

Parked cars are now a leading source of stolen guns, new report finds

BY AMANDA HERNANDEZ
States Newsroom

A growing number of firearms are being stolen from parked cars, especially in urban areas, according to a new report that highlights a frequently overlooked source of illegally circulating guns.

The nonpartisan think tank Council on Criminal Justice released an analysis examining five years of gun theft data reported to law enforcement in 16 cities — both urban and rural — with populations over 250,000. The analysis found that while the overall rate of reported gun thefts remained steady between 2018 and 2022, gun thefts from motor vehicles rose sharply.

The number of guns reported stolen from vehicles increased by 31% over the five-year period, while gun thefts during burglaries of homes and businesses fell by 40%. In large urban areas, the overall gun theft rate jumped by 42% between 2018 and 2022, while rural areas saw a 22% decline.

The findings are based on data from more than 2,000 law enforcement agencies across the country that consistently submitted detailed crime reports to the FBI's National Incident-Based Reporting System between 2018 and 2022. Together, those agencies represent about 25% of the U.S. population and 12% of all law enforcement agencies nationwide.

As gun violence continues to grip communities across the country, a growing body of research suggests that firearm theft — particularly from vehicles — is a key, but often overlooked, source of weapons used in crimes. While research



(Photo by Tom Def/Unsplash)

remains limited, some studies show stolen guns are disproportionately recovered at crime scenes, and gun violence tends to rise in areas where thefts have occurred.

Yet national data on gun theft remains sparse and there is no nationwide system for tracking stolen guns. Even basic details — such as how many guns are taken in each reported incident — are often missing from official police reports.

With crime and firearm policy high on the Trump administration's agenda, experts say more research is urgently needed to understand how stolen guns fuel broader cycles of violence.

"We really don't have a

full national picture of stolen guns," said Susan Parker, one of the report's authors and a research assistant professor in the Department of Emergency Medicine at Northwestern University. "It's really difficult to think about prevention when you don't know much."

The report's findings suggest that parked cars have become a major weak point in firearm security — one that could be addressed through policy, public education and better data collection.

Some states, including Colorado and Delaware, have recently passed laws requiring firearms stored in vehicles to be locked in secure containers. In recent years, several other states have considered similar

measures, including legislation mandating safe storage and stricter reporting requirements for lost or stolen guns.

Currently, just 16 states and the District of Columbia require gun owners to report lost or stolen firearms to law enforcement, according to the Giffords Law Center, a nonpartisan gun safety group.

"Where you store your gun really matters. We see that so many of the guns that are stolen are increasingly from vehicles," Parker said. "That kind of shift in how we're carrying guns should also maybe be accompanied by shifts in how we're thinking about keeping them safe and out of the risk of being misused."

Among the 16 cities in-

cluded in the report, Memphis, Tennessee, had the highest rate of gun thefts in 2022 — 546 reported incidents per 100,000 residents. That's nearly double the rate in Detroit, which ranked second at 297 per 100,000, and more than 10 times higher than in Seattle, which had the lowest rate at 44 per 100,000.

Kansas City, Missouri, had the third-highest rate at 234 per 100,000, followed by Milwaukee, at 219 per 100,000, and Nashville, Tennessee, at 210 per 100,000.

While residences remained the most common place guns were stolen from overall, the share of gun thefts occurring in parking lots, garages and on roads rose significantly. By 2022, 40% of all reported gun thefts involved a vehicle, up from 31% in 2018.

Vehicle break-ins resulting in stolen firearms nearly doubled in urban areas — from 37 per 100,000 people in 2018 to 65 per 100,000 people in 2022.

As parked vehicles have become a more frequent target for thieves, the locations of those thefts have shifted. In 2018, about half of all reported gun thefts from vehicles occurred at residences. By 2022, that share had dropped to roughly 40%, while thefts from vehicles in parking lots and garages rose by 76%. The report also found significant increases in gun thefts from vehicles on roads, highways and alleys — up 59% over the five-year period.

In the most rural areas, where gun ownership is often more common, the share of vehicle break-ins that resulted in gun theft rose from 18% to 24%. In urban areas, that figure increased from 6% to 10.5%.

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The ordinance was given a first reading and passed on June 23, 2025, and a second reading was given and passed on July 14, 2025. The full text of the ordinance is available for public inspection during the hours of 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, at the Office of the City Clerk at City Hall, located at 445 West Main Street, Danville, Kentucky 40422.

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PUBLIC NOTICE

BOYLE COUNTY COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE
SNOW/ICE REMOVAL & TREATMENT SERVICES

The Boyle County Extension Service is seeking bids for contractual snow/ice removal and treatment services to safely maintain the facilities property at 99 Corporate Drive in Danville, KY. Services are requested per snow/ice weather event on call 24/7 during the months of October 2025 – April 2026 as needed with pricing per event. Services include snow/ice removal of all main building sidewalks, all Barn building sidewalks, snow/ice removal of all parking lots with treatment of all blacktop paved parking lots and proper "safe for concrete" treatment of all concrete sidewalks. All pricing needs to include all labor, materials, and equipment to be provided by the contractor. The contract will be for 1 year with yearly renewal based on performance.

To be considered for this snow/ice removal & treatment services contract, all applicants must submit a sealed bid proposal and current certificate of liability insurance to the Boyle County Extension Service Office, 99 Corporate Drive, Danville KY 40422 by 4:30p.m ET on Friday August 1st, 2025

All questions and requests should be directed to:

Barry Rice
Extension Facilities Manager
859-236-4484