RETAIL THEFT IN VERMONT USING NIBRS DATA

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Retail Theft Using NIBRS

This memo relies on the incident level data of the National Incident Based Reporting System (NIBRS) maintained by the FBI. The raw FBI NIBRS data available are available online at the Crime Data Explorer (CDE). NIBRS data has information on incidents, offenses, offenders, victims, and arrests. An incident may have more than one offense, offender, victim or arrest.
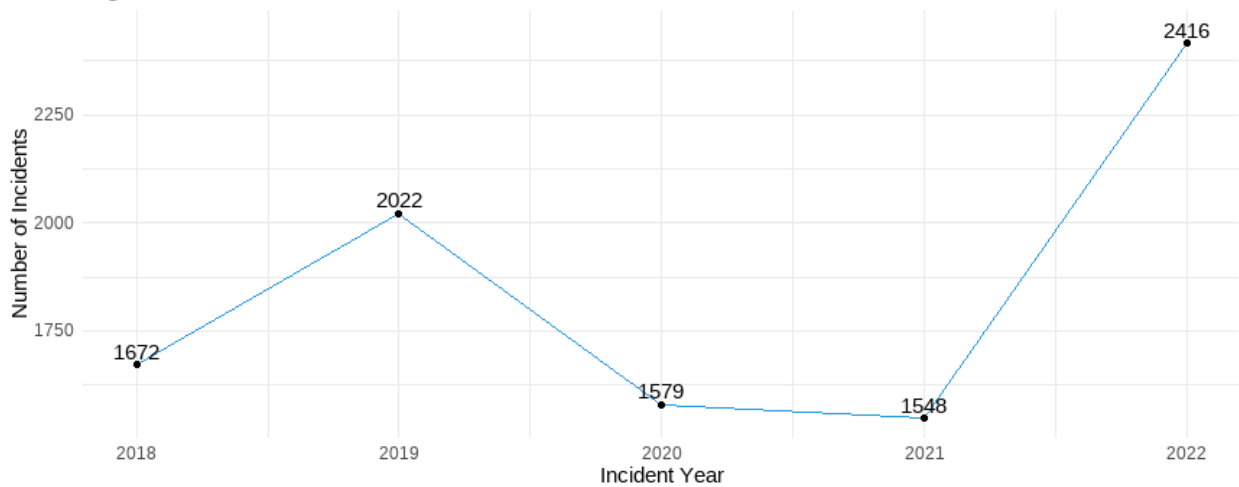
Summary

- Retail theft has increased post – Covid from 2,022 incidents in 2019 to 2,416 incidents in 2022.
- Only 2.66% of retail theft offenses have other offenses associated with them.
- NIBRS data do not indicate evidence of organized crime or gang activity for retail theft. Scholars struggle to answers questions about organized crime with the data that is available.
- Clearance rates by arrest for retail theft have decreased from 50% in 2019 to 35% in 2022.
- 70% of all retail thefts arrests are made within one week of the offense.

Is retail theft on the rise compared to pre-Covid years?

Yes. This figure shows the number of criminal incidents that had a retail theft offense from 2018-2022. There were approximately 400 more incidents in 2022 than in 2019. There were 9,327 incidents total during the 5-year period.

Fig 1: Number of Retail Theft Incidents 2018 - 2022

Source: FBI CDE/CRG

NIBRS data counts incidents and offenses. An incident can have more than one offense. For NIBRS, the offense of retail theft (NIBRS uses the term shoplifting) is counted at the store level, regardless of how many objects are stolen. For example, an individual steals five sets of earrings from a store at one time. That would be one offense. However, if the individual steals the earrings from one store and then goes down the street and steals diapers from another store, that would be

one incident but two offenses. All of the incidents of retail theft from 2019-2022 were recorded as the only retail theft offense in the incident.

What other crimes are committed during retail theft incidents?

Only 246 retail theft incidents had another offense associated with it. This was 2.66% of the retail theft incidents. The most common of the other offenses was Stolen Property Offenses, such as buying/receiving stolen property with 60 incidents of the 246.

Table 1: Other Offenses Committed During a Retail Theft Incident

Other Offense	n	Percent
Stolen Property Offenses	60	22.64%
Drug/Narcotic Violations	56	21.13%
Simple Assault	40	15.09%
Destruction/Damage/Vandalism of Property	23	8.68%
False Pretenses/Swindle/Confidence Game	20	7.55%
All Other Larceny	15	5.66%
Aggravated Assault	9	3.40%
Embezzlement	9	3.40%
Theft From Building	7	2.64%
Counterfeiting/Forgery	5	1.89%
Burglary/Breaking & Entering	4	1.51%
Credit Card/Automated Teller Machine Fraud	3	1.13%
Identity Theft	3	1.13%
Intimidation	3	1.13%
Motor Vehicle Theft	3	1.13%
Robbery	2	0.75%
Drug Equipment Violations	1	0.38%
Purse-snatching	1	0.38%
Theft From Motor Vehicle	1	0.38%

Source: CDE/CRG

Is there evidence of organized crime or gang activity driving retail theft incidents in NIBRS?

No. Scholars have struggled to answer this question in the data since the concept of organized gang retail theft activity made national news. It is important to note that in December of 2023, the Retail Association of America withdrew its claim that half of all retail theft was as a result of organized crime.

The Council on Criminal Justice (CCJ), an independent and nonpartisan criminal justice think tank, outlines some of the data issues in answering the organized crime issues in their report Shoplifting Trend: What You Need to Know. This memo adopts their methodology from that report.

The CCJ methodology looks at other crimes committed and number of offenders both known and unknown in incidents.

As mentioned above, the most common other offense committed with retail theft incidents is stolen property offenses, such as buying or receiving stolen property. The CCJ reasons that because this offense requires at least two people to commit: the one selling the stolen property and the one receiving the stolen property, it is indicative of a level of coordination in retail theft incidents. Overall, the level of stolen property offenses is .6% of all retail theft incidents from 2018-2022. Table 2 shows that the percentage of stolen property offenses remains under 1% for all years in the cohort.

Table 2: **Percent of Retail Theft Incidents with Stolen Property Offenses by Year**

Total Incidents	Total Stolen Property	Percent
2018		
1672	6	0.36%
2019		
2022	20	0.99%
2020		
1579	9	0.57%
2021		
1548	6	0.39%
2022		
2416	19	0.79%

Source: CDE/CRG

Another measure of concerted involvement is how many people are involved in the incident and how many people remain unknown or unidentified. Table 3 shows that overwhelmingly retail theft incidents involve only one person. The percentage of single person shoplifting incidents appears to be rising from pre-Covid levels. This is evidence against the idea of widespread gang activity.

Table 3: Percentage of Retail Theft Incidents by Year and Number of Offenders

Number of Offenders	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
1	84.07%	87.25%	89.17%	91.95%	90.77%
2	13.14%	11.55%	10.29%	7.31%	8.75%
3	2.13%	0.83%	0.54%	0.74%	0.24%
4	0.66%	0.37%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
6	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.24%

Source: CDE/CRG

Is there evidence in the NIBRS data that retail theft is related to a substance use disorder?

No. There is no agreed upon definition on when a crime is substance use related in the administrative data. NIBRS has a field to record if the offender is suspected of using a substance during the offense. This does not capture people who were not under the influence at the time, but their substance use disorder was a factor in the offense.
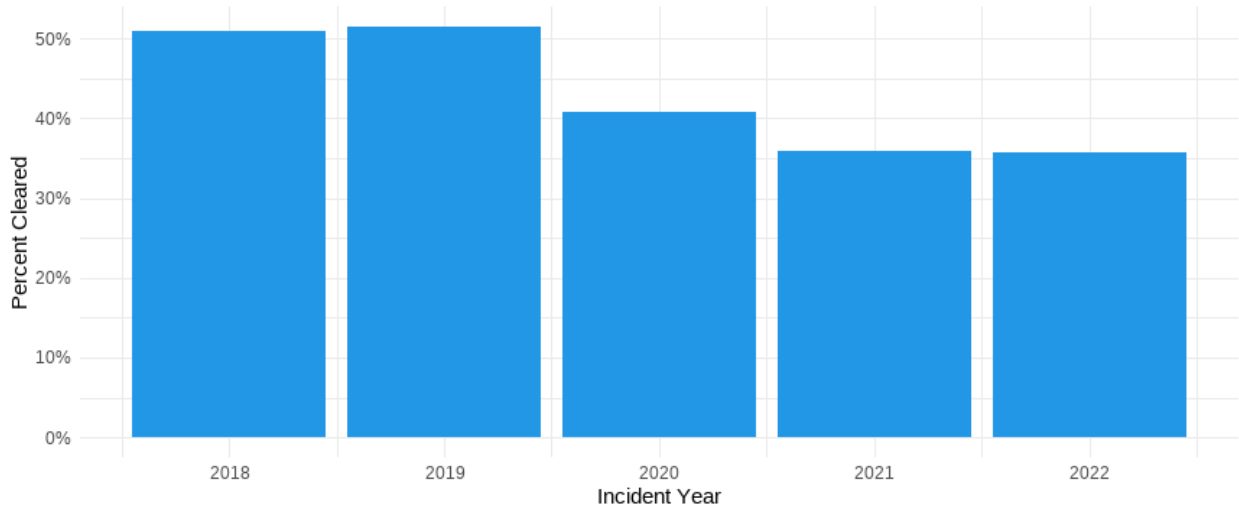
Table 4: Number of Offenders Using by Substance

Substance	n	Percent
Alcohol	105	1.14%
Drugs	37	0.40%
None	9098	98.46%

Source: CDE/CRG

How many retail thefts are cleared by arrest?

Prior to Covid, about 50% of retail theft incidents were cleared by arrest. Currently, about 35% are cleared by arrest. Figure 2 shows the percentage cleared by year. The decline in clearance rates may be due to store and/or police staffing shortages.

Fig 2: Percent of Retail Theft Incidents Cleared by Arrest by Year

When an arrest is made, it is made within a year of the offense. Table 5 shows the time to arrest by year. In 2018, 58.89% of the retail theft arrests happened on the same day as the offense. This number has declined to 52.45% in 2022. However, about 70% of all retail thefts arrests are made within one week of the offense. This number has been consistent during the study period.

Table 5: Percentage of Arrests by Time of Arrest and Year

Time to Arrest	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Same Day	58.89%	57.59%	52.94%	52.27%	52.45%
1 to 7 days	16.42%	16.86%	17.36%	17.14%	17.16%
8 to 15 days	8.47%	8.43%	8.61%	9.75%	10.98%
Two weeks to one month	6.59%	8.08%	8.46%	10.76%	7.04%
Within 2 to 3 months	7.22%	7.46%	8.61%	7.90%	8.10%
Within 3 to 6 months	1.67%	1.14%	3.73%	1.34%	3.84%
Six months to 1 year	0.73%	0.44%	0.29%	0.84%	0.43%

Source: CDE/CRG