms of demographic assessment, these results must be interpreted cautiously. Race data can be misclassified, which impacts any analysis of race across criminal justice decision points. Less than 0.1% of arrests were excluded in the demographic analysis due to race data being unknown likewise less than 0.1% of the sex data was excluded. Race data provided by WSP are defined by NCIC and are required to be utilized by all agencies reporting CHRI to the FBI.
- Any longitudinal analyses must be carefully evaluated due to potential policy changes in vehicle theft laws that could impact trends and interpretations.
- Due to the impacts of COVID-19, trends might be skewed and underreported.
- There are many factors that contribute to the reluctance of a victim reporting, and the data might not accurately represent the true picture of vehicle theft-related arrests.

Demographics

Between January 1, 1995, to December 31, 2024, there were 34,685 vehicle theft-related arrests. The average age of an arrestee was 30 years old ($M = 30.4$, $SD = 9.2$). Vehicle theft-related arrests were more likely to be associated with males as compared to females (Table 1). Vehicle theft-related arrests were more likely to be associated with white arrestees than the rest of race categories. In terms of age category, those about same age as the average age or younger were more likely to be associated to a vehicle theft-related arrest.

Washington's population is almost evenly distributed in terms of sex, and the majority of the population were white (81.0%), while the BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and/or People of Color community) presented slightly less than one-fifth of the Washington population.

Table 1. Vehicle Theft-related arrests demographics

	N	%
Sex		
Female	8,548	24.4
Male	26,226	75.6
Race		
American Indian or Alaskan Native	619	1.8
Asian or Pacific Islander	927	2.7
Black	3,389	9.8
White	29,577	85.7
Age Category		
18 to 25	11,828	34.1
26 to 35	13,199	38.1
36 to 45	6,883	19.8
> = 46	2,775	8.0

Notes: Percentages are based on column totals. Due to rounding, totals may not equal 100%. Due to unknown values demographic totals may not be equal.

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Outcomes

Most felony vehicle theft-related arrests were classified as a Class B felony (58.7%) (Figure 1). Class A felony is the most severe classification and was not noted as a classification for the vehicle theft-related arrests included in this report. It is important to note that not all arrests were classified, leading to an unspecified felony arrest (7.1%); there are many reasons for nonclassification, including the potential of a fast-paced environment during the arrests. Among all vehicle theft-related arrests, 97.1% were classified as felony offenses and 2.9% were gross misdemeanors, leaving less than 0.1% being classified as a misdemeanor. Due to low counts, only vehicle theft-related felonies, classified and nonclassified, and gross misdemeanors will be evaluated.

Across all demographic breakdowns, gross misdemeanor was the least prevalent (Table 2). Class B felony, which is less severe than Class A but more severe than Class C accounted for the majority of classifications of vehicle theft-related arrests across all demographic breakdowns. Note that these classifications reflect the charge at time of arrest, which may be modified by the court prior to disposition.

On average, there were about 1,156 robbery-related arrests annually from 1995 to 2024. The years 2011–20, and 2022 were all above average. Additionally, Figure 2 shows the number of arrests with a firearm enhancement from 2010 to 2024. From a low point in 2010, there was a 92.0% increase to the peak in 2018, which was followed by a 53.0% decrease the other low point in 2021, which likely reflects reductions in arrests during the COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, there was a slight general decrease in vehicle theft-related arrests over time.

Figure 1. Distribution of ranked felony classifications for vehicle theft-related arrests

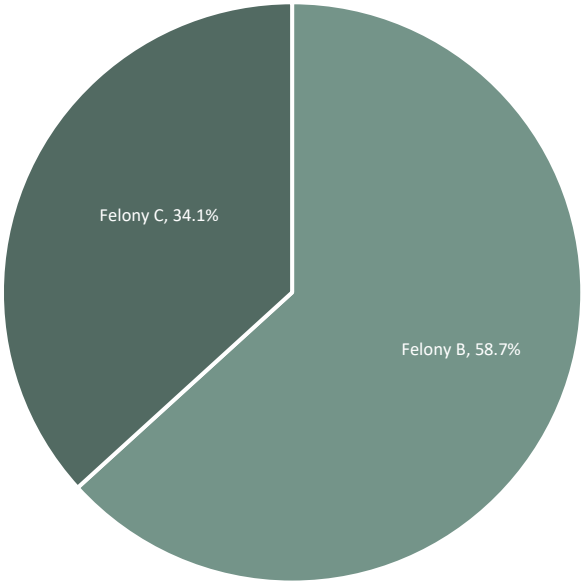
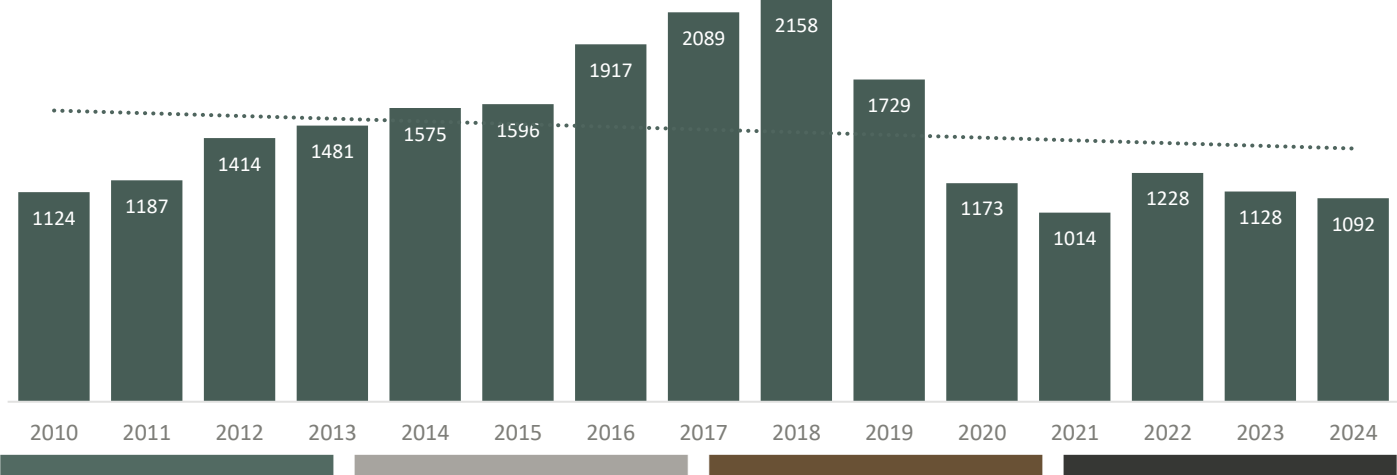


Table 2. Distribution of offense classification by demographics for vehicle theft-related arrests

	Classification N (%)			
	Felony	Felony B	Felony C	Gross Misdemeanor
Sex				
Female	586 (6.9)	5,067 (60.0)	2,641 (31.3)	152 (1.8)
Male	1,808 (6.9)	14,674 (56.1)	8,832 (33.7)	861 (3.3)
Race				
American Indian or Alaskan Native	29 (4.7)	385 (62.3)	191 (30.9)	13 (2.1)
Asian or Pacific Islander	84 (9.1)	477 (51.7)	334 (36.2)	28 (3.0)
Black	324 (9.6)	1,634 (48.4)	1,360 (40.3)	60 (1.8)
White	1,952 (6.6)	17,138 (58.0)	9,529 (32.2)	911 (3.1)
Age Category				
18 to 25	941 (8.0)	5,287 (44.8)	5,230 (44.3)	351 (3.0)
26 to 35	740 (5.6)	8,278 (62.9)	3,740 (28.4)	409 (3.1)
36 to 45	497 (7.2)	4,313 (62.9)	1,863 (27.1)	199 (2.9)
> = 46	216 (7.8)	1,864 (67.2)	640 (23.1)	54 (1.9)

Notes: Percentages are based on row totals. Due to rounding and exclusion of low N's totals may not equal 100%.

Figure 2. Frequency of vehicle theft-related arrests by year



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