



Grace Cairo

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Select Crimes Issue Paper: Motor Vehicle Theft Offenses (FY2024)

Introduction

The New Mexico Sentencing Commission’s Select Crimes Issue Papers provide thorough examinations of data concerning criminal offenses that are regularly discussed by policymakers in New Mexico. Each paper in the series describes the frequency of charges and outcomes for a selected category of offenses in a given fiscal year. The Sentencing Commission publishes the Select Crimes Issue Papers pursuant to its statutory mandate (see Section 9-3-10(D) NMSA 1978).

This Select Crimes Issue Paper concerns motor vehicle theft offenses. A short description of the Dataset is followed by a Description of the tables. The Tables show the frequency, disposition, sentencing, and length of stay for motor vehicle theft crimes. A Methodology section at the end of the Issue Paper describes in detail how the information in each Table was compiled.

All papers in the series are published on the New Mexico Sentencing Commission website at <https://nmsc.unm.edu/reports/index.html>. They will be updated periodically. Please feel free to reach out to the Sentencing Commission with any questions.

Dataset

This Select Crimes Issue Paper concerns motor vehicle theft offenses. The offenses included are those in Section 30-16D-1 through 30-16D-7 NMSA 1978, excluding 30-16D-5. We include the 2,647 cases that included a motor vehicle offense as any charge and were adjudicated between July 1, 2023 and June 30, 2024. Information about the offenses comes from data collected by the Administrative Office of the Courts and the Corrections Department. The Methodology section describes how the information in each table was compiled.

Description of Tables

In Table 1, we describe the offenses by statute, including the typical degree assigned in statute (not including initiatory offenses, which may drop the degree) as well as the number of cases in which an offense of the statute was charged.

Tables 2 and 3 examine dispositions for the subset of cases (2,307, or 87%) in which a motor vehicle theft offense is the lead offense—that is, the charge with the highest degree. We define a finding of guilt as one in which either a conviction or a deferral has taken place. Conditional discharge is not a finding of guilt, but is included in its own column since a conditional discharge can result in a probation term. Acquittal means the defendant was found not guilty, while incompetency and dismissal suggest the court did not make a determination of guilt.¹ Tables 2 and 3

¹ Different charges within cases may have different dispositions. Tables 2 and 3 consider only the disposition of the lead offense. In addition, dispositions are not necessarily indicative of sentencing. For example, a conviction may result in incarceration, probation, or a

organize the same information differently: Table 2 provides dispositions by statute, while Table 3 provides the same information by degree.

In Tables 4 and 5, we examine dispositions of the most serious motor vehicle theft offense charged. Unlike Tables 2 and 3, these analyses include all 2,647 cases, including those with lead offenses that are not motor vehicle theft offenses. One might thus expect lower rates of conviction here compared to Tables 2 and 3, as offenses other than lead offenses are often dismissed via plea bargains. Tables 4 and 5 organize the same information differently. Table 4 provides dispositions by statute, while Table 5 provides the same information by degree.

Tables 6 and 7 examine sentencing for the subset of cases (797, or 30%) in which a motor vehicle theft offense is the most serious (meaning the highest degree) conviction, including all cases that could result in incarceration (prison or jail) or probation: convictions, deferrals, and conditional discharges. We calculate the median incarceration, probation, and parole sentence. Table 6 reports this information by statute, while Table 7 provides the same information by degree.² These tables do not incorporate expected earned meritorious deductions (good time).

Table 8 reports the expected length of stay (LOS) for people who were incarcerated in a New Mexico prison for a motor vehicle theft offense on June 30, 2024. This table incorporates expected earned meritorious deductions. The table does not include people incarcerated in a detention center or youth detention center.

Please see the Methodology section at the end of this report for more details.

program such as a treatment court. A case may be dismissed for many reasons, including the possibility that the court assigned the defendant to a preprosecution diversion program.

² Electronic sentencing information is either unavailable or difficult to interpret for 26 or 3% of the 823 cases. In addition, sentencing information is complex and more prone to data entry error than other information included in this report.

Tables

Table 1: Motor Vehicle Theft Offenses Charges in Cases³

Statute	Description	Typical Degree	Number of Cases	Percent of Overall Cases
30-16D-4	Receiving or transferring stolen motor vehicles	4th degree felony	1,731	65%
30-16D-1	Unlawful taking of a motor vehicle	4th degree felony	799	30%
30-16D-2	Embezzlement of a motor vehicle	4th degree felony	147	6%
30-16D-6	Altering or changing engine or other numbers	4th degree felony	16	<1%
30-16D-3	Fraudulently obtaining a motor vehicle	4th degree felony	12	<1%
30-16D-7	Operating a chop shop	3rd degree felony	3	<1%

Table 2: Motor Vehicle Theft-Related Lead Offenses and Their Dispositions by Statute

Statute	Description	Number of Cases	Finding of Guilt for the Lead Offense	Conditional Discharge	Dismissal	Incompetency	Acquittal
30-16D-4	Receiving or transferring stolen motor vehicles	1,504	29%	5%	64%	1%	<1%
30-16D-1	Unlawful taking of a motor vehicle	650	31%	3%	61%	3%	<1%
30-16D-2	Embezzlement of a motor vehicle	142	16%	5%	79%	<1%	0%
30-16-3, 6, & 7	All other motor vehicle theft offenses	11	9%	0%	91%	0%	0%
	Total cases	2,307	29%	4%	65%	2%	<1%

³ Because cases can include charges for more than one type of motor vehicle theft violation, the sum of cases in Table 1 exceeds 2,647, and the sum of percentages exceeds 100%.

Table 3: Motor Vehicle Theft-Related Lead Offenses and Their Dispositions by Degree

Degree	Number of Cases	Finding of Guilt for the Lead Offense	Conditional Discharge	Dismissal	Incompetency	Acquittal
2 nd Degree Felony	48	42%	0%	54%	2%	2%
3 rd Degree Felony	105	36%	0%	63%	1%	0%
4 th Degree Felony	2,045	25%	5%	68%	2%	<1%
Misdemeanor	109	84%	1%	13%	1%	0%
Total cases	2,307	29%	4%	65%	2%	<1%

Table 4: Most Serious Motor Vehicle Theft Offenses and Their Dispositions by Statute

Statute	Description	Number of Cases	Finding of Guilt for the Most Serious Motor Vehicle Theft Offense	Conditional Discharge	Dismissal	Incompetency	Acquittal
30-16D-4	Receiving or transferring stolen motor vehicles	1,693	29%	5%	65%	1%	<1%
30-16D-1	Unlawful taking of a motor vehicle	790	31%	3%	62%	3%	<1%
30-16D-2	Embezzlement of a motor vehicle	147	16%	5%	79%	<1%	0%
30-16-3, 6, & 7	All other motor vehicle theft offenses	17	24%	0%	77%	0%	0%
	Total cases	2,647	29%	4%	65%	2%	<1%

Table 5: Most Serious Motor Vehicle Theft Offenses and Their Dispositions by Degree

Degree	Number of Cases	Finding of Guilt for the Most Serious Motor Vehicle Theft Offense	Conditional Discharge	Dismissal	Incompetency	Acquittal
2 nd Felony	48	42%	0%	54%	2%	2%
3 rd Felony	111	36%	0%	63%	1%	0%
4 th Felony	2,349	25%	5%	68%	2%	<1%
Misdemeanor	139	78%	2%	18%	1%	0%
Total cases	2,647	29%	4%	65%	2%	<1%

Table 6: Sentencing When Most Serious Conviction is a Motor Vehicle Theft Offense by Statute⁴

Statute/ Description	Typical Degree	Number of Cases	Fully Incarcerated		Partial Suspension		Fully Suspended
			Jail/prison sentence (yrs)	Parole term (yrs)	Jail/prison sentence (yrs)	Probation sentence (yrs)	Probation sentence (yrs)
30-16D-4 Receiving or transferring stolen MV	4th F	528	1.5 (60)	0.0	1.0 (128)	1.5	1.5 (340)
30-16D-1 Unlawful taking of MV	4th F	237	1.5 (27)	1.0	1.0 (45)	1.5	1.5 (165)
30-16D-2 Embezzlement of a MV	4th F	31	1.5 (3)	0.0	1.0 (6)	1.2	1.5 (22)
30-16D-3 Fraudulently obtaining a MV	4th F	1	--	--	--	--	5.0 (1)
Total cases		797	1.5 (90)	0.0	1.0 (179)	1.5	1.5 (528)

⁴ Numbers of cases are indicated in parentheses. Charges were not necessarily assigned the typical degree, especially for initiatory crimes.

Table 7: Sentencing When Most Serious Conviction is a Motor Vehicle Theft Offense by Degree⁵

Degree	Number of Cases	Fully Incarcerated		Partial Suspension		Fully Suspended
		Jail/prison sentence (yrs)	Parole term (yrs)	Jail/prison sentence (yrs)	Probation sentence (yrs)	Probation sentence (yrs)
2 nd Felony	18	9.0 (9)	0.0	3.1 (6)	5.0	5.0 (3)
3 rd Felony	37	3.0 (6)	0.5	1.0 (11)	3.0	3.0 (20)
4 th Felony	622	1.5 (65)	1.0	1.0 (139)	1.5	1.5 (418)
Misdemeanor	120	1.0 (10)	0.0	0.1 (23)	1.0	1.0 (87)
Total cases	797	1.5 (90)	0.0	1.0 (179)	1.5	1.5 (528)

Table 8: Expected Lengths of Stay for People Incarcerated in NM Prisons on Motor Vehicle Theft Offenses June 30, 2024

Statute	Description	Number of Cases	Mean Expected LOS (yrs)	Median Expected LOS (yrs)
30-16D-1	Unlawful taking of MV	14	1.7	1.6
30-16D-4	Receiving or transferring stolen MV	18	2.5	1.8
	Total cases	32	2.2	1.6

Methodology

This report covers those offenses in Section 30-16D-1 NMSA through 30-16D-7, excluding 30-16D-5 NMSA. It includes the 2,647 cases that were adjudicated between July 1, 2023 and June 30, 2024. We drew cases that included a motor vehicle theft offense as any charge, but the case was eliminated if (1) all charges of motor vehicle theft offenses were dropped before the case was adjudicated, (2) the case has not yet been adjudicated or (3) the case was bound over, transferred, or consolidated to a different case. Among all 6,493 charges in the 2,647 cases, 46% are motor vehicle theft offenses. Other common charges include offenses of possession of a controlled substance and aggravated fleeing a law enforcement officer.

Sometimes dispositions are amended; in this report we use the most recent disposition for each charge. However, we do not include changes in dispositions that may have occurred due to appeals processes.

We determine the Lead Offense for Tables 2 and 3 primarily based on the charges with the highest degree. If a motor vehicle theft offense charge is among those with the highest degree, we select it as the lead offense. If there are multiple such charges, we select the charge with a conviction, if any.

⁵ Numbers of cases are indicated in parentheses.

We determine the Most Serious motor vehicle theft offense for Tables 4 and 5 based on the motor vehicle theft charge with the highest degree. If there are multiple such charges, we select the charge with a conviction, if any.

The determination of sentencing in Tables 6 and 7 requires some explanation. Electronic sentencing information usually is recorded charge by charge, with an indication of whether the sentence is concurrent or consecutive to other convictions in the case. We determine the ‘charge term’—the intended length of incarceration for the charge—by adding any enhancement (e.g., habitual offender, firearm) to the sentence and subtracting any suspension. For total incarceration in the case, we use the longest charge term when all charge terms are to be served concurrently; we sum charge terms when they are each to be served consecutively. The incarceration sentences reported here do not incorporate the calculations of expected earned meritorious deductions (good time). Therefore, the lengths of incarceration for those incarcerated in prison (not jail) may be shorter than indicated here, as individuals incarcerated in prison earn meritorious deductions.

Probation sentences are derived from a different dataset than sentencing. There may be one entry for the entire case, or there may be separate entries for multiple convictions. We sum probation sentences. If the sum exceeds five years, we use the longest probation term instead, unless the defendant is a sex offender for whom the statutory maximum of five years of probation does not apply.

Parole sentences are derived from yet another dataset unrelated to sentencing or probation. While there is usually just one entry for a case, occasionally there are multiple entries. We assume the longest parole term. We do not include any parole term for partially suspended sentences because, if one exists, it is served concurrently to the probation term, which is usually longer. We also do not include the parole term for fully suspended sentences, as they only are served when a defendant completes probation incarcerated after probation has been revoked.

In Tables 6 and 7, we omit cases when electronic data is confusing or questionable, unless checked manually using New Mexico Secure Court Case Access. Omitted cases include those in which there are a mix of concurrent and consecutive charge terms, parole exceeds two years for a non-sex offender, a single probation record exceeds five years for a non-sex offender, parole terms are not accompanied by incarceration terms, or no sentencing information is available electronically.

Finally, for Table 8 we use admission dates and expected release dates to determine the mean and median lengths of stay for individuals incarcerated on June 30, 2024 for motor vehicle theft offenses in New Mexico prisons. The incarceration sentences reported here include expected earned meritorious deductions.