

# Strategy for the Reduction of Vehicle Thefts

applying

## Problem-Oriented Policing (POP)

Morelia, Michoacan, Mexico



## INTRODUCTION

Problem-Oriented Policing (POP) is an approach to policing in which discrete **pieces of police business** (each consisting of a cluster of similar incidents) are subject to microscopic examination in hopes that what is freshly learned about each problem will lead to discovering a new and more effective strategy for dealing with it. Problem-oriented policing places a high value on new responses that are preventive in nature, that are not dependent on the use of the criminal justice system, **and that engage other public agencies**, the community and the private sector. *Herman Goldstein (2001)*

In October 2020, the Municipal Commission for Citizen Security (CMSC) of Morelia, Michoacán, began **implementing POP**, with the initial support of LAB-CO and then with technical assistance from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). In January 2022, **in response to the increase in vehicle thefts**, the CMSC decided to address the problem using the POP Approach, through the application of the SARA methodology (see Table 1).

## SARA Methodology

This is a four-step methodology developed by John E. Eck and William Spelman<sup>1</sup> to facilitate the implementation of POP.

1. *Scanning*
2. *Analysis*
3. *Response*
4. *Assessment*

Table 1. SARA Methodology

## APPLICATION OF POP VEHICLE THEFTS

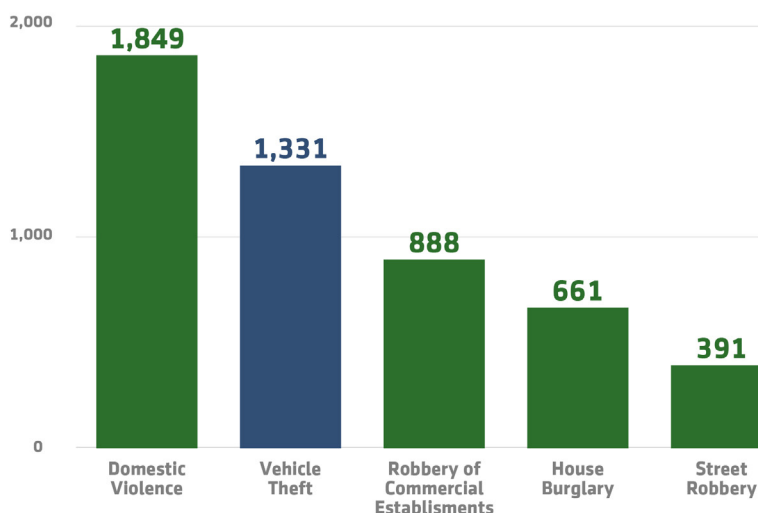
### 1. Scanning

The analysis of criminal incidents between January 2021 and December 2021 showed the following:

- Vehicle theft was the second most prevalent crime in the municipality;
- 79% of these thefts were non-violent, and;

• **Between May and December, there was a 152% increase in incidence.**

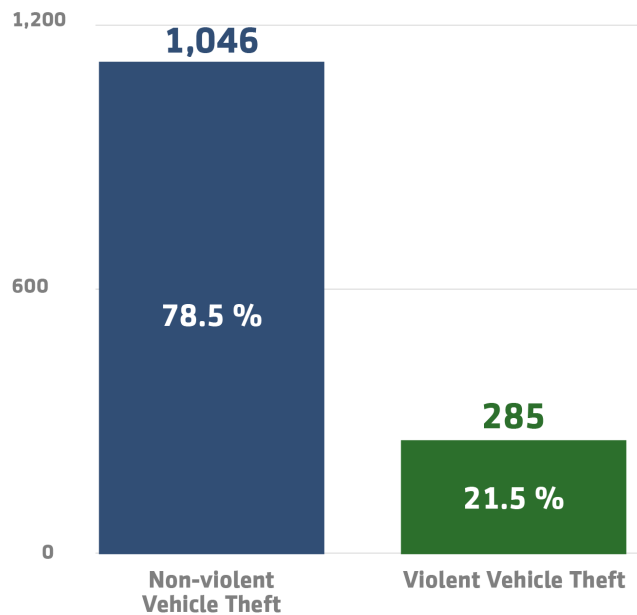
### CRIMES WITH THE HIGHEST INCIDENCE IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF MORELIA IN 2021



**Source:** Self-prepared based on an internal database provided by the CMSC.

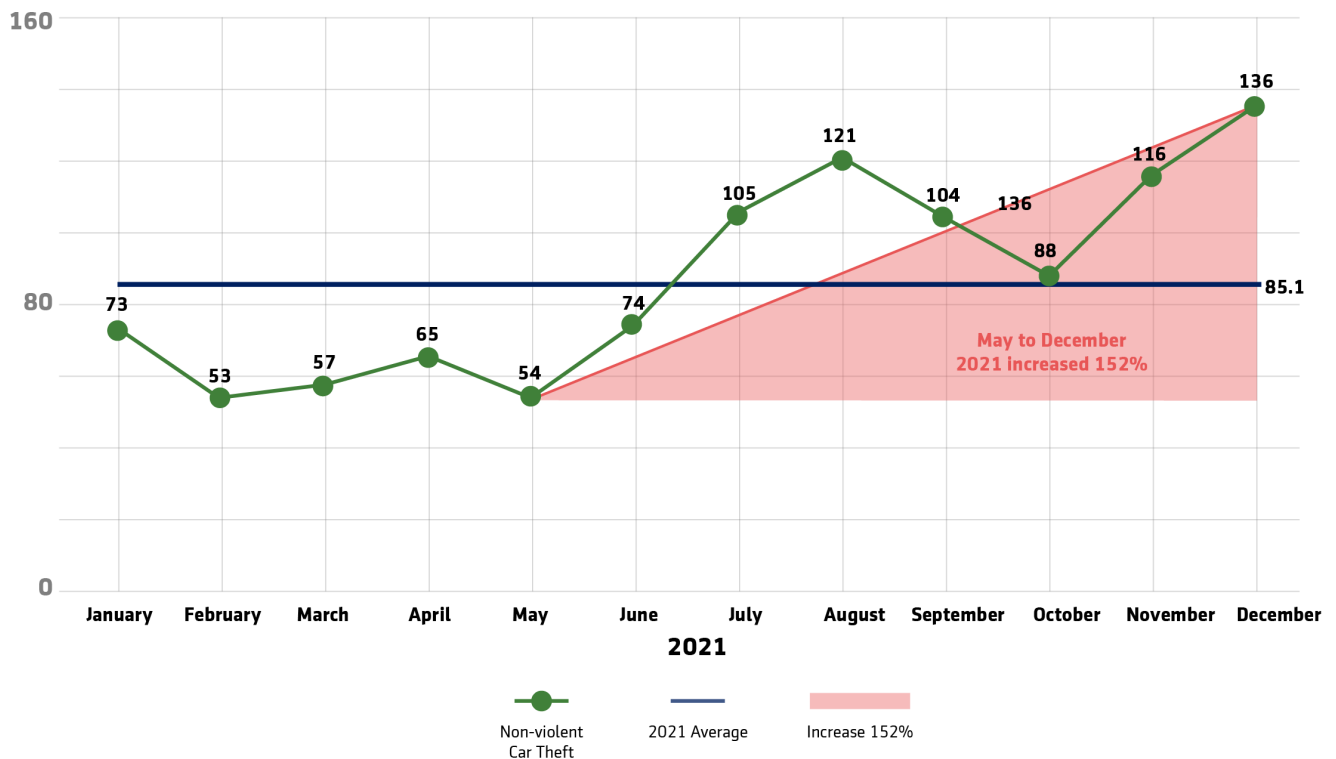
<sup>1</sup>J. E. Eck, W. Spelman. Problem-solving: problem-oriented policing in Newport News, (Washington D.C.: Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice, 1987).

## INCIDENCE OF VEHICLE THEFTS BY MODALITY IN 2021



Source: Prepared by the authors based on CMSC internal database.

## EVOLUTION OF NON-VIOLENT VEHICLE THEFT IN 2021



Source: Prepared by the authors based on CMSC internal database.

## 2. Analysis

The Morelia Police conducted a geographical, time, and victim/offender characterization analysis, to gain a better understanding of the problem of non-violent vehicle theft.

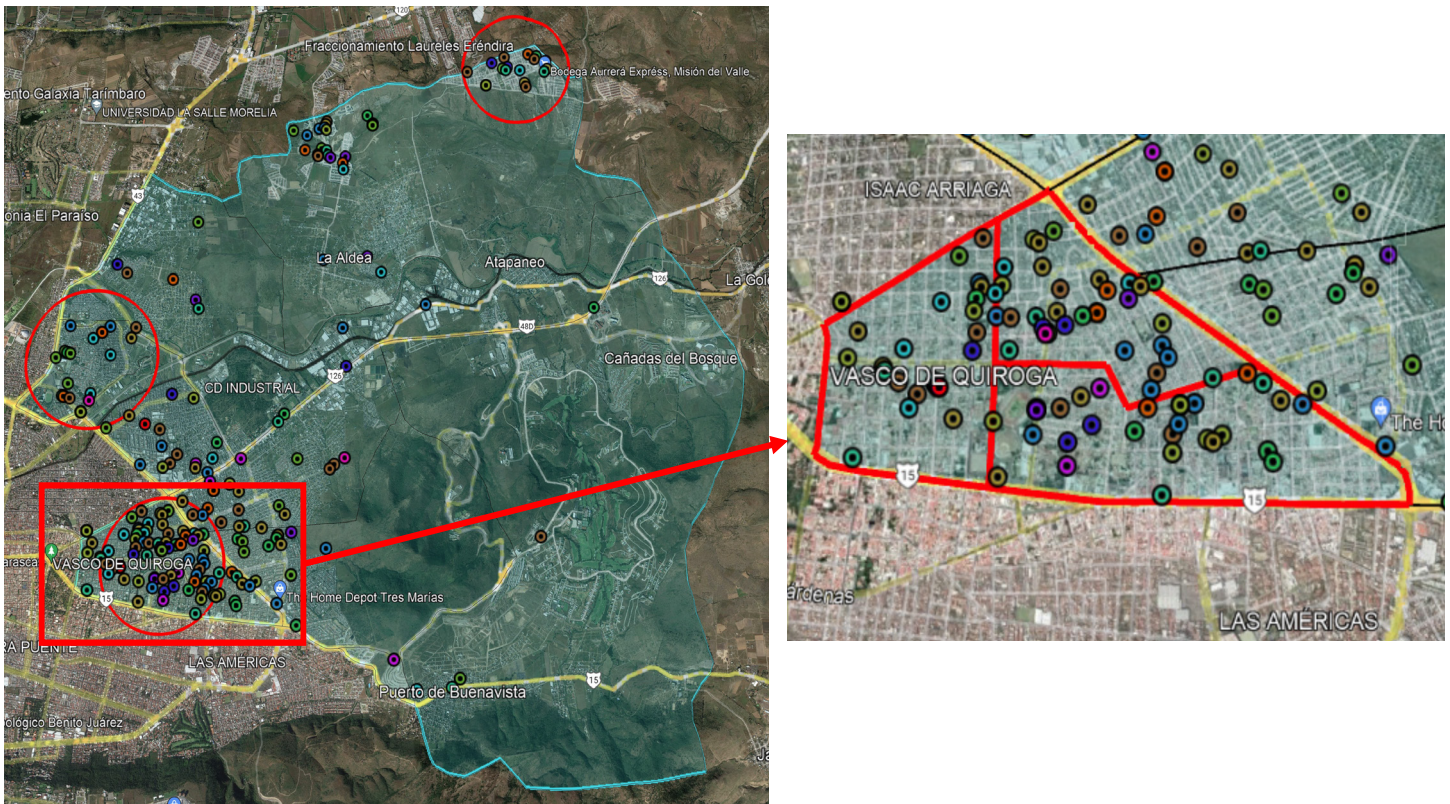
During the **Analysis stage**, the Morelia Police carried out both desk-based activities and field investigations.

### 2.1 Geographical and Time Analysis

The police identified the hot spots for vehicle theft incidents and delimited polygons to represent **areas with the highest incidence**.

For example, in the **Revolución<sup>2</sup> Sector**, they identified three hot spots.

### HOT SPOTS IN THE REVOLUCIÓN SECTOR



**Source:** Prepared by the authors based on CMSC internal database.

<sup>2</sup>The Morelia Police has a territorial division of 7 sectors, through which it organizes the deployment of its police personnel.

## 2.2 Problem Analysis Triangle

The Morelia Police applied the Problem Analysis Triangle to conduct a **detailed analysis** to characterize the victim/target, the place, and the offender.

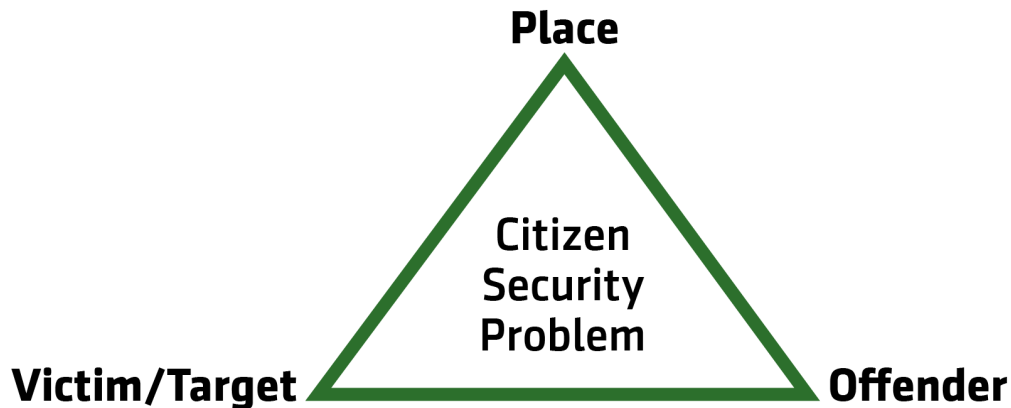


FIGURE 5. PROBLEM ANALYSIS TRIANGLE<sup>3</sup>

### Victim/Targets:

The stolen vehicles were mainly **older models** and of low monetary value.

Criminals primarily stole the vehicles to **sell auto parts**, making it common to recover the stolen vehicles (with missing parts) near the location of the theft

### Place:

The thefts were concentrated in sectors with poorly illuminated streets and close to main avenues **providing escape routes**.

In these sectors, businesses and/or houses **lack parking lots or garages**, resulting in the majority of vehicles parking on the street.

### Offenders:

Offenders tended to carry out these activities **in groups of 2 or 3** and were often repeat offenders.

The Morelia Police identified individuals who allegedly surveil the areas and **identify the easiest vehicles** to steal.

Offenders took the stolen vehicles to dismantling yards or the auto parts to street markets.

<sup>3</sup>POP Center. (2021). *The Problem Analysis Triangle* | ASU Center for Problem-Oriented Policing. Available at: <https://popcenter.asu.edu/content/problem-analysis-triangle-0>

## 2.3 Third-Party Analysis

Third parties are individuals or organizations that **have the potential** to have a positive or negative impact on the incidence of the selected problem.

**Negative third-parties:** informal car washers who could **provide information** to potential offenders, auto repair shops where stolen vehicles might be kept.

**Positive third-parties:** neighbors with surveillance systems, vendors in weekly markets, and individuals responsible for maintaining order and willing **to collaborate with the police.**

## 3. Response

The Morelia Police developed **five responses** to reduce the incidence of non-violent vehicle theft in the municipality.

The police focused its patrolling in the places and times where the thefts occurred, effectively **detering potential** criminals and fostering **greater trust** among the local population.

### Response 1

#### Focused Patrolling

### Response 2

#### WhatsApp groups among neighbors in hot spots

The police collaborated with community members of hot spots of vehicle theft to create WhatsApp groups. These enabled residents to report crimes and suspicious activities, as well **as share information** about the problem. In these groups, the Police provided precise instructions for community participation and interaction:

- **Alerting** the Police about the presence of suspicious individuals or vehicles.
- **Sharing information** to identify potential offenders (e.g., surveillance camera videos capturing potential offenders and their *modus operandi*).

Additionally, the Police provided **reports to the community** when completing requested actions (e.g., checking a suspicious vehicle signaled by a community member).

In this way, the Police guided people's participation within the WhatsApp group, allowing to focus participation on **sharing relevant information** for addressing the problem.

### Response 3

#### Registration of Potential Offenders

Based on information from the Police and the information obtained through WhatsApp groups (e.g., videos showing a person committing a theft), police officers created **a registry** (list of potential offenders) with information that facilitated their identification (e.g., vehicles used to commit the theft, their address, or frequented locations). It is worth noting that this was done in a context of limited resources, in which the Morelia Police does not count with a sophisticated system to process information regarding offenders.

This systematic registration allowed the Police to constitute **a list** of 30 suspicious individuals linked to non-violent vehicle theft, which was then circulated to each Sector Chief.

### Response 4

Based on the information from the registry, the Police established focused surveillance of the **suspicious individuals** in each sector. For example, monitoring their movements and identifying their routines, or directing patrols near the residences of the potential offenders during peak hours of incidence to deter possible theft.

#### Focused Surveillance of Potential Offenders

### Response 5

#### Coordination for Criminal Investigation

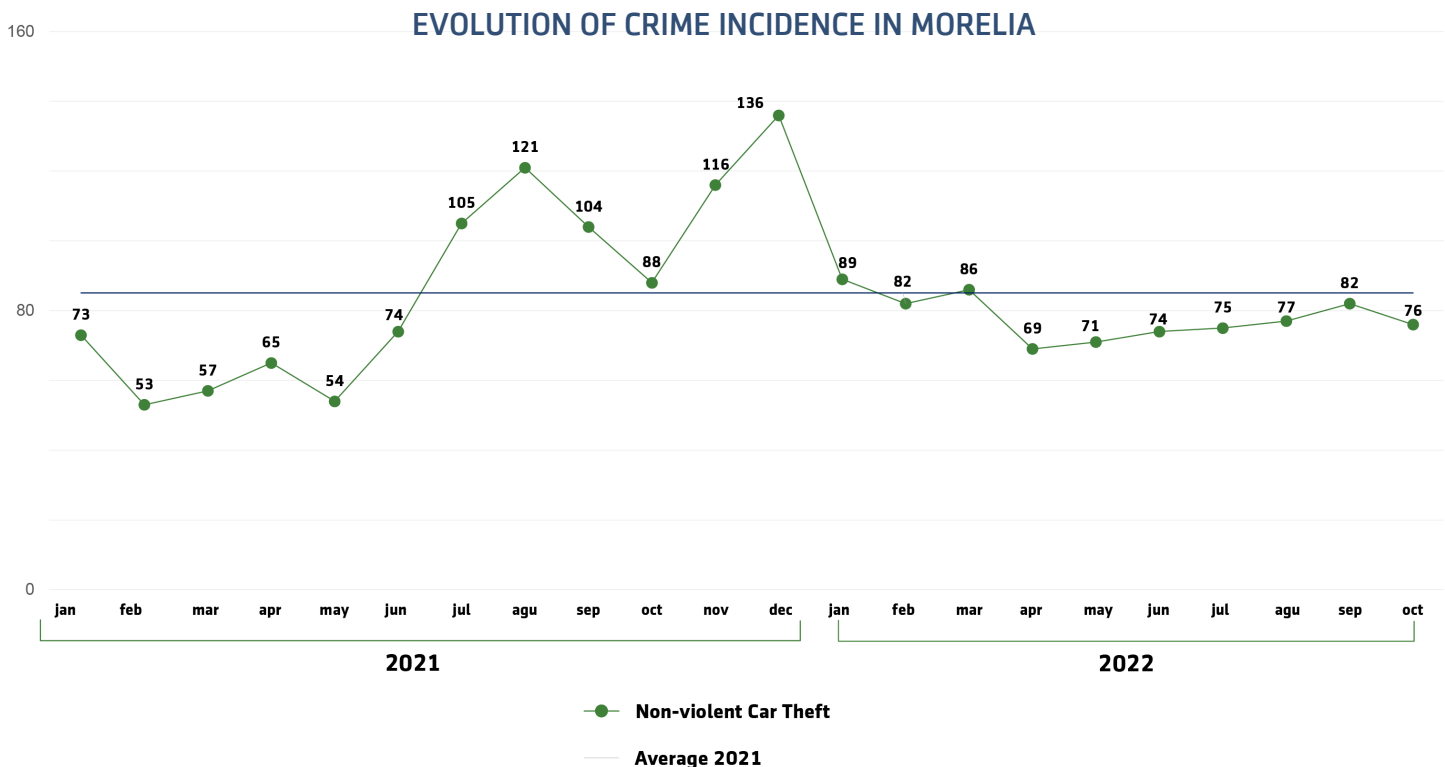
The Sector Chiefs established an **efficient communication** scheme with the Investigation Unit, which directly coordinates with the State Prosecutor's Office of Michoacán to collaborate on crime investigations. In this way, the Police supplemented the investigations conducted by the Prosecutor's Office by providing **field information** regarding individuals linked to vehicle theft. This strengthened the investigations and ultimately led to the apprehension of several offenders.

## 4. Assessment

Between January and May 2022, the Police carried out multiple actions aimed at reducing **the incidence of non-violent** vehicle theft:

- Implementation of responses in **13 hot spots**.
- 184 neighborhood meetings and the creation of 209 neighborhood WhatsApp groups **throughout the municipality**.
- Obtention of 34 videos and identification of 30 **potential offenders**.
- Arrest of **4 offenders** in coordination with the Prosecutor's Office.

The implementation of POP achieved a **44% reduction** in the incidence of non-violent vehicle theft, which remained consistent over time.



Source: Prepared by the authors based on CMSC internal database.