

Critical Issues in Policing Series

The Carjacking Crisis

Identifying Causes and
Response Strategies

2024



POLICE EXECUTIVE
RESEARCH FORUM

CRITICAL ISSUES IN POLICING SERIES

The Carjacking Crisis: Identifying Causes and Response Strategies



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A Message from PERF's Executive Director

Less than one year into the COVID-19

pandemic, the rise in carjacking numbers across the country was significant enough that the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) devoted its February 8, 2021, *Daily Critical Issues Report* to the topic.¹ Police leaders from Minneapolis, Chicago, Washington, D.C., and New Orleans spoke about the carjacking trends in their cities. Three years later, much of what those leaders said still rings true:

Many of those arrested for carjacking have been juveniles — some as young as 12 years old — and few have been placed in any form of direct supervision, allowing some individuals to commit multiple crimes before cases are concluded. These crimes often are committed by groups who are not targeting specific cars or individuals; rather, carjackings are overwhelming crimes of opportunity. Most carjackings involve a firearm, and some offenders assault their victims even when those victims comply with demands.

Violent crime increased across the country in the first two years of the pandemic and has generally decreased in subsequent years. Specifically,

homicides and aggravated assaults declined in both 2022 and 2023, with indications that those trends are continuing into 2024. Carjackings, however, appear to have steadily increased through 2023, with some cities hitting record highs in 2023. According to the FBI, carjackings rose 8.1 percent in 2022 compared with 2021, and nearly 90 percent involved a weapon.² More than a quarter of all carjackings in 2022 resulted in a victim being injured.³ The FBI recently reported that carjacking rates nationwide fell to 6.6 per 100,000 in 2023, down from 7.5 in 2022.⁴ Mid-year reports in 2024 for some of the hardest-hit jurisdictions indicate significant carjacking declines have continued.^{5, 6}

To bring attention to this issue and identify potential strategies to stem the crisis, PERF hosted a National Summit on Carjacking in early 2024, in Washington, D.C., with over 130 representatives from more than 50 agencies, including the U.S. Department of Justice and the White House. Many participants were from the Washington, D.C., metro area, which has seen a sharp increase in carjackings

1. Police Executive Research Forum. (February 8, 2021). Police Challenged by Dramatic Increases in Carjackings by Juveniles. <https://www.policeforum.org/criticalissues8feb21>.

2. Nicole Sganga. (October 17, 2023). Violent crime down, carjackings up, according to FBI crime statistics. CBS News. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/violent-crime-car-jackings-fbi-2022-crime-statistics/>.

3. Jim Salter. (October 16, 2023). FBI report: Violent crime decreases to pre-pandemic levels, but property crime is on the rise. The Associated Press. <https://apnews.com/article/fbi-crime-report-violence-property-carjacking-murder-fa7c6e3879d3bf16f93bd42683b100>.

4. FBI. (August 12, 2024). FBI Releases Motor Vehicle Theft, 2019—2023. <https://www.fbi.gov/news/press-releases/fbi-releases-motor-vehicle-theft-2019-2023>.

5. Shayna Estulin. (July 8, 2024). After yearslong surge, carjackings fall 46% in DC. WTOP. <https://wtop.com/dc/2024/07/carjackings-fall-46-percent-in-dc/>.

6. Allen Henry. (May 3, 2024). Minneapolis police chief says carjacking crackdown is working as auto theft numbers drop. WCCO News. <https://www.cbsnews.com/minnesota/news/minneapolis-carjacking-numbers-decrease/>.

since 2020, but the issue is not D.C.'s alone; representatives from a dozen states across the country attended as well.

Before the summit, PERF surveyed its members on how carjackings have impacted their communities. PERF also sought information from those participating in the summit about their local carjacking data, including trends in time, location, and type of car; the role social media appears to play in carjackings; and the challenges and successes they've experienced.

At the summit, police leaders, federal officials, local and federal prosecutors, researchers, executives, and business and community leaders considered the data, the extent of the problem, common case factors, victim experiences, promising prevention strategies, and ways individuals can reduce their risk of becoming the victim of a carjacking.

And while there were numerous takeaways, two stood out:

- The inclusion and increase in juveniles taking part in carjackings makes addressing the crime and finding potential solutions more complicated.
- The potential reasons for the increase in carjackings are complex, and solutions will need more than a criminal justice response.

This report's framework is drawn from the comments and observations of those who participated in PERF's summit, survey, and follow-up interviews.

This report concludes with 10 recommendations jurisdictions can use to help address this complicated crime.

Thanks to all the summit attendees who traveled to Washington, D.C., to share their knowledge and experience and to all the PERF members who completed our survey. Our work would not be possible without the continued engagement of our membership.

And thanks to Motorola Solutions and its philanthropic arm, the Motorola Solutions Foundation, which supported this project and many



others over the past three decades. This is the 50th report in the *Critical Issues in Policing* series, and the ongoing support of the Motorola Solutions Foundation enables PERF to tackle the critical issues facing the profession. In particular, PERF would like to thank Greg Brown, Motorola Solutions Chairman and CEO; Jack Molloy, Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer; Jason Winkler, Executive Vice President and Chief Financial Officer; and John Zidar, Senior Vice President, North America Government.

Finally, thanks to the many PERF staff members who contributed to this report. Director Tom Wilson and Senior Principal Dave McClure oversaw meeting preparations and background research. Senior Research Assistant Caleb Regen conducted background research and interviews. Consultant Diana D'Abruzzo completed the initial draft of this report, and it was edited by Director Chris Fisher, Deputy Director Jen Sommers, Senior Communications Principal James McGinty, and Communications Associate Dustin Waters. Consultant Dave Williams designed and laid out the report.

Chuck Wexler
Executive Director
Police Executive Research Forum
Washington, D.C.

Executive Summary

Jurisdictions across the United States have struggled with a dramatic rise in carjackings since 2020, leaving police leaders with questions about why this spike is occurring, why juveniles are committing this crime in unprecedented numbers, and why carjacking numbers remained elevated when the number of homicides and aggravated assaults started to decline.

With those questions in mind, the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) assembled a group of over 130 people from more than 50 different agencies for a National Summit on Carjacking in early 2024 in Washington, D.C. Throughout the day, police leaders, federal officials, local and federal prosecutors, researchers, executives, and business and community leaders discussed the situation in

their communities and the challenges they have faced effectively addressing these incidents, particularly when juveniles are involved. Jurisdictions that have successfully brought their numbers down shared lessons learned and promising strategies for preventing carjackings.

This report is drawn from the comments and observations of those who attended PERF's summit and follow-up interviews. It looks at the carjacking problem in cities and counties across the country, offers insights into the factors causing the increase, and shares some of the innovative approaches jurisdictions are implementing — including the use of technology, data analysis, and cross-agency partnerships. The report includes 10 recommendations to help police and other stakeholders effectively respond to carjackings in their communities.

The Problem

In late summer 2020, Washington, D.C., which had experienced about a dozen carjackings each month in 2018 and 2019, suddenly saw its carjacking numbers spike: From July through December, there were an average of 44 a month.⁷ Chicago noticed the same trend. The city averaged about 65 carjackings each month during the



7. D.C. Metropolitan Police Department. MPD Carjacking Dashboard. <https://mpdc.dc.gov/page/carjacking>.

first four months of 2020,⁸ but from July to December, the average swelled to 156.⁹ And both D.C. and Chicago noticed something else: There was a startlingly high number of juveniles taking part in these crimes, and many were armed with handguns. Across the country, police from Los Angeles to Milwaukee, Kansas City to Atlanta, and other large cities were observing similar trends.

By the end of 2020, it was clear that many parts of the country were experiencing a sustained increase in carjackings, especially some of the biggest cities. Some police chiefs were confident the numbers would return to normal once young people were back in school, but instead, carjackings continued to rise. By the end of 2023, carjackings were up 93 percent since 2019 across 10 U.S. cities that tracked carjacking data.¹⁰

A number of circumstances likely contributed to the rise. A global pandemic shut down schools and businesses for months, left some kids home alone, brought normalcy to mask-wearing, resulted in mass layoffs, and increased the number of delivery drivers on the road. But 2020 also brought forth social unrest following the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis; this led to criminal justice reforms in many states — including juvenile justice reform — and understaffed police departments. Technological advances — except for pre-recall Kia and Hyundai vehicles — have made it harder to steal cars by traditional means, which may have led some offenders to carjack instead.

Carjacking Definitions and Data

It's important to distinguish between cars that are stolen (motor vehicle theft) and those that are stolen by the use — or threat of — force (carjacking).

One of the challenges to analyzing carjackings is in the collection of data. In both the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) and National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS), carjacking is coded as a robbery with the taking of a motor

vehicle. While many other crime types have their own category, carjackings must be accurately coded in the correct category (robbery) and subcategory (with the taking of a motor vehicle). This makes it challenging to establish reliable national trends. Law enforcement agencies should ensure they are correctly tracking carjackings in their area to identify local trends, hotspots, and methods used by offenders, which can help agencies create targeted prevention strategies.

RECOMMENDATION: Keep data on local carjackings. Law enforcement agencies should keep data on carjackings in their area, including detailed information about the circumstances of each incident. They should also train their staff on what qualifies as a carjacking and how to analyze the data to seek out any apparent trends.

The Washington, D.C., Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) has a team of analysts and IT personnel who keep a public-facing crime dashboard current with the latest information about carjackings, including how many are reported each month going back to January 2018, how many involve guns, how many cases are closed, how many arrests involve juveniles, and where the carjackings are occurring. Providing the public with this kind of up-to-date information is a service that helps with transparency, trust, and keeping the community safe.

RECOMMENDATION: Rigorously collect, compile, and analyze data from carjackings. Law enforcement agencies should ask detailed questions when collecting information on carjackings so they can accurately track trends. This information should be shared with neighboring jurisdictions.

8. CBS Chicago. (April 8, 2022). Tracking Chicago's Carjackings. <https://www.cbsnews.com/chicago/news/carjacking/>.

9. Ibid.

10. Ernesto Lopez and Bobby Boxerman. (January 2024). Crime Trends in U.S. Cities: Year-End 2023 Update. Council on Criminal Justice. <https://counciloncj.org/year-end-2023-crime-trends/>.

RECOMMENDATION: Ensure public-facing crime dashboards include data on carjackings. Law enforcement agencies should be transparent by providing the community with information on carjackings to help residents stay aware of current trends and possibly take steps to protect themselves. The Washington, D.C., Metropolitan Police Department offers an example of a robust public-facing dashboard.¹¹

Common Elements of Carjackings

Most law enforcement officials describe recent carjackings as “crimes of opportunity,” with offenders victimizing random people in random cars under circumstances that offenders believe will allow them to get away with the crime. Some consistent elements of carjackings have been identified concurrently with recent increases. Many of those arrested for carjackings are juveniles (or a mix of adults and juveniles) acting in groups, and their offenses usually involve firearms. Most occur at night, and a large percentage occur when the victim is sitting behind the wheel of a parked car. Others occur as people get into or out of their cars — at gas stations, where a person is approached while pumping gas, in an apartment complex parking lot, or at a shopping center while the victim is loading their car. Ride-share and delivery drivers have also been carjacked at higher rates than before the pandemic.

Motivations

In discussions with investigators, prosecutors, community advocates, and researchers, different motivations were identified for engaging in carjacking. It was noted that for many younger offenders, carjackings were committed for the thrill of the act, to get attention and respect on social media, or as “something to do” when bored. Others — usually adults or juveniles hired by adults — carjack to sell vehicles for their parts. Some carjacked cars have been located in shipping containers in port cities, like San Diego, Vancouver, and Baltimore. Juveniles

and adults also may carjack to obtain a vehicle to use in the commission of another crime or while fleeing from an earlier crime. Understanding the different types of carjackings occurring in a jurisdiction is essential in identifying prevention and intervention strategies. The response to “joyride” carjackings will be different than the response to those connected to organized crime.

RECOMMENDATION: Align prevention and intervention strategies with the motivations for carjackings. “Joyride” carjackings are different than those connected to organized crime. Different types of carjackings require tailored approaches and solutions. For example, in Los Angeles, the Los Angeles (CA) Police Department (LAPD) reduced carjackings through a task force focused on smash-and-grab robberies involving cars obtained through carjackings.

Repeat Offenders

So much of the information about who is committing carjackings is anecdotal because the clearance rates are low; among the cities that shared data with PERE, arrest rates hovered at 50 percent or less. That also means that many carjackers are not first-time offenders. This is true even for those who are arrested, as some, particularly juveniles, are not incarcerated for a carjacking arrest. These factors contribute to the likelihood that a relatively small number of individuals are responsible for most of a city’s carjackings, as many police officials noted during the summit.

Law enforcement agencies are finding some success in targeting these repeat offenders. In New Orleans, Lieutenant Samuel Palumbo Jr. said that retooling their unit to be more focused on identifying and arresting repeat violent offenders has been successful, including the use of social media, physical surveillance, and other methods, to gain additional evidence of their crimes. Baltimore has also made progress by going after repeat offenders.

11. D.C. Metropolitan Police Department. MPD Carjacking Dashboard. <https://mpdc.dc.gov/page/carjacking>.

In late February 2024, six suspects were charged in connection with at least 80 violent crimes, including 36 carjackings, in Baltimore City and Baltimore County.¹²

RECOMMENDATION: Focus on the small number of individuals who are persistently committing carjackings. Most carjackings are committed by a small number of repeat offenders; by stopping that smaller number, significant reductions in overall numbers are possible.

Response and Prevention

The arrest, prosecution, conviction, and sanctioning for a carjacking offense, like any crime, involves a variety of system actors and factors. When juveniles and young adults are arrested, the justice system response is further complicated by concerns about suspect intent, overall legal culpability, and access to effective and non-stigmatizing sanctions. With all these factors at play, it is essential that stakeholders communicate, share information, and align on the ultimate goals of preventing carjackings and keeping the community safe. In both the meeting and interviews, it was clear that justice system actors agree on the goals in many jurisdictions but not the means to achieve them. Police leaders voiced frustration, reporting instances of officers arresting the same person for multiple carjackings mere days apart because charges were not filed after the first arrest, or the individual was released pending trial. Prosecutors explained that carjacking cases require specific elements to prove intent and responsibility, and the police often are unable to provide all the necessary evidence. Both police and prosecutors highlighted instances where strong cases were presented but judges issued lenient sanctions. While no judges were present at the meeting, in public statements they have pointed to legislation that guides their sentencing options.¹³ And legislators have

justified that legislation by citing public opinion regarding efforts to address mass incarceration, bias in the justice system, and juvenile justice reform.

Meeting participants stressed that to achieve success, justice system stakeholders, school leaders, and community members and organizations need to align on the strategies they will use to prevent carjackings.

Cross-Agency Partnerships and Information Sharing

Jurisdictions that have achieved reductions in carjackings attribute the decline, in part, to cross-agency partnerships.

In New Orleans, where carjackings were down 43.6 percent in 2023 compared to 2022, police have increased their collaborative efforts, using federal, state, and local law enforcement partnerships to execute joint operations. The department also holds in-depth violent crime meetings with federal and state partners once a week.

Chicago, which saw a 29.3 percent decrease in carjackings from 2021 to 2023, collaborates with other agencies through its citywide Vehicular Hijacking Task Force, which brings together the Chicago Police Department, the Cook County Sheriff's Office, the Illinois State Police, and the FBI. Members of the task force have also started holding regular monthly meetings with prosecutors from the city's juvenile court system.

Survey respondents identified the need for neighboring jurisdictions to share information to facilitate a response to the problem. With carjackings so high in the Washington, D.C., area — including bordering cities and counties in Virginia and Maryland — agencies have been collaborating and sharing information over the past few years, and the effort is growing. In February 2022, Washington, D.C.'s Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) and the Prince George's County

12. Alexa Dikos and Amy Simpson. (February 27, 2024). 4 adults, 2 juveniles charged for nearly 80 violent crimes, says Maryland Attorney General. Fox 45 Baltimore. <https://foxbaltimore.com/news/local/4-adults-2-juveniles-charged-for-nearly-80-violent-crimes-says-maryland-attorney-general>.

13. Ted Oberger. (October 31, 2024). Bowser slams DC judge for sending 15-year-old carjacking suspect home. NBC 4 Washington. <https://www.nbcwashington.com/investigations/bowser-slams-dc-judge-for-sending-15-year-old-carjacking-suspect-home/3457261/>.

Police Department in Maryland announced a cross-border carjacking initiative to focus on greater communication, expanded intelligence-sharing, and increased investigative support.¹⁴ And in April 2024, MPD launched its Real-Time Crime Center, which coordinates a real-time response to crime across the region.¹⁵ In this center, federal law enforcement, as well as police from neighboring jurisdictions in Virginia and Maryland, will have access to Washington, D.C.'s network of surveillance cameras.¹⁶

RECOMMENDATION: Look outside your agency and jurisdiction for collaborations.

Regularly meet with partners (prosecutors, service providers, neighboring law enforcement agencies, etc.) to discuss problems and coordinate solutions. Create information-sharing programs between jurisdictions, mapping data to identify patterns, motivations, and types of carjackings among different agencies.

Partnering with Schools

Chronic student absenteeism and truancy have been significant issues since the COVID-19 pandemic began in 2020. While students generally returned to their classrooms by 2021, not all kids are back in school; many officials attribute this, in part, to the rise in carjackings among juveniles.

In Prince George's County, Maryland, the public school system is working on ways to bring juveniles back, including making sure mental health supports and mentoring services are available. The school system and police department have also established a partnership where they share information on crime trends and juveniles who repeatedly encounter the criminal justice system.

RECOMMENDATION: Work with local school systems and community organizations to address juvenile crime and get kids back in school.

Communities need to examine why kids aren't attending school and respond to individual needs. While no one has established a causal relationship, the number of juvenile carjackings rose while children were out of school during the COVID-19 pandemic, and many of those kids have not re-engaged with their education.

Collaborating with Community Organizations

The national anti-violence organization Roca¹⁷ works with young adults ages 16 to 24 who have experienced urban violence and trauma to build relationships between them and police and other government agencies. Kurtis Palermo, Executive Vice President of Baltimore's Roca program, said it's unfair for individual agencies to ask how they'll solve the violent crime problem constantly. Police, community organizations, and government agencies need to be working together to solve it, he said. Roca, for instance, works closely with the Baltimore Police Department and a host of other agencies, including Maryland's Department of Juvenile Services.

In Wisconsin, Beloit Police Chief Andre Sayles said his department has teamed with local groups to develop relationships with at-risk youth and programs focused on providing mentorship, education, and alternatives to criminal activities, which has "helped address the root causes of carjackings."

Police may also find inroads to helping juveniles by having a more consistent presence in neighborhoods.

14. Mark Segreaves. (February 2, 2022). 'Playtime Is Over': DC, Prince George's Working Together to Reduce Carjackings. NBC 4 Washington. <https://www.nbcwashington.com/news/local/playtime-is-over-dc-prince-georges-working-together-to-reduce-carjackings/2959296/>.

15. Peter Hermann. (April 8, 2024). D.C. police 'Real-Time Crime Center,' launches with live video monitoring. The Washington Post. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2024/04/08/crime-center-dc-police-video/>.

16. Executive Office of the Mayor. (December 7, 2023). Mayor Bowser and MPD Announce New Real-Time Crime Center. <https://mayor.dc.gov/release/mayor-bowser-and-mpd-announce-new-real-time-crime-center-0r>.

17. Roca. <https://rocainc.org/who-we-work-with/locations/roca-baltimore-location/>.

And even businesses may offer valuable information to combat the carjacking problem. Heather Childs, Chief Trust and Security Officer with the ride-sharing platform Uber, said her company works with local, state, and federal law enforcement and uses its data to help jurisdictions make cases against carjackers who target their drivers.

RECOMMENDATION: Engage and Involve the Community. Coordinate with families, schools, and service organizations to provide supportive rehabilitation to juvenile offenders. Seek input from community groups, people who have engaged in carjackings, and researchers. Have a consistent police presence in high-crime neighborhoods, keeping officers on consistent beats.

Victims of Carjacking

As cities across the country have seen their carjacking numbers increase, these cases have changed the lives of many victims. They must deal with any injuries, the ongoing fear that accompanies a violent crime, the logistics of securing a new means of transportation, and navigating an often-complicated system of accessing victim assistance.

It's important for cities to give victims of carjacking a voice and ensure they get the assistance they need. There should be a pipeline for providing the victim with consistent updates about their case, and the victim should be immediately informed about the types of help available to them, including financial assistance.

RECOMMENDATION: Recognize the unique aspects of victimization inherent in carjacking cases and work to maximize victim services and support. It is critical that jurisdictions acknowledge and attend to the specific emotional, physical, and economic impacts of carjacking by promptly referring

victims to compensation programs and helping prevent revictimization. Prioritizing victim safety and support helps victims' well-being and may enable them to participate in the criminal justice process meaningfully.

Public Awareness

Because there are some commonalities to recent carjackings, law enforcement in cities with a carjacking problem should share that information with their residents to help keep their communities safe. Public awareness campaigns need to be sensitive so as not to appear to blame victims. Clearly, no one does anything to justify being attacked. At the same time, police and the justice system need to educate the public on common factors of recent carjackings to identify strategies to prevent further victimizations.

These campaigns should include a variety of sources — not just a presence on the department's website but billboards, commercials, flyers, and social media posts. And when possible, the literature should be presented in all languages commonly used in the region.

RECOMMENDATION: Start a public education campaign to educate the community on common risk factors. To be effective, agencies should share information through as many channels as possible, including commercials, social media, and billboards. And they should make sure to include information in other languages that are common in their jurisdictions. **These campaigns should educate communities on where, how, and when victims are being carjacked, and provide strategies for reducing one's risk.** Examples of public education campaigns can be seen on the Los Angeles¹⁸ and Chicago¹⁹ police department websites.

18. LAPD. Carjacking. <https://www.lapdonline.org/carjacking/>.

19. Chicago Police Department. Carjacking: What You Should Know. <https://home.chicagopolice.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Carjacking-Tips-English.pdf>.

Part 1: The Problem



“““

In the middle of the pandemic, this particular crime was skyrocketing. Why?

Chuck Wexler, Executive Director of PERF

In late summer 2020, Washington, D.C., which had experienced about a dozen carjackings each month in 2018 and 2019, suddenly saw its carjacking numbers spike to 44 per month from July to December.²⁰ Chicago noticed the same trend. The city averaged about 65 carjackings each month during the first four months of 2020 (already high compared with the 50-per-month average in 2019).²¹ In June of 2020, the number of carjackings in Chicago swelled to 114 and continued rising to 156 per month from July to December.²² And both D.C. and Chicago noticed something else: There was a startlingly high number of juveniles taking part in these crimes — some as young as 10 years old,²³ and many were armed with handguns.

Across the country, police in Minneapolis, New Orleans, Los Angeles, and other large cities observed similar trends. And while many cities do not keep data on carjackings, instead using codes for robberies or auto thefts, anecdotal reports suggested that cities like Milwaukee, Louisville, Nashville, and Kansas City were seeing similar increases.²⁴

By the end of 2020, it was clear that the country was facing a sharp rise in carjackings. Some police chiefs were confident the numbers would return to normal once young people were back in school, but carjackings continued to rise. The worrisome 360 carjackings in D.C. in 2020 grew to 958 in 2023.²⁵ By the end of 2023, carjackings

20. D.C. Metropolitan Police Department. MPD Carjacking Dashboard. <https://mpdc.dc.gov/page/carjacking>.

21. CBS Chicago. (April 8, 2022). Tracking Chicago's Carjackings. <https://www.cbsnews.com/chicago/news/carjacking/>.

22. Ibid.

23. David Struett. (July 20, 2020). Armed kids as young as 10 carjack more than a dozen people, police say, including CPS teacher left 'traumatized' in Calumet Heights. Chicago Sun-Times. <https://chicago.suntimes.com/crime/2020/7/20/21327232/calumet-heights-carjacking-alyssa-blanchard-trinity-hospital>.

24. Andy Fies. (December 12, 2020). Why carjackings have skyrocketed in parts of the country during the pandemic. ABC News. <https://abcnews.go.com/US/carjackings-skyrocketed-parts-country-pandemic/story?id=74674597>.

25. D.C. Metropolitan Police Department. MPD Carjacking Dashboard. <https://mpdc.dc.gov/page/carjacking>.

were up 93 percent since 2019 across 10 U.S. cities that kept carjacking data.²⁶

Statistically, most carjackings do not result in injury, but some do. Victims and offenders have died during the course of these, at times, brutally disturbing crimes.

Carjackings have low closure rates, leaving offenders free to commit additional crimes. It's difficult for traumatized victims to identify assailants who often wear ski masks and quickly drive away from the scene. And even if a carjacked vehicle is recovered, proving that the person in possession is the same person who stole it — or even proving that the person now driving the vehicle knew or should have known it was stolen — is challenging. Low arrest rates reflect this reality. In Chicago, for example, only 6 percent of carjacking cases ended in arrest in 2023.²⁷

Failure to clear cases and arrest offenders enables carjackers to keep committing this crime. And because of recent criminal justice reforms, juveniles, in particular, may face few consequences — in the event they are even identified and arrested.

To combat this issue, some cities have increased communication with other local agencies and across jurisdictions; others have established task forces or new units to address carjacking. And in cities like New Orleans, Minneapolis, and Chicago, the numbers started to go down.

The Circumstances of 2020

From 2019 to 2020, Chicago saw its carjacking numbers increase 135 percent;²⁸ Washington, D.C., saw a 143 percent increase;²⁹ New Orleans observed a 154 percent rise;³⁰ and Minneapolis saw an astounding 301 percent increase in carjackings.³¹ A number of circumstances likely contributed to the rise. There was a global pandemic, which shut down schools and businesses for months, left some kids home alone, brought normalcy to mask-wearing, resulted in mass layoffs, and increased the number of delivery drivers on the road. But 2020 also brought forth social unrest following the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis; this led to criminal justice reforms in many states — including juvenile justice reform — and understaffed police departments. And advances in technology — with the exception of pre-recall Kia and Hyundai vehicles — made it harder to steal cars by traditional means, which may have led some offenders to carjack instead.

Mask-Wearing: Face masks were ubiquitous during the pandemic, so it became normal to see people masked in public. Before the pandemic, a driver might leave if they saw a person come up to their car with a mask on, but during COVID, everyone was wearing a mask.³²

Some were wearing black ski masks. Chief Pamela Smith of the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) in Washington, D.C., said one of the big challenges her department has faced is the significant increase in juveniles wearing ski masks during carjackings, which makes solving these crimes and holding offenders accountable

26. Ernesto Lopez and Bobby Boxerman. (January 2024). Crime Trends in U.S. Cities: Year-End 2023 Update, Council on Criminal Justice. <https://counciloncj.org/year-end-2023-crime-trends/>.

27. Dylan Sharkey. (January 18, 2024). Carjacking outside Gov. J.B. Pritzker's mansion thwarted by stick-shift car. Illinois Policy. <https://www.illinoispolicy.org/carjacking-outside-gov-j-b-pritzkers-mansion-thwarted-by-stick-shift-car/>.

28. Jens Ludwig. (June 2021). How the Pandemic Is Accelerating Carjackings in Chicago. The University of Chicago Crime Lab. <https://crimelab.uchicago.edu/resources/how-the-pandemic-is-accelerating-carjackings-in-chicago/>.

29. Dan Morse and Tom Jackman. (February 25, 2021). Teens drive brutal spike in carjackings with covid limiting school and supervision. The Washington Post. https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/public-safety/juvenile-carjackings-increase-coronavirus/2021/02/24/903e8fda-6c81-11eb-ba56-d7e2c8defa31_story.html.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

32. Fies. Why carjackings have skyrocketed.

challenging. “If a victim cannot identify the [offender], even if we have arrested that person in the stolen vehicle, it is very hard to prosecute,” Chief Smith said.

Increased Use of Delivery Services: When people couldn’t visit a restaurant to eat or the mall to shop, they turned to delivery services like Uber Eats, DoorDash, Grubhub, and Amazon. And with so many more of these vehicles on the road — and drivers frequently hopping in and out to make deliveries — opportunities for carjackers increased.

Effects on Juveniles: When schools shut down in March 2020, students were sent home and directed to attend classes online. In addition to being away from the routine of classes and teachers’ oversight, they were cut off from important youth programs. Disparities emerged — some students didn’t have access to the internet; some parents were not available to vigilantly monitor their children’s home-learning habits the way other parents were; and the face-to-face family services that many students relied on were delayed or stopped altogether. Social media and video games were also a place where youths could show off.

Social Unrest

Some cities saw their spike in carjackings begin early in the pandemic, but Minneapolis and Chicago saw violent crime, including carjackings, increase significantly after the murder of George Floyd and the social unrest that followed. “Our monthly spike coincided with the George Floyd civil unrest,” said Kevin Bruno, Deputy Chief, Bureau of Detectives, Chicago Police Department.

“It was crime across the board. It’s when our homicides started increasing, our shootings, as well as our carjackings. Our carjackings were below 100 a month until June of 2020. They’ve been up since.”

Melinda Williams, Assistant U.S. Attorney for the District of Minnesota, saw the same. “Minnesota is a large place but historically had pretty low crime rates,” Williams said. “That changed in an instant following the murder of George Floyd, and our crime exploded, particularly carjackings.”

The social unrest led to criminal justice reform across the country, including many new laws that, in some states, affected juvenile interrogations and detentions. On top of that, an unprecedented number of officers retired or otherwise left policing, leading to understaffed agencies, with recruiting more difficult than ever.³³

Improvements in Car Technology

When auto manufacturers began making it more difficult to steal vehicles that have anti-theft devices or push-button ignitions, which may have made carjacking a comparatively easier way to illegally obtain a car.^{34,35} Criminologist Bruce Jacobs said in April 2023 that some carjackers think it’s easier and safer to carjack than to steal a vehicle off the street if the victim cooperates.³⁶

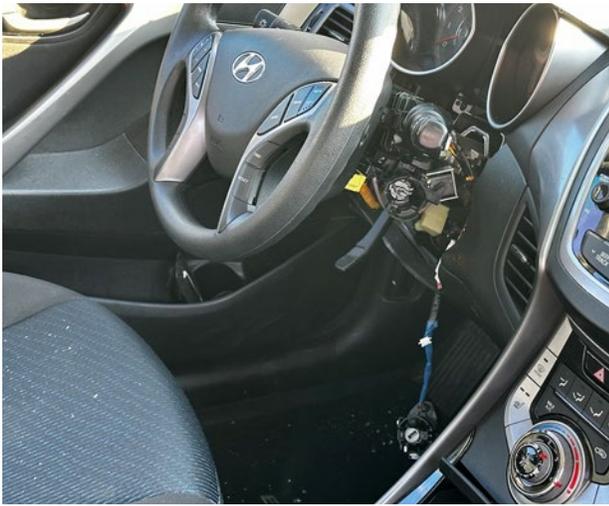
Despite these improvements in technology, motor vehicle thefts have increased in recent years, though they have not risen as sharply as carjackings. From 2019 to 2022, the rate of motor vehicle theft in the United States jumped

33. PERF. (August 2023). Responding to the Staffing Crisis: Innovations in Recruitment and Retention. <https://www.policeforum.org/assets/RecruitmentRetention.pdf>.

34. Campbell Robertson. (March 1, 2022). ‘I Honestly Believe It’s a Game’: Why Carjacking Is on the Rise Among Teens. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/01/us/car-theft-teens-pandemic.html>.

35. The exceptions to this are Hyundais and Kias, which, as seen on social media, have proved rather simple to steal; some cities have actually seen decreases in their carjackings in parallel with increases in car thefts of Kias and Hyundais. Missy Wilkinson. (June 16, 2023). After two years of historic highs, carjackings in New Orleans are on the decline. NOLA.com. https://www.nola.com/news/crime_police/after-two-years-of-historic-highs-carjackings-in-new-orleans-are-on-the-decline/article_0099f56c-0b9f-11ee-ba91-f7daef5bb4e5.html.

36. Ula Chrobak. (April 27, 2023). Understanding carjacking. Knowable Magazine. <https://knowablemagazine.org/content/article/society/2023/understanding-carjacking>.



Carjacking: Definitions and Data

Carjacking: The taking of a motor vehicle from a person by force or credible threat of force.

It's important to distinguish between cars that are stolen (motor vehicle theft) and those that are stolen by the use — or threat of — force (carjacking).⁴⁰ Examples of car theft include smashing a windshield, wiring the car, and driving away while the owner is away, or opportunistically taking a running car as the owner is inside a store paying for gas. Examples of a carjacking include dragging a person out of a vehicle or threatening to shoot the driver if the keys are not relinquished.

One of the challenges to analyzing carjackings is in the collection of data. **There is no carjacking category in the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS).** This means jurisdictions are inconsistent in their carjacking-data collection, including the circumstances involved.

In a 2023 academic paper on carjackings in the *Annual Review of Criminology*, the authors described the process they used to identify carjackings — and the difficulties it entailed.⁴¹ One of the authors later noted that “It’s very difficult to do a year-to-year or city-to-city analysis because the data are not maintained that way on a federal level or even on a state or local level. Most jurisdictions don’t track carjacking separately from other forms of robbery. So we had to rely on reports from police officials who did track it in some of these cities.”⁴² This makes analyzing carjacking data on a national level impossible. But, the authors noted, “targeted samples can assist policy makers in developing

28 percent.³⁷ In particular, thefts of cars made by two companies — Hyundai and Kia — spiked in recent years after information about how they could be stolen was shared on social media.³⁸

Investigator Chris Muscato of the Rochester (NY) Police Department told PERF that the carjacking problem is overwhelmingly juvenile in his jurisdiction. He also noted that the 2022 TikTok challenge, which taught kids to steal Kias and Hyundais, seems to have contributed to the rise in carjackings. After the car companies began paying to have antitheft devices installed in those vehicles,³⁹ juveniles turned to carjacking.

New Orleans (LA) Police Department Lieutenant Samuel Palumbo Jr. said the people committing carjackings were primarily the same people committing auto burglaries. “We saw a ‘graduation’ from one crime to another,” Palumbo said.

37. FBI. Crime Data Explorer. <https://cde.ucr.cjis.gov/LATEST/webapp/#/pages/home>.

38. Peter Valdes-Dapena. (January 5, 2024). Hyundai and Kia thefts soar more than 1,000% since 2020. CNN. <https://www.cnn.com/2024/01/04/business/hyundai-kia-thefts-increased-10-fold/index.html>.

39. Marsha Augustin. (May 23, 2023). Kia and Hyundai agree on \$200M settlement for car thefts. News 10 NBC. <https://www.whcc.com/top-news/kia-and-hyundai-agree-on-200m-settlement-for-car-thefts/>.

40. Different states also label the crime differently. Of the jurisdictions that participated in the PERF summit, California, Washington, D.C., Louisiana, Maryland, Minnesota, Tennessee, Virginia, and Wisconsin use the term “carjacking.” New York, North Carolina, and the state of Washington categorize it as “robbery,” and Illinois uses “vehicular hijacking.”

41. Bruce A. Jacobs and Michael Cherbonneau. (2023). Carjacking: Scope, Structure, Process, and Prevention. *Annual Review of Criminology*, 6, 155–179. <https://www.annualreviews.org/content/journals/10.1146/annurev-criminol-030421-042141>.

42. Chrobak. Understanding carjacking.

timely responses,” so media reports and local data shouldn’t be dismissed.⁴³

Law enforcement agencies should ensure they are correctly tracking carjackings in their area to identify local trends, hotspots, and methods used by offenders, which can help them create targeted prevention strategies.

RECOMMENDATION: Keep data on local

carjackings. Law enforcement agencies should keep data on carjackings in their area, including detailed information about the circumstances of each incident. This information should be shared with neighboring jurisdictions. They should also train their staff on what qualifies as a carjacking and how to analyze the data to seek out any apparent trends. These efforts also should support the timely and correct coding of carjackings in NIBRS to allow for collecting information nationally.

Carjacking Commonalities

Many police officials describe carjackings as “crimes of opportunity” in that offenders victimize random people in cars under circumstances offenders believe are ripe for carjacking. There are, therefore, few patterns regarding what type of cars are hijacked, their locations, and the victims.

But there are some commonalities. Many carjackings since the pandemic are being committed by younger people in groups. Carjackings are often committed in strings or sprees and usually involve a firearm. And because many carjackers seem to be seeking thrills, rather than financially motivated, a lot of carjacked vehicles are quickly abandoned and recovered.

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It happens at all hours of the night and day, but 80 to 85 percent of our carjackings occur when the victim is sitting in a car scrolling on the phone.

Sergeant Valkyrie Barnes, Washington, D.C., Metropolitan Police Department

Meeting attendees said carjackings often take place when the driver is sitting behind the wheel of a parked car. Sergeant Valkyrie Barnes of Washington D.C.’s Metropolitan Police Department said that most of the District’s victims are looking at their phones when approached.

Many other carjackings take place as people are getting into or out of their vehicles; some occur at gas stations, where a person is approached while pumping gas, in apartment complex parking lots, or shopping centers while the victim is loading their car. Some perpetrators carjack their victims by first staging car accidents that prompt people to leave their cars to offer help or exchange insurance information.⁴⁴

But not all offenders blindly commit these crimes. In a 2021 CBS Chicago special report, a 19-year-old named “Chris,” who committed his first carjacking at age 15, said he specifically targeted Chicago neighborhoods with low crime rates and wealthy residents. He said he also tracked police responses, looking for gaps in service and targeting the areas where police took the longest time to arrive.⁴⁵

Victims have also been targeted on mobile apps, which is how some carjackers victimize ride-share drivers (by ordering a car and then directing the driver to a place where others are waiting to take the vehicle). In late 2022, police in Los Angeles warned the public about a rise in carjackings using a dating

43. Jacobs and Cherbonneau. Carjacking: Scope.

44. Michael Lee. (September 13, 2023). Seattle police scramble for leads as armed carjackings leave city on edge: report. Fox News. <https://www.foxnews.com/us/seattle-police-scramble-leads-armed-carjackings-leave-city-edge>.

45. Irika Sargent and Carol Thompson. (October 2, 2021). CBS Chicago Special Report: Why I Carjack; Teens Tell All. CBS Chicago. <https://www.cbsnews.com/chicago/news/why-i-carjack-teens-tell-all/>.



“““

National statistics don't tell us the real story. And that's because these stories are very place specific. ... All crime is local, and local factors feature prominently.

Nancy La Vigne, Director of the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) at the Office of Justice Programs (OJP)

app; offenders would lure their victims to a specific area and carjack them at gunpoint.⁴⁶

Carjackings Across the Country

Comprehensive national data on carjackings would help identify large trends and accurately disclose the extent of the crime across the nation. However, compiling local data enables the important determination of whether and why carjackings are taking place in one area.

The following is a snapshot of what is happening around the United States and Canada. All information was reported to PERF prior to the conference.

Los Angeles, California

2021 • 313 carjackings • 8.0 per 100,000

2022 • 407 carjackings • 10.4 per 100,000

2023 • 323 carjackings • 8.3 per 100,000

Juvev Mejia, Detective Supervisor at the Los Angeles Police Department, said most of the city's carjackings are crimes of opportunity, including those perpetrated by offenders looking for getaway vehicles after committing crimes. That was the case in 2022, when a car carrying a homicide suspect

crashed during a police chase; the suspect then reportedly left the disabled vehicle and carjacked the vehicle of a 63-year-old man, who got stuck in his seatbelt and was dragged for more than a mile.⁴⁷ The incident, in which the man lost his life, was one of the most brutal and horrific carjackings in the city's history.

But most carjackings in L.A. don't involve physical assault, Mejia said.

Mejia said most of the city's carjackings take place when the victim is outside of the vehicle, like at a gas station or walking to an ATM. Sometimes the suspect will force the victim at gunpoint to relinquish the keys; other times, one suspect will distract the victim while another jumps into the car and takes off.

San Diego, California

2021 • 67 carjackings • 4.8 per 100,000

2022 • 100 carjackings • 7.2 per 100,000

2023 • 71 carjackings • 5.1 per 100,000

San Diego Police Department former Chief David Nisleit said there is a growing contingent of juvenile carjackers; he estimates, based on arrests and witness reports, that youths commit 50 percent of carjackings in the city.

46. Vivian Chow. (December 18, 2022). 6 juveniles arrested in connection with dating app carjacking in southeast Los Angeles. KGET. com. <https://www.kget.com/news/state-news/6-juveniles-arrested-in-connection-with-dating-app-carjacking-in-southeast-los-angeles/>.

47. The Associated Press. (October 14, 2022). LA carjacking victim dragged, killed during police pursuit. <https://apnews.com/article/police-los-angeles-carjacking-homicide-87884f8fc1e77738e6f2baa96bad21c0> and KCAL News. (October 21, 2022). Family of man killed during carjacking calls for AG Rob Bonta to investigate LAPD's handling of case. <https://www.cbsnews.com/losangeles/news/family-of-man-killed-during-carjacking-calls-for-ag-rob-bonta-to-investigate-lapds-handling-of-case/>.

Just because offenders are younger doesn't mean their crimes are any less violent. In 2023, a San Diego-based member of the Navy was reportedly carjacked by an 18-year-old male and 15-year-old female. The victim held on to the hood for two miles; when the car crashed, the victim was killed.⁴⁸ Three months later, a 15-year-old boy pulled a woman out of her car, stabbing her repeatedly in the chest before taking off in her vehicle.⁴⁹

San Diego keeps very detailed records of its carjackings and tracks any trends. There is no particular type of car that is more frequently carjacked; Chief Nisleit said he, like many others, sees most carjackings as crimes of opportunity.

About half of the cars are never recovered, Chief Nisleit said, suggesting that many end up south of the border in Mexico. "We border the busiest port in North America, and it's very easy to go south," he said. "And so we lose many cars south of the border."

Chicago, Illinois

2021 • 1850 carjackings • 67.4 per 100,000

2022 • 1649 carjackings • 60.0 per 100,000

2023 • 1308 carjackings • 47.6 per 100,000

Chicago was one of the first cities to see its vehicular hijacking⁵⁰ rate skyrocket during the pandemic, as early as the spring of 2020. And according to officials, juveniles were behind most of that spike.

The city's six-year average from 2014 to 2019 was 601 vehicular hijackings per year, said Kevin Bruno, Deputy Chief of the Chicago Police Department. "And then in 2020, we jumped to over 1,400."

Bruno said that 2020 spike coincided with the civil unrest following George Floyd's murder.

In prior years, most vehicular hijackings were committed by organized crime networks and gangs who used those cars to commit other crimes, such as shootings and robberies, so they would not be easily tracked by police. Other hijackings involved high-end vehicles that were then retagged or sent to a chop shop. Those types of vehicular hijackings still took place during the pandemic, but police attribute most of the pandemic spike to juvenile offenders.

"It's just a game for these kids," said then-Chief of Detectives Brendan Deenihan in a 2021 interview with PERF. "We have kids who do 14 carjackings a week. ... Our cars are mostly being dumped within 12 to 24 hours and recovered. They're taking the cars, and they aren't selling them or going to chop shops. They're maybe going to McDonald's, and then they're going to carjack another car."⁵¹

And some of these juveniles are shockingly young. In 2021, an 11-year-old boy was charged with aggravated vehicular hijacking with a firearm; police noted that he was a repeat offender.⁵² In 2023, three girls — 15, 15, and 17 years old — reportedly carjacked a 62-year-old rideshare driver in front of his home; as he tried to stop them from stealing his car, one of the girls allegedly struck him with what appeared to be a pipe.⁵³

Like other cities, Chicago finds that these are most often crimes of opportunity, with juveniles looking for people who are sitting in their cars or getting ready to exit after parking; some of the juvenile offenders are armed with weapons and/or using force.

48. Debbie L. Sklar. (June 23, 2023). Ricardo Vazquez-Gongora, 18, Charged with Murder in Coronado Carjacking of Sailor. Times of San Diego. <https://timesofsandiego.com/military/2023/06/23/ricardo-vazquez-gongora-18-accused-in-coronado-carjacking-of-sailor-charged-with-murder/>.

49. Eric S. Page. (September 25, 2023). Woman fights for life after teen carjacker stabs her over and over in chest in Vista: SDSO. NBC 7 San Diego. <https://www.nbcsandiego.com/news/local/woman-fights-for-life-after-teen-carjacker-stabs-her-over-and-over-in-chest-in-vista-sdso/3313467/>.

50. Under the Illinois criminal code, carjacking is termed "vehicular hijacking."

51. PERF. Police Challenged by Dramatic Increases.

52. Michelle Gallardo. (November 29, 2021). Police arrest 11-year-old boy in Chicago carjacking, investigate his role in several others. ABC 7 Chicago. <https://abc7chicago.com/carjacking-chicago-11-year-old-suspect-police-cpd/11282024/>.

53. ABC 7 Chicago. (September 29, 2023). 3rd teenage girl charged in carjacking, beating of rideshare driver in Chinatown: Chicago police. <https://abc7chicago.com/chinatown-chicago-teen-girl-arrested-crime-carjacking/13844851/>.

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

2021 • 372 carjackings • 64.4 per 100,000

2022 • 398 carjackings • 69.0 per 100,000

2023 • 463 carjackings • 80.2 per 100,000

Milwaukee has seen a decline in auto thefts since 2021, but a rise in carjackings. “Some of the intelligence we’re getting when we interview these kids — most of the offenders are youth — they’re coming in and they’re saying it’s no longer cool to simply steal cars; they’ve amped it up to carjackings,” said Milwaukee Police Inspector Paul Lough. “We see a pattern where they either have a lengthy arrest record for auto theft before they rise to carjacking, or they have several fingerprint alerts on multiple other stolen cars. So we’re kind of seeing an escalation in the behavior.”

A lot of the youth carjacking, he said, is fueled by several juvenile groups feuding over social media-related disrespect, and the carjacked vehicle is a way for the offenders to travel to a shooting without being tracked. Lough said that from what he sees, social media use — the banter back and forth between cliques — is driving the trend.

Minneapolis, Minnesota

2021 • 655 carjackings • 152.3 per 100,000

2022 • 524 carjackings • 121.9 per 100,000

2023 • 305 carjackings • 70.9 per 100,000

When PERF spoke with then-Minneapolis Deputy Chief of Investigations Kathy Waite in early 2021, the spike from 101 carjackings in 2019 to 405 in 2020 had her alarmed.⁵⁴ Waite said she kept seeing the same suspects, several groups of kids from 12 to 15 years old. And many were using guns as a

threat to take the vehicle and even getting physically violent.⁵⁵

Waite had also seen carjackers use the vehicles as their getaway cars after committing street robberies and said that suspects were narrowing their focus to the southern end of the city. That trend seems to be continuing. Sergeant David Ligneel with the Minneapolis Police Department said the city’s carjackers are primarily going to the wealthier areas in the southern end of the city because that’s where they see more opportunities. He also sees carjackers becoming more brazen and stealing more than just cars, noting, “Most of the time, they’re forcing victims to unlock their phones and transfer money from CashApp and whatever other online financial stuff they have.”

New Orleans, Louisiana

2021 • 295 carjackings • 76.8 per 100,000

2022 • 381 carjackings • 99.2 per 100,000

2023 • 215 carjackings • 56.0 per 100,000

New Orleans Police Department Superintendent Shaun Ferguson told PERF in 2021 that the city saw a 154 percent increase in carjackings from 2019 to 2020.⁵⁶ He also said that over the two prior years, about 25 percent of the city’s carjackings were committed by the same 35 individuals.

Several violent carjackings over the past few years have grabbed the attention of the city’s residents. In 2022, a woman suffered a fractured skull, traumatic brain injury, and spinal injuries when an 18-year-old repeat carjacker took her car as she was pumping gas outside of a Costco, dragging her along the pavement.⁵⁷ A little more than a month later, a 73-year-old woman whose car was hijacked by four teens got tangled in her seatbelt and was

54. PERF. Police Challenged by Dramatic Increases.

55. Ibid.

56. Ibid.

57. David Hammer. (January 3, 2023). Woman carjacked at Costco gas station files lawsuit against the store. CBS 4 WWL. <https://www.wwlv.com/article/news/investigations/david-hammer/new-orleans-carjacking-victim-sues-costco-for-negligence/289-0f18ebd6-4c38-4a27-b213-c89c750f1dfb>.

dragged for more than a block; her arm was severed, and she was pronounced dead at the scene.⁵⁸

Charlotte-Mecklenburg, North Carolina

2021 • 126 carjackings • 14.3 per 100,000

2022 • 127 carjackings • 14.4 per 100,000

2023 • 111 carjackings • 12.6 per 100,000

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Deputy Police Chief David Robinson said carjackings have been a problem since even before the pandemic.

Washington, D.C.

2021 • 425 carjackings • 61.6 per 100,000

2022 • 484 carjackings • 70.2 per 100,000

2023 • 959 carjackings • 139.1 per 100,000

When PERF first spoke with Washington D.C. Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) Assistant Chief Leslie Parsons in February 2021, the city's 143 percent increase in carjackings from 2019 to 2020 was alarming, but Parsons expressed hope that a new carjacking task force and the return of juveniles to school would curtail the problem.⁵⁹ Most victims were not assaulted during the carjackings, but many offenders wielded firearms or knives, he said.

When cases did result in injury or death, they reverberated throughout the community. In 2021, a 66-year-old immigrant from Pakistan who was making an Uber Eats delivery near Nationals Park was carjacked and killed when, during a struggle,

the car accelerated and crashed.⁶⁰ And just four days after the PERF carjacking summit in January 2024, a man having a mental health crisis went on a rampage, carjacking or attempting to carjack four vehicles from D.C. en route to Prince George's County, Maryland, killing two people in the process.⁶¹

Despite Parson's 2021 hopes, the numbers didn't go down once kids returned to school. From 2019 to 2023, carjackings increased 571 percent.⁶² And in each of those years, juveniles made up the majority of arrestees, accounting for nearly two-thirds of them each year since 2020.^{63, 64} The firearm threat has also remained steady; about 75 percent of carjackings committed in D.C. over the past four years have involved guns.⁶⁵

This type of granular analysis is only possible because MPD has a very thorough, public-facing carjacking dashboard — an important step in identifying trends.

Prince George's County, Maryland

2021 • 393 carjackings • 41.1 per 100,000

2022 • 480 carjackings • 50.2 per 100,000

2023 • 570 carjackings • 59.7 per 100,000

Carjackings rose in Prince George's County from 2021 to 2023. During that time the department's carjacking clearance rate improved; in 2021, it was 31 percent, while in 2023, it was 44 percent.

Carjackings that take place in D.C. often cross over into bordering Prince George's County, and

58. Olivia Jakiel. (March 23, 2022). Woman, 73, Was Allegedly Dragged to Death in Carjacking by 4 Teens Whose Parents Turned Them In. *People*. <https://people.com/crime/woman-73-dragged-to-death-in-carjacking-allegedly-committed-by-4-teens-whose-parents-turned-them-in/>.

59. PERF. Police Challenged by Dramatic Increases.

60. Peter Hermann, Justin Jouvenal and Paul Duggan. (March 24, 2021). Girls, 13 and 15, charged with murder after alleged carjacking attempt in D.C. *The Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/public-safety/teen-girls-carjacking-charges/2021/03/24/50c29dee-8c96-11eb-a6bd-0eb91c03305a_story.html.

61. Martin Weil, Emily Davies, and Lizzie Johnson, L. (February 3, 2024). Former election official, shot in D.C. during carjacking rampage, dies. *The Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2024/02/03/gill-rampage-carjacking-shot-dies/>.

62. MPD Carjacking Dashboard.

63. *Ibid.*

64. In comparison, in 2019, a year in which there were 152 carjacking offenses, juveniles accounted for 42 percent of the 59 arrests.

65. MPD Carjacking Dashboard.

vice versa. And like its neighbor, juveniles have made up the bulk of the county's carjacking arrests since 2020. "We had more adults arrested in 2020, but since that time, it's been more juveniles," said Chief Malik Aziz of the Prince George's County Police Department. Of those arrested in 2023, 147 were juveniles and 115 were adults. In 2022, 109 were juveniles and 108 were adults.

Even though schools are back in session, carjackings continue among juveniles today. The reasons are complex, but in addition to a truancy problem in the region, kids are committing these crimes for "credibility, status, something to do," Chief Aziz said. "A big one is these juveniles are very smart and they know nothing will happen to them."

Most of the vehicles carjacked in the county are recovered in D.C.⁶⁶ County police report a high recovery rate (about 89 percent), indicating that cars are being carjacked for joyriding or as a means to commit other crimes, not to be sold.

Montgomery County, Maryland

2021 • 61 carjackings • 5.8 per 100,000

2022 • 79 carjackings • 7.5 per 100,000

2023 • 97 carjackings • 9.2 per 100,000

Montgomery County's carjacking numbers are far lower than those of Washington, D.C., and Prince George's County, but carjackings there rose more than 400 percent from 2019 to 2023.⁶⁷ Former Montgomery County Police Chief Marcus Jones said most of their carjackings occur in the parts of the county closest to the D.C. and Prince George's County lines and that most of the vehicles end up in Prince George's County or D.C. However, Chief Jones added that most offenders are from Montgomery County.

In 2023, most carjacking arrests in the county (64 percent) involved juveniles. Chief Jones said what hampers them in identifying the root causes

of carjacking is the inability to question kids when they are arrested due to new juvenile justice laws.

Baltimore, Maryland

2021 • 564 carjackings • 96.3 per 100,000

2022 • 718 carjackings • 122.6 per 100,000

2023 • 585 carjackings • 99.9 per 100,000

Most of Baltimore's carjacking offenders are, or appear to be, juveniles. Most victims are sitting in their car or transitioning from their car to their home, and most incidents occur late at night, according to Lieutenant Colonel John Herzog of the Baltimore Police Department.

"What we found from the intel we do have is that the suspects are riding around looking for these people; they are crimes of opportunity," Herzog said.

While there doesn't appear to be a consistent type of vehicle carjacked, Baltimore, like San Diego, is near a port, and there is some indication that those taking high-end cars like Mercedes and BMWs are taking them to the port to send abroad, Herzog said.

Fairfax County, Virginia

2021 • 17 carjackings • 1.5 per 100,000

2022 • 27 carjackings • 2.3 per 100,000

2023 • 25 carjackings • 2.2 per 100,000

In Fairfax County, police haven't seen the same trends as their neighbors in Washington, D.C., and Maryland. Carjackings are infrequent in the county, but when they do take place, they are generally committed by adults.

Of the 25 carjackings reported in 2023, 12 ended in arrest. Of those 12, only two were juveniles. "So we're not seeing the exact same juvenile

66. Scott Broom. (June 14, 2023). Most carjacked vehicles from Prince George's County are recovered in DC. WUSA9. <https://www.wusa9.com/article/news/crime/carjacked-vehicles-from-prince-georges-county-recovered-dc/65-fc8ceb9f-d9cb-48e2-a64d-f261cbf7f181>.

67. Susan J. Farag. (January 31, 2024). Memorandum: Crime Statistics Update. Montgomery County Public Safety Committee. https://montgomerycountymd.granicus.com/Viewer.php?view_id=169&event_id=16031&meta_id=171079.

problem as everybody else,” Executive Deputy Chief Brian Reilly said. Why his county isn’t experiencing the same juvenile problem as other counties is hard to determine, Reilly said. “It’s a very affluent county, and if you believe socioeconomic issues come into play when it comes to crime, that may be part of the answer.”

Reilly said that most of the county’s carjackings are clustered near Tysons Corner Center, a high-end shopping center, as well as the southeastern portion of the county.

Prince William County, Virginia

In 2023, Prince William County had 16 carjackings, which equates to 3.3 per 100,000 residents. It doesn’t have earlier data on carjackings because “it was not even an issue before 2023,” said Captain Jacques Poirier of the Prince William County Police Department.

Of the carjackings that have resulted in arrest, all but one were committed by adults, Poirier said.

Alexandria, Virginia

2021 • 4 carjackings • 2.5 per 100,000

2022 • 7 carjackings • 4.4 per 100,000

2023 • 11 carjackings • 6.9 per 100,000

Alexandria, a small city of 150,000 residents, has seen a sharp rise in carjackings in recent years, from one in 2019 to 11 in 2023. Juveniles appear to be at least partially driving the increase. Teenagers were involved in several carjackings in 2023.^{68, 69, 70}

Arlington County, Virginia

While Arlington didn’t see many carjackings in the early years of the pandemic, there was a significant jump in 2023, which can likely be connected to the increase in neighboring Washington, D.C.

“We’re so close to them,” said Captain Michael Rowling of the Arlington County Police Department. “In 30 seconds, you can steal a car in Crystal City and get across the bridge to D.C.”

Rowling said the county is mostly seeing high-end vehicles — like BMWs and Audis — carjacked, and the vehicles that are recovered are mostly found in Southeast D.C. While some juveniles have contributed to the increase, Rowling said the average age of carjackers in Arlington is 19 or 20. In 2023, 70 percent of Arlington County’s 24 carjackings involved a firearm, and seven victims were injured.

Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

2022 • 52 carjackings • 7.9 per 100,000

2023 • 49 carjackings • 7.4 per 100,000

Most of the carjackings in Vancouver involve organized crime and drug manufacturing or distribution. These crimes are committed by adults (the city does not appear to have a juvenile carjacking problem) who carjack vehicles to use in other crimes, said Inspector Shane Aitken of the Vancouver Police Department. Those adults then ship most of the high-end vehicles to other countries.

68. Samantha Gilstrap. (April 29, 2023). Police arrest teen for attempted carjacking in Alexandria. WUSA. <https://www.wusa9.com/article/news/local/virginia/teen-taken-into-custody-after-attempted-carjacking-in-alexandria-virginia/65-dc957bf6-85e3-4b88-bd0a-3a82bdd3e439>.

69. Vernon Miles. (May 1, 2023). Teen arrested for attempted carjacking on Duke Street. ALX Now. <https://www.alxnow.com/2023/05/01/teen-arrested-for-attempted-carjacking-on-duke-street/>.

70. City of Alexandria. (July 26, 2023). Alexandria, D.C. Collaboration Leads to Juvenile Carjacking Arrest. <https://www.alexandriava.gov/news-apd/2023-07-26/alexandria-dc-collaboration-leads-to-juvenile-carjacking-arrest>.

Part 2: Carjacking Victims



“““

I'm terrified. I'm not going to sugarcoat it. It's really scary. It's one of those things where your stomach drops ... the hair on your neck raises. And it just feels like it's never going to go away. Never.

Shantise Summers, Prince George's County, Maryland, carjacking victim

As cities have seen their carjacking numbers increase, these cases have changed the lives of many victims. Whether the victims were sitting in their cars, getting gas, or taking in their groceries, some victims escaped physical injury, but many still live with the fear it will happen again. Many victims no longer have a way to get to work and have to buy a new car, which can involve navigating the often-complicated victims' assistance system. This chapter shares the experiences of some of those victims.

Ride-Share and Delivery Workers

Companies like Uber and DoorDash that rely on workers to transport passengers and deliver food began seeing an increase in the carjacking of their drivers when the pandemic started, as more of these workers were on the road, delivering essentials to people locked down in their homes. “We see what you see,” said Heather Childs, Chief Trust and Security Officer for Uber, at PERF's carjacking summit. “And that is a big uptick in this crime since COVID. ... Before COVID, we didn't see very much to be honest with you. And then in 2020, we started

seeing an increase concentrated in certain cities in the United States.”

Childs, who spent most of her career in the U.S. Department of Justice, cites Chicago, Washington, D.C., Baltimore, and Prince George's County, Maryland, as the jurisdictions where Uber has seen the most carjackings of its drivers.

“We care deeply about this,” she said. “You know, these people are very important to us. They

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Heather Childs, Chief Trust and Security Officer for Uber

One Victim's Story

Shantise Summers, a mother of five from Prince George's County, Maryland, was returning home from a night out on August 7, 2022. As she walked up the stairs to her apartment at around 2:30 a.m., she sensed a presence behind her, saw two teens running toward her with guns, and then felt cold metal on her face.

"One literally had a gun on my chin," Summers said, "and said, 'Give me your keys. Give me your phone. Give me your purse, your watch. Give me all that shit.'"

She handed over the keys to her 2019 Honda Accord Sport, her phone, her purse, and her Apple Watch. Then, after the teens took off, she ran upstairs and banged on her apartment door, hoping her 15-year-old daughter would hear her. The girl woke up and called 911.

As the carjackers rushed to get away, one dropped the Apple watch, which Summers was able to use to locate her phone; the teens had thrown it out the car window a block away.

Six hours later, she saw a video of her car on social media; it had been crashed into a city bus in D.C. while the drivers were being pursued by police. Four juveniles were in the car, including the 16-year-old driver. One was taken away by ambulance after being thrown through the windshield.

Summers was terrified because the teens knew where she lived, and she feared they would return. She also needed a new car and felt she needed to move.

"These men had my identification for hours, knew where I lived for hours, and they were on the street with me," she said. "I could have been walking next to them every day and didn't know. I have children, and I was scared. You can't just pick up and move the next day. So I was terrified."

Summers said she was frustrated by the process that followed. Over a year and a half, she learned that the teens were involved in multiple carjackings and had multiple arrests. But she said she never received updates on the case. She also found victim services frustrating; while she was initially contacted by someone with the Prince George's County government about getting help with her first month's rent or a security deposit, she ultimately never heard back.

The laws governing how juveniles are treated in Maryland criminal cases need to be addressed, Summers said. "I'm a taxpaying citizen. I don't break laws. I don't do anything wrong, and this was a misjustice for me," she said. "They get to go home. They get to be with their families. They get to enjoy Christmas and all of those things. And I'm here having to rehabilitate my home, my family, my mental health, and still wake up and be a good citizen every day. I still have to go to work. I still have to be a good mom, all the while going through tons of therapy."

Eighteen months after the carjacking, she is still scared.

"I'm terrified. I'm not going to sugarcoat it," she said. "It's really scary. It's one of those things where your stomach drops, and it doesn't stop. The hair on your neck raises. And it just feels like it's never going to go away. Never."



Shantise Summers



““““

Carjacking is a violent crime that can leave the survivors with serious trauma that, if not addressed, is going to lead to a whole host of other issues. Not only do you lose your sense of safety, you often lose your car, which means you can't get to work. You can't take your kids to childcare. These are just a few examples.

Kristina Rose, Director of the Office for Victims of Crime

continued from page 20

make their living driving for Uber or delivering food for Uber. And it's just an absolute travesty when these crimes happen.”

Childs said some offenders target drivers on the ride-share app by ordering a ride and carjacking the vehicle once inside. But other carjackings are crimes of opportunity, involving perpetrators targeting a person delivering food when they get out of their car to make a delivery.

Taylor Bennett, the Global Head of Public Affairs for DoorDash, echoed what Childs said about the circumstances of these carjackings. Both he and Childs said most of the drivers/couriers who have gotten carjacked return to their jobs afterward.

“On the delivery front, yeah, they go back,” Bennett said. “Most people who deliver with us do four hours a week or less, and so it's very supplemental. It's students. It's retirees, people with full-time jobs just making some extra cash to help pay the bills. It is traumatizing and scary, but we see a lot of them go back to make that extra money.”

Victim Services

Kristina Rose, Director of the Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) at the U.S. Department of Justice, said it's important for cities to make sure victims of carjacking get the assistance they need.

One thing that many victims find lacking after going through a traumatic crime is the ability to feel safe, Rose said. Survivors need access to safety

and services,” she said. “When you invest in victim services, survivors may be more likely to participate in the criminal justice process. Having victim advocates in your police department can help ensure that victims are connected with the services they need. The Office for Victims of Crime has a grant program that will help pay for these services.”

Rose said she is shocked at how few people know about the resources available for those who have been victimized. She said it's imperative that law enforcement agencies make sure victims know that there is help — including financial reimbursement for out-of-pocket costs that result from the crime. Victims should be immediately provided with information about local victim services and how to apply for compensation for medical and mental health services, transportation, funeral and burial services, and lost wages as a result of injury.

RECOMMENDATION: Recognize the unique aspects of victimization inherent in carjacking cases and work to maximize victim services and support.

It is critical that jurisdictions acknowledge and attend to the specific emotional, physical, and economic impacts of carjacking by promptly referring victims to compensation programs and helping prevent revictimization. Prioritizing victim safety and support helps victims' well-being and may enable them to meaningfully participate in the criminal justice process, including accessing VOCA-funded compensation and assistance.⁷¹

71. More information on accessing victim services in a jurisdiction can be found at <https://www.benefits.gov/benefit/4416>

Elevating the Victim's Voice

Retired San Diego Police Chief David Nisleit said it's important for police to remember to focus on victims, as well as offenders, noting, "I think the victims have lost their voice." Based on his observations over the course of 36 years in policing, Chief Nisleit said that "We've seen that turn to where it's more about the offender. And we need to spin back out of that and talk about the impact of violent crime on the communities and those individual victims who, even if they are not physically injured, are left with scars that last a lifetime."

Prince William County (VA) Police Chief Peter Newsham echoed this, noting that while it's important to address the underlying problems that are leading young people to commit crimes, there should also be focus on the victim. "Everyone's so empathetic to these kids who have been involved in very violent offenses and the conditions that they grew up with," he said. "I'm empathetic to that, too. But I'm more empathetic to the person who drives down the street and gets a gun waved in their face and then has no car."

Speaking to Victims

Director Rose from the Office for Victims of Crime said it's important to avoid victim blaming when conducting awareness campaigns and speaking with victims. "You can do everything right and still be

the victim of a carjacking, of a violent crime," she said.

Support for Ride-Share and Delivery Driver Victims

For Uber drivers who become victims of a carjacking, the company has built up its victim support services.

"Drivers can call us and receive [assistance] because we think it's very important to try to help people to get their car back, get their lives back," said Heather Childs of Uber, adding that the company also has victim wellness checks. "We have a specialized team dedicated to conducting safety investigations, which includes speaking with the rider and/or driver involved about their experience and checking on their well-being," Childs said. Uber also has programs in place to financially support families dealing with tragedy.

DoorDash's Taylor Bennett said his company is similarly committed to helping its drivers who are victims of carjacking. "When our couriers are carjacked, the challenge can include what are the resources? What are the things that we can do to help? So connecting them with community groups, helping them navigate law enforcement, helping them find the contacts, and just being there after and throughout the process can be really helpful."



Retired San Diego Police Chief David Nisleit (FAR LEFT)

Taylor Bennett, the Global Head of Public Affairs for DoorDash (LEFT)

Part 3: Offenders

So much of the information about who is committing these crimes is anecdotal because the closure rates among the cities that shared data with PERF are typically under 50 percent. That limits the available data about offenders — including their age, race, and residence. Witnesses may be able to fill in some holes, but when an assailant is masked, identification is difficult.

A National Perspective

There has been little academic research on carjackings over the past decade. And as noted in Part 1, there is no way to track the number of carjackings nationally because there is no carjacking category in NIBRS. Nancy La Vigne, Director of the National Institute of Justice at the U.S. Department of Justice, shared some information about offenders while acknowledging that little data exists. “We should have all the answers. We don’t,” she said. “But what we’re hearing from everyone around the room ... is that ... national statistics don’t tell us the real story. And that’s because these stories are very place-specific.”

Motivations

Director La Vigne said that what she sees in research and hears from localities is that there are different kinds of crimes going on with different motivations behind them. Some, mostly juveniles, are carjacking for the thrill of the ride — for

attention on social media and from their peers — and as “something to do” when bored. Others — usually adults or juveniles hired by adults — carjack to sell vehicles for their parts. Some carjacked cars are ending up in shipping containers in port cities, like San Diego, Vancouver, and Baltimore.⁷² Juveniles and adults also may carjack to obtain a vehicle to use in the commission of another crime or to escape from an earlier crime.

Los Angeles (CA) Police Department (LAPD) Sergeant Juvey Mejia, a member of L.A.’s Task Force for Regional Auto Theft Prevention, said that “approximately 80 percent of the time, the suspects are looking for a getaway vehicle after committing a crime” or as they are on the way to commit another.

Getting to the root of the motivation behind carjackings is one way to try to prevent them, said Kristine Hamann, Executive Director of the Prosecutors’ Center for Excellence. For example, if police take down an organized retail theft group that uses hijacked cars to commit those crimes, that action may also reduce carjackings, Hamann said. San Diego went after one of the common perpetrators of its carjackings — street gangs — and was able to take enforcement action against some of the groups that were committing them. In Los Angeles, the LAPD found some success in reducing carjackings by putting together a task force that goes after smash-and-grab robberies because carjacked vehicles were being used to commit them.

72. Derick Waller. (January 4, 2024). Stolen cars heading to West Africa being intercepted at Port of Baltimore. Fox 5 DC. <https://www.fox5dc.com/news/stolen-cars-heading-to-west-africa-being-intercepted-at-port-of-baltimore>.

RECOMMENDATION: Align prevention and intervention strategies with the motivations for carjackings. “Joyride” carjackings are different than those connected to organized crime. Different types of carjackings require tailored approaches and solutions. For example, in Los Angeles, the LAPD reduced carjackings through a task force focused on smash-and-grab robberies involving cars obtained through carjackings.

The Rise in Juvenile Carjackings

Some criminal justice experts say it’s difficult to conclusively show that juveniles are the prevailing reason why carjackings have skyrocketed across the country. But it’s clear there is a juvenile problem in many jurisdictions.

Brian Schwalb, Attorney General of the District of Columbia, said it’s possible that juveniles are driving the rise in carjackings in Washington, D.C., but he emphasizes that due to the lack of reliable data, it’s not a proven fact. “The vast majority of carjacking offenses remain unsolved,” Schwalb said. “So when we talk about knowing that juveniles are committing the vast majority of carjackings, we really don’t know that. But anecdotally, it’s not an unfair assumption to make. There are arguments made that kids commit crimes in groups, while adults don’t. There are arguments made that kids are not good at escaping. Some of these kids don’t have driver’s licenses and are not good drivers. So I don’t know for certainty; I don’t know if anybody knows for certainty whether youth are committing more of these crimes than adults.”

But Schwalb does know for certain that D.C. is in the midst of a significant challenge. “We see more kids showing up in the criminal justice system at a younger age,” Schwalb said. “We see more kids *with guns* showing up in the criminal justice system at an earlier age. And we see more kids committing a serious offense as their first offense than we have seen before.”



District of Columbia Attorney General Brian Schwalb

When cities started to notice this new trend in 2020, the hope was that once the pandemic eased and children returned to school, juvenile crime would return to pre-pandemic levels. That did not initially happen. Below are some of the factors that law enforcement leaders say have likely contributed to some cities’ rise in juvenile crime beyond assumptions about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Lack of Resources: One factor undoubtedly adding to the uptick in youth crime was that outreach teams and social services that often operate through schools were not as accessible during the pandemic. For some young people, the after-school programs that helped keep them out of trouble were also missing — which led them to seek out other ways to spend their time.

Peer Pressure and Social Media

Law enforcement leaders say that many juveniles are carjacking for a thrill, not to make money. In February 2022, when Washington, D.C., and Prince George’s County, Maryland, announced they would work together to address their carjacking problem, then-D.C. Police Chief Robert Contee spoke decisively about how he’d seen juveniles livestreaming themselves laughing and weaving through traffic while pursued by police. Contee said, “Let me tell you something: Playtime is over. This is not a video game.”⁷³ But that’s how some young people view it.

73. Mark Segreaves. (February 2, 2022). ‘Playtime Is Over’: DC, Prince George’s Working Together to Reduce Carjackings. NBC 4 Washington. <https://www.nbcwashington.com/news/local/playtime-is-over-dc-prince-georges-working-together-to-reduce-carjackings/2959296/>.



Washington, D.C. MPD Chief Pamela Smith

Peer Pressure: Peer pressure appears to be another significant factor in juvenile carjacking. D.C. Attorney General Schwalb said he’s heard stories during plea allocutions about why some young people commit these crimes, and one thing that stands out is how strong peer pressure can be. He brought up the case of a young man who had a prestigious internship with a government agency and admission to college. But he was running with a group of guys who decided they were going to commit a carjacking. He didn’t want to look weak, so he went along.

Rarely does a juvenile carjack a vehicle alone. In one Maryland case, police said five students from Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School were charged in a carjacking where an 18-year-old student picked up four classmates, ages 15 and 16, near the school at lunchtime before committing the crime. They were among 13 teens arrested in one day in Montgomery County in 2023 on charges of stealing or carjacking cars.⁷⁴

Social Media: Peer pressure is exacerbated by social media, where some kids post videos of their crimes and brag about their heists. One video on TikTok shows a kid erratically steering the wheel of a car while emojis of laughing faces, fire, and knives pop up on the screen. Another video shows teen

bystanders watching at a school and laughing as their peers drive a car into a pole.

Albany (GA) Police Chief Michael J. Persley said cities “need to know the influence social media has on these types of crimes. It affects [everything] from how to do the crime to highlighting criminal behavior.”

Of course, social media is not just for bragging; it also accelerates arguments and promotes rivalries. Inspector Paul Lough of the Milwaukee (WI) Police Department has seen teens on social media publicly airing their grievances, which can lead to shootings by juveniles riding in stolen or carjacked vehicles.

Carjacking for Money

Duane Cunningham, a mentor who has been working with teens in Southeast D.C. since 2006, said he believes the 13- to 17-year-olds who are carjacking often do so for money.

MPD Chief Pamela Smith said she has seen adults hire juveniles to commit carjackings. At one point, she said, MPD was investigating a carjacking ring that involved adults paying juveniles to steal cars and leave them in certain locations in D.C. — with the fob in the vehicle so the adult could drive the vehicle away. But Chief Smith said MPD hasn’t seen much of that since its Carjacking Task Force arrested five juveniles in 2023 after a weeklong investigation. **For more on the task force, see page 38.**

A subset of carjackers targets high-end vehicles for resale. In D.C. in 2023, police charged three teens, ages 17 and 18, with attempting to sell the luxury vehicles they carjacked on Instagram.⁷⁵

Youth mentors say that if communities can’t find a way to replace this “activity” of carjacking with something constructive — particularly something where young people can make money — the problem will continue.

74. NBC 4 Washington. (November 15, 2023). 13 teenagers arrested in Montgomery County carjackings, thefts [video]. <https://www.nbcwashington.com/news/local/13-teenagers-arrested-in-montgomery-county-carjackings-thefts/3472159/>

75. Jackie Bensen. (October 11, 2023). BMW for \$1,500: Teens charged in DC scheme to sell carjacked luxury vehicles on Instagram. NBC 4 Washington. <https://www.nbcwashington.com/news/local/suspects-arrested-in-alleged-criminal-scheme-to-carjack-sell-luxury-vehicles/3442130/>

Part 4: Accountability



“““

We can't allow kids to commit violent crimes and get away with it. But it also doesn't mean we walk away from two decades of success.

Brent Cohen, Acting Assistant Attorney General in the DOJ's Office of Justice Programs

Many factors play into whether a carjacking is solved — whether a suspect is arrested, charged, detained, and prosecuted — and what repercussions the offender will face. As with other criminal justice issues, good-faith disagreement among involved entities is inevitable. Police may sometimes feel that district attorneys aren't prosecuting enough. Prosecutors may at times feel that police are not giving them solid cases. Both police and prosecutors may think that judges are being too lenient. Judges say they are working within the parameters of the laws drafted by legislators. And legislators believe they are following the wishes of their constituents.

Meeting attendees reported that jurisdictions where different players, including youth violence interrupters, work together to tackle the problem have the most success. As noted by former Seattle

Police Chief Adrian Diaz, “Whether it's the prosecution, whether it's the judges, all of us have to make sure that [we're working together]”

Penalties

Penalties for adult carjackers vary across the country but are relatively predictable. But for juveniles and some young adults, the situation is more complicated. Sentencing options for juveniles range from diversion to probation to a custodial sentence. And some laws have caveats: In Washington, D.C., for example, the district's Youth Rehabilitation Act states that if a person is 24 years old or younger at the time of the offense, they are eligible for a shorter sentence. On the other hand, 16- and 17-year-olds can be charged as adults in certain cases.

Juveniles vs. Adults

The research is clear that adolescent brains are not as developed as adults', said Brent Cohen, Deputy Assistant Attorney General in the DOJ's Office of Justice Programs (OJP). "And so the question of ... 'Are kids being treated differently than adults?' — of course, they're treated differently, and they should be treated differently," he said. Cohen noted that while current juvenile sentencing guidelines may not be perfect, the justice system should not treat youths as adults because kids are in a different place developmentally.

Elizabeth Ryan, Administrator of the DOJ's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), agrees. "We know that juvenile brains are still developing until around age 25, so juveniles can't be treated the same as adults," she said. But, Ryan added, adolescent brain development research shows that during the teenage years, kids are capable of change, so intervention points are important.



OJJDP Administrator Elizabeth Ryan

Police

Barriers to Making Arrests

Staffing Shortages: Over the past four years, law enforcement agencies across the country have faced significant staffing issues; this obviously affects any department's ability to fight crime. Washington, D.C.'s Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) Chief Pamela Smith noted that "One of the less obvious complexities in combatting this [carjacking] trend is staffing challenges. Reduced force strength plays a role here because many of the strategies we've employed to drive down violent crime rely on overtime." MPD "is the smallest it has been in decades," *The Washington Post* noted in a March 2023 editorial "... and D.C. is more dangerous as a result." The article noted that the typical patrol

officer was responding to 23 percent more calls than five years prior.⁷⁶

Other jurisdictions — from Beloit, Wisconsin, to Holly Springs, North Carolina — related similar staffing problems. PERF has extensively researched and reported on the sworn officer staffing crisis facing U.S. law enforcement agencies caused by: (1) fewer people applying to become police officers; (2) more officers leaving their departments well before reaching retirement age; and (3) more current officers becoming eligible for retirement.⁷⁷

Making Identifications: MPD Chief Smith said that another complexity is the continued use of masks by offenders. "When a carjacking suspect wears a mask, it makes it more difficult not only for the victim to be able to identify them, but their face is also obscured in any video footage that is recovered from the incident," Chief Smith said.

76. Editorial Board. (March 24, 2023). Opinion: D.C. needs hundreds more police officers. Here's how to do it right. *The Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2023/03/24/dc-police-hiring-crime/>.

77. Police Executive Research Forum. (September 2019). *The Workforce Crisis, and What Police Agencies Are Doing About It*. <https://www.policeforum.org/assets/WorkforceCrisis.pdf> and Police Executive Research Forum. (August 2023). *Responding to the Staffing Crisis: Innovations in Recruitment and Retention*. <https://www.policeforum.org/assets/RecruitmentRetention.pdf>.

Another challenge when it comes to carjacking is connecting the individual later found in the stolen vehicle to the carjacking itself. If police can't prove that the person in the vehicle was the one who carjacked it, the charge may need to be downgraded to unauthorized use of a vehicle. And that means offenders are often released sooner.

Jurisdictional Boundaries: Because many carjackings cross jurisdictions — and sometimes state lines — jurisdictional issues must be resolved. These cases rely heavily on coordination and cooperation between jurisdictions.

Frustrations Over Lack of Accountability

A sentiment echoed by many police officials is that laws treat juvenile carjackers far too leniently. Because of new laws, some departments feel severely restricted in their ability to even investigate these crimes.

Maryland: In 2022, the Maryland General Assembly established the Child Interrogation Protection Act, which says that law enforcement may not conduct an interrogation of anyone under the age of 18 until the child has consulted an attorney retained by the parent or guardian or provided by the public defender's office.⁷⁸

Maryland law enforcement officials said that even if the child and parents want to talk, the requirement that an attorney be involved stops the process and severely hinders their ability to solve cases or learn about motives. "We all know that once an attorney gets involved, they are not going to [let the kid] talk," former Montgomery County Police Chief Marcus Jones said.

But Heather Warnken, Executive Director of the Center for Criminal Justice Reform at the University of Baltimore School of Law, said the Child Interrogation Protection Act was necessary. "It essentially

prevents the ability to lie to kids during an investigation and to create age-appropriate mechanisms so that they can exercise their Miranda rights — so they get access to an attorney and the interrogation shouldn't start till then," Warnken said.

The intention of Maryland's Juvenile Justice Reform Act, which also was approved in 2022, was to set up young people involved in the criminal justice system for long-term success. Among other things, it set 13 as the minimum age a young person can be arrested, except in cases of violent crime, where the minimum age is 10.⁷⁹

Malik Aziz, chief of the Prince George's County Police Department, said he believes there's been a rise in juvenile carjacking primarily because "these juveniles are very smart, and they know nothing will happen to them."

Prince George's County police have a great relationship with the state's attorney, he said. The issue for Chief Aziz is that, in Maryland, the Department of Juvenile Services has the overriding authority and approval to determine what is best for arrested juveniles.

Washington, D.C.: With more than half of its armed carjackings committed by juveniles, some in D.C. law enforcement have also been frustrated that many suspects are released. But in 2023, the U.S. Attorney's Office charged five teens under 18 at the time of the crime as adults in a series of carjackings.⁸⁰ "When that happened, we saw a significant decrease in our armed carjackings and carjackings as a whole for roughly about a month and a half," MPD Chief Smith said.

Other Jurisdictions: Investigator Chris Muscato of the **Rochester** (NY) Police Department said new legislation that went into effect in 2020 in New York means that it's exceedingly difficult to keep a juvenile incarcerated overnight — which

78. Maryland General Assembly. (2022). Juvenile Law – Child Interrogation Protection Act. <https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/mgaweb/legislation/details/SB0053?ys=2022RS>.

79. Maryland General Assembly, Department of Legislative Services. (2022). Fiscal and Policy Note: Juvenile Justice Reform. https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2022RS/fnotes/bil_0009/hb0459.pdf.

80. Keith L. Alexander. (December 11, 2023). Authorities in D.C. charge 10 people in sweeping carjacking indictment. The Washington Post. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2023/12/11/carjacking-indictment-dc-maryland/>.

means they never get that “immediate consequence” needed to change behavior.

In **Seattle** (WA), former Police Chief Adrian Diaz said he also struggles with the lack of accountability for juveniles. “We have to figure out a way where we create a level of accountability in the system,” he said. “If a juvenile gets caught with a gun, it may not be until the fifth time that they actually see a consequence. ... And that’s a huge challenge. Some of the youth we work with ... will go in front of a judge and say, ‘Well, my friend got an ankle monitor. So just give me an ankle monitor.’ Because they know there’s not that accountability.”

Former **San Diego** (CA) Police Chief David Nisleit has also been frustrated with the lack of accountability for juveniles. Because California has a point system, “it’s very difficult to put juveniles in jail.” Case in point: Four juveniles were recently apprehended on charges of committing a series of armed robberies — 20 convenience stores and five Amazon FedEx trucks — and Nisleit said they are likely to receive only six months in custody for those crimes.

Captain Doug Foster of the **Tucson** (AZ) Police Department said his department frequently encounters juveniles arrested for violent felony offenses with multiple prior arrests for similar conduct.

Omaha (NE) Police Department Captain Jeremy Christensen said his agency has arrested juveniles for stealing cars, but after being taken to the city’s youth center, they have been released within a short timeframe after the arrest, which presents the possibility they will re-offend before any effective rehabilitation efforts.

Prosecutors

Barriers to Prosecution

Prosecutors indicate that carjacking cases can be among the most challenging cases to solve and prosecute because of factors inherent in the crime — especially issues surrounding identification. Offenders move fast, wear masks, and surprise and terrify victims, all of which makes identification a challenge. And since offenders tend to work in groups, if a victim does get a good look at a person,

it is likely one of many suspects and may not be the primary perpetrator, since that person is almost always masked.

Further, if a car is recovered, it’s hard to prove that the person driving it is the person who committed the carjacking, and the prosecutor may only be able to prove unauthorized use of the vehicle.

And even if a crime is solved and a juvenile is prosecuted, there are limited options for where that juvenile can be detained. For instance, Brian Schwalb, Attorney General for the District of Columbia, said there have been periods of time in D.C. when juvenile facilities have been over capacity, lacking adequate space for youth requiring detention. “Supply of space, support, personnel, all of those are challenges, of course,” Schwalb said.

Jurisdictional Barriers

Washington, D.C.: Schwalb said that of the armed and unarmed carjackings that come into his office, about 60 percent are charged on the day of arrest, and there are many reasons why that number isn’t higher. “The attorneys in my office are assessing each case and making a determination whether there’s enough evidence to prove [the cases] beyond a reasonable doubt,” he said, adding that he wishes they had cases they could always prosecute, but the fact that they don’t is “not on anyone. ... These are hard cases.”

In D.C., most crimes committed by adults are prosecuted by the U.S. Attorney’s Office, which also prosecutes federal crimes.

Matthew Graves, U.S. Attorney for the District of Columbia, said one of the difficulties he has faced is that offenders 24 years old or younger at the time of the offense are eligible for shorter sentences than what would otherwise be handed down, pursuant to D.C.’s Youth Rehabilitation Act. According to Graves, in 2023, D.C. made 182 arrests for armed carjacking; of those, 139 were juveniles and 43 were adults, most of whom were 24 years old or under. Therefore, of the 182 people arrested in 2023 for carjacking, only 12 would have been eligible for the mandatory minimum 15-year sentence. Practically speaking, in D.C., according to Graves, “we’ve



Matthew Graves, U.S. Attorney for the District of Columbia

effectively eliminated the mandatory minimum for armed carjacking based on the profile of people committing the offense.”⁸¹

Maryland: Like their law enforcement colleagues, Maryland prosecutors also have been hampered by how juvenile cases can be processed. In many ways, the prosecution of juveniles in Maryland is out of the state’s attorney’s hands, said Aisha Braveboy, State’s Attorney for Prince George’s County. When a juvenile is arrested, the state’s Department of Juvenile Services is the processing arm that receives the charging document and makes an initial determination of whether the offending child will be detained or released.

Making a Federal Case

Crossing Jurisdictions: Especially when cases are cross-jurisdictional, federal prosecutors might be able to step in. Alex Blanchard, Assistant U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia, said his office focuses on cross-jurisdictional cases of carjackings — groups that go from Prince William County to Alexandria to Fairfax and so on.

“Obviously, those jurisdictions on their own can only do so much,” Blanchard said. “The feds have to come in. And this holds equally true for series [of carjackings] that occur across state lines. Throughout the [D.C., Maryland, and Virginia area], it’s only the feds who are going to be able to get their arms all the way around something like that.”

Taking a Tough Stance: Sometimes federal prosecutors get involved in carjacking cases to send a message. That was the case in Minneapolis, and the result was very encouraging. **For more on this effort, see page 33.**

The Department of Justice recently said it would commit more federal prosecutors and other resources to fighting gun crime in Washington, D.C., including carjackings.⁸²

Legislation

In states where the rise in carjackings has not abated since 2020, politicians are considering changes in the law. The D.C. Council passed a public safety overhaul in March 2024 that, among other things, expands the definition of carjacking.⁸³ And Maryland’s General Assembly began addressing the issue in its latest session, proposing legislation to curb juvenile shootings and carjackings.⁸⁴

Juvenile Justice Reform

While juvenile justice reform measures might need revisions, leaders agree that any changes must be thoughtful and not simply reactive.

As Prince George’s County (MD) Police Chief Malik Aziz noted, violent crime is not a widespread problem among juveniles. He emphasized that of the 150,000 kids across Prince George’s County,

81. Local law allows Graves to charge 16- and 17-year-olds as adults for certain crimes—but carjacking is not one of them. To get around this, the teen can be charged as an adult with armed robbery, and once they are in adult court, the carjacking charge can be added.

82. Sadie Gurman. (January 26, 2024). “Feds to Dispatch More Resources to Fight Washington’s Violent-Crime Surge.” *The Wall Street Journal*. <https://www.wsj.com/us-news/feds-to-dispatch-more-resources-to-fight-washingtons-violent-crime-surge-772ee754>

83. Meagan Flynn and Emily Davies. (March 5, 2024). “D.C. Council passes public safety overhaul following historic crime spike.” *The Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2024/03/05/dc-council-public-safety-secure-overhaul-pinto/>.

84. John Gonzalez. (February 16, 2024). Maryland leaders debate juvenile justice reform amid increasing youth violence. *ABC 7*. <https://wjla.com/news/local/maryland-lawmakers-prince-georges-county-leaders-juvenile-justice-reform-increase-youth-violence-crime-prevention-efforts-weapons-carjacking>.

about 500 are involved in crime of any type, and less than 75 require intense focus because of their persistent involvement in violent crime.

Administrator Elizabeth Ryan of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) noted, “There is a very, very small proportion of kids, like less than 0.1 percent% of the kids in the justice system, who engage in very serious, violent crime chronically.”

Office of Justice Programs (OJP) Acting Assistant Attorney General Brent Cohen agreed, noting that the rise in juvenile carjackings and other violent crimes is not a reason to roll back important reform legislation. “You’re talking about a very specific population of juveniles with a very specific severity of charge or high risk of committing another violent crime,” Cohen said. “And I think that’s a really important point and seems like a nuance that gets lost too often, but it’s core to this issue.” If changes need to be made, Cohen said, the focus should always be on which kids pose a risk to public safety and how do we take immediate action to mitigate that specific risk.

Cross-Agency Information Sharing

Executive Director Kristine Hamann of the Prosecutors’ Center for Excellence said forming cross-agency collaborations is important both for building successful cases and for preventing crimes by identifying who the carjackers are and taking proactive measures. Hamann was encouraged by the coordination in Prince George’s County, Maryland, among police, prosecutors, and the school system.

For more on this partnership, see page 39.

In a report released in January 2024, the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council, an independent agency within D.C. government, noted that there hasn’t been enough government coordination to tackle the district’s crime problem.⁸⁵ While coordination could improve, some D.C. leaders said it’s been better in the past year than ever before.

In his 35 years in law enforcement, Anne Arundel County (MD) Police Major Herbert Hasenpusch said he also has seen tremendous progress in information-sharing among agencies and across jurisdictions. According to Hasenpusch, the amount of information being shared openly and freely, as well as the degree of cooperation, is impressive and something not seen in the past.

Heather Childs, the Chief Trust and Security Officer with Uber, encourages cities to come up with an information-sharing task force across agencies and jurisdictions. Her company saw firsthand how such a thing can promote success.

85. Emily Davies. (January 30, 2024). Report says D.C. agencies need better coordination to curb gun violence. The Washington Post. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2024/01/30/dc-gun-violence-report-coordination/>.

Minnesota's Innovative Approach to Tackling Carjackings

In May 2020, Minneapolis was ground zero for the protests that followed the murder of George Floyd. Those protests led to riots, followed by an explosion in crime. A state that historically maintained low crime rates saw a sharp increase, said Melinda Williams, Assistant U.S. Attorney for the District of Minnesota.

And among those violent crimes, carjackings skyrocketed — increasing 549 percent from 2019 to 2021.

But by 2023, carjackings had decreased by more than 50 percent. Andy Luger, U.S. Attorney for the District of Minnesota, assembled a coalition in the spring of 2022 and announced at a press conference that “until things get back to normal levels, the U.S. Attorney’s Office will take every viable adult carjacking, [and offenders] will be prosecuted federally,” Williams said. “And he got really loud about it.”



Melinda Williams, Assistant U.S. Attorney for the District of Minnesota

Williams believes that, for the most part, carjackings respond to deterrence. “We were seeing two different kinds of carjacking: Your gang/joyriding/we’re-doing-this-to-be-wild-and-put-it-on-the-socials,” she said. “And then we were seeing more organized groups who wanted the cars and were doing things with the cars instead of just dumping them. And certainly the second group ... was much more organized. And they were very aware of, ‘If I do this, there is going to be a federal response, and this isn’t going to be good for me.’”

But even among the first group, the state saw a dramatic reduction; even though juveniles were not being prosecuted federally, Minnesota found that

those “swift, certain consequences” for adults influenced the juvenile crime rate. Federal prosecutors also focused on elevating the voices of the victims — not just in the courtroom but in the community.

Working with Police: Williams said the Minneapolis Police Department is very involved in the initiative and has had a very positive partnership with her office. Part of that effort involves police officers sitting inside a “war room” with the assistant U.S. attorneys who are leading the state’s gang strategy.

And because taking cases federally might be new to local officers collecting evidence, Williams streamlined the intake form, which alerts officers about what is needed for the feds to take the case. “We’ve papered the state with these forms,” she said. The user-friendly form “has made it much more helpful in terms of getting the right things in the door.”

Working with Youth: In an effort to not only reduce the crime rate, but also have a preventive impact on youth crime, Minnesota also uses the data-driven Group Violence Intervention⁸⁶ program. “Because we’re not just out to put people in prison for as long as we possibly can,” Williams said. “We want to reduce crime rates and make our community [safer].”

>> *continued on page 34*

86. National Network for Safe Communities at John Jay College. Group Violence Intervention. <https://nnscommunities.org/strategies/group-violence-intervention/>.

continued from page 33

In the program, the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Minnesota identifies young offenders who are proximate to crime but not yet prolific criminals. Then they bring those young people into a room along with community members who tell them there's a better way. Community resources are shared with the group, and they are encouraged to leave gang life.

Working Together: Williams acknowledged that what Minnesota has done may not work everywhere. But she stressed the importance of strong partnerships and meeting regularly with local police, the FBI, and other agencies in the community that have a hand in finding justice. They don't always agree, Williams said, but having those conversations has led to positive results that they hope will continue.

Part 5: Insights, Innovations, Promising Solutions, and Prevention



“““

It's not one person's problem to solve.

Kurtis Palermo, Executive Vice President of Roca in Baltimore, Maryland

While policing and prosecution play important roles in making sure cities remain safe from carjackings, prevention also needs to enter the conversation, said Brian Schwab, Attorney General of the District of Columbia. “We ask, in my view, too much of the criminal justice system to solve this problem.”

Neera Tanden, Director of the White House Domestic Policy Council, said she applauds the work cities are doing across the country to try to stop crime before it happens and not rely solely on the criminal justice system. “We’ve had traditional answers in the past,” Tanden said. “At the end of the day, we want to ensure that we’re preventing crime instead of waiting for crime to happen.”

Tanden said a lot of the issues raised at the PERF summit were ones she has been working on at the White House Domestic Policy Council — the interconnected issues of mental health, poverty, and the significant rise in absenteeism in schools since the pandemic.

This section addresses the promising solutions and prevention programs happening across the country.

What's Working Across the Country

Minneapolis, Minnesota

53.4 percent decrease from 2021 to 2023

Much of the work the state of Minnesota has done to decrease carjackings stems from the U.S. Attorney's Office pursuing federal prosecutions, including its coordination with the Minneapolis Police Department (MPD) and other agencies.

Law enforcement has also implemented other initiatives and changes. Before the city's spike in carjackings, the MPD had two units that would receive juvenile carjacking reports: the juvenile unit and the robbery unit, said Sergeant David Ligneel. Once they determined that carjackings were coming in sprees by both juveniles and adults, the department decided to assign all Minneapolis carjackings to three investigators.

MPD also prioritized processing all carjacked vehicles — using license-plate recognition forensics and searching for any items associated with the vehicle that could be fingerprinted or used to identify suspects, Ligneel said. Once MPD has identified suspects, they partner with the FBI to use cellphone data and map out whether those suspects were at the carjacking scenes.

MPD also partners with the Hennepin County (MN) Sheriff’s Office (HCSO), which provides criminal intelligence analysts dedicated to auto thefts and carjackings. According to HCSO Lieutenant Bryan Hermerding, the county saw a 40 percent decrease in carjackings from 2022 to 2023. The agency attributes the drop to federal intervention and aggressive prosecution by the U.S. Attorney’s Office, as well as Minnesota’s creation of a carjacking statute in 2023. According to HCSO Sergeant Mike Hopkins, the new carjacking law carries a more significant sentence for first-degree convictions compared with aggravated robbery, which was the law previously used to prosecute these cases.

New Orleans, Louisiana

43.6 percent decrease from 2022 to 2023

Hans Ganthier, Chief Deputy Superintendent of the New Orleans Police Department (NOPD), attributes the decrease in his city’s carjacking numbers to the implementation of a six-point violent crime reduction strategy.

The most effective point: “Dealing with them from the very beginning,” Ganthier said. “In other words, it may not be the carjackings we’re going after. We find the auto burglaries. In our city, auto thefts and auto burglaries can easily turn into carjackings, armed robbery, shooting. So we decided that’s where we’re going after them right there. We’re going to see who the most pertinent groups are and destroy them piece by piece with our violent crime team, our special ops folks, and our detectives. So we have gone after them really aggressively from the start.”



New Orleans Chief Deputy Superintendent Hans Ganthier

NOPD also began working closely with the city’s prosecutors. “We had a problem with juveniles going to court and claiming, ‘I only carry a gun because I live in a bad neighborhood,’” Ganthier said. “What we were able to do is get with our prosecutors and show them social media of these juveniles and show them taunting each other and say, ‘They will bring this excuse to you; don’t buy it.’ And the more history we were able to give them, the more seriously they and the juvenile judges would take it.”

The other points in the New Orleans strategic plan are: increasing collaborative efforts to fight violent crime; reorganizing and refocusing specialized units; providing tactical support, additional manpower, and effective hands-on training and professional development opportunities; using initiatives and operations to maintain a continuous active presence in areas impacted by violent crime; and using precision data analysis to reduce and prevent crime.

RECOMMENDATION: Focus on the small number of individuals who are persistently committing carjackings.

Most carjackings are committed by a small number of repeat offenders; by stopping that smaller number, significant reductions in overall numbers are possible.

Chicago, Illinois

29.3 percent decrease from 2021 to 2023

Chicago has seen its carjacking numbers drop from a high of 1,850 in 2021 to 1,308 in 2023. One of its biggest initiatives to address carjackings has been collaborating with other agencies through its citywide Vehicular Hijacking Task Force, which expanded in 2021 and received the Mayor's Medal of Honor in April 2023. The task force brings together the Chicago Police Department (CPD), the Cook County Sheriff's Office, the Illinois State Police, and the FBI.

The department also created dedicated vehicular hijacking task forces in each of its five detective division areas, said CPD Deputy Chief Kevin Bruno.

A member of the citywide task force is embedded in the CPD's emergency communications room 24/7, listening for calls that involve carjackings, monitoring city cameras, and directing resources. Bruno notes that these members of the task force are "in the communications room with the dispatchers, and when a carjacking occurs, they know where the plate readers are, and they know the trends. They know how to track this information, and they're putting this out there in real time." If the suspect jumps on the expressway, the task force member knows where the plate readers are on the expressway; if air support is up, the task force member will notify them right away to try to get them in the area of the carjacking.

Leaders from the Bureau of Detectives started having regular monthly meetings started having regular monthly meetings with prosecutors from the city's juvenile court system and have developed good working relationships with them, so that "when we have repeat offenders, we are able to pick up the phone and ask them to pay special attention to some of these cases," Bruno said.

San Diego, California

29 percent decrease from 2022 to 2023

San Diego has been going after one of the driving forces of its carjackings — street gangs. "We have been doing a lot of large-scale operations in the past 18 months that were really targeting street gangs," said former San Diego Police Department (SDPD) Chief David Nisleit. "And we've had a lot of good prosecution from that. We've really kind of decimated some of our gangs."

SDPD Lieutenant Matt Dobbs said his agency has also assigned investigative responsibility for all carjackings to its centralized robbery unit instead of the patrol command where the carjackings occur. "This allows for rapid identification of emerging series that may have gone unnoticed if the incidents crossed jurisdictional boundaries between area commands," Dobbs said. "The prompt response of seasoned investigators assists in quickly disseminating information in hopes of identifying suspects and returning the victim's vehicle."

Dobbs also said their robbery unit has a permanently assigned field evidence technician to process the recovered vehicles for DNA, fingerprints, and other evidence to aid in the identification and prosecution of suspects.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg, North Carolina

21.8 percent decrease from 2019 to 2023

David Robinson, Deputy Chief of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department, said his department responds to carjackings as they would a homicide; it's a Priority 1 response with multiple officers, and they immediately engage with their real-time crime center to share information.

Los Angeles, California

20.6 percent decrease from 2022 to 2023

Juvey Mejia, Detective Supervisor of the Los Angeles Police Department, said his department found some success reducing carjackings by putting together a task force that goes after smash-and-grab robberies "because a lot of those cars will be used to

commit these secondary crimes,” he said. “By targeting the smash-and-grab robberies ... that, I believe, helped with carjacking numbers.”

Baltimore, Maryland

18.5 percent decrease from 2022 to 2023

John Herzog, Lieutenant Colonel of the Baltimore Police Department, said his agency has done a lot of work on prevention programs and going after repeat offenders. In late February 2024, two juveniles were among six suspects who were charged in connection with at least 80 violent crimes, including 36 carjackings, in Baltimore City and Baltimore County. One of the juveniles was charged as an adult.⁸⁷

Washington, D.C.

While D.C.’s carjacking numbers are still high, they do appear to be easing somewhat. Four months into 2024, D.C. saw a 32.5 percent decrease in carjackings compared with the same four-month period in 2023.⁸⁸

The D.C. Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) has set up cross-jurisdictional collaborations and partnerships with federal organizations, but it also has implemented a number of initiatives and operations over the past few years that appear promising.

MPD first formed its Carjacking Task Force in January 2021, working closely with federal and regional law enforcement partners to investigate those offenses. In January 2022, with carjackings showing no signs of slowing, MPD expanded the task force.

In July 2023, MPD created a citywide Robbery Suppression Initiative, which identified the high-density areas and timeframes when most carjackings and other violent crimes occur and deployed additional resources. This initiative differs from past approaches in that it focuses on coordinating resources across all police districts with an incident

commander taking the lead and the Joint Operations Command Center activated at night. During operations, MPD coordinates with federal law enforcement, university police departments, Metro Transit Police, and surrounding jurisdictions.

“We’ve stood up several different operations or initiatives overnight,” said MPD Chief Pamela Smith. “In Operation ATLAS (Action Teams Leaving Areas Safer), we bring in officers overnight just to focus on various areas of crime, and what we’ve seen is a significant reduction in crime in those areas, specifically with our armed carjackings.”

Cross-Agency and Cross-Jurisdictional Partnerships

In PERF’s survey on carjackings, its members echoed one another on the need for more agencies and jurisdictions to share information to get the problem under control. “Collaboration between agencies is critical to combat this crime,” said Lieutenant Julia Heng of the University of Maryland Police Department. Many who have collaborated have seen positive results.

Chief Andre Sayles of the Beloit (WI) Police Department said that “collaborations between different law enforcement agencies, as well as partnerships with community organizations and local businesses, have improved information-sharing and coordination efforts.” And Gloucester Township (NJ) Police Chief David Harkins said that “law enforcement information sharing, cooperation, and the full application of investigative resources has led to successful investigations of carjacking cases.”

Director Nancy La Vigne of the DOJ’s National Institute of Justice (NIJ) said there can be great value in forming multi-jurisdictional collaborations, if for no other reason than to share data to identify patterns and map trends. And mapping the locations where carjackings take place and where vehicles are recovered gives communities clues as to

87. Alexa Dikos and Amy Simpson. (February 27, 2024). 4 adults, 2 juveniles charged for nearly 80 violent crimes, says Maryland Attorney General. Fox 45 Baltimore. <https://foxbaltimore.com/news/local/4-adults-2-juveniles-charged-for-nearly-80-violent-crimes-says-maryland-attorney-general>

88. MPD. MPD Carjacking Dashboard.



It's really important that when we're mapping out these offenses, we're doing it beyond the specific jurisdictions. There are thousands of independent law enforcement agencies, and they all have their own [records management] systems — they're not necessarily sharing data. So there is great potential value in interagency and multi-jurisdictional task forces, where they're not just sharing intelligence but also data and mapping across boundaries to identify more of these patterns and distinguish between different types of carjackings.

Director Nancy La Vigne, National Institute of Justice

where to increase surveillance and opportunities for intervention.

Washington, D.C.

D.C. officials realized early on that collaboration was going to be critical. In February 2022, they announced a cross-border initiative with neighboring Prince George's County, Maryland, to focus on greater communication around carjackings, expanded intelligence-sharing, and increased investigative support.⁸⁹

The Metropolitan Police Department (MPD)'s Violent Crime Suppression Division has worked with federal and local partners to conduct operations that resulted in arrests and seizures of firearms and drugs. One example was Operation Free Car, in which MPD used undercover officers to investigate and expose a carjacking crew in Northeast D.C. The multi-agency effort included MPD's Violent Crime Impact Team and Carjacking Task Force, as well as the FBI and Prince George's County (MD) Police Department. At the end of the 10-month operation, eight individuals were indicted on a variety of charges, including armed carjacking/robbery and firearms offenses, and the team was able to recover nine vehicles.

In April 2024, MPD launched its Real-Time Crime Center, which coordinates a real-time response to crime across D.C. and the region.⁹⁰ In

this center, federal law enforcement — including the U.S. Secret Service, Park Police, Capitol Police, and Metro Transit Police — as well as police from neighboring jurisdictions in Virginia and Maryland will have access to D.C.'s network of surveillance cameras.⁹¹ As proposed, each agency will have a staff member stationed at the center to monitor the city's 300 cameras and share information in real time.

Prince George's County, Maryland

When Malik Aziz became chief of the Prince George's County Police Department in 2021, the number of carjackings in the area surprised him. Within two months, his department created a 20-person Carjacking Interdiction Unit.

Significantly, this is not a task force but, according to Chief Aziz, a full-time unit dedicated to addressing this crime. "It was one of the best things we ever did in Prince George's," he said. "Before that, it was segregated. We were investigating carjackings individually in three different sections of the city, so you had three different groups investigating. We centralized a unit with the kind of leadership that was needed to put this thing together in one place."

Forming a relationship with D.C.; Montgomery County, Maryland; Fairfax County, Virginia; and other counties in Maryland was also critical, Chief Aziz said.

89. Segraves. 'Playtime Is Over.'

90. Peter Hermann. (April 8, 2024). D.C. police 'Real-Time Crime Center,' launches with live video monitoring. The Washington Post. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2024/04/08/crime-center-dc-police-video/>

91. Executive Office of the Mayor. (December 7, 2023). Mayor Bowser and MPD Announce New Real-Time Crime Center. <https://mayor.dc.gov/release/mayor-bowser-and-mpd-announce-new-real-time-crime-center-0r>



Prince George's County Schools Superintendent
Millard House II

Another key relationship involves the players inside the county, and that includes the school system — a necessary partner since juveniles have made up a bulk of the arrests for carjacking in Prince George's County since 2021. Millard House II, Superintendent of Prince George's County Public Schools, attended PERF's carjacking summit and stressed that it was not the first time he was connecting with the police chief and state's attorney about the issue. "What we're seeing in Prince George's County is about momentum: We are [addressing and] combatting this issue," he said.

Because so many of the kids committing carjackings are not in school and are truant, the school system is working on ways to bring them back. They are also working closely with police on juveniles in the school system who repeatedly encounter the criminal justice system (see page 41). "We are not separate entities," House said. "We are an entity of the community now, and we have to keep [the lines] open and look at all the issues and data in front of us."

New Orleans, Louisiana

The New Orleans Police Department has increased its collaborative efforts, using federal, state, and local law enforcement partnerships to execute joint operations. The department holds in-depth violent crime meetings with federal and state partners once

a week, said Chief Deputy Superintendent Hans Ganthier.

New Orleans has been working on cross-agency collaborations since carjackings began rising in 2020. Then-New Orleans Superintendent Shaun Ferguson told PERF in 2021 that they had created a violent crime abatement team in October 2020 that included his officers, investigators from the Louisiana State Police, and the FBI. He'd also been meeting with others in the criminal justice system, including the chief judge of the criminal court, the chief judge of the juvenile court, the district attorney, and the public defender's office. "We've all committed to sitting down and identifying the challenges in our various shops," Ferguson said in 2021. "As a result, we're starting to see the different components make a difference."⁹²

Chicago, Illinois

The Chicago Police Department has been collaborating with other agencies through its citywide Vehicular Hijacking Task Force.

Other Collaborations

Jurisdictions should also look to collaborate with organizations other than police, prosecutors, and government agencies. Businesses like ride-share companies and community organizations can help curb the carjacking problem.

RECOMMENDATION: Develop information-sharing relationships with neighboring jurisdictions. Regularly meet with partners (prosecutors, service providers, neighboring law enforcement agencies, etc.) to discuss problems and coordinate solutions. Create information-sharing programs between jurisdictions, mapping data to identify patterns, motivations, and types of carjackings among different agencies.

92. PERF. *Police Challenged by Dramatic Increases*.

Police Working in Partnership with Schools

Gary Cunningham is no stranger to policing or to Prince George's County, Maryland, having worked for the county's police department from 1985 to 2011. In 2022, he became Director of Safety and Security for the county's school system.

He tracks crime in the county by attending the Prince George's County Police Department's weekly crime meetings and other regular meetings held by regional law enforcement, the courts, and the State's Attorney's Office.

A few months into the job, he heard the juvenile crime rate was rising, and he was seeing the disruptions from arrests in the schools. That's when he decided to take further steps to increase communication with local police. "In an effort to prevent arrests from occurring at the schools, we decided to share information so that they could make the arrests away from the schools," Cunningham said. "As a result of that, we created a liaison investigative position where the local jurisdictions can contact my officer, and they have a direct contact for information."

Having a single liaison has streamlined the process, Cunningham said. The liaison focuses on issues like carjackings, firearms, and gang activity.

At the weekly Prince George's County Police Department crime meetings, Cunningham and his liaison get insight into what has been happening outside the school walls — for example, the number of carjackings from the previous week and if they resulted in arrests.

While the Prince George's County school system and police department have more resources available to them than smaller jurisdictions do, Cunningham said it is imperative for all jurisdictions to find a way for schools and police to partner to reduce juvenile crime.

"[Police departments] have to have a relationship with the school system, because oftentimes, as it relates to juvenile crime, we have the information, and there's a specific way that we have to release it," he said. "Having a direct contact with a liaison with that agency, you develop a relationship. You know what the limits are. You know what needs to be done to obtain information. And, again, one of the last things we want is for police officers to come to school to make arrests, so we'll work with you to get what you need."

Juvenile Prevention

The key to decreasing juvenile carjackings, community leaders say, is to reach kids before they get involved in crime — and to make sure those who have started committing nonviolent offenses don't progress to crimes of violence. "Our systems have failed these kids so many times before they show up in the criminal justice system," said Brian Schwalb, Attorney General of the District of Columbia. "So we have a job to do [to try to reach them]."

Schools and the Truancy Problem

When schools shut down at the beginning of the pandemic, some teens had too much time on their hands, especially if they weren't closely monitored by parents or didn't have the technology needed to effectively learn online.

While most students returned to their classrooms by 2021, rates of chronic absenteeism and truancy are still elevated. "They're supposed to be in school, but we have an awful lot of kids who never go to school, or who have very spotty attendance records," said Aisha Braveboy, State's Attorney for Prince George's County in Maryland. "We're working on a project with our superintendent to really focus in on truancy, because we have recognized

Prince George's County State's Attorney Aisha Braveboy (RIGHT)

Jawanna Hardy, founder of Guns Down Friday (FAR RIGHT)



that has been a common denominator among a lot of the young people who we arrest — the fact that they are not in school.”

In Washington, D.C., chronic absenteeism and truancy declined in the 2022–23 school year but were still higher than pre-pandemic rates. Chronic absenteeism (absent at least 10 percent of the time) fell from 48 percent to 43 percent, while truancy (having at least 10 unexcused absences) fell from 42 percent to 37 percent. “Attendance is not growing at an equal pace in all schools,” according to the D.C. attendance report for 2022–23.⁹³ Some individual schools, particularly those in disadvantaged neighborhoods, have a much larger chronically absent student body. At Ballou High School in Ward 8, for example, 89.3 percent of students were chronically absent in 2022–23.⁹⁴

The school system and D.C. Council have proposed several initiatives, including those focused on mentorships, in 2024.⁹⁵ And because the majority of those arrested by the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) for carjacking are juveniles, the department has stepped up enforcement of curfew

and truancy laws. In September 2023, in response to the summer peak of carjackings in D.C., MPD introduced a Juvenile Curfew Enforcement Pilot Program.⁹⁶

In Prince George’s County, the public school system is working on ways to bring juveniles back, including making sure mental health supports and mentoring services are available. Giving them a way to engage is imperative, said Superintendent House. “One of the things we’re working on is the resurgence of career-tech opportunities,” he said. “When you look at students who are not coming to school, they are looking for engagement in other places. It may come from gang activity; it may come from a carjacking crew. So we’re looking for opportunities to engage them in different ways.”

But Jawanna Hardy, a D.C. mentor who created Guns Down Friday⁹⁷ and works with many of the kids who are committing these crimes, said many aren’t in class because they’re afraid to go to their neighborhood schools. Scared of rival gangs, some kids stay away from large gatherings like schools.

93. District of Columbia Office of the State Superintendent. (November 2023). District of Columbia Attendance Report 2022-2023 School Year. https://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/publication/attachments/2022-23%20Attendance%20Report_FINAL_0.pdf.

94. DC School Report Card. Ballou High School. <https://schoolreportcard.dc.gov/lea/1/school/452/report>.

95. Sarah Y. Kim. (March 20, 2024). School absenteeism rates in D.C. are alarmingly high. What’s the city doing about it? WAMU 88.5 <https://wamu.org/story/24/03/20/how-is-dc-addressing-chronic-absenteeism/>.

96. Executive Office of the Mayor. (August 31, 2023). Mayor Bowser Reminds Residents that the Juvenile Curfew Enforcement Pilot Begins on September 1. <https://mayor.dc.gov/release/mayor-bowser-reminds-residents-juvenile-curfew-enforcement-pilot-begins-september-1>.

97. Guns Down Friday. <https://gunsdownfriday.com/>.

RECOMMENDATION: Work with local school systems and community organizations to address juvenile crime and get kids back in school.

Communities need to examine why kids aren't attending school and respond to individual needs. While no one has established a causal relationship, the number of juvenile carjackings rose while children were out of school during the COVID-19 pandemic, and many of those kids have not re-engaged with their education.

Community Programs and Mentors

D.C. mentor Duane Cunningham, who works with D.C. Youth Rehabilitative Services in the Oasis Mentorship Program and is known in the community as "Cousin Wayne," said it's imperative that juveniles who are involved in crime or at risk of falling into it are given one-on-one mentoring if cities hope to curtail their juvenile crime problem. "When young kids [who commit carjacking] get locked up, they go to jail; they come right back home the next day, and then they go and do it again ... nobody sits them down and says, 'Let me tell you what you're doing. This is how you hurt your family. This is how you hurt your community. And this is how you hurt yourself.' Nobody's doing it. That's the part that's missing."



Marcelles Queen, founder of Representation for the Bottom

Marcelles Queen, a D.C. "violence interrupter" who started the non-profit Representation for the Bottom in 2023, focuses on family development and intensive membership. He said it all begins in the household, and if the family life is not addressed, the violence will continue. His organization focuses on the home, bringing parents and children together. He said, "You can lock up the kid all day; it's not gonna change. You're gonna have a full adult come home with no skills, and why would he not come home and rob a bank or really hurt someone? You have to challenge the household in general."

Engaging and Supporting Young People:

Jawanna Hardy served in the military for six years, and when she came home to D.C., she "realized the streets were worse than a warzone," she said. She wanted to create change, so she started Guns Down Friday, an organization that goes door-to-door reaching out to families personally. She also works as a violence intervention specialist at Children's National Hospital.⁹⁸

Hardy mentors several teens, including a 14-year-old who attended the PERF summit with her. She spoke of how the young man had already lost four friends to gun violence. And when he lashes out at her, she knows it is generated by the trauma he has experienced; she also knows she cannot give up on him. Consistency is important in the lives of these kids, Hardy said. Many programs and many mentors come and go, teaching kids that they can't be relied on.

Kurtis Palermo, Executive Vice President of Roca⁹⁹ in Baltimore, has seen the effects of that inconsistency. He works with young adults ages 16 to 24 who have experienced urban violence and trauma to build relationships between them and police and other government agencies. "We're working with a group of young people that most other agencies either don't want to work with or they've tried [to work with] but haven't been successful," Palermo said. Roca is a four-year intervention

98. Children's National. Youth Violence Intervention Program. <https://www.childrensnational.org/in-the-community/advocacy-and-outreach/youth-violence-intervention-program>.

99. Roca. <https://rocainc.org/who-we-work-with/locations/roca-baltimore-location/>.

program that uses cognitive behavioral therapy to create a sustained change in behavior.

“We’re working with them one-on-one and in groups,” Palermo said. “[We use] different avenues to build that muscle in the brain so that they’re not pulling out the gun when they see someone across the street who they think disrespected them.” Reprogramming that automatic reaction is so critical “because it’s putting them in harm’s way.”

Former Seattle Police Chief Adrian Diaz said he is encouraged by the 2021¹⁰⁰ creation of the Seattle and King County Regional Peacekeepers Collective, which provides resources to young people and their families.¹⁰¹ Through it, police work with various organizations, including Community Passageways¹⁰² and Choose 180.¹⁰³ Having such programs can be helpful in tackling the juvenile crime issue, but former Chief Diaz warns against inconsistency. “One of the things that is the biggest challenge is when you have an uptick in violence, there are cities investing all this money into these organizations, and then the violence goes down, and the money retracts,” he said. “And so you have huge challenges in that youth require stability. And when you don’t have that stability, it impacts them, and then we wonder why they re-offended.”

Heather Warnken, Executive Director of the Center for Criminal Justice Reform at the University of Baltimore School of Law, said that — as the ongoing carjacking crisis has shown — the long-term impacts of the pandemic require that investments made during COVID don’t go away. She said resources for community-based strategies and services will instead need to be increased. One of the biggest gaps is in supporting victims of crime — because, Warnken said, those who commit crimes are almost always victims first. It is important to have community-based victim services that are untethered to the criminal justice system, she said.



Heather Warnken, Executive Director of the Center for Criminal Justice Reform at the University of Baltimore School of Law

Collaboration with Community Organizations

Kurtis Palermo of Baltimore’s Roca program said it’s unfair for individual agencies to be constantly asked how they’ll solve this problem. Police, community organizations, and government agencies need to be working *together* to solve the problem. Roca, for instance, works closely with the Baltimore Police Department and a host of other agencies. “We’ve been able to work together at the state and local levels, [across] agencies, to have a cross-systems approach to violence,” he said. “I meet with police leadership every month; myself and Tyrone [Kent, Assistant Director of Outreach and Safety at Roca] are at every single district in Baltimore City every single month talking about young people of concern. We’re talking about referrals ... and following up: How are they doing? What are they doing? Are they engaged?”

Roca also works with judges and Maryland’s Department of Juvenile Services. “And that’s what it takes,” Palermo said. “Sending someone to a program is great. Giving someone a job is

100. Kamaria Hightower. (July 22, 2021). Mayor Durkan Announces \$2 Million Investment in King County Regional Peacekeepers Collective Focused on Addressing Gun Violence in King County Using a Public Health Approach. Office of the Mayor. <https://durkan.seattle.gov/2021/07/mayor-durkan-announces-2-million-investment-in-king-county-regional-peacekeepers-collective-focused-on-addressing-gun-violence-in-king-county-using-a-public-health-approach/>.

101. Seattle & King County Public Health. (2022). Regional Peacekeepers Collective Strategy. <https://kingcounty.gov/~media/depts/executive/performance-strategy-budget/documents/pdf/RLSJC/2022/May26/RPKC-Service-Model-Overview.ashx?la=en>.

102. Community Passageways. <https://www.communitypassageways.org/>.

103. Choose 180. <https://choose180.org/>.

Federal Support for Young People

The DOJ's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) provides federal funding resources, conducts training and technical assistance, and researches which programs are working.

"And the good news is that we know a lot about what works now to keep kids out of delinquency," said Elizabeth Ryan, Administrator of OJJDP, which funds Roca and violence interrupters around the country.

OJJDP has invested in decades of research that shows what works to reduce juvenile crime, and much can be found on the National Institute of Justice's CrimeSolutions website.¹⁰⁴ The site contains evidence-based programs and practices in the areas of criminal justice, juvenile justice, youth mentoring, school safety, and crime victim services.

It also funds an array of programs that span prevention, intervention, and reentry strategies to help prevent youth crime. One of the key ingredients to keeping kids out of delinquency and violent crime is intensive family-based support.

"You can't work with a kid in isolation outside of working with their family," Ryan said. Connecting young people to caring adults through mentorship programs is also key. It's also imperative to strengthen young people's connection to school by doubling down on efforts to get kids back into school and create more safe spaces for kids.

Another key is focusing on youth development that's tailored to the child, as not every kid is going to want to play an instrument or play basketball. "You need to work with kids individually to find out what's going to help them," Ryan said.



OJJDP Administrator Elizabeth Ryan

awesome. But if they can't sustain that opportunity, and if we're not holding them accountable in a safe environment, they're not going to be successful. And we need to be held accountable as well."

Beloit (WI) Police Chief Andre Sayles said that his department has teamed with Community Action¹⁰⁵ and Youth Build¹⁰⁶ to develop relationships with at-risk youth and programs focused on providing mentorship, education, and alternatives

to criminal activities, which has "helped address the root causes of carjackings." Sayles added, "We had an opportunity to work with at-risk kids and really get to know them ... [and when] we did this ... those kids started to understand the consequences of what they were doing and how these acts were bad for the overall community. We've since seen a decrease in carjackings and vehicle thefts."

104. National Institute of Justice. Crime Solutions. <https://crimesolutions.ojp.gov/>.

105. WISCAP. <https://wiscap.org/>.

106. YouthBuild. <https://youthbuild.org/>.

RECOMMENDATION: Engage and Involve

Community: Coordinate with families, schools, and service organizations to provide supportive rehabilitation to juvenile offenders. Seek input from community groups, people who have engaged in carjackings, and researchers. Have a consistent police presence in high-crime neighborhoods, keeping officers on consistent beats.

Ride-Sharing and Delivery Strategies

Heather Childs, the Chief Trust and Security Officer with Uber, said her company has been working on ways to prevent carjackings and help their drivers who become victims. Childs noted that their most significant strategy has been trying to prevent criminals from using Uber's service by removing potentially fraudulent accounts and installing targeted ID verification. For example, in 2021, Uber launched a feature requiring riders who set up a new account with a prepaid card, gift card, or Venmo to upload a valid ID, such as a driver's license or passport. They then conduct a series of validity checks on the ID.

Childs said Uber also has worked to educate its drivers about ways to prevent carjackings and auto thefts by avoiding common traps, like leaving their car unattended while still running or sitting in a dark area while looking at their phone. These tips are pushed out as alerts and are in the app, she said. There is also an emergency button, available in about 1,800 cities through a partnership with RapidSOS, that enables key trip details to be digitally sent to 911 dispatchers, including the caller's name, the make and model of the Uber car, the license plate, and GPS coordinates.

Taylor Bennett, the Global Head of Public Affairs for DoorDash, has also seen carjackers using his company's app fraudulently. "They're finding all kinds of ways with fake IDs to get around the system," Bennett said. "And so it's a constant whack-a-mole to close those accounts."

In addition to fighting fraud, Bennett said DoorDash has recently partnered with

municipalities, including D.C., to provide dashcams to drivers. The cameras not only act as deterrents but can also help identify carjackers. And Apple AirTags can act in similar ways — as a means of deterrent and for finding the suspect/vehicle. "I think it's a deterrent," Bennett said. "The more that these carjackers know that there are technologies in these cars that can potentially connect them to the crime, hopefully that reduces it."

Promising Technology

Summit attendees said that law enforcement agencies should keep current on the available technological resources that can help identify trends, gather evidence, and ultimately make arrests.

License Plate Readers and Surveillance Cameras

Lieutenant Adam Minner of the Knoxville (TN) Police Department was one of many in law enforcement who praised license plate reader technology. He said plate readers are "One of the department's most successful uses of technology, [and it's] through our license plate reader technologies [that they learn] important trends and provide important information in the circumstance that led up to the incident."

Captain Doug Foster of the Tucson (AZ) Police Department said that investments like automated plate reader cameras will allow for quick apprehension — and "the quick apprehension of these offenders is essential, not only to public safety, but to the successful prosecution of the case," Foster said.

The Chicago Police Department (CPD) invested in nearly 400 fixed plate readers and an additional dozen mobile readers. According to Deputy Chief Kevin Bruno, the department also has access to the Illinois State Police plate readers, as well as those from some of the local universities. CPD has more than 35,000 cameras throughout the city. "We've dedicated a number of resources to this and incredible investments in technology, which we found to be very helpful," Bruno said.

Precision in Data Collection and Mapping

As mentioned, one of the difficulties in collecting and analyzing carjacking data is the inconsistency in how the crime is reported across agencies and jurisdictions. The NIBRS system doesn't include a carjacking category, and agencies are supposed to code carjackings as a robbery with an automobile as the property taken.

But that doesn't mean an agency can't keep track of carjackings in a more direct way. Lieutenant Colonel John Herzog of the Baltimore (MD) Police Department (BPD) said his agency chose to add a carjacking-specific tag to their NIBRS data.¹⁰⁷ As noted by Graham Campbell, BPD Deputy Chief of Data Driven Strategies, "It's useful for deployment and intelligence to be able to understand what kind of robberies are occurring, [because] street robberies, bank robberies, and carjackings may all be robberies by definition, but they require different strategies."

In PERF's survey, many members noted the importance of precise data when defining trends and ultimately curtailing carjackings. Chief Andre Sayles of the Beloit (WI) Police Department said it's important to "stay informed about the current trends and patterns of carjackings in [your] jurisdiction. This includes understanding high-risk areas, specific times when incidents are more likely to occur, and the types of vehicles targeted." Lieutenant Julia Heng of the University of Maryland Police Department agreed, noting that "understanding trends, hotspots, and methods used by carjackers can help in creating targeted prevention strategies."

Some cities and counties were able to provide PERF with detailed data about their carjackings over the past three years, while others didn't have the information readily available.

The D.C. Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) has a team of analysts and IT personnel who keep the department's public-facing crime

dashboard current with the latest information about carjackings, including how many are reported each month going back to January 2018, how many involve guns, how many cases are closed, how many arrests involve juveniles, and where the carjackings are occurring. The dashboard — which was created in 2021 as carjackings were skyrocketing in D.C. — is refreshed nightly to ensure up-to-date information is available to the public.

"Crime strategies that are driven by data and best practices can lead to success," MPD Chief Pamela Smith said.

Members of the MPD Technical and Analytical Services Bureau, which is part of the department's Real-Time Crime Center, review and analyze crime daily to track any patterns, including those related to carjacking. The analytical team also produces daily reports — internal and external — related to carjacking offenses and related arrests.

RECOMMENDATION: Leverage technology for prevention and prosecution of carjackings. Ensure local businesses and justice system partners are using available technological tools to both dissuade offenders from targeting individuals and support the successful prosecution of any cases.

RECOMMENDATION: Ensure public-facing crime dashboards include data on carjackings: Be transparent by providing the community with information on carjackings to help residents stay aware of current trends and possibly take steps to protect themselves. The Washington, D.C. Metropolitan Police Department offers an example of a robust public-facing dashboard.¹⁰⁸

107. Open Baltimore. Part 1 Crime Data. <https://data.baltimorecity.gov/datasets/baltimore::part-1-crime-data/about>.

108. D.C. Metropolitan Police Department. MPD Carjacking Dashboard. <https://mpdc.dc.gov/page/carjacking>.

Carjacking Data Collection

When investigating carjackings, law enforcement agencies should collect and track specific data that can be analyzed to map trends. Among the questions that should be pursued:

- What is the make, model, and year of the car?
- What day of the week, what time of day, and where did the carjacking occur (including the location relative to the victim’s home or workplace)?
- What was the victim doing when they were carjacked?
- What method was employed (e.g., ramming the victim’s car)?
- If recovered, where was the car found in relation to the carjacking location?
- How much time elapsed from carjacking to vehicle recovery?
- What kind of force was used, was a weapon involved, and were there physical injuries?
- How many carjackers were there?
- What are the demographics of the offender(s) and victim(s)?
- What was the motivation behind the carjacking?
- Did the carjacking lead to an arrest?

Dashcams and AirTags

As New York City was seeing an increase in carjackings and car thefts, the City of New York Police Department (NYPD) organized a giveaway of Apple AirTag tracking devices in May 2023 and encouraged drivers to hide them in their vehicles.¹⁰⁹ Earlier in 2023, Denver police started its DenverTrack program, which encourages vehicle owners to register their GPS (e.g., OnStar), AirTag, or other tracking device with the police department, preauthorizing police to track their vehicle if it’s carjacked or

stolen.¹¹⁰ Participants get a sticker that says “This Vehicle Is Tracked By the Denver Police Department” for their car.¹¹¹

In November 2023, the Washington D.C. Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) organized several giveaway events to provide residents with Apple AirTag and Tile tracking devices. The tracking tags were distributed in those communities experiencing the highest levels of motor vehicle theft and carjackings.¹¹² MPD also teamed up with DoorDash to give away dashcams to ride-share and delivery drivers and helped them install the devices.¹¹³

109. Lauren Leffer. (May 1, 2023). NYPD to Hand Out 500 Free AirTags as Car Thefts Rise. Gizmodo. <https://gizmodo.com/apple-airtags-nypd-tiktok-stop-car-thefts-eric-adams-1850390957>.

110. Dillon Thomas. (March 3, 2023). Denver police seeking consent to track stolen cars as incidents remain on rise. CBS News Colorado. <https://www.cbsnews.com/colorado/news/denver-police-consent-track-stolen-cars-incidents-remain-rise/>.

111. City of Denver. Auto Theft Prevention. <https://denvergov.org/Government/Agencies-Departments-Offices/Agencies-Departments-Offices-Directory/Police-Department/Safety-and-Crime-Prevention/Auto-Theft-Prevention>.

112. Ashraf Khalil. (November 20, 2023). The District of Columbia is combating car thefts and carjackings with dashcams and AirTags. The Associated Press. <https://apnews.com/article/car-theft-carjacking-washington-dc-crime-68a081ec948898ab28b2bbb1018b8eb9>.

113. Sam Ford. (November 14, 2023). DC gives out dashcams amid rise in carjackings involving delivery, rideshare drivers. ABC 7. <https://wjla.com/news/local/washington-dc-gives-out-dashcams-dashboard-cameras-amid-rise-in-carjackings-involving-delivery-rideshare-drivers-uber-lyft-door-dash-grant-crime-deterrent-police-district-of-columbia>.

Aerial Surveillance

Some cities — like Baltimore, D.C., and Chicago — have found success using aerial surveillance. The air unit allows departments to minimize vehicular pursuits, which can cause fatal accidents. MPD Inspector Michael Pulliam told the local NBC affiliate that the helicopter “helps us to coordinate throughout the District, Maryland, and Virginia area, and to kind of bring everybody’s resources to play to stop these spree offenses.”¹¹⁴

Former Chief Marcus Jones of the Montgomery County (MD) Police Department, told PERF that his department has “initiated a pilot first-responder drone program ... in a couple of geographic areas to assist with our responses and work toward more positive outcomes.”

Public Awareness

Jeffery Carroll, Executive Assistant Chief of the MPD, said public awareness campaigns are a good place to start addressing carjackings.

“Obviously there’s no one solution that’s going to solve everything, but I think awareness is key,” Carroll said, noting during the PERF summit that many drivers are not aware of their surroundings when they’re getting in and out of their vehicles. “We’re all guilty of it in this room, right? We’re looking at these phones; we’re doing this and the other, or folks sit in their car when it’s cold outside. And there’s people in the neighborhood who may be watching them, and the next thing you know, they’re popping up and carjacking.”

Some cities have rolled out campaigns to let their residents know how to avoid a carjacking. These campaigns can be messaged along the lines of “These actions make it harder for someone to commit a carjacking” or “Here are some common elements of the city’s carjacking incidents.”



MPD Executive Assistant Chief Jeffery Carroll

Jurisdictions should put together public information campaigns through a variety of channels — lists on their websites, billboards, commercials, flyers, and a social media presence. And when possible, they should present literature in the languages commonly used in their region.

D.C. mentor Duane Cunningham suggests that police use social media with the same proclivity and enthusiasm that juveniles do — but for public awareness campaigns about carjackings.

RECOMMENDATION: Start a public education campaign to educate the community on common risk factors. To be effective, agencies should share information through as many channels as possible, including commercials, social media, and billboards. And they should make sure to include information in all languages that are common in their jurisdictions. **These campaigns should educate communities on where, how, and when victims are being carjacked, and provide strategies for reducing one’s risk.** Examples of public education campaigns can be seen on the Los Angeles¹¹⁵ and Chicago¹¹⁶ police department websites.

114. Mauricio Casillas. (2024, January 23). DC police take to the skies to solve carjackings. NBC 4 Washington. <https://www.nbcwashington.com/news/local/dc-police-take-to-the-skies-to-solve-carjackings/3524338/>.

115. LAPD. Carjacking. <https://www.lapdonline.org/carjacking/>.

116. Chicago Police Department. Carjacking: What You Should Know. <https://home.chicagopolice.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Carjacking-Tips-English.pdf>.

Common Elements of Recent Carjackings

Carjacking is a crime of opportunity, as offenders generally do not target specific individuals.

Most carjackers are looking for people who are distracted — for example, scrolling or talking on their phones — and sitting in their cars.

Many carjackers strike outside shopping centers, apartment complexes, gas stations, ATMs, and public garages.

Some carjackers have attacked people who are loading or unloading their cars.

Carjackers may open a car door before the driver can lock it after entering the vehicle. Police suggest locking car doors immediately upon entering, even before putting the keys in the ignition.

Carjackers may pretend to have a disabled vehicle and flag people down for help — then pull a gun on those who stop. The safest way to help a motorist in need is to call 911.

Carjackers may lie in wait behind dumpsters or large vans or in the back of pickup trucks. When possible, avoid parking near anything that limits visibility.

Carjackers will demand car keys or fobs, so keep house keys separate from car keys/fobs.

Carjackers may strike when cars are stopped at a traffic light or slowing down. Some may act like they're handing out a pamphlet or asking for money, then take advantage of unlocked doors or rolled-down windows.

Though carjackings can — and do — occur at any time of day, most appear to take place during the late-night hours.

Some carjackers “bump and rob.” They will rear-end a car in traffic and, when the driver gets out to check out the damage, commit a carjacking. If a driver feels uneasy about a situation, they should jot down the car's tag number and signal for the car to follow them to the nearest police station or well-lit area. If the driver must get out of the car, they should take their keys and wallet/purse and stay alert.

Conclusion

PERF's National Summit on Carjacking in

January 2024 included police, prosecutors, researchers, business leaders, and community members who are dedicated to solving the current carjacking crisis. Officials from as far away as California and British Columbia came to Washington, D.C., to discuss the rise in carjackings that began in 2020.

The summit also explored the complex root causes of carjackings and the challenges of addressing juvenile violent crime.

But there were signs of hope and progress. Some police leaders spoke of new task forces or units that collaborate across jurisdictions to address carjacking. And several large cities — including New Orleans, Minneapolis, and Chicago — have started to see carjackings decrease by as much as 53 percent over the past two years.

Based on the discussions at the summit, PERF developed the following set of recommendations to help police agencies address carjacking in their communities.

1 **Keep data on local carjackings.** Law enforcement agencies should keep data on carjackings in their area, including detailed information about the circumstances of each incident. This information should be shared with neighboring jurisdictions. They should also train their staff on what qualifies as a carjacking and how to analyze the data to seek out any apparent trends. These efforts also should support the timely and correct coding of carjackings in NIBRS to allow for collecting information nationally.

2 **Recognize the unique aspects of victimization inherent in carjacking cases and work to maximize victim services and support.** It is critical that jurisdictions acknowledge and attend to the specific emotional, physical, and economic impacts of carjacking by promptly referring victims to compensation programs and helping prevent revictimization. Prioritizing victim safety and support helps victims' well-being and may enable them to meaningfully participate in the criminal justice process, including accessing Victims of Crime Act (VOCA)-funded compensation and assistance.

3 **Align prevention and intervention strategies with the motivations for carjackings.** “Joyride” carjackings are different than those connected to organized crime. Different types of carjackings require tailored approaches and solutions. For example, the Los Angeles Police Department reduced carjackings through a task force focused on smash-and-grab robberies involving cars obtained through carjackings.

4 **Focus on the small number of individuals who are persistently committing carjackings.** Most carjackings are committed by a small number of repeat offenders; by stopping that smaller number, significant reductions in overall numbers are possible.

5 **Develop information-sharing relationships with neighboring jurisdictions.** Regularly meet with partners (prosecutors, service providers, neighboring law enforcement agencies, etc.) to discuss problems and coordinate solutions. Create information-sharing programs between jurisdictions, mapping data to identify patterns, motivations, and types of carjackings among different agencies.

6 **Work with local school systems and community organizations to address juvenile crime and get kids back in school.** Communities need to examine why kids aren't attending school and respond to individual needs. While no one has established a causal relationship, the number of juvenile carjackings rose while children were out of school during the COVID-19 pandemic, and many of those kids have not re-engaged with their education.

7 **Engage and Involve Community.** Coordinate with families, schools, and service organizations to provide supportive rehabilitation to juvenile offenders. Seek input from community groups, people who have engaged in carjackings, and researchers. Have a consistent police presence in high-crime neighborhoods, keeping officers on consistent beats.

8 **Ensure public-facing crime dashboards include data on carjackings.** Be transparent by providing the community with information on carjackings to help residents stay aware of current trends and possibly take steps to protect themselves. The Washington, D.C., Metropolitan Police Department offers an example of a robust public-facing dashboard.¹¹⁷

9 **Leverage technology for prevention and prosecution of carjackings.** Ensure local businesses and justice system partners are using available technological tools to both dissuade offenders from targeting individuals and support the successful prosecution of any cases.

10 **Start a public education campaign to educate the community on common risk factors.** To be effective, agencies should share information through as many channels as possible, including commercials, social media, and billboards. And they should make sure to include information in all languages that are common in their jurisdictions. **These campaigns should educate communities on where, how, and when victims are being carjacked, and provide strategies for reducing one's risk.** Examples of public education campaigns can be seen on the Los Angeles¹¹⁸ and Chicago¹¹⁹ police department websites.

117. D.C. Metropolitan Police Department. MPD Carjacking Dashboard. <https://mpdc.dc.gov/page/carjacking>.

118. LAPD. Carjacking. <https://www.lapdonline.org/carjacking/>.

119. Chicago Police Department. Carjacking: What You Should Know. <https://home.chicagopolice.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Carjacking-Tips-English.pdf>.

The Police Executive Research Forum

The Police Executive Research Forum (PERF)

is an independent research organization that focuses on critical issues in policing. Since its founding in 1976, PERF has identified best practices on fundamental issues such as reducing police use of force; developing community policing and problem-oriented policing; using technologies to deliver police services to the community; and developing and assessing crime reduction strategies. Over the past decade, PERF has led efforts to reduce police use of force through its guiding principles on use of force¹²⁰ and innovative Integrating Communications, Assessment, and Tactics (ICAT) training program.¹²¹

PERF strives to advance professionalism in policing and to improve the delivery of police services through the exercise of strong national leadership; public debate of police and criminal justice issues; and research and policy development.

The nature of PERF's work can be seen in the reports PERF has published over the years. Most of these reports are available without charge online at <http://www.policeforum.org/free-online-documents>. All of the titles in the *Critical Issues*

in *Policing* series can be found on the back cover of this report and on the PERF website at <https://www.policeforum.org/critical-issues-series>. Recent reports include *Transforming Police Recruit Training: 40 Guiding Principles*¹²² and *Lessons Learned from the COVID-19 Pandemic: What Police Learned from One of the Most Challenging Periods of Our Lives*.¹²³

In addition to conducting research and publishing reports on our findings, PERF conducts management studies of individual law enforcement agencies; educates hundreds of police officials each year in the Senior Management Institute for Police,¹²⁴ a three-week executive development program; and provides executive search services to governments that wish to conduct national searches for their next police chief.

All of PERF's work benefits from PERF's status as a membership organization of police officials, who share information and open their agencies to research and study. PERF members also include academics, federal government leaders, and others with an interest in policing and criminal justice.

120. Police Executive Research Forum. (March 2016). Guiding Principles on Use of Force. <https://www.policeforum.org/assets/guidingprinciples1.pdf>.

121. Police Executive Research Forum. ICAT: Integrating Communications, Assessment, and Tactics. <https://www.policeforum.org/icat>.

122. Police Executive Research Forum. (November 2022). Transforming Police Recruit Training: 40 Guiding Principles. <https://www.policeforum.org/assets/TransformingRecruitTraining.pdf>.

123. Police Executive Research Forum. (December 2021). Lessons from the COVID-19 Pandemic. <https://www.policeforum.org/assets/COVIDPandemic.pdf>.

124. Police Executive Research Forum. Senior Management Institute for Police. <https://www.policeforum.org/smip>

All PERF members must have a four-year college degree and must subscribe to a set of founding principles, emphasizing the importance of research and public debate in policing, adherence to the Constitution and the highest standards of ethics and

integrity, and accountability to the communities that police agencies serve.

PERF is governed by a member-elected President and Board of Directors and a Board-appointed Executive Director.

To learn more about PERF, visit: www.policeforum.org

The Motorola Solutions Foundation

As the charitable and philanthropic arm of Motorola Solutions, the Motorola Solutions Foundation partners with organizations around the globe to create safer cities and equitable, thriving communities. We focus on giving back through strategic grants, employee volunteerism and other community investment initiatives. Our strategic

grants program supports organizations that offer first responder programming and technology and engineering education, and align to our values of accountability, innovation, impact, diversity and inclusion. The Foundation is one of the many ways in which the company is solving for safer communities.



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