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# Exploring the involvement of organized crime in motor vehicle theft



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# Exploring the involvement of organized crime in motor vehicle theft

**By Marnie Wallace, Statistics Canada**

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## **Note de reconnaissance**

*Canada owes the success of its statistical system to a long-standing partnership between Statistics Canada, the citizens of Canada, its businesses, governments and other institutions. Accurate and timely statistical information could not be produced without their continued cooperation and goodwill.*

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## Highlights

- In 2002, over 161,000 vehicles were stolen in Canada. The vehicle theft rate had increased steadily between 1984 and 1996, and has generally declined since, including a 5% drop in 2002.
- While thrill-seeking continues to be a major motive for the theft of vehicles, vehicles stolen for profit is a serious concern in certain parts of the country. According to experts, vehicles stolen by organized groups are generally stolen for export overseas, inter-provincial resale or stripped for parts.
- The prevalence of organized crime involvement in vehicle thefts can be roughly estimated by looking at the proportion of stolen vehicles not recovered. In 2002, approximately one out of every five stolen vehicles was not recovered.
- While the highest rates of total vehicle theft are found in the western provinces, most of these vehicles are later recovered and are generally taken for thrill-seeking purposes. The highest rates of organized vehicle theft, using the rate of stolen vehicles not recovered as a proxy measure, are found in the larger urban centres of Quebec and Ontario as well as the port city of Halifax.
- Among large forces, Montréal appears to have the largest problem of organized vehicle theft in the country, with a non-recovered rate that is more than twice that of the next highest force (Halifax). Montréal also has the highest proportion of vehicles not recovered, at 44%.
- Other high rates of non-recovered vehicles were found in London, Ottawa-Gatineau and the Toronto area. The lowest rates were in St. John's, Victoria and Regina.
- Vehicles stolen from private homes have a much higher probability of not being recovered (34%) than vehicles stolen from streets (10%) and parking lots (15%). As well, 41% of vehicles stolen from car dealerships are not recovered. This may indicate that organized groups are very selective in the vehicles they target.

## Introduction

While thrill-seeking remains a major motive for motor vehicle theft in Canada, the number of vehicles stolen for profit by organized groups is a serious concern among auto theft experts. In 2000, auto theft was identified as an emerging priority under the National Agenda to Combat Organized Crime. Vehicle theft is a relatively low-risk, high-profit activity that is often used as a means of raising funds for criminal organizations to pursue various additional criminal activities<sup>1</sup>.

Data on vehicle thefts are collected by Statistics Canada's Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Survey directly from Canadian police services. These data do not include any direct indication of whether or not a vehicle theft was committed by organized crime. However, many police services are able to provide information on the number of stolen vehicles recovered or not recovered. The data on vehicles "not recovered" are used in this report as a proxy indicator of the prevalence of vehicle theft perpetrated by organized groups (see box entitled 'Measuring stolen vehicle recoveries' on page 9).

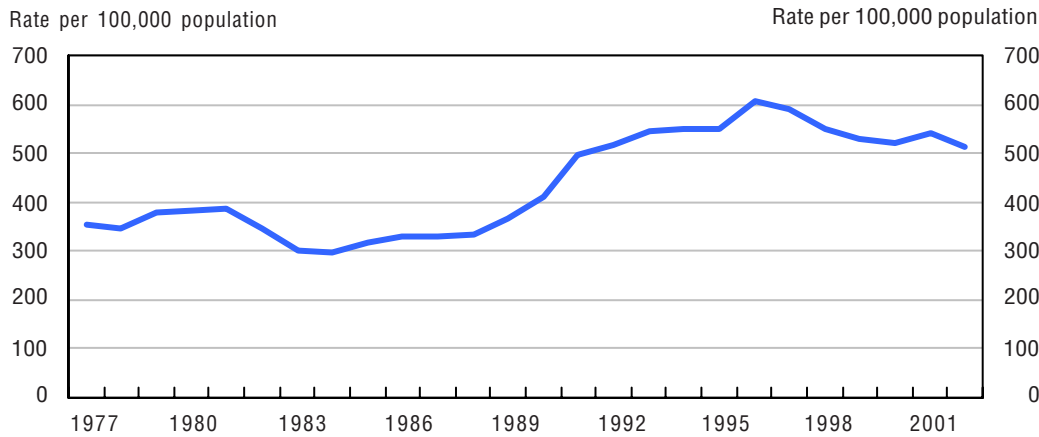
The first section of this report examines the extent of, and trends in, overall vehicle theft in Canada. The second section examines the involvement of organized crime in vehicle theft, where it is concentrated, who is involved, as well as what happens to the vehicles once they are stolen. It should be noted that throughout this report the terms organized vehicle theft, theft by organized groups, theft by organized crime and thefts by vehicle theft rings are used to describe the same activity, as experts in this field tend to use these expressions interchangeably.

### *The extent of vehicle theft in Canada*

#### **Vehicle thefts declining**

In 2002, over 161,000 vehicles were stolen in Canada, or about 440 vehicle thefts each day. The motor vehicle theft rate increased steadily from 1984 to 1996, including double-digit increases from 1989 to 1991 and in 1996. Since 1996, rates have generally declined, including a 5% drop in 2002 (Table 1, Figure 1). Motor vehicle theft rates in recent years have remained higher than those seen in the 1970s and 1980s.

Figure 1

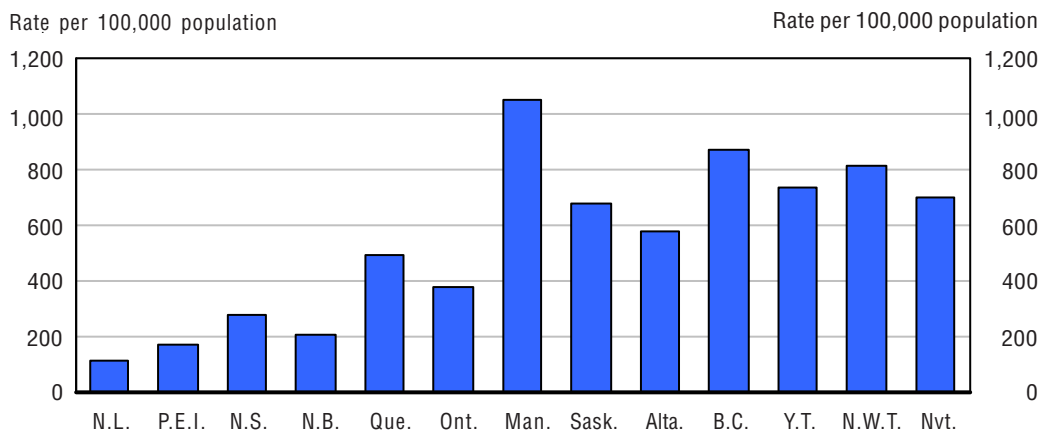
**Motor vehicle theft in Canada, 1977 to 2002**

**Source:** Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Statistics Canada, and *Annual Demographic Statistics, 2002* report, catalogue no. 91-213-XIB.

The decline in 2002 was led by a 13% drop in Saskatchewan and 11% drops in Quebec and Prince Edward Island. British Columbia was the only province to report a large increase (+7%) in its vehicle theft rate in 2002 (Table 2).

As for most crimes, motor vehicle theft rates tend to be lower in the East than in the West. Manitoba has reported the highest rate of vehicle thefts in nine of the past ten years while the lowest rate has been reported by Newfoundland and Labrador for over 20 years (Figure 2).

Figure 2

**Motor vehicle theft rates by province and territory, 2002**

**Source:** Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Statistics Canada.



## **Regina, Winnipeg and Vancouver continue to report highest rates**

Vehicle theft tends to be concentrated in major urban areas. In 2002, the overall rate of motor vehicle theft in census metropolitan areas (CMAs)<sup>2</sup> was 606 incidents per 100,000 population, compared to 364 in non-CMA areas.

In 2002, rates among all 25 CMAs ranged from 147 incidents per 100,000 population in St. John's to 1,424 in Regina (Table 3). Regina, Winnipeg and Vancouver have reported the highest vehicle theft rates in the country each year since 1995. Despite being the CMAs with the highest vehicle theft rates, both Regina and Winnipeg reported substantial declines in 2002 (-27% and -13% respectively).

Over the past decade motor vehicle theft rates have doubled in London, nearly tripled in Regina, and almost quadrupled in Winnipeg, resulting in a large increase in vehicle theft rates in Manitoba and Saskatchewan in particular. In contrast, vehicle theft rates in Québec, Thunder Bay, Sudbury and Calgary have decreased by half since 1992. As a result, the overall rate of motor vehicle thefts in 2002 (514) was at nearly the same level as in 1992 (517).

## **Clearance rate stable in recent years**

Motor vehicle theft is a crime characterized by relatively low clearance rates. In 2002, 12% of all vehicle thefts in Canada were "solved" by police, compared to the overall clearance rate of 20% for property crimes. The clearance rate for vehicle thefts has been relatively steady for the last seven years (Table 1). Significant declines in the clearance rate between 1989 and 1996 coincided with a period of increasing motor vehicle theft rates.

In 2002, 8% of vehicle thefts resulted in police laying a charge, and 4% were cleared "otherwise". An incident is cleared "otherwise" when the police have identified at least one accused and there is sufficient evidence to lay a charge in connection with the incident, but the accused is processed by other means. This could occur for a number of reasons: the police may have used discretion and decided not to lay a charge, the complainant did not want police to lay a charge or the accused was involved in other incidents.

Provincially, clearance rates ranged from 30% in Newfoundland and Labrador to 5% in British Columbia (Table 4).

## **Cars continue to be the most commonly stolen type of vehicle**

Cars continued to be the most commonly stolen type of vehicle in 2002, accounting for 59% of all vehicle thefts. However trucks, including minivans and sport utility vehicles, now account for one-third of vehicles stolen. The rate of trucks being stolen has increased 44% over the past decade, compared to a 9% decrease in the rate of cars being stolen since 1992. This illustrates the growing popularity of sport utility vehicles, mini-vans and trucks on the road and as potential targets for theft.

## ***Defining organized vehicle theft***

The following definition of a criminal organization appears in section 467.1 of the *Criminal Code*:

“Criminal organization” means a group, however organized, that:

1. is composed of 3 or more persons in or outside Canada; and
2. has as one of its main purposes or main activities the facilitation or commission of one or more serious offences that, if committed, would likely result in the direct or indirect receipt of a material benefit, including a financial benefit, by the group or by any of the persons who constitute the group.

It does not include a group of persons that forms randomly for the immediate commission of a single offence. Committing an offence means being a party to it or counseling any person to be a party to it under sections 467.11 to 467.13.

Some organized vehicle theft is perpetrated by established organized crime groups, with the intent of using profits to fund further criminal activity. A 1998 study by the RCMP suggested that organized crime groups are involved in every aspect of the auto theft for export process, including placing orders for specific makes/models/years, commissioning the thefts, counterfeiting the identity of the cars and accompanying paperwork, transporting the cars out of province, and arranging for their illegal export out of the country<sup>3</sup>.

In its *Annual Report on Organized Crime in Canada*, the Criminal Intelligence Service Canada (CISC) listed vehicle theft as an activity perpetrated by Aboriginal-based Organized Crime groups, Eastern European Organized Crime groups, and street gangs<sup>4</sup>. The Aboriginal-based Organized Crime groups are present in a number of urban centres, particularly Edmonton, Regina, and Winnipeg. These groups also operate to a lesser extent in British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec. The centre of the Eastern European Organized Crime groups is Southern Ontario; however large urban centres in other provinces are also beginning to report their presence<sup>5</sup>.

There are also vehicle theft rings. These rings specialize in the theft and sale of stolen vehicles, either in whole or as parts, and are likely not to be involved in other criminal activities that do not benefit or relate to their auto theft activities. For these groups, profit is the end goal. Vehicle theft rings can be as simple as a couple of people with the common purpose of stealing and selling motor vehicles or their parts, or as complex as a business organization with assigned roles and duties<sup>6</sup>. Organized theft rings may operate locally and steal vehicles to be dismantled in a secure building known as a “chop shop” and sold as parts. However, some organized vehicle theft rings are also involved in both inter-provincial and international exportation.

In general, vehicle theft rings are multi-layered, made up of brokers, middlemen and thieves. Typically, brokers make arrangements with a middleman to hire thieves. The thieves are often young people who are instructed to steal vehicles and deliver them to a predetermined location. Some sources also include the experts who are responsible for chopping (dismantling for parts), re-Vinning (altering the Vehicle Identification Number to disguise the vehicle), and exporting as additional layers<sup>7</sup>. Members within each level tend to deal with other levels only as required in order to complete their tasks<sup>8</sup>. For instance, middlemen deal with thieves and brokers, but are unlikely to interact with the choppers or exporters.

## *Measuring stolen vehicle recoveries – An indication of the prevalence of organized vehicle theft*

### Measuring stolen vehicle recoveries

The number of stolen vehicles not recovered is one of the measures used as a proxy indicator of the number of vehicles stolen for profit by organized groups<sup>9</sup>. This is because vehicles that are stolen for other purposes, such as thrill seeking or transportation, tend to be subsequently located by police. As such, in this report motor vehicles stolen for the purpose of thrill-seeking (sometimes referred to as joy-riding), transportation, or to aid in the commission of another crime are not considered to have been stolen as part of organized vehicle theft.

Data on the number of motor vehicles stolen each year are available from the aggregate version of the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Survey. However, the only available data on the recovery status of stolen vehicles come from the most recent version of the incident-based UCR Survey (UCR2.1). Only 62 police services currently provide data to this version of the survey. In order to increase coverage, major police services were approached and asked to supply these data where possible.

While the non-recovery rate provides a proxy measure of the extent of organized vehicle theft, it should be kept in mind, however, that it is subject to the following limitations:

- It under-estimates organized vehicle theft by counting vehicles that have been stripped and burnt as “recovered” when it is likely that these vehicles were taken by organized theft rings for the sale of parts<sup>10</sup>; and by counting any stolen vehicles that are destined for export but stopped at the border as “recovered”;
- It over-estimates organized vehicle theft by counting vehicles stolen for thrill-seeking or fraudulent purposes that are well-hidden on private property, submerged under water, or otherwise hidden, as “not recovered”.

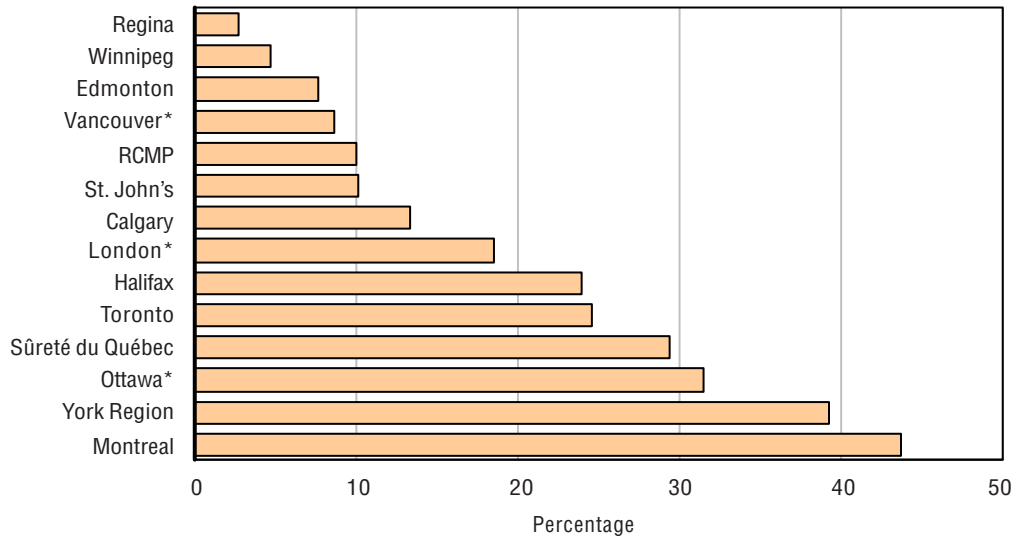
Available data from 22 large police services (accounting for almost three-quarters of all police-reported vehicle thefts in Canada) indicate that approximately one out of every five stolen vehicles was not recovered in 2002 (Table 5). Therefore, approximately one in five vehicle thefts may be linked to organized groups or theft rings. This is a large increase over the early 1970s when approximately 2% of all stolen vehicles were not recovered<sup>11</sup>.

An even better measurement of organized vehicle crime in a given area is to calculate the “rate” of stolen vehicles not recovered per 100,000 population. While the highest rates of total vehicle thefts are reported in the western provinces, most of these vehicles are later recovered. Experts agree that while organized vehicle theft is beginning to be seen in nearly all areas of the country, the largest problem continues to be concentrated in the larger urban centres of Quebec and Ontario<sup>12</sup>.

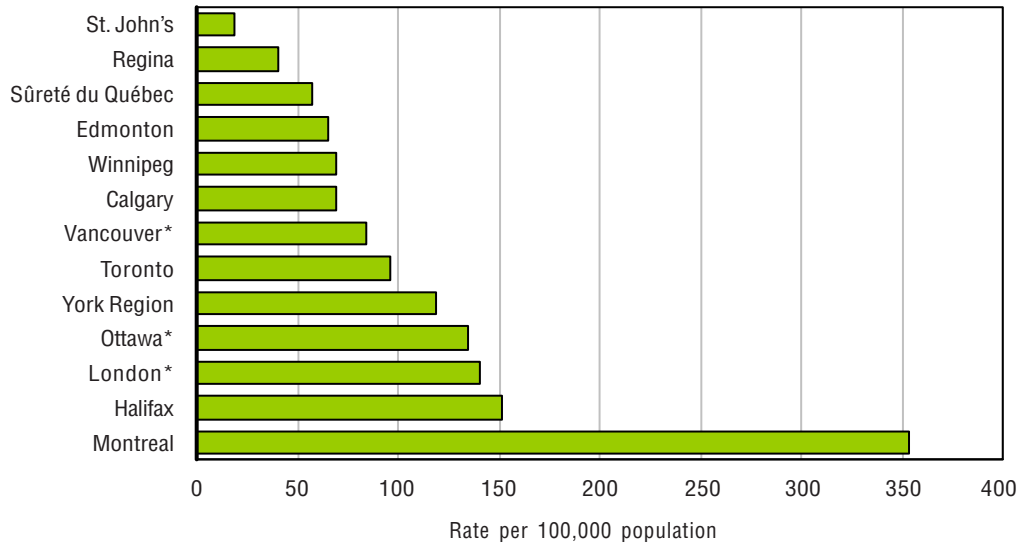
In 2002, data from the 22 police services show that the highest rates of stolen vehicles not recovered were found in Quebec and Ontario, as well as the port city of Halifax (Table 5). Montréal reported the highest non-recovered rate (354 stolen vehicles not recovered per 100,000 population), more than twice that of the next highest force (Halifax at a rate of 151). As well, nearly half of all vehicles stolen in the city of Montréal (44%) were not recovered. The next highest rates of stolen vehicles not recovered were reported by other forces in Quebec and Ontario: London (141), Ottawa (135), York Region (118), Gatineau-Métro (117) and Toronto (97) (Figure 3).

Figure 3

Proportion of stolen vehicles not recovered, select police services, 2002



Rate of stolen vehicles not recovered, select police services, 2002



\* Data from UCR 2.1 Survey, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Statistics Canada.

Source: Data supplied directly by Police Service.

There are generally lower rates of unrecovered vehicles and lower proportions of stolen vehicles not recovered elsewhere in the country. Thrill-seeking and transportation are the main motives for vehicle theft in other areas, such as Calgary<sup>13</sup> and Winnipeg<sup>14</sup>, though they do also experience a small amount of theft for profit. The lowest rates of vehicles not recovered were reported in St. John's (19), Victoria (31), Regina (40), Thunder Bay (41) and Windsor (45).

### **Characteristics of recovered and not recovered vehicle theft incidents**

In 2002, thieves stole almost twice as many cars as trucks (including vans and sport utility vehicles). Stolen trucks were less likely to be located by police than were cars. Of all the trucks that were stolen in 2002, 19% were not recovered, compared to 14% of stolen cars. This suggests that while cars are more likely than trucks to be a target of auto theft in general, trucks are more likely to be a target of organized vehicle theft.

Similarly, there appears to be a difference between recovered and not recovered vehicles in the locations from which they are stolen. Of all stolen vehicles, 35% were stolen from parking lots and 31% from streets. Only 15% of vehicles stolen from parking lots and 10% of those stolen from streets are not recovered. While there are fewer vehicles stolen from homes (15%) and private property structures (7%), such as detached garages and sheds, they are much more likely not to be recovered by police. One-third of vehicles stolen from homes (34%) and nearly a quarter (23%) stolen from private property structures are not recovered. This indicates a higher degree of organized theft from homes and private property structures than from parking lots and streets.

Car dealerships can be appealing targets for organized groups. Generally these locations display a number of new vehicles located conveniently close together in relatively unprotected parking lots. While car dealerships account for only a small portion of all vehicle thefts in Canada (1%), a large portion of vehicles (41%) that are stolen from these locations are not recovered.

This selectivity in the location from which organized groups steal vehicles may be directly related to types of vehicles being stolen from each of these locations<sup>15</sup>. For instance, the most desirable vehicles in the illicit market are high value vehicles which tend to be protected by advanced anti-theft systems. To bypass these systems it is necessary to have the vehicle's keys, which are often obtained by breaking and entering into a home or dealership and stealing them before the car. Vehicles stolen from streets and parking lots generally tend to be older models, or those not protected with sophisticated anti-theft systems.

### ***Defining a Criminal Organization for future data collection***

There has recently been an increased interest in studying organized crime in Canada and abroad. The *Criminal Code* includes the above mentioned definition of the term 'criminal organization' for use by police services. However, for the purposes of data collection and statistical analysis a more specific operational definition is required. The following definition of 'criminal organization', which will be included

in the next version of the incident-based UCR survey (UCR2), has been developed in consultation with numerous experts. It is currently undergoing testing and may be subject to some modification.

A **criminal organization** consists of a static or fluid group of (2 or more) individuals who communicate, co-operate, and conspire within an ongoing collective or network; and has as one of its main purposes or activities the facilitation or commission of offences undertaken or planned to generate material benefits or financial gain.

### Provisions

If data collectors or coders are uncertain about whether a group answers to the definition of Criminal Organization, the group should be included if it can also be characterized by either or both of the following provisions: involvement in a series, or variety of criminal activities, and/or the potential for violence, and/or intimidation, and/or corruption to facilitate its criminal activities.

### *Youth involvement in organized vehicle theft*

Vehicle theft in general is a crime that is associated with young offenders, more so than other offences. In 2002, 40% of persons charged with this crime were between the ages of 12 and 17<sup>16</sup>. This is higher than the proportion of youth charged with any other major crime category. According to an Australian report, while most young people cease their illegal behaviour before it develops into an entrenched pattern, some continue on to become repeat offenders, and a further portion graduates to stealing cars to supply the illicit market<sup>17</sup>.

A report by Transport Canada indicates that organized vehicle theft groups recruit youths to steal cars specifically in order to protect the upper levels of the theft ring<sup>18</sup>. Some experts also indicate that organized groups involved in vehicle theft rely on the justice system to be lenient with young offenders and will assure them they have little to fear if they are apprehended<sup>19</sup>. In most cases, the youths are only able to identify others involved in the theft ring by nickname, which decreases the risk to other members if the young thieves are apprehended.

Results of a recent Swedish study suggest that there is something about motor vehicle theft in particular that makes it an ideal recruitment tool for organized criminal groups<sup>20</sup>. The study made use of data from the national register of persons convicted of criminal offences in order to identify which first offences might indicate a higher risk for a continued criminal career. These high-risk first offences are referred to as strategic offences. The study found that motor vehicle theft was the most readily identifiable strategic offence, followed by non-vehicle thefts and robbery. In other words, those who are most at risk of continuing along the criminal career path are those whose first conviction is for motor vehicle theft.

### *Sophistication of organized crime and vehicle theft*

In many cases the same methods are employed in organized vehicle thefts as in non-organized vehicle thefts. However, because of their higher degree of specialization and access to experts with various skill sets, groups involved in organized vehicle theft have been known to employ more sophisticated methods

such as high quality document forgery and identity theft in order to obtain financing and steal new vehicles directly from car dealerships<sup>21</sup>. Similarly, rings have been known to forge ownership documentation in order to export or resell a stolen vehicle as second-hand. Theft rings will also lease cars from rental companies, and then export them to clients overseas<sup>21</sup>.

## ***Turning stolen vehicles into profit***

### **Overseas exportation**

In order to be involved in overseas exportation, theft rings require that a system exist in the destination country in order to receive and sell the stolen vehicles as well as return the profit to the Canadian ring. As a result, overseas exportation tends to be dominated by ethnically-based groups that already have strong connections in their country of origin and are therefore able to ensure that the requisite structure is in place<sup>23</sup>. It is also possible, though less common, for groups domestic to Canada to develop international connections and become involved in the international trafficking of stolen vehicles.

Vehicles that are stolen for export overseas are often loaded into shipping containers and accompanied by false documentation claiming the container holds a different type of cargo. In some cases, the organized crime groups may have a link to a port in the form of individuals in key positions who are influential in the movement of commercial cargo off a vessel and within the port environment<sup>24</sup>.

A report by Europol indicates that the market for second hand vehicles at a cheap price always exists, particularly in countries which are not as economically developed or do not manufacture vehicles themselves<sup>25</sup>. As a result, vehicles stolen within Canada may be destined for a number of locations. Stolen vehicles that are shipped out of Montréal or Toronto may first arrive in the United States and from there travel to Europe, South America or East Africa. Stolen vehicles that are shipped out of the port of Halifax are likely to arrive eventually in Eastern Europe. Stolen vehicles moved through the port of Vancouver often end up in Asia. Recently, there has been evidence of vehicles stolen in both Toronto and Montréal that have been shipped to Edmonton, and from there through the United States and on to Mexico<sup>26</sup>.

The destination of stolen vehicles is often linked to the organized crime group doing the exporting, and often determines which port is used by the group. For instance, Eastern European crime groups may operate in Toronto but are likely to ship their cargo out of Montréal or Halifax in order for the vehicles to arrive most quickly in Eastern Europe<sup>27</sup>. Similarly, Asian-based crime groups are most likely to ship their cargo out of the port of Vancouver, even if they are stolen in Ontario or Quebec and must travel first by rail to reach the port.

Europol estimates that organized international vehicle trafficking is more profitable than prostitution or any other black market activity<sup>28</sup>. Theft rings need only put out money to pay for the theft of the vehicle and the cost of shipping, which together generally add up to less than 10% of what the stolen vehicle will sell for overseas<sup>29</sup>.

## Inter-provincial exportation

Vehicles that are destined for resale in another province must be disguised or given a new identity before they can be sold, often to an unsuspecting buyer. If the stolen vehicle is later identified and seized by police, the buyer becomes the second victim, often with an unsecured loan which must be paid<sup>30</sup>.

Stolen vehicles can be disguised in a variety of ways. One popular method is Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) Switching, or “re-Vinning”. To do this, theft rings will purchase a vehicle that has been in an accident and has been written off as salvage, in order to obtain its Vehicle Identification Number<sup>31</sup>. They will then steal a car of the same make, model, and year and replace its VIN with the VIN from the wreck wherever it appears on the vehicle. The stolen vehicle is then resold under its new identity.

Another method of re-identifying stolen vehicles is through the production of counterfeit VIN plates<sup>32</sup>. Organized theft rings often copy legitimate VINs from another province, thus eliminating the need to purchase a salvage vehicle, and allowing multiple use of the VIN.

A recently released paper outlines another method of re-identifying stolen vehicles<sup>33</sup>. This method, called “body switching”, involves transferring the body of a stolen vehicle to the frame or sub-frames of a wrecked vehicle. The vehicle may be further disguised by mixing and matching interiors, engines, and other parts. This poses a serious safety hazard for the innocent end purchasers since the body switching does not necessarily comply with all standards of repair and inspection, and the purchasers seldom know the vehicle was damaged in another jurisdiction<sup>34</sup>.

## Theft for the sale of vehicle parts

Vehicle theft for parts is attractive to organized groups, since in many cases a vehicle’s stripped parts are worth two to three times the value of the vehicle itself<sup>35</sup>. As with some of the vehicle re-identification schemes, organized theft rings that steal vehicles in order to dismantle them and sell the parts require a particular infrastructure, including land and labour for processing vehicles and their parts<sup>36</sup>. Theft rings may first steal a vehicle and then look for a buyer for its parts, or may receive an order for certain parts and then steal a particular vehicle in order to fill the order<sup>37</sup>.

Theft rings may get orders for specific parts directly from body shops or re-builders. Brokers receive orders from the body shop and arrange to hire thieves as necessary to acquire the vehicles that contain the required parts. The thieves steal and then deliver the car to a “chop shop” where it is dismantled and the requisite parts obtained. The parts are then sold directly to the body shop. Alternatively, the theft ring may receive orders from and sell stolen parts to an auto recycler, who then sells the parts to the body shops<sup>38</sup>. As a result, the body shops that end up using the parts may or may not know that they came from a stolen vehicle<sup>39</sup>.



## ***Measures to Combat Organized Vehicle Theft***

### **Combating the illegal export of stolen vehicles**

Organized vehicle theft rings often work with each other, and are not hampered by jurisdictional boundaries<sup>40</sup>. As a result, the key to success in the battle against organized vehicle theft is collaborative and dedicated partnerships at all levels of the private and public sectors<sup>41</sup>.

There are a number of such partnerships and taskforces under way in Canada. Among them are the Provincial Auto Theft Team (PATT) in Ontario, Project CEASE (Controlled Enforcement of Automobiles Stolen for Export) in British Columbia, Project CERVO (Control of the Exportation and Receiving of Stolen Vehicles Overseas) in Quebec, and the Halifax Auto Theft Team (HATT) covering the Atlantic Provinces<sup>42</sup>. Each of these projects involves the participation of members of the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency (CCRA) as well as in most cases, members of the RCMP and/or local municipal police services. These projects were formed to identify and prosecute parties responsible for the illegal export of stolen vehicles from Canada. Stolen vehicles located en route or in foreign jurisdiction will be repatriated to Canada if financially feasible<sup>43</sup>. These projects also gather intelligence on organized vehicle theft more generally.

Internationally, the North American Export Committee (NAEC) is made up of various representatives from Canada, Mexico and the United States. The NAEC's mission is to bring together those entities that share a common goal of combating the exportation of stolen vehicles and to facilitate contacts for the exchange of information and ideas to achieve that goal<sup>44</sup>.

Given the large volume of containers passing through Canadian ports each day, Customs officials are unable to examine them all and are often forced to rely on intelligence and personal experience in order to determine which containers should be searched for goods being exported illegally<sup>45</sup>. Generally such things as last minute bookings or declaration forms detailing unusual commodities to unusual destinations are indications that a container may not contain what its documentation says it should.

Also, certain gross weights are known to be the equivalent of a container filled with vehicles, and if that weight is entered on a declaration form it may be enough to get the attention of a Customs official. In these cases, officials conduct what is known as a tail-end search, which means opening the container and looking inside. If the official is unable to see the contents clearly, a more thorough search will be conducted. If vehicles are found, an investigation ensues to determine if the vehicles are in fact stolen and, if so, they are removed from their containers and the police are notified. Stolen vehicles are just one of the many contraband items that Customs officials search for, however, and it is likely that only a small portion of them can be detected at the ports.

## Vehicle theft prevention measures

There are a number of measures that can be taken by vehicle owners and manufacturers to help prevent vehicle theft, which helps to combat organized vehicle theft. Such measures include the use of steering wheel locking devices, alarms, etchings, ignition kill switches, gearshift locks, tire or wheel locks, hood locks, or vehicle tracking systems.

A standard for measuring the effectiveness of vehicle theft deterrent systems was created by the Vehicle Information Centre of Canada (VICC) in 1998. It requires deterrent systems to be passively armed (requiring no driver intervention), to be disarmed using many possible key codes and, when activated, cut off many vehicle systems such as the fuel pump, the ignition and the starter motor<sup>46</sup>. The Insurance Bureau of Canada indicates that while nearly half of all new motor vehicles sold in Canada are equipped with VICC approved anti-theft systems, most Canadians do not have anti-theft devices in their vehicles<sup>47</sup>.

Another measure that can help discourage motor vehicle theft is parts marking. Parts marking provides police with a means of identifying a stolen vehicle, as well as arresting and prosecuting the people involved. However, Vehicle Identification Numbers are currently engraved on very few body parts (fender, hood, and doors), making it difficult to track stolen parts. An American study commissioned by the National Institute of Justice attempted to determine the effectiveness of parts labelling in reducing auto thefts<sup>48</sup>. Though auto theft investigators involved in the study remained divided about whether parts labelling deters actual thefts, they did agree that it clearly increases the thieves' cost of doing business. They must either take more time in selecting vehicles with unmarked parts, or accept less money from chop shop operators who must spend extra time removing the labels. However, even removing the labels is often not enough to disguise a stolen vehicle or its parts. If police locate a vehicle component that is known to have been labelled by the manufacturer but no longer has a label, they are able to seize the part as stolen property and take the profit away from the organized rings<sup>49</sup>.

## Methodology

### The Uniform Crime Reporting Survey

The Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Survey was developed by Statistics Canada with the co-operation and assistance of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police. The survey, which became operational in 1962, collects crime and traffic statistics reported by all police agencies in Canada. UCR survey data reflect reported crime that has been substantiated through police investigation.

Currently, there are two levels of detail collected by the UCR survey:

#### 1. Aggregate UCR Survey

The aggregate UCR survey records the number of criminal incidents reported to the police, and subsequently reported by the police to CCJS. It includes the number of reported offences, actual offences, offences cleared by charge or cleared otherwise, persons charged (by sex and by an adult/youth breakdown) and those not charged. It does not include victim characteristics. The number and rate of motor vehicle thefts in Canada and the provinces presented in this report are based on the results of this survey.

The aggregate UCR survey classifies and tabulates incidents according to the most serious offence in the incident (generally the offence that carries the longest maximum sentence under the *Criminal Code*). In categorizing incidents, violent offences always take precedence over non-violent offences. As a result, less serious offences are under-represented by the aggregate UCR survey.

#### 2. Incident-based Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR2) Survey

The incident-based UCR2 survey captures detailed information on individual criminal incidents reported to police, including characteristics of victims, accused persons and incidents. Police forces convert from the aggregate to the incident-based survey as their records management systems become capable of providing the more detailed level of detail.

In 2002, detailed data were collected from 123 police services in 9 provinces through the UCR2 survey. These data represent 59% of the national volume of reported actual (substantiated) *Criminal Code* crimes. The incidents contained in the 2002 database were distributed as follows: 41% from Ontario, 29% from Quebec, 11% from Alberta, 5% from British Columbia, 5% from Manitoba, 5% from Saskatchewan, 2% from Nova Scotia, 1% from New Brunswick, and 1% from

Newfoundland & Labrador. Other than Ontario and Quebec, the data are primarily from urban police departments. The reader is cautioned that these data are not geographically representative at the national or provincial level. Continuity with the UCR aggregate survey data is maintained by a conversion of the incident-based data to aggregate counts at year-end.

The most recent version of the Incident-based UCR Survey, UCR 2.1, is a subset of Incident-based UCR Survey. There were 62 respondents to this version of this survey in 2002 accounting for 27% of the national volume of crime. Data on stolen vehicle recovery status is from this version of the survey, unless otherwise indicated.

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## Notes

- 1 RCMP Criminal Analysis Branch. 1998. *Organized Crime and Automobile Theft*.
- 2 A census metropolitan area (CMA) is a large urban core (over 100,000 population) together with adjacent urban and rural areas that have a high degree of economic and social integration.
- 3 RCMP Criminal Analysis Branch. 1998. *Organized Crime and Automobile Theft*.
- 4 Criminal Intelligence Service Canada. 2003. *2003 Annual Report on Organized Crime in Canada*.
- 5 RCMP Criminal Analysis Branch. 1998. *Organized Crime and Automobile Theft*.
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- 7 Ontario Provincial Auto Theft Team Source. 2004.
- 8 National Committee to Reduce Auto Theft, 2003. *Sub-Committee Report on Organised Vehicle Theft Rings*.
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- 13 Calgary Police Service. 2003. "Auto Theft Unit."
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- 33 Tremblay, Pierre, Bernard Talon and Doug Hurley. 2003. "Body Switching and Related Adaptations in the Resale of Stolen Vehicles."
- 34 Toronto Police Service source, April 21, 2004.
- 35 Edmonton Police Service. 2003. "Why Vehicles are Stolen."
- 36 Gant, Francis and Peter Grabosky. 2001. "The Stolen Vehicles Parts Market."
- 37 Ontario Provincial Auto Theft Team Source. 2004.
- 38 Barry G. Ward, Executive Director, National Committee to Reduce Auto Theft. 2004.
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- 40 National Committee to Reduce Auto Theft. (2003) *Sub-Committee Report on Organised Vehicle Theft Rings*.
- 41 National Committee to Reduce Auto Theft. (2003) *Sub-Committee Report on Organised Vehicle Theft Rings*.
- 42 Canada Customs and Revenue Agency Source. 2003.
- 43 RCMP Criminal Analysis Branch. 1998. *Organized Crime and Automobile Theft*.
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- 46 Insurance Bureau of Canada. 2002. *Facts of the General Insurance Industry in Canada, 2002*.
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- 48 Finn, Peter. 2000. "Labelling automobile parts to combat theft".
- 49 Toronto Police Service source, April 21, 2004.

**Table 1**  
**Motor vehicle theft rates and clearance rates, Canada, 1977-2002**

	Population <sup>1</sup>	Motor vehicle thefts			Clearance <sup>2</sup>		
		Number of incidents	Rate per 100,000 population	Percent change in rate	Percentage cleared by charge	Percentage cleared otherwise	Total clearance rate (%)
1977	23,726,345	84,252	355	0.0	18.8	8.0	26.8
1978	23,963,967	83,130	347	-2.3	18.6	8.4	27.0
1979	24,202,205	91,445	378	8.9	15.3	10.2	25.6
1980	24,516,278	93,928	383	1.4	15.0	10.1	25.1
1981	24,820,382	96,229	388	1.2	14.2	10.1	24.3
1982	25,117,424	86,997	346	-10.7	14.2	8.8	23.0
1983	25,366,965	75,988	300	-13.5	15.2	9.5	24.7
1984	25,607,555	76,613	299	-0.1	15.0	7.9	22.9
1985	25,842,590	82,250	318	6.4	14.7	7.9	22.6
1986	26,100,587	85,585	328	3.0	15.2	7.4	22.5
1987	26,449,888	87,061	329	0.4	15.0	7.7	22.7
1988	26,798,303	89,454	334	1.4	15.6	7.9	23.4
1989	27,286,239	100,208	367	10.0	14.8	7.4	22.3
1990	27,700,856	114,082	412	12.1	13.2	6.7	19.9
1991	28,030,864	139,345	497	20.7	12.0	5.4	17.4
1992	28,376,550	146,801	517	4.1	10.9	5.2	16.1
1993	28,703,142	156,685	546	5.5	10.0	5.2	15.2
1994	29,035,981	159,469	549	0.6	9.5	5.2	14.7
1995	29,353,854	161,696	551	0.3	8.8	4.7	13.5
1996	29,671,892	180,123	607	10.2	8.1	4.3	12.3
1997	29,987,214	177,130	591	-2.7	7.9	4.2	12.2
1998	30,248,412	165,920	549	-7.1	8.1	4.5	12.6
1999	30,509,323	161,388	529	-3.6	7.7	4.7	12.4
2000	30,790,834	160,315	521	-1.6	7.9	4.6	12.4
2001	31,110,565	168,595	542	4.1	7.7	4.6	12.4
2002	31,413,990	161,506	514	-5.1	7.6	4.3	11.9

1 The population estimates come from the *Annual Demographic Statistics, 2002* report, produced by Statistics Canada, Demography Division. Populations as of July 1st: intercensal estimates for 1977 to 1990, final intercensal estimates for 1991 to 1995, final postcensal estimates for 1996 to 1999, updated postcensal estimates for 2000 and 2001, and preliminary postcensal estimates for 2002.

2 An incident is cleared by charge when at least one accused has been formally charged. An incident is cleared "otherwise" when the police have identified at least one accused and there is sufficient evidence to lay a charge in connection with the incident, but the accused is processed by other means. This could occur for a number of reasons: the police may have used discretion and decided not to lay a charge, the complainant did not want police to lay a charge or the accused was involved in other incidents.

**Source:** Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Statistics Canada.



**Table 2**  
**Motor vehicle theft rates<sup>1</sup>, Canada, provinces and territories, 1977-2002**

	N.L.	P.E.I.	N.S.	N.B.	Que.	Ont.	Man.	Sask.	Alta.	B.C.	Y.T.	N.W.T. <sup>2</sup>	Nvt. <sup>2</sup>	Canada
1977	150	174	236	246	378	308	380	401	495	429	806	860	..	355
1978	126	173	217	272	339	319	384	383	472	440	813	663	..	347
1979	122	172	256	311	432	324	408	364	476	447	854	796	..	378
1980	136	194	250	293	428	323	440	386	523	450	818	758	..	383
1981	132	194	241	280	443	310	422	409	527	480	1,155	1,060	..	388
1982	120	163	194	259	374	279	391	383	487	454	940	915	..	346
1983	114	159	165	241	326	245	358	348	395	381	466	782	..	300
1984	126	171	161	228	354	239	342	347	350	374	552	923	..	299
1985	121	217	175	220	397	245	421	369	334	399	525	811	..	318
1986	122	143	177	198	402	255	475	363	374	401	498	781	..	328
1987	95	111	167	200	406	261	471	365	372	392	545	1,068	..	329
1988	90	165	164	187	405	276	399	344	379	416	657	1,000	..	334
1989	105	156	179	215	489	281	366	315	408	491	815	947	..	367
1990	116	153	193	206	567	290	347	301	467	635	842	861	..	412
1991	134	230	217	217	676	360	328	361	651	724	785	942	..	497
1992	99	250	205	193	694	385	338	340	776	698	612	806	..	517
1993	99	195	192	183	668	456	709	335	701	708	1,019	843	..	546
1994	83	186	180	188	606	509	850	426	594	711	942	615	756	549
1995	84	173	194	191	593	522	844	522	459	780	709	617	854	551
1996	99	153	259	198	660	527	902	635	513	961	589	545	847	607
1997	91	194	277	202	675	497	994	685	544	825	664	510	686	591
1998	118	132	301	189	645	442	926	710	534	733	676	563	605	549
1999	98	139	308	216	586	434	939	690	502	738	734	549	629	529
2000	120	160	304	218	575	412	1,030	747	496	721	791	514	720	521
2001	119	197	290	229	556	415	1,149	785	571	811	792	696	864	542
2002	113	174	279	208	495	380	1,053	682	576	869	735	812	697	514
Percent change 1977-2002	-25.1	0.2	18.6	-15.4	30.8	23.3	177.5	70.4	16.5	102.4	-8.7	...	...	44.8
Percent change 1992-2002 <sup>3</sup>	13.9	-30.2	36.2	7.7	-28.6	-1.4	212.0	100.9	-25.7	24.4	20.2	32.0	-7.8	-0.6
Percent change 2001-2002	-5.4	-11.3	-3.6	-9.1	-10.9	-8.4	-8.3	-13.1	1.0	7.2	-7.2	16.6	-19.4	-5.2

.. Not available for a specific reference period

... not applicable

1 Rates are calculated on the basis of 100,000 population. The population estimates come from the *Annual Demographic Statistics, 2002* report, produced by Statistics Canada, Demography Division. Populations as of July 1st: intercensal estimates for 1977 to 1990, final intercensal estimates for 1991 to 1995, final postcensal estimates for 1996 to 1999, updated postcensal estimates for 2000 and 2001, and preliminary postcensal estimates for 2002.

2 In 1999, Nunavut, which comprises the eastern part of the old Northwest Territories, officially became a Canadian territory. Therefore, a break occurred in the time series for the Northwest Territories. For the purpose of analysis, data for the Northwest Territories from 1994 to 1998 are based on 1999 boundaries. Data prior to 1994 reflect Northwest Territories including Nunavut. Data for Nunavut between 1994 and 1999 are based on 1999 boundaries.

3 For Nunavut and Northwest Territories, the percent change is calculated for the 1994 to 2002 period.

**Source:** Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Statistics Canada.

**Table 3**  
**Motor vehicle theft rates<sup>1</sup>, Census Metropolitan Areas<sup>2,3</sup>, 1992-2002**

	1992	2001	2002	Percent change in rate 2001-2002	Percent change in rate 1992-2002
Regina	490	1,959	1,424	-27.3	190.6
Winnipeg	373	1,608	1,405	-12.6	276.7
Vancouver	961	1,147	1,177	2.6	22.5
Edmonton	977	755	789	4.5	-19.2
Hamilton	457	849	746	-12.1	63.2
London	322	731	734	0.4	128.0
Sherbrooke	567	828	725	-12.4	27.9
Montréal	1,024	779	683	-12.3	-33.3
Calgary	1,077	580	539	-7.1	-50.0
Saskatoon	376	560	538	-3.9	43.1
Kitchener	287	535	494	-7.7	72.1
Ottawa <sup>4</sup>	679	491	476	-3.1	-29.9
Halifax	300	495	474	-4.2	58.0
Sudbury	885	490	441	-10.0	-50.2
St.Catharines-Niagara	373	407	413	1.5	10.7
Trois-Rivières	483	414	384	-7.2	-20.5
Windsor	291	484	358	-26.0	23.0
Toronto	384	371	348	-6.2	-9.4
Gatineau <sup>5</sup>	382	292	282	-3.4	-26.2
Victoria	439	354	280	-20.9	-36.2
Saguenay	397	320	265	-17.2	-33.2
Thunder Bay	415	415	196	-52.8	-52.8
Québec	461	184	193	4.9	-58.1
Saint John	267	178	186	4.5	-30.3
St. John's	165	184	147	-20.1	-10.9

1 Rates are calculated on the basis of 100,000 population. The population estimates come from the *Annual Demographic Statistics, 2002* report, produced by Statistics Canada, Demography Division. Populations as of July 1st: final intercensal estimates for 1992, updated postcensal estimates for 2001 and preliminary postcensal estimates for 2002.

2 Note that a CMA typically comprises more than one police force. Also, note that the Oshawa CMA is excluded from this table due to the incongruity between the police agency jurisdictional boundaries and the CMA boundaries.

3 Populations for all CMAs have been adjusted to follow policing boundaries.

4 Ottawa represents the Ontario portion of the Ottawa-Gatineau CMA.

5 Gatineau was formerly known as Hull and refers to the Quebec portion of the Ottawa-Gatineau CMA.

**Source:** Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Statistics Canada.

**Table 4**  
**Motor vehicle theft clearance rates<sup>1</sup>, Canada, provinces and territories, 2002**

	Number of incidents	Percentage cleared by charge	Percentage cleared otherwise	Total clearance rate (%)
Newfoundland and Labrador	599	25.0	5.0	30.1
Prince Edward Island	244	15.2	5.3	20.5
Nova Scotia	2,639	10.6	5.4	16.0
New Brunswick	1,576	15.0	5.5	20.5
Quebec	36,904	6.8	2.1	8.9
Ontario	45,835	7.7	7.2	15.0
Manitoba	12,121	11.4	2.1	13.4
Saskatchewan	6,904	14.5	7.1	21.6
Alberta	17,948	10.3	5.8	16.1
British Columbia	35,980	3.4	1.8	5.2
Yukon	220	14.1	12.3	26.4
Northwest Territories	336	24.7	12.8	37.5
Nunavut	200	13.0	12.5	25.5
<b>Canada</b>	<b>161,506</b>	<b>7.6</b>	<b>4.3</b>	<b>11.9</b>

1 An incident is cleared by charge when at least one accused has been formally charged. An incident is cleared "otherwise" when the police have identified at least one accused and there is sufficient evidence to lay a charge in connection with the incident, but the accused is processed by other means. This could occur for a number of reasons : the police may have used discretion and decided not to lay a charge, or the accused has been diverted to an alternative measures program.

**Source:** Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Statistics Canada.

**Table 5**  
**Proportion and rate of stolen vehicles not recovered, select police services<sup>1</sup>, 2002**

Police service	Population <sup>2</sup>	Number of stolen vehicles <sup>3,4</sup>	Percentage of vehicles not recovered <sup>5</sup>	Rate <sup>6</sup> of vehicles not recovered
Montréal	1,853,489	14,999	44	354
Halifax	200,928	1,268	24	151
London	346,372	2,639	18	141
Ottawa	817,375	3,490	32	135
York Region	818,013	2,472	39	118
Gatineau-Métro	219,717	773	33	117
Toronto	2,614,956	10,258	25	97
Vancouver	580,094	5,709	9	84
Kingston	115,205	314	30	81
Barrie	106,132	419	20	78
Calgary	915,453	4,799	13	70
Winnipeg	631,620	9,321	5	69
Edmonton	666,739	5,664	8	65
Saskatoon	206,922	991	13	63
Sûreté du Québec <sup>7</sup>	2,222,572	4,351	29	58
Greater Sudbury	159,316	613	23	51
Windsor	214,348	872	11	45
Thunder Bay	118,086	198	25	41
Regina	184,661	2,754	3	40
Victoria	75,424	506	5	31
St. John's	176,619	326	10	19
RCMP <sup>7</sup>	...	35,799	10	...

... not applicable

- Police Services included in this table accounted for 72% of all vehicle thefts reported to police in 2002, as captured by the Uniform Crime Reporting Survey.
- The population estimates come from the *Annual Demographic Statistics, 2002* report, as produced by Statistics Canada Demography Division. Populations as of July 1st: preliminary postcensal estimates for 2002.
- The number of stolen vehicles in this table will not match the UCR Aggregate counts as released in the *Crime Statistics in Canada, 2002* Juristat in July of 2003 as the data in this table represent only completed thefts, unless otherwise stated. Further, the UCR Aggregate survey counts only the most serious violation in an incident, whereas data in this table represent all completed vehicle thefts, including those occurring in conjunction with more serious offences. Also, the data in this table excludes incidents where vehicle recovery status was coded 'Not Applicable'.
- The number of stolen vehicles for the following police services came directly from the police services: Montréal, York Region, Toronto, Regina, Gatineau-Métro, Winnipeg (includes attempts), St. John's (includes attempts), Victoria (includes attempts), the RCMP and the Sûreté du Québec. Data for the following police services came from the UCR2.0 Survey Halifax and Calgary. Data for the following police services came from the UCR2.1 Survey: Vancouver, Kingston, Barrie, Saskatoon, Greater Sudbury, Windsor, Edmonton, London, Ottawa and Thunder Bay.
- The percent of stolen vehicles not recovered for the following police services came directly from the police services: Montréal, Halifax, York, Toronto, Calgary, the Sûreté du Québec, Edmonton, Winnipeg, Regina, St. John's, Gatineau-Métro, Victoria and the RCMP. Data for the following police services came from the UCR2.1 Survey: London, Ottawa, Vancouver, Kingston, Barrie, Gatineau-Métro, Saskatoon, Greater Sudbury, Windsor and Thunder Bay.
- Rates are calculated on the basis of 100,000 population.
- Due to the rural nature of the areas policed by the R.C.M.P. and the Sûreté du Québec, a much higher proportion of recreational vehicles such as snowmobiles and all terrain vehicles are stolen than in municipal police services. These types of vehicles tend not to be recovered and are generally not connected to organized vehicle theft. Therefore, data for the R.C.M.P. and the Sûreté du Québec include only cars and trucks (including minivans and SUVs).

**Source:** UCR2.1 Survey, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Statistics Canada.