

Albuquerque's mid-year figures show decrease in crime, with declines in property crime and auto theft



Mid-year figures show a 10% decline in auto theft in Albuquerque in the first six months of 2020 when compared to the same time period in 2019, and a near 31% decrease from the first six months of 2018.

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Led by decreases in property crimes and what law enforcement officials call societal offenses, overall crime in Albuquerque decreased in the first half of 2020 when compared to the first halves of 2019 and 2018.

Overall crime decreased by 4.6% from Jan. 1 through June 30, 2020 when compared to the same time period in 2019, according to data the Albuquerque Police Department released Sept. 21. The decrease from 2018 to 2020 was even higher — about 15.4%.

And for Albuquerque, which has been much maligned for the rate of auto theft over the years, the release of the mid-year stats shows law enforcement efforts have made progress.

This year marks the third that Albuquerque law enforcement officials have submitted data to the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting program using a new

framework, one that all police departments across the country will be expected to use by the end of 2021.

Called the National Incident Based Reporting System — or NIBRS — it attempts to create streamlined crime categories, and more of them.

At a macro level, officials can classify whether a crime affects property, people or society. Drilling down, a law enforcement agency through NIBRS can log all crimes connected with an incident, as opposed to only the most serious crime from each incident offered through the Summary Reporting System, said Albuquerque Police Department spokesman Gilbert Gallegos. This provides a more complete snapshot of crime, he said.

Still, it's a snapshot, and the figures released last month can't tell the whole story.

First, the move to NIBRS and its intricate categories means that data submitted in previous years can't be compared without some kind of manual translation and review. That's because under the FBI's SRS, only the most serious crime related to an incident was reported.

Second, the Albuquerque Police Department mid-year data released in September lacks what are called Group B offenses in the FBI NIBRS categories. These include offenses such as disorderly conduct, bad checks, loitering, driving while intoxicated, non-violent domestic situations and trespassing, among others. Gallegos said that data is in the process of being compiled for release.

And for Albuquerque's interim Police Chief Harold Medina, the inability to compare data before 2018 means the public misses out on comparing previous trends.

Based on the data released, here's what we can see.

Property crimes — auto thefts, burglaries, stolen property and robberies — made up nearly three-quarters of the crimes reported to the Albuquerque Police Department in the first half of 2020, and decreased by 5.6% when compared to the first half of 2019.

Crimes against society — a FBI category created to account for offenses that essentially prohibit certain activities, such as drug use and prostitution — decreased by just over 8%. These crimes accounted for about 5% of the crimes reported to the Albuquerque Police Department in the first half of 2020.

The combined decreases in these categories helped to offset what essentially was a flattening of violent crimes.

These crimes — homicides, aggravated offenses and rape — decreased by less than half a percent in the first half of 2020 when compared to the previous year.

Four of the five main categories declined from 2020 to 2019 except one — aggravated offenses. Within that category, aggravated assaults increased 6.9% leading to the overall category increasing by 1.7%, the data show.

For comparison, between the first six months of 2018 and the time period in 2019, violent crimes — categorized by the FBI as crimes against people — decreased by just over 3.25%.

Double-digit reductions in property crimes such as auto theft, robberies and stolen property crimes helped drive down crime, as did drug use and prostitution, the data show.

In fact, overall categories of burglary, theft, motor vehicle theft and stolen property all decreased between the first half of 2020 when compared to the first half of 2019, even taking into account a 21.6% increase in shoplifting offenses.

Albuquerque's interim Police Chief Harold Medina said Covid-19 related shutdowns initially helped drive down crime, except for commercial burglaries. But when people finally started going out, he said crime started to peak again in several categories.

Among the main categories used to track crime, the Albuquerque Police Department reported the largest increases in arson, pornography and weapons violations.

Crimes related to damage, vandalism and destruction of property increased by about 6.6% from the first six months of 2019 and the first six months of 2020. These crimes made up about 21.6% of all property crimes over the first six months of 2020 and some 15.7% of all crimes reported in Albuquerque over that time frame.

When it comes auto theft, Albuquerque's notoriety wasn't created overnight. Its reputation won't change overnight either, but failure to make progress isn't an option, officials say.

According to the data, progress has been made.

Mid-year figures show a 10% decline in auto theft in the first six months of 2020 when compared to the same time period in 2019, and a near 31% decrease from the first six months of 2018. In both 2018 and 2019, the majority of auto thefts occurred in the first half of the year, according to available data from the Albuquerque Police Department.

The decrease was enough for the [National Insurance Crime Bureau](#) to drop Albuquerque down its list of cities with the most auto thefts in the country.

The National Insurance Crime Bureau's latest "Hot Spot" report, [released in July and based on data for 2019](#), shows Bakersfield, California took over the top spot with about 726 auto thefts per 100,000 people. Albuquerque dropped to second place with 697 auto thefts per 100,000 people. St. Joseph, Missouri was third with about 615 auto thefts per 100,000 people.

Interim Chief Medina said the gains show how deep of a hole the city was in. According to National Insurance Crime Bureau data, the hole began to appear in 2014.

The prior year, Albuquerque ranked 20th on the agency's Hot Spot list, with a rate of 444 vehicle thefts per 100,000 people. In 2014, Albuquerque jumped to 12th. The following year, the Duke City ranked second.

Then came three straight years atop the Hot Spot report as the worst location in the U.S. for auto theft.

Albuquerque's first two appearances in the top spot were historic, [according to National Insurance Crime Bureau data dating back to 2007](#). The region's rate of auto theft in 2016 (1,114 per 100,000) and 2017 (1,097 per 100,000) were the highest recorded since at least 2007.

In fact, only two other MSA's have topped a rate of 1,000 vehicle thefts per 100,000 people, according to the Hot Spot data: Las Vegas, Nevada in 2007 and Modesto, California in 2007

Incidentally, Modesto is the only metropolitan area to top the list more times than Albuquerque.