



National Motor Vehicle  
Theft Reduction  
Council

# Consumer perceptions of motor vehicle theft

## Summary of the Nexus Survey

April 2020

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**Informing Australia  
on vehicle crime.**

## Report outline

<b>Date</b>	April 2020
<b>Title</b>	Consumer perceptions of motor vehicle theft
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<b>Type of report</b>	Summary report
<b>Objectives</b>	To summarise and review the results of the 2020 consumer survey conducted by Nexus research for the NMVTRC on community perceptions and awareness of vehicle theft
<b>TRC program</b>	Capacity building and Innovation
<b>Abstract</b>	<p>Each year the NMVTRC commissions Nexus Research to conduct a national consumer survey on community awareness and perceptions of motor vehicle theft amongst a representative sample of the population. The 2020 survey results indicate that–</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a) The majority of motorists in Australia remain concerned about vehicle theft (67%). However, the level of concern suggests that there has not been an increase in fear amongst the community</li><li>b) The findings indicate that motorists have a strong understanding of the perpetrators of car crime, and vehicle theft targets.</li><li>c) Despite a growing awareness of the current dynamics of motor vehicle theft, there is still a level of confusion around residential burglaries and key theft, and a prevailing misconception as to where cars are most commonly stolen from and the most effective security method to employ to reduce the risk of theft</li><li>d) It is recommended that the NMVTRC’s educational resources focus on providing clear, factual and unalarming information about residential burglary and key theft.</li></ol>
<b>Purpose</b>	To inform stakeholders of motorists’ attitudes to vehicle theft in Australia and of the areas the NMVTRC perceives to require further education.
<b>Key words</b>	Consumer survey, Nexus, motorists, perceptions, awareness, vehicle theft.

## Executive Summary

The NMVTRC places strong emphasis on measurable outcomes and the delivery of high-quality monitoring and evaluation processes. Periodically the NMVTRC conducts consumer research in order to determine key changes in community attitudes and concerns about vehicle crime relative to other crimes. Results are published in the Annual Report as part of the NMVTRC's suite of performance measures.

The survey aims to determine community awareness and attitudes to vehicle theft amongst a representative sample of the population. This year, a total of 1,218 car drivers were interviewed within the capital cities of Australia. The sample was weighted to represent almost 13.1 million people aged 18 years or over. Survey results were also filtered by a range of demographics including age and geographical location.

Overall, survey results remained consistent with those obtained in 2019. The 2020 survey indicated that the large majority of motorists in Australia remain concerned about vehicle theft. However, the level of concern suggests that there has not been an increase in fear amongst the community despite the prevalence of residential burglaries to steal car keys.

The findings indicate that motorists have a strong understanding of the perpetrators of car crime, and vehicle theft targets. There is however still a level of confusion around what is the most common method of theft and a prevailing misconception as to where car is most likely to be stolen from and the most effective security method to employ to reduce the risk of theft.

When asked directly, motorists were 'not surprised' about the shift to residential burglaries to steal keys and the fact that it is becoming more and more common. The survey also showed a growing understanding of the importance of safeguarding keys with media recall of stories on residential burglary and keeping keys safe strong amongst participating motorists. Combined, these results indicate that clear messaging about how key theft occurs and how to reduce the risk of having a car stolen from the home is necessary, and likely to resonate amongst motorists.

The generally high level of concern amongst motorists about vehicle theft and sound media recall amongst survey participants indicates that public education campaigns will continue to resonate with the Australian population. It is recommended that the NMVTRC's educational resources focus on providing clear, factual and unalarming information about residential burglary and key theft.

Given the predilection for media to feature stories of violent, home invasions and residential burglaries in order to steal keys, there is the potential for increased fear amongst communities and a sense of loss of control. It is therefore important that educational material counteracts the fear by focussing on the simple steps people can actively take to reduce their risk of becoming a victim.

It is also worthwhile considering educational material that considers the impacts of vehicle crime and how vehicle theft facilitates more threatening crimes to assist in increasing motorists' understanding of the dynamics of car crime.

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## 1. Context

Periodically the NMVTRC commissions Nexus Research to conduct national consumer research in order to determine key changes in community attitudes and concerns about vehicle crime relative to other crimes. NMVTRC places a strong emphasis on measurable outcomes and the delivery of high-quality monitoring and evaluation processes. Regular surveying enables the NMVTRC to track changes in community perceptions and refine its key messages.

## 2. Methodology

In February 2020 the NMVTRC commissioned Nexus Research to conduct an on-line national survey about the awareness and perceptions of car theft amongst a representative sample of car drivers within the capital cities of Australia. The survey aims to establish amongst car drivers:

- Concern about car theft
- Perceptions of car theft: culprits, type of cars and where it occurs from
- Concern about present levels of crime in Australia in particular, car theft
- Response to residential burglaries and car theft
- Differences in perceptions over time

A range of demographic questions were also asked in order to filter and determine differences on age, geographical location, gender, marital status, work status and income. The final sample was weighted by 13.1 million people aged 18 years and over in all capital cities.

## 3. Level of concern

### 3.1 Concern about vehicle theft

The survey indicated that 67 per cent of drivers were concerned about having their car stolen. This is below the 71 per cent recorded last year and the lowest percentage since the 2013 survey.

Concern for having their car stolen was significantly higher amongst drivers living in Melbourne (74%); with the fewest number of drivers concerned in Darwin (55%), coinciding with an upwards trend in thefts in the state.

Those aged 30 years old or younger and those aged between 50 to 59 years old indicated the highest level of concern (ie. moderately/ very concerned) about having their car stolen. This is possibly a reflection of a perceived need or reliance on a car that for motorists within these age groups.

### 3.2 Car security measures

When asked what security measures they currently employ to protect their car, locking the car (87%) and parking in a driveway/garage (78%) were the most frequent responses. The most common were as follows:

- Lock car 87%
- Park in driveway/garage 78%
- Keep keys out of sight at home 58%
- If not home with car, take keys with me 43%
- I have a car alarm 36%
- Use an immobilizer 32%

These results point to growing awareness of the most effective security measures to prevent car crime in the current environment. The large proportion of motorists who park their car in the driveway or garage to prevent theft is pleasing. However, with only 58 per cent indicating that they keep their keys out of sight, it also reinforces the need for further education that makes the connection between home burglary and key theft clear, and highlights that even if parked in the driveway, your car can be stolen if the thief has access to the keys.

## 4. Perceptions of vehicle theft

### 4.1 Perpetrators of theft

Pleasingly, more than half of participants surveyed (54%) understood vehicle theft be mostly committed by 'young people and the like for short-term use'. This was lower than the 59 per cent recorded in 2019 but significantly higher than the 42 per cent recorded in 2015. The fact that theft of vehicles being committed by young people has been the dominant response for the fifth consecutive survey indicates a general awareness of the dynamics of vehicle theft in Australia where 7 out of 10 thefts are for short term use.

Drivers in all capital cities and territories thought that motor car theft is more often "young people and the like for transport or to commit another crime", whilst the highest perceptions of motor car theft being for "organised theft for resale or spare parts" were in Sydney (30%) and Melbourne (29%). This is likely due to NSW and VIC both experiencing increases in profit-motivated thefts across the board in 2019.

## 4.2 Types of cars stolen

Similar to last year's results, just under half (46%) of all motorists think car theft is more often 'recent model mainstream cars.' A further 26 per cent believe 'luxury more expensive cars' are more often stolen and 14 per cent think it is more often "older model cars".

Given the older age of its vehicle fleet, it is unsurprising that nearly half of all motorists in Hobart perceived the types of cars stolen to be 'older model cars'. Historically, older vehicles had been the target due to their lack of security but now over half of all vehicles stolen are newer models fitted with sophisticated security that cannot be started without access to an original Where cars are stolen from

## 4.3 Where cars are stolen from

Twenty-one per cent of motorists indicated theft most often occurs from the home (a slight increase from 20 per cent in 2019) and forty-six per cent of drivers still believe thefts most often occur when a car is parked on 'the street'. In reality in 2019, just under half of all vehicle thefts occurred from the home including the driveway or garage with 24 per cent occurring from the street and a further 9 per cent being stolen from a business or public place.

Although perceptions are slowly changing, the results still highlight a misconception amongst a high number of motorists about the risk of parking in the street versus a driveway.

Given the high proportion of thefts from the home it is important that the NMVTRC continues to use community messaging to highlight the fact that cars are mostly stolen from homes or driveways via sneak thefts.

## 4.4 Common method of car theft

Only 34 per cent of drivers believed that key theft was the most common method used by thieves to steal cars. This figure is slightly lower than the 2019 results and was most prevalent in Darwin (71%), Perth (50%) and Brisbane (49%). Other responses included 'hotwiring' (23%) and 'electronic hacking' (13%). A large proportion of motorists surveyed (30%) were 'uncertain' about what is the most common method of theft, pointing to there still being considerable confusion about how vehicles are stolen in the current environment.

While messaging around key theft is starting to resonate with motorists, this decrease in the survey responses (combined with only 21 per cent perceiving most cars to be stolen from the home) points to a prevailing lack of awareness of the connection between key theft and residential burglaries. Again, this reinforces the need for sustained education on the most common theft method and locations and how motorists can reduce their risk.

## 5. Present level of crime

Each year we compare respondents' present level of concern about motor vehicle theft to other crimes. Motorists were asked whether they felt greatly concerned, fairly concerned or a little concerned about-

- Rape and assault
- Drug related crime
- Residential burglaries
- Murder
- Vandalism
- Store hold-ups and;
- Car theft

This gives perspective to the level of concern about car theft within the community and allows us to determine any changes that may occur year to year as a result of the perceptions of certain types of crime, media attention and other outside influences.

Historically, survey participants have shown the least amount of concern for car theft. This year, however, concern for car theft (32%) surpassed store hold-ups, likely the result of increased levels of car crime and reporting over the past year. Similarly, a higher proportion of motorists surveyed were concerned about residential burglaries (46%). Given the fact that car keys are being stolen from the home, this may indicate that concern about car theft is higher than the survey indicates.

## 6. Residential burglaries

### 6.1 Response to keys being stolen

Seventy-four per cent of drivers were not surprised by the fact that car keys being stolen during residential burglaries is becoming an increasingly common method of stealing cars – similar to the 72% recorded in February 2019- while 20% were surprised and 6% were uncertain.

## 6.2 Response to keys being only contents stolen

When asked whether they were surprised that in up to a third of all residential burglaries in major capital cities where a car was stolen, the vehicle keys were the only contents stolen, 49% of drivers were not surprised. This has decreased since the 2019 survey by 2 per cent.

Interestingly, more drivers in Sydney (53%) were surprised that this occurs whilst drivers in Darwin (90%), Perth (62%), Hobart (57%) and Melbourne (55%), were not surprised this survey indicating the impact of media attention and the focus on home invasions on community perceptions.

## 7. Media reporting

Thirty- six per cent of drivers could recall media reporting about car theft over the past 12 months, significantly fewer than the 45 per cent recorded in February last year. Messages recorded by motorists who recalled media reporting were ensuring your vehicle is locked and parked in your driveway and ensuring your keys are secure.

This year all drivers were asked whether during the past 12 months they could recall any media reporting about keeping their car keys safe. Nineteen per cent of drivers said they recalled media about keeping their car keys safe. Of the drivers who recalled the media reporting 56 per cent recorded the messaging to be about keeping keys hidden, safe and out of sight

Motorists who responded were asked whether that media had influenced their personal security practices with car keys. More than three quarter of these drivers said they were influenced.

These results indicate that media influence remains strong, and messaging around securing keys and your vehicle is beginning to resonate with motorists and should remain the focus of future public education material and key messaging from organisational spokespersons.

## 8. Summary and recommendations

- Motor vehicle theft remains a concern for the Australian population. However, pleasingly, while there is a growing awareness of residential burglaries in order to steal keys, the results do not point to increased levels of public fear.
- There is sound awareness of the perpetrators and targets of motor vehicle crime across most of the population. Most motorists surveyed see motor vehicle theft as most often being committed by young people for short- term purposes such as transport or to aid in committing another crime and perceive recent model cars (manufactured after 2001) to be the top theft targets.
- While messaging around key theft is resonating with motorists, there still appears to be some confusion about how vehicles are stolen and the most effective security measures. The results point to a lack of awareness of the connection between key theft and the fact that vehicles are most commonly stolen from the home, including the garage or a driveway.
- The results indicate that motorists are likely to respond to practical, common sense messaging about protecting your car. In particular more can be done to improve people's understanding of the need to keep keys out of sight and away from open windows and doors in addition to security measures such as locking car doors and parking in a driveway or garage. This can be done by highlighting how such simple measures can greatly reduce the risk of theft.
- With the results indicating that media coverage is likely to influence people's perceptions, it is important that such messaging is informative, focused on the realities of car crime, and does not incite fear. It is recommended that CAR-SAFE educational materials continue to focus on the simple steps that people can take to reduce their risk of theft and aim to counteract any messages of fear or a sense of loss of control.
- Continued targeted information about the key drivers, methods and locations of motor vehicle crime including the importance of protecting keys and the home, top vehicle theft targets and vehicle theft hotspots and effective security measures is needed to ensure motorists are informed on the best ways to avoid becoming a victim of vehicle theft.