

MOTOR VEHICLE THEFT

DEFINITION

Defined as the theft or attempted theft of a motor vehicle, this offense category includes the stealing of automobiles, trucks, buses, motorcycles, motorscooters, snowmobiles, etc. The definition excludes the taking of a motor vehicle for temporary use by those persons having lawful access.

TREND		
<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of offenses</i>	<i>Rate per 100,000 inhabitants</i>
1997	1,354,189	506.0
1998	1,240,754	459.0
Percent change	-8.4	-9.3

During 1998, over 1.2 million motor vehicles were stolen nationally, representing the lowest total for motor vehicle offenses since 1986. By region, the distribution of motor vehicle thefts in 1998 showed the most populous region, the Southern States, with 36 percent of the volume, the Western States with 28 percent, the Midwestern States with 20 percent, and the Northeastern States with 16 percent. (See Table 3.)

Monthly volume figures of motor vehicle thefts during the year indicated that January was the month in which vehicles were most frequently stolen, and February and November were the months with the fewest thefts. (See Table 2.29.)

Table 2.29

Motor Vehicle Theft by Month					
Percent distribution, 1994-1998					
Months	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
January	8.1	8.6	8.8	9.0	9.1
February	7.4	7.5	8.0	7.6	7.9
March	8.5	8.2	8.2	8.2	8.5
April	7.9	7.8	7.9	7.9	8.0
May	8.2	8.2	8.1	8.2	8.3
June	8.3	8.1	8.0	8.1	8.1
July	8.9	8.6	8.8	8.7	8.7
August	9.0	9.0	8.6	8.7	8.8
September	8.4	8.4	8.2	8.3	8.3
October	8.7	8.9	8.6	8.6	8.4
November	8.3	8.5	8.3	8.2	7.9
December	8.3	8.3	8.6	8.3	8.1

Decreases in motor vehicle thefts of 8 percent in the Nation and 10 percent in cities collectively are noted when comparing 1998 figures to those of 1997. Among city population groupings, the decreases ranged from 13 percent in cities 500,000 to 999,999 in population to 4 percent in cities with populations under 10,000. Decreases of 8 percent in suburban counties and 2 percent in rural counties were recorded during the same 2-year period.

Declines in the numbers of motor vehicle thefts from 1997 to 1998 were reported for all four regions. The greatest decline, an 11-percent drop, was reported in the Northeastern States. The Western States reported a 10-percent decrease; the Midwestern States, an 8-percent decrease; and the Southern States, a 6-percent decrease. (See Table 4.)

The accompanying chart shows that the volume of motor vehicle thefts in 1998 declined 19 percent from the 1994 volume. (See Figure 2.17.)

Rate

A national rate of 459 motor vehicle thefts per 100,000 inhabitants was recorded for the year. This rate was

9 percent lower than in 1997, 22 percent below the 1994 rate, and 27 percent lower than the 1989 rate.

A rate of 533 motor vehicle thefts was reported in 1998 for every 100,000 inhabitants living in metropolitan areas. Rates of 223 per 100,000 population in cities outside metropolitan areas and 129 per 100,000 inhabitants in rural counties were reported for motor vehicle thefts for the same timeframe. The Nation's most heavily populated municipalities, cities with populations over 250,000, experienced the highest rate of motor vehicle theft during the year—1,000 for every 100,000 inhabitants. Cities with fewer than 10,000 inhabitants recorded a rate of 243 per 100,000.

The highest motor vehicle theft rate by region was recorded in the Western States at 581 per 100,000 people. The Southern States reported a rate of 470; the Midwestern States, a rate of 396; and the Northeastern States, a rate of 373 per 100,000 inhabitants. Declines in all regions are indicated when 1997 rates are compared to those of 1998. The greatest drop, 11 percent, was reported in both the Northeast and the West. The Midwest reported a decrease of 9 percent, and the South, a decrease of 7 percent. (See Table 4.)

Nature

Nationally, the value of motor vehicles stolen during 1998 was estimated at nearly \$7.5 billion. The average value per vehicle was \$6,030 at the time of theft. The recovery percentage for the value of vehicles stolen was higher than for any other property type. Relating the value of vehicles stolen to the value of those recovered resulted in a 65-percent recovery rate for 1998. (See Tables 23 and 24.)

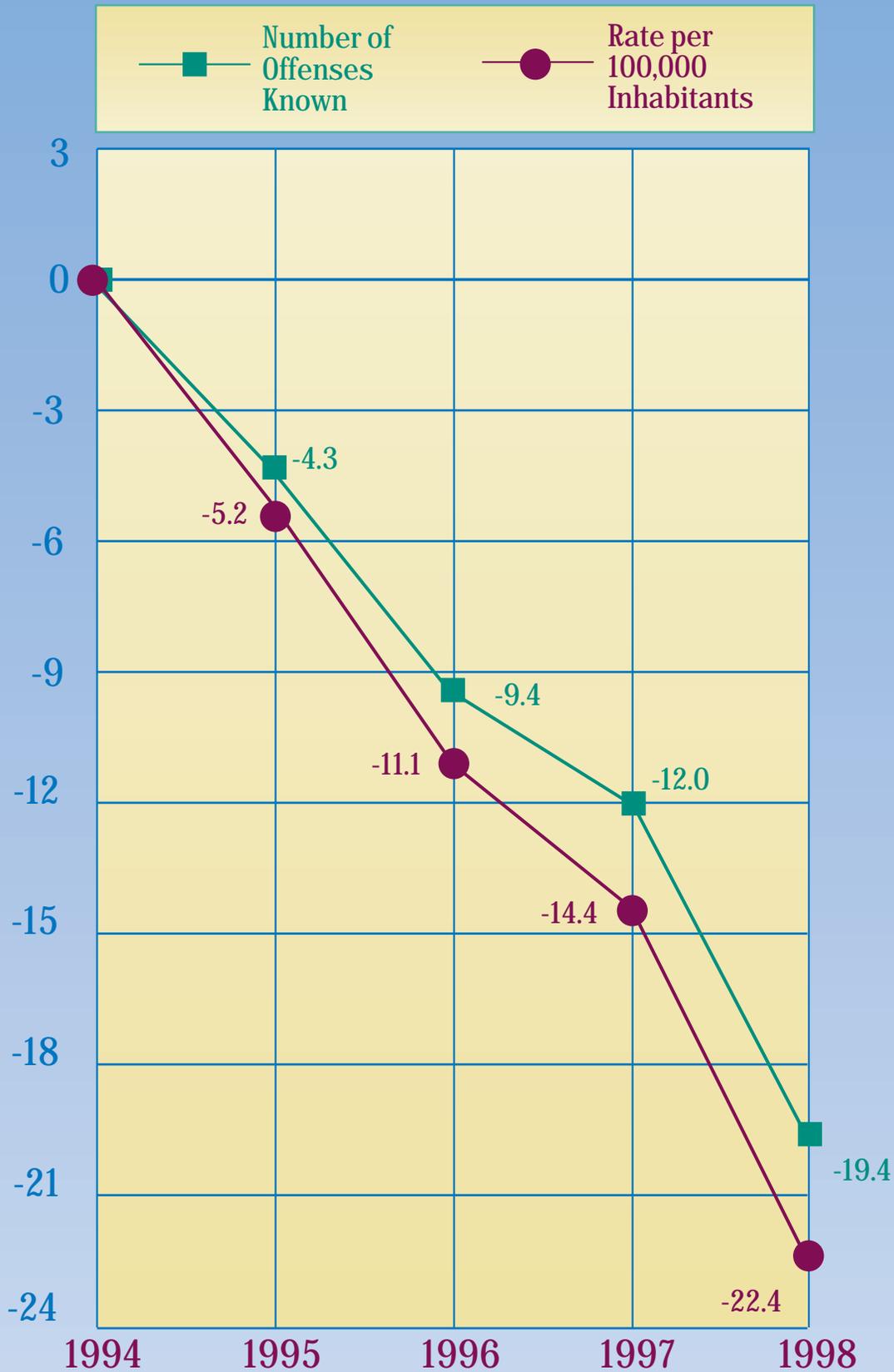
Considering the types of vehicles stolen during the year, automobiles accounted for the highest percentage, 76 percent. Trucks or buses accounted for 19 percent, and the remainder were accounted for by other types of vehicles.

Table 2.30

Motor Vehicle Theft				
Percent distribution by region, 1998				
Region	Total ¹	Autos	Trucks and buses	Other vehicles
Total	100.0	75.6	18.6	5.9
Northeastern States	100.0	89.7	6.1	4.1
Midwestern States	100.0	80.4	13.9	5.7
Southern States	100.0	71.9	20.9	7.2
Western States	100.0	70.1	24.6	5.3

¹ Because of rounding, percentages may not add to total.

Figure 2.17 Motor Vehicle Theft
Percent change from 1994



Law Enforcement Response

In 1998, law enforcement agencies across the Nation reported a 14-percent motor vehicle theft clearance rate. Motor vehicle theft clearance rates in the Nation's cities ranged from a 28-percent clearance rate in cities with less than 10,000 inhabitants to 9 in cities with populations of 1 million and over. Law enforcement agencies in suburban counties reported a 16-percent clearance rate, and those in rural counties reported a 29-percent clearance rate. (See Table 25.)

By geographic region, motor vehicle theft clearance rates were 18 percent for the Southern States, 15 percent for the Midwestern States, 12 percent each for the Northeastern States and the Western States.

Persons in the under-18 age group were involved in 18 percent of the motor vehicle thefts cleared nationally. This age group also comprised 18 percent of the motor vehicle thefts cleared in cities, and 18 percent of those cleared in both rural and suburban counties.

Of the estimated 150,700 arrests for motor vehicle theft in 1998, males accounted for 84 percent of those arrested. By race, 58 percent of the arrestees were white, 39 percent were black, and the remainder were of other races.

Of all persons arrested for motor vehicle theft, the largest portion was comprised of persons under the age of 25 — 67 percent. Though arrestees under the age of 18 accounted for 36 percent of the total in 1998, arrests of persons under age 18 were down 15 percent from the 1997 total. Arrests of both juvenile males and females decreased, 16 percent and 8 percent, respectively.

Sixty-four percent of all motor vehicle theft arrestees were adults. However, the number of adults arrested in 1998 declined 4 percent from the 1997 figure.

Total motor vehicle theft arrests in 1998 were down 8 percent from the previous year's total. Long-term trends indicate the 1998 arrest total was 27 percent below the 1994 level and 31 percent lower than the 1989 figure.