

Property Crime in Alaska 1985–2017

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This fact sheet describes Alaska property crime trends from 1985 through 2017, with a focus on motor vehicle theft rate trends during that period. The data comes from Alaska’s contribution to the FBI’s Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) data, otherwise known as the *Crime in Alaska* report. The UCR is compiled from crimes reported to state and local law enforcement agencies and is the most commonly cited official source for data on crime in the United States. The observed trends indicate that property crime is increasing in Alaska since 2011, but that motor vehicle theft is rising at a faster rate than other property crimes in the UCR report.

Property crime in Alaska

Figure 1 separates the UCR property crime rate per 100,000 adult population into its major component index crimes — burglary, larceny theft, and motor vehicle theft. (Arson, the UCR’s fourth property crime category, is excluded from Figure 1.)

Property crimes depicted in Figure 1 demonstrate similar patterns - peaking in the late 1980s and early 1990s and then declining steadily through approximately 2011. As shown in Figure 1, larceny thefts comprised the majority of property crimes reported to police between 1985 and 2017. In 2017, larceny thefts constituted 67.4% of all property crimes reported to police in Alaska. Burglary was the second-most common property crime type, until 2017, when the motor vehicle theft rate exceeded the burglary rate.

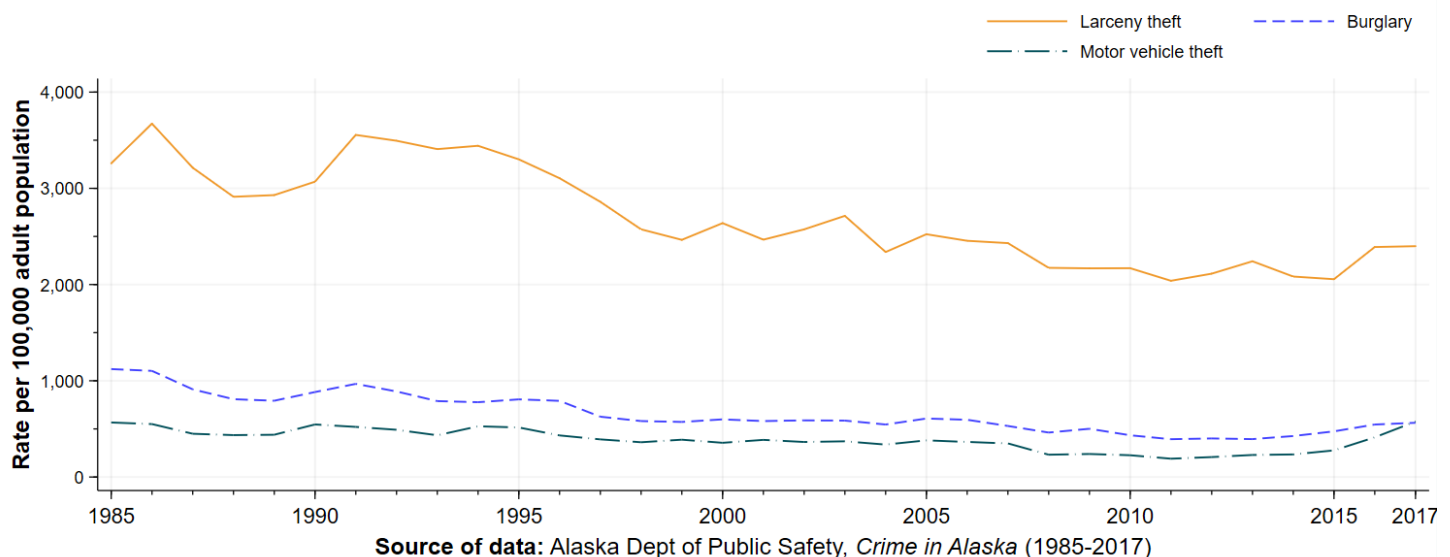
The year 2011 was an historic low point for overall property crime in the state. Since then, Alaska’s rates of larceny theft, burglary, and motor vehicle theft increased, and all at varying rates.

Alaska motor vehicle theft rates

Figure 2 shows only the rate of motor vehicle theft for the period 1985-2017 in Alaska.

Figure 1.

Alaska property crime rates 1985-2017



The largest property crime rate increase observed between 2011 and 2017 was for motor vehicle theft. In the seven years spanning 2011 and 2017, the rate of motor vehicle theft in Alaska increased by 202.5%, from 190.6 to 576.6 motor vehicle thefts per 100,000 residents.

Rates of larceny theft (+17.6%) and burglary (+43.4%) also increased between 2011 and 2017, but not nearly as much as motor vehicle theft.

Prior to 2011, Alaska motor vehicle theft rate had steadily declined since the mid-1990s. In 1994 Alaska's motor vehicle theft rate stood at 527.1 per 100,000. A decade later in 2004, the rate was 337.6, and by 2011 Alaska's motor vehicle theft rate was 190.6 - a decline of 63.8% since 1994.

From 2011 to 2017, however, motor vehicle theft rates began a continuous increase. From a low of 190.6 crimes per 100,000 residents in 2011, the rate per 100,000 rose to a peak of 576.6 in 2017.

As shown in Figure 2, the initial rise from 2011 to 2015 can be viewed as a return to the rates seen from 1998 to 2007. However, the motor vehicle theft rate continued to increase in both 2016 and 2017. By 2017, Alaska's motor vehicle theft rate far surpassed the 33-year average, reaching its highest level since 1985.

Comparing Alaska to the United States

Figure 2 additionally presents a comparison between Alaska motor vehicle theft rates to those of the rest of the country.

This is helpful because it shows that the trend in Alaska since 2011, especially the last three years, is not something the rest of the United States experienced. From an initial peak of 566.8 in 1985 (in Alaska) and 659 in 1991 (in the U.S.) the rate drops through 2011.

While the rest of the country saw motor vehicle rates stabilize through 2017, Alaska's motor vehicle theft rate increased dramatically. In 2017, the Alaska motor vehicle theft rate was 142.9% higher than that of the U.S.

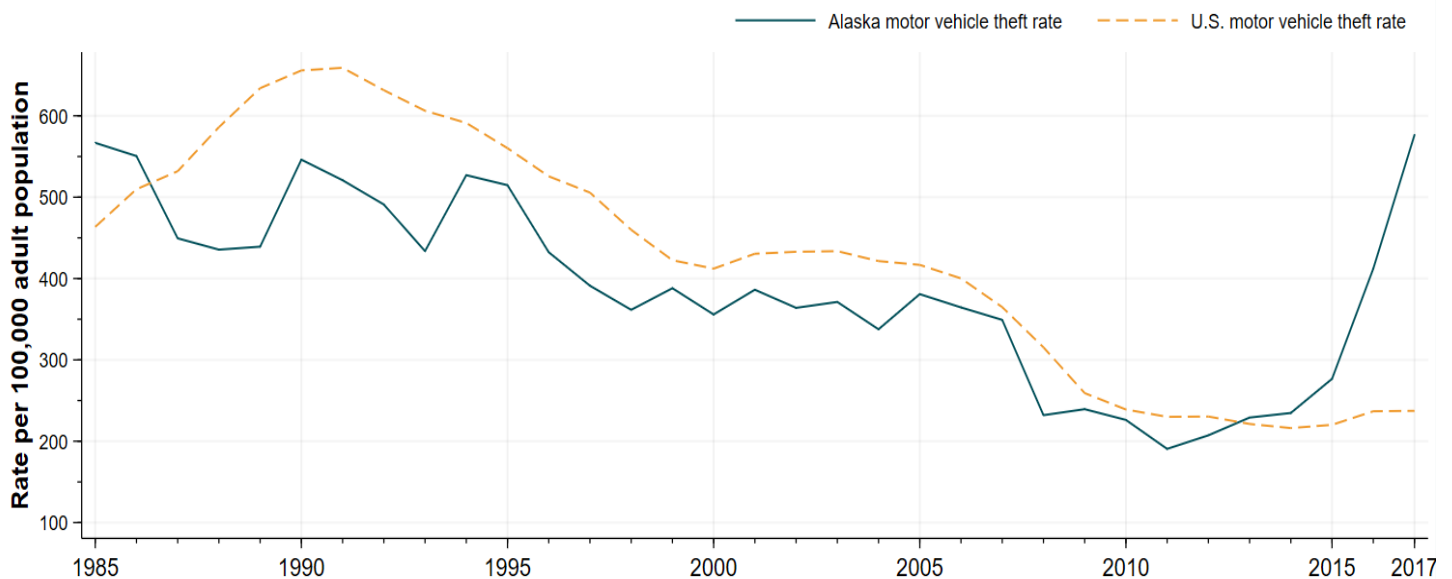
Year-by-year motor vehicle theft increase

Figure 3 shows the year-over-year increase in motor vehicle theft in Alaska. The pattern from 2011 to 2015 is that of a large but gradual increase that is not without precedent in the last 33 years.

However, the years 2015, 2016, and 2017 depart from this trend when the rate of motor vehicle theft increased by 17.9%, 48.9%, and 39.9% (respectively) when compared to the previous year.

Figure 2

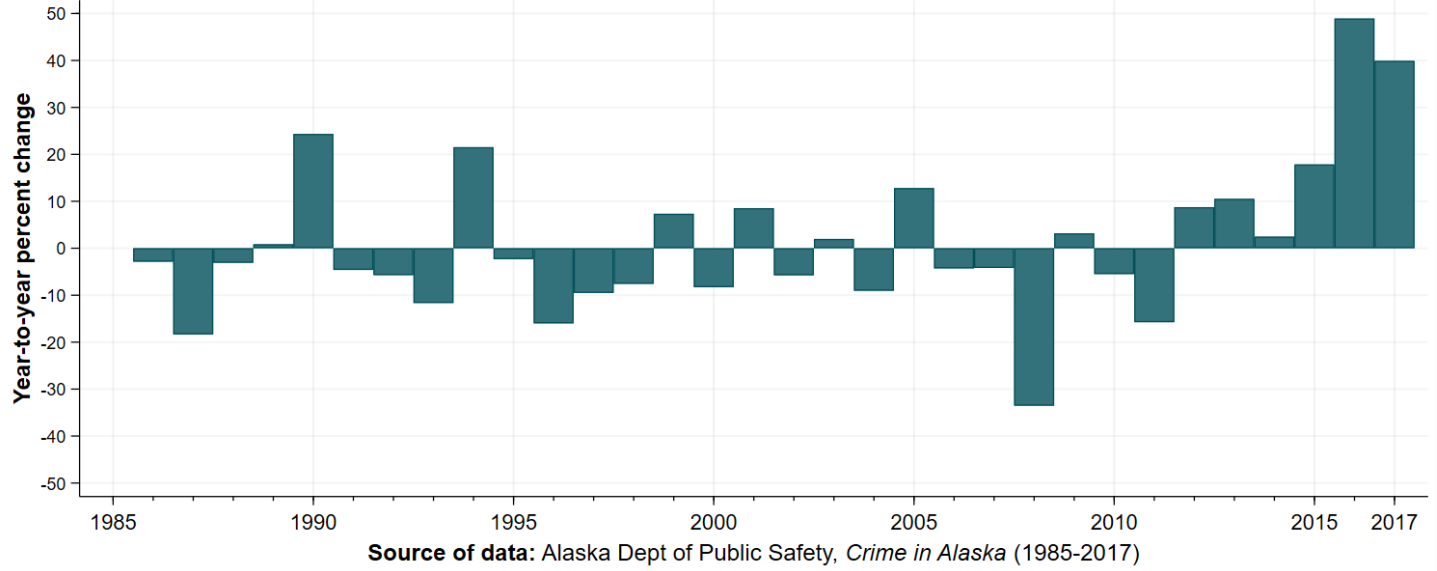
US and Alaska motor vehicle theft rates 1985-2017



Source of data: Alaska Dept of Public Safety, *Crime in Alaska* (1985-2017)
Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Crime in the United States* (1985-2017)

Figure 3

Alaska motor vehicle theft rate: Year-to-year percent change 1985-2017



This means that the rate climbed quicker than any other index crime in any three-year stretch throughout the past 32 years.

SUMMARY

Overall property crime in Alaska increased by 28.6% from 2011 to 2017. The motor vehicle theft rate in 2017

is at the highest yet observed from 1985-2017, as indicated by Figure 2.

Burglary and larceny theft increased moderately. Motor vehicle theft rates, however, tripled from the lowest recorded rate 2011 to the highest recorded rate in 2017.

Notes

CALCULATING RATES

Rates per 100,000 populations are calculated by dividing the number of specified events by the total population and then multiplying the total by 100,000. For example, to determine the motor vehicle theft rate in Alaska for 2017, we take the total number of recorded motor vehicle thefts reported in Alaska for 2017 (4,250), divide it by the estimated 2017 state population (737,080), and multiply the quotient by 100,000 to reach the motor vehicle theft rate of 576.6 per 100,000 male residents $[(4,250 \div 737,080) * 100,000 = 576.6]$.

REFERENCES

All population estimates were retrieved from the State of Alaska, Department of Labor and Workforce Development at: <http://live.laborstats.alaska.gov/pop/index.cfm> (1960 to present).

Crime in Alaska is available online at: <http://dps.alaska.gov/Statewide/UCR.aspx> (2000–2017) and <https://www.uaa.alaska.edu/ajic/ucr.cshtml> (1976–1999).

UCR OFFENSE DEFINITIONS

Burglary (breaking or entering)—The unlawful entry of a structure to commit a felony or a theft. Attempted forcible entry is included.

Larceny-theft (except motor vehicle theft)—The unlawful taking, carrying, leading, or riding away of property from the possession or constructive possession of another. Examples are thefts of bicycles, motor vehicle parts and accessories, shoplifting, pocketpicking, or the stealing of any property or article that is not taken by force and violence or by fraud. Attempted larcenies are included. Embezzlement, confidence games, forgery, check fraud, etc., are excluded.

Motor vehicle theft—The theft or attempted theft of a motor vehicle. A motor vehicle is self-propelled and runs on land surface and not on rails. Motorboats, construction equipment, airplanes, and farming equipment are specifically excluded from this category.

Alaska Justice Information Center



ABOUT

The Alaska Justice Information Center (AJiC) was established in 2015, with a mission to compile, analyze, and report on criminal justice topics to policymakers, and practitioners in order to improve public safety, to increase criminal justice system accountability, and to reduce recidivism. In 2017, AJiC merged with the Alaska Justice Statistical Analysis Center (AJSAC), which was designated as Alaska's statistical analysis center in 1986 by Governor William Sheffield. The fact sheet series was previously published under the AJSAC masthead.

Since 1972, the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) and its predecessor agency, the National Criminal Justice Information and Statistics Service, have provided support to state and territorial governments to establish and operate Statistical Analysis Centers (SACs) to collect, analyze, and report statistics on crime and justice to federal, state, and local levels of government, and to share state-level information nationally. There are currently 53 SACs located in the United States and its Territories. The Alaska SAC is a member of the Justice Research and Statistics Association (JRSA), a national nonprofit organization comprised of SAC directors, researchers, and practitioners dedicated to policy-oriented research and analysis.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Location

The Alaska Justice Information Center (AJiC) is housed in the University of Alaska Anchorage Justice Center, which is located on the second floor of the UAA/APU Consortium Library, Suite 213.

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