COMMON SENSE INSTITUTE

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# POLICING QUALITY OF LIFE IN DENVER:

## NUISANCE CRIME TRENDS

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# FOREWORD

Ask a Denver resident whether nuisance crime matters, and you will not get a lecture on arrest statistics. You will hear about the store that locked up its shelves, the bus stop nobody wants to wait at, and the graffiti that comes back a week after it is painted over. Many elected leaders and criminal justice practitioners call these offenses "low-level," but they are not low-level to the people who live with them.

What this report shows is that Denver's arrest numbers say more about the city's choices than about its criminals. From 2019 to 2023, nuisance crime arrests fell by nearly half. The underlying problem did not. From 2021 to 2023, reported nonviolent crime rose 9.9% while arrests kept falling. During those years the state raised theft thresholds and reduced drug penalties, the courts shifted low-level cases from arrests to summonses, and DPD lost officers faster than it could replace them. Less enforcement did not produce less disorder. It produced residents who noticed. By late 2023, people living downtown were telling the city, in its own survey, that homelessness and public order were their top safety concerns.

To its credit, the city listened. As DPD rebuilt its staffing, turned its attention to retail theft, and stood up a dedicated downtown unit under the Downtown Safety Action Plan, nuisance arrests rose 27% from 2023 to 2025. Enforcement is a choice, and they chose to make it.

But there are potential headwinds even as enforcement ramps up. A few months ago, the Denver City Council passed Council Bill 26-0328, cutting the maximum penalties for many of the same offenses the city is spending officer hours and tax dollars to enforce. Disturbance of the peace, roughly a quarter of all nuisance arrests in this data, went from a maximum of 300 days in jail to 10. Shoplifting under $300 now carries the same 10-day ceiling. That comes as reported shoplifting in Denver has more than doubled since 2022, and as the city's shoplifting rate has climbed to 1.41 times the national rate.

Some of this was not the Council's choice. In the *Camp and Simons* decisions, the Colorado Supreme Court held that cities cannot punish conduct more harshly than the state does, and Denver had to comply. But the Council went further than the Court required, and it did so for the very offenses at the center of the city's own enforcement push. The message to officers is: go make the arrest. The message to offenders is: it won't cost you much.

Many readers will ask whether cracking down on public nuisance crime prevents more serious crime. This report does not prove that, but there is some correlation in the inverse. As public nuisance enforcement plummeted by nearly half from 2019 to 2023, violent crime in Denver climbed, and it kept climbing in 2022 even as it fell in most major American cities. Denver's violent crime fell sharply from 2023 to 2025 while nuisance enforcement rose. Other factors such as police staffing, the pandemic, and national trends also moved over the same years, and offer alternative bases for the trend. But the case for addressing nuisance crime does not depend on it being a gateway to violence. Retail theft costs jobs and closes stores. Public disorder empties downtowns. These are the conditions that decide whether families and businesses stay in a city.

# INTRODUCTION

Nuisance crime refers to offenses such as public disorder, property damage, and disturbances of the peace that unreasonably interfere with a community's public safety. These offenses might not be the most violent or destructive, but they are a burden on all residents and a meaningful indicator of the quality of life in a community.

Denver's nuisance crime arrests have followed a volatile path since 2019, falling sharply during the pandemic before rebounding since 2023. This report examines the factors driving that rebound. Using a dataset of 23,033 arrests across 19 nuisance crime statutes from January 2019 through June 2026, alongside citywide reported-incident data, this report traces how policy and enforcement priorities have shaped Denver's response to nuisance crime over the past seven years.

## Data Note

The reported crime incident dataset does not correspond exactly to CSI's CORA (Colorado Open Records Act)-requested nuisance crime arrests dataset. Accordingly, comparisons between reported incidents and arrests should be interpreted as general trends across similar, but not identical, categories of public disorder and nonviolent crime, rather than as a direct, offense-level comparison. Plainly, reported incidents capture a larger subset of public disorder crimes while arrests correspond only to the 19 specific nuisance crime categories included in CSI's CORA request. Throughout this report, an arrest involving more than one eligible charge is counted once for each charge. The 23,033 charges in this dataset correspond to 21,486 unique arrests.

# KEY FINDINGS

**Denver is on pace for its most nuisance crime arrests since 2020.**

- Arrests fell 48.5% from 4,656 in 2019 to 2,400 in 2023 before rising 27% to 3,045 in 2025. If the 2026 pace through June continues, arrests would reach approximately 3,198 by year-end; 31% below 2019 but the highest annual total since 2020, when 3,361 were reported.

**Arrest trends have diverged from reported crime trends.**

- From 2021 to 2023, reported nonviolent crime (excluding auto theft and theft from motor vehicles) increased 9.9% while nuisance crime arrests fell 9.6%. From 2023 to 2025, arrests increased 27% while reported nonviolent crime increased by 3.1%.

**Arrests have tracked enforcement priorities and policy.**

- Changes in arrest authority, police staffing, enforcement practices, and state and local policy were reflected in arrest totals, with arrests falling as enforcement priorities pulled back and rising as they intensified.

**A small number of offenses account for most nuisance crime arrests, concentrated in a handful of neighborhoods.**

- From 2019 to June 2026, shoplifting accounted for 30% of arrests, followed by disturbance of the peace at 28% and property damage and defacement at 22%. Together, these categories account for 80% of arrests in the dataset.
- 10 of Denver's 78 neighborhoods account for 45% of all arrests since 2024, with Central Park and the Central Business District accounting for more than a fifth.

**Denver has increased enforcement of nuisance crimes while reducing penalties for lower-level municipal offenses.**

- In June 2026, Denver reduced the maximum penalties for certain municipal offenses including shoplifting and disturbance of the peace. This follows prior penalty reductions at the state and local levels.
- This comes as annual reported shoplifting incidents grew 105.1% and arrests grew 63.6% from 2022 to 2025.

**Nuisance crime has diverged from Denver's recent violent crime downward trend.**

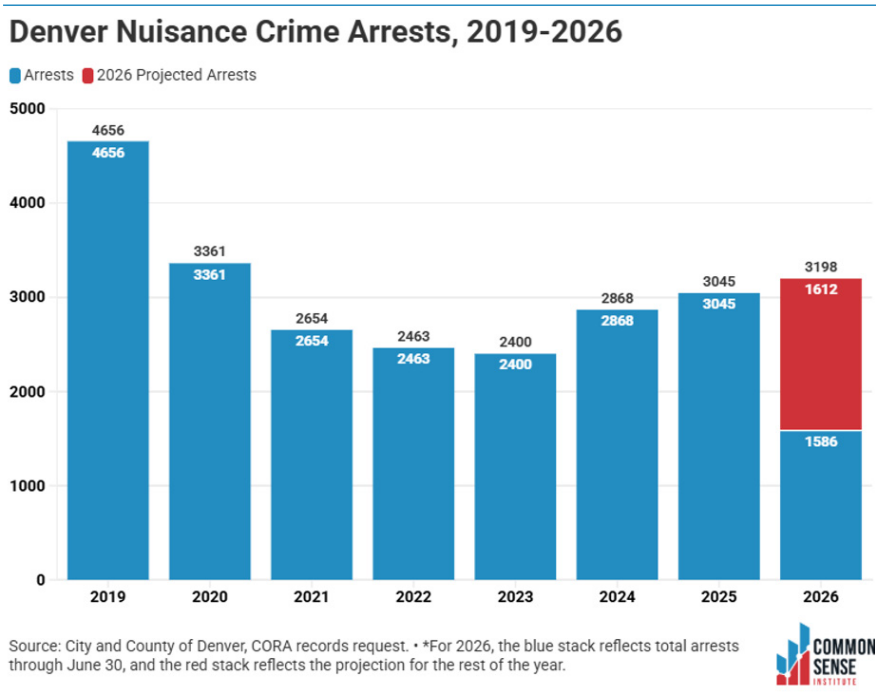
- From 2023 to 2025, homicides fell 55.3% and other reported violent crime (aggravated assault, robbery, and sexual assault) fell 10.2%. Meanwhile, nuisance crime arrests increased by 27%.

# NUISANCE CRIME ARRESTS HAVE REBOUNDED SINCE 2023, BUT REMAIN BELOW 2019 LEVELS

Denver's nuisance crime arrests have increased substantially since reaching a low in 2023. Citywide nuisance arrests fell from 4,656 in 2019 to 2,400 in 2023 (-48.5%) before increasing to 2,868 in 2024 and 3,045 in 2025 (27%). Through June 2026, Denver recorded 1,586 arrests, already exceeding the same six-month period in every year from 2021 through 2025. If the pace continues, **CSI projects approximately 3,198 nuisance crime arrests in 2026. That would represent a 33% increase from the 2023 low and the highest annual total since 2020, when Denver recorded 3,361 arrests.**[i]

Despite the rebound, nuisance crime arrests remain below pre-pandemic levels. CSI's projected 2026 total would still be 31% below the 4,656 arrests in 2019. The trend therefore represents a substantial increase from the 2023 low, but not a return to the enforcement level reflected in the 2019 data. The distinction is important when evaluating Denver's recent public safety environment. The city is experiencing a clear increase in nuisance crime arrests, but that increase follows several years of declining enforcement activity.

**FIGURE 1.**




Source: City and County of Denver, CORA records request. • *For 2026, the blue stack reflects total arrests through June 30, and the red stack reflects the projection for the rest of the year.

# ARRESTS REFLECT CHANGES IN ENFORCEMENT PRIORITIES

Arrest counts measure enforcement activity as well as criminal activity. Changes in the number of arrests can reflect changes in the amount of crime occurring, but they can also reflect enforcement priorities, criminal justice policies, police staffing, and officers' discretion.

**From 2021 to 2023, reported nonviolent crime (excluding auto theft and theft from motor vehicles) in Denver increased each year, rising from 35,361 reported incidents in 2021 to 38,850 in 2023, an increase of 9.9%.[ii] Over the same period, nuisance crime arrests declined every year, falling from 2,654 to 2,400, a 9.6% decrease.**

This divergence occurred during a period of significant changes in Colorado's criminal justice and Denver's enforcement environment. In 2019, HB19-1225 restricted the use of monetary conditions of release for certain low-level offenses, including specified petty and municipal offenses.[iii] HB19-1263 changed the classification and enforcement provisions for certain controlled-substance and marijuana possession offenses. Its provisions took effect in 2020, after which arrests under the nuisance crime marijuana statutes in this report fell 79% from 2019 to 2020.[iv] Another bill, SB19-227, amended Colorado's drug-paraphernalia statute in a manner that removed syringe or injection device possession from the applicable offense. Arrests then fell 91% for possession of injection devices from 2019 to 2020.[v] In 2021, SB21-271 further restructured Colorado's misdemeanor and petty-offense classifications, effective March 1, 2022. The law increased the value threshold for petty theft from $50 to $300 and shifted some lower-value theft offenses into less severe classifications.[vi]

Denver's specific enforcement priorities also changed during this period. Beginning in March 2020, Denver implemented COVID-era changes that encouraged the use of summonses rather than custodial arrests for certain low-level offenses.[vii] Compounding these policies, the Denver Auditor reported that the Denver Police Department (DPD) was approximately 100 officers below authorized strength following a significant 2021 attrition wave.[viii]

The timing of these changes is important. Nuisance crime arrests declined from 4,656 in 2019 to 3,361 in 2020, and continued declining to 2,654 in 2021, 2,463 in 2022, and 2,400 in 2023. Category-specific declines, as well as the overall decline, are consistent with enforcement conditions contributing materially to the decline in arrest totals.

**Centrally, an arrest is an enforcement outcome, not a direct count of offenses occurring in the community.** Changes in arrest policy, police discretion, and staffing can therefore alter arrest totals even when reported criminal activity moves differently.

# THE POST-2023 INCREASE REFLECTS BOTH RENEWED ENFORCEMENT AND REPORTED ACTIVITY

Beginning in 2024, this pattern reversed. **Nuisance crime arrests rose from 2,400 in 2023 to 2,868 in 2024 and 3,045 in 2025, a 27% increase, with Denver on pace for 3,198 by the end of 2026, the most since 2020.**

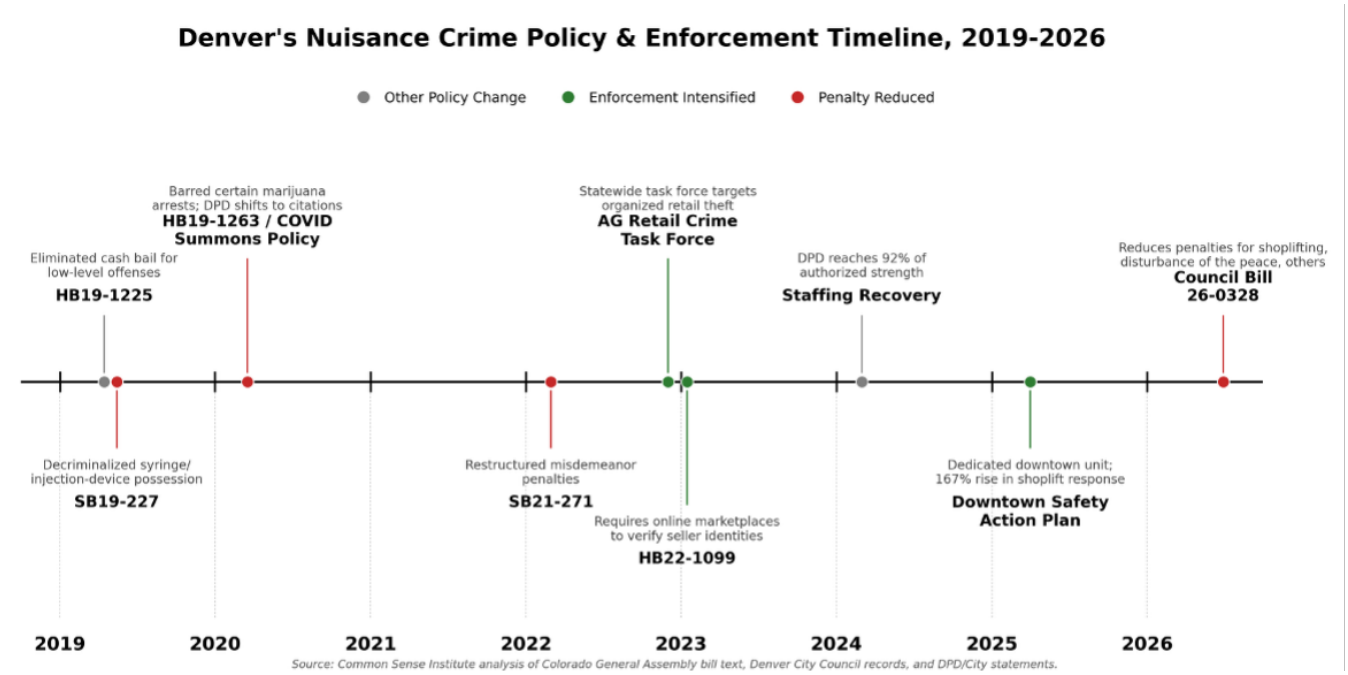
**Two neighborhoods accounted for a large amount of this increase.** Central Park accounted for 41% of the entire 2023-2024 citywide rise, with 83% of its arrests attributable to shoplifting alone. Central Business District (CBD) drove nearly all of the 2024-2025 increase, with arrests more than doubling, from 105 to 261. **Shoplifting was the single largest contributor citywide, accounting for approximately 34% of all nuisance crime arrests from 2024 through June 2026.**

This increase coincided with a series of enforcement actions targeting many of the same offenses. The Colorado Attorney General established a statewide Organized Retail Crime Task Force in December 2022 to combat organized retail theft rings and illegal reselling of goods online.[ix] HB22-1099, which took effect in January 2023, required online marketplaces to verify third-party sellers' identities and provided a mechanism to report stolen-goods sales.[x] Denver's Downtown Safety Action Plan, launched in April 2025, established a dedicated downtown policing unit; DPD subsequently reported a 167% increase in the downtown shoplifting response rate, and a 64% increase in open drug use calls.[xi] Along with this, DPD's 2026 budget tied a planned increase of 168 additional officers explicitly to addressing "crimes like shoplifting and open air drug use."[xii] This initiative is directly targeting the nuisance (quality of life) crimes addressed in this report.

These enforcement changes coincided with a recovery in police staffing. DPD was down nearly 200 officers, 12% of its authorized force, when Chief Ron Thomas took office in October 2022.[xiii] Staffing reached 92% of authorized strength (1,515 officers) by March 2024.[xiv]

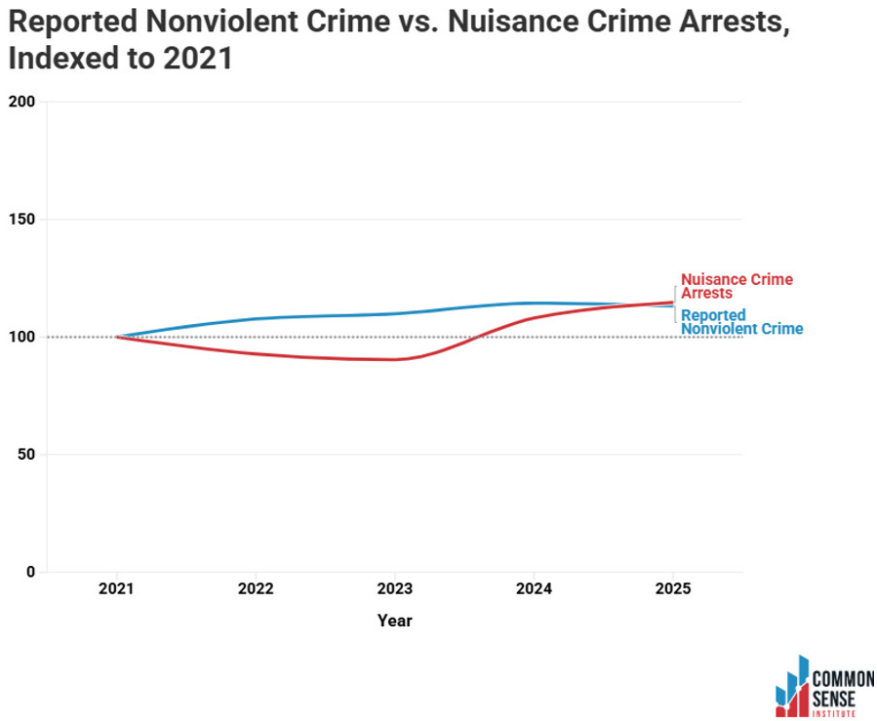
**Each shift in enforcement or penalty policy left a visible mark on Denver's nuisance crime arrest totals.**

**FIGURE 2.**




The available data indicate that both reported activity and enforcement contributed to the increase, though not proportionally across all offense categories. From 2023 to 2025, reported shoplifting incidents rose 73.1%, while shoplifting arrests rose 48.7%, indicating that enforcement did not fully keep pace with the reported increase in this offense.[xv] This increase also outpaced the national trend: FBI data shows Denver's shoplifting rate fell below the national average in 2022 and 2023 (0.86x and 0.83x, respectively), then rose above it in 2024 and 2025 (1.19x and 1.41x), even as the national rate itself declined over the same two years.[xvi] By contrast, reported marijuana-possession incidents rose only 5.9% over the same period, while marijuana arrests rose 79.4%, indicating that enforcement activity, rather than a comparable change in underlying activity, accounts for most of the increase in this category.[xvii] Taken together, reported nonviolent crime (excluding auto theft and theft from motor vehicles) continued to rise from 2023 to 2025, though more slowly, at 3.1%, while nuisance crime arrests rose 27%.[xviii]

**FIGURE 3.**



**The post-2023 period differs from 2019–2023 in an important respect.** The earlier decline in arrests occurred alongside rising reported nonviolent crime and substantial changes in enforcement policy and capacity, as arrests fell even as the underlying activity did not. The subsequent increase reflects both factors moving together: reported activity kept rising, though more slowly, while enforcement capacity recovered, with the balance between the two varying meaningfully by offense.

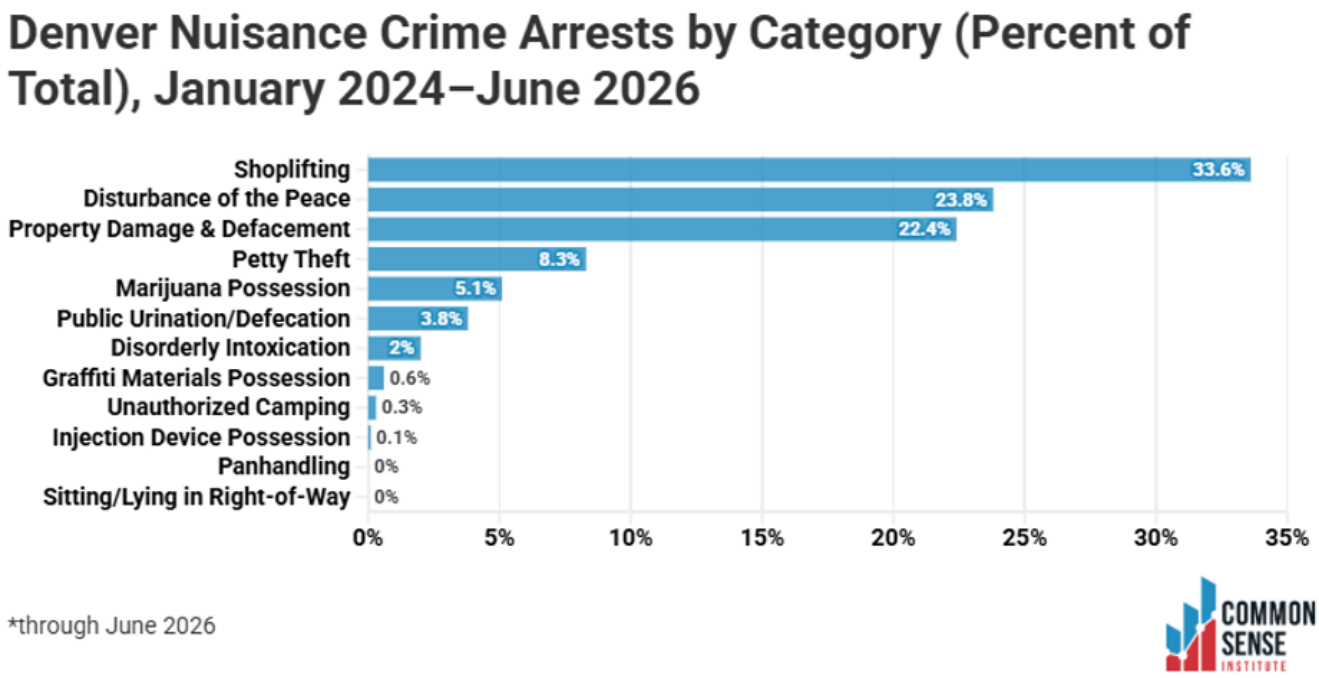
These enforcement changes coincided with a recovery in police staffing. DPD was down nearly 200 officers, 12% of its authorized force, when Chief Ron Thomas took office in October 2022. Staffing reached 92% of authorized strength (1,515 officers) by March 2024.

**Arrests dropped well below reported crime from 2021 to 2023, then surged back into alignment by 2025, reflecting shifts in enforcement, not in underlying crime.**

# CATEGORICAL AND NEIGHBORHOOD TRENDS

**Shoplifting accounts for 34% of all nuisance crime arrests since January 1, 2024, the largest category in this period,** and its trajectory closely tracks the specific enforcement actions described above. Disturbance of the peace (24%) and property damage and defacement (22%) are the only other categories that individually exceed 10% of arrests; together, **these three offenses account for roughly 80% of all nuisance crime arrests in this period.** The remaining 20% is distributed across nine other statutes, led by petty theft (8%) and marijuana possession (5%).

**FIGURE 4.**




The neighborhoods that account for most of the total increase fall into three distinct profiles based on their underlying offense composition, not a single uniform pattern. Central Park is overwhelmingly retail-oriented: 83.4% of its own arrests are shoplifting alone. CBD shares this retail orientation to a

lesser degree (47.3% shoplifting) alongside a secondary public space component; marijuana possession, disturbance of the peace, and public urination together account for roughly 36% of its arrests. Civic Center, by contrast, is public disorder-oriented rather than retail-oriented: disturbance of the peace, property damage, and marijuana possession together account for 80% of its arrests, while shoplifting remains a modest 6.1%, well below the citywide rate, despite Civic Center also exceeding the citywide arrest growth rate by a wide margin. A third, distinct profile appears among the remaining hot-spot neighborhoods examined in this report: East Colfax and Barnum share little in common geographically, but in each, property damage and defacement is the single largest arrest category, at 37.7% and 31.6% of arrests, respectively. Montbello shares this same general disorder profile but is led by disturbance of the peace (36.2%), followed by property damage and defacement (31.5%).

**FIGURE 5.**

**Denver's Top 10 Nuisance Crime Neighborhoods by Arrests, January 2024–June 2026**

| Rank | Neighborhood | Arrests (Jan 2024–Jun 2026) | % of Citywide Total | Top Category (Share of Neighborhood's Arrests) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Central Park | 1075 | 14.3% | Shoplifting (83.4%) |
| 2 | CBD | 497 | 6.6% | Shoplifting (47.3%) |
| 3 | Five Points | 446 | 5.9% | Disturbance of the Peace (28.3%) |
| 4 | Union Station | 277 | 3.7% | Disturbance of the Peace (23.5%) |
| 5 | Cherry Creek | 214 | 2.9% | Shoplifting (85%) |
| 6 | College View - South Platte | 200 | 2.7% | Shoplifting (73%) |
| 7 | DIA | 191 | 2.5% | Disturbance of the Peace (41.9%) |
| 8 | Capitol Hill | 184 | 2.5% | Property Damage (32.1%) |
| 9 | Civic Center | 164 | 2.2% | Disturbance of the Peace (39.4%) |
| 10 | Gateway - Green Valley Ranch | 150 | 2% | Disturbance of the Peace (44%) |
| | **Top 10 Total** | **3398** | **45.3%** | |

**Nuisance crime arrests are heavily concentrated: the top 10 of Denver's 78 neighborhoods account for 45% of all arrests since 2024,** led by Central Park and CBD, where shoplifting alone drives roughly half or more of local enforcement activity.

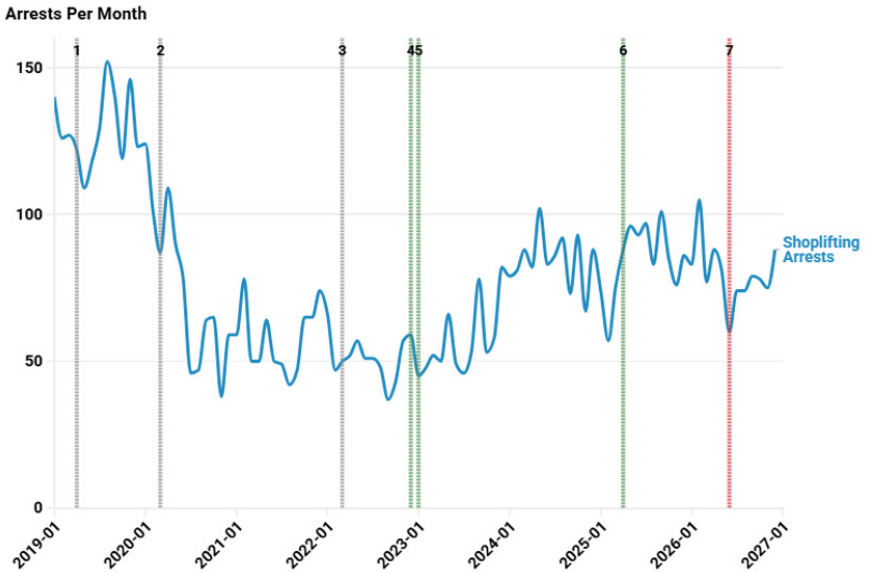
# DENVER HAS SIMULTANEOUSLY INCREASED NUISANCE CRIME ENFORCEMENT AND REDUCED PENALTIES

Shoplifting enforcement and shoplifting penalties have recently moved in opposite directions. As enforcement remains intensified, Denver has reduced the penalties available for lower-level shoplifting offenses. On June 29, 2026, Denver City Council passed Council Bill 26-0328. The ordinance specifically revised Denver's municipal shoplifting/retail theft provision. Prior to the change, shoplifting was classified as a Class 3 or Class 4 municipal offense, with Denver's general municipal penalty structure allowing up to 300 days in jail and a $999 fine. Under the revised code, shoplifting involving property valued below $300 is classified as a Class 4 offense, while theft of $300 to less than $1,000 is classified as a Class 3 offense. The revised classification system also reduced the maximum penalties associated with these lower-level classes. Class 3 offenses now carry a maximum of 120 days in jail and a $750 fine, while Class 4 offenses carry a maximum of 10 days in jail and a $300 fine.[xix]

The ordinance's reach extends well beyond shoplifting. **Disturbance of the peace, this report's second largest nuisance crime category at 28% of all arrests, received the steepest reduction of any offense examined in this report.** Previously subject to Denver's general municipal penalty ceiling of up to 300 days in jail and a $999 fine, it was reclassified as a flat

**FIGURE 6.**

**Shoplifting Arrests and Policy Timeline, 2019-2026**




1. HB19-1225 ends cash bail for low-level offenses (Apr 2019) 2. DPD COVID summons policy begins (Mar 2020) 3. SB21-271: misdemeanor reform + felony threshold up (Mar 2022) 4. AG statewide retail-theft task force formed (Dec 2022) 5. HB22-1099 effective, marketplace verification (Jan 2023) 6. Downtown Safety Action Plan launches (Apr 2025) 7. Denver ordinance cuts shoplifting penalties (Jun 2026)
*monthly estimates after June 2026 (annotation 7) are CSI projections

Class 4 offense capped at 10 days and $300, **a roughly 97% reduction in maximum jail exposure,** with no value-based tier the way shoplifting retains for cases involving $300 to less than $1,000. The ordinance applied the same Class 4 cap to offenses with no direct state counterpart, including disturbance of the peace, though **the *Camp and Simons* decisions did not require that reduction.**[xx]

**Since SB21-271 took effect in 2022, reported shoplifting incidents in Denver have more than doubled, rising 105.1%, while arrests rose 63.6%.** Denver City Council was forced to reduce certain penalties as a result of the Colorado Supreme Court's *Camp and Simons* decisions, which found that municipalities cannot penalize offenses more harshly than the state does for comparable conduct.[xxi] However, the City Council went further in reducing certain penalties beyond what the Court decision required. Whether this rationale accounts for reducing penalties on the offense with the sharpest recent enforcement increase is a separate question that this report does not resolve.

This is the first time a penalty reduction has occurred alongside rising, rather than falling, enforcement in the timeframe examined in this report. Whether increased enforcement continues to outweigh reduced penalties, creates a compounding effect with reduced penalties, or whether reduced penalties eventually blunt the arrest trend, is an open question this report is positioned to revisit as later data becomes available.

# DENVER'S VIOLENT CRIME AND NUISANCE CRIME TRENDS HAVE DIVERGED

Violent crime in Denver has declined sharply since 2023, while nuisance crime enforcement has moved in the opposite direction. **Denver homicides fell 55.3% from 85 in 2023 to 38 in 2025 , and other violent crime (aggravated assault, robbery, and sexual assault) fell 10.2% over the same period.**[xxiii] This is an important divergence in Denver's public safety trends: two of the city's broad crime categories are moving in opposite directions.

Denver's Place Network Investigations (PNI) program is one of several factors the city has credited with contributing to violent crime's decline from 2021 through 2025, a period in which Denver homicides fell from 96 to 38 (CSI's account).[xxiv] PNI targets "corrupting locations," which trigger licensing actions, civil nuisance abatement cases, criminal charges, increased lighting, reopened businesses, and enhanced police visibility.[xxv] This trend did, however, reverse through the first half of 2026: CSI's own homicide analysis found homicides up 46% year-to-date through July 20 compared to the same period in 2025 and concluded it remains "unclear to what extent" place-based policing has been effective against the broader backdrop of post-COVID crime trends citywide.

The overall violent crime trend, however, has not spilled over into a discernible nuisance crime trend in the city's identified hot spot PNI locations below. The table below examines nuisance crime arrests from 2022 to 2025 in the neighborhoods of these intersections. Note that the intersection of S. Federal Blvd and W. Alameda Ave. borders four neighborhoods.[xxvi]

DPD has also credited the Downtown Safety Action Plan, previously noted as a potential nuisance crime enforcement driver, alongside PNI, in the violent crime decline.[xxvii] If aligned enforcement, directives, and consequences have contributed to violent crime decline, Denver's current nuisance crime approach lacks that same alignment. Enforcement has intensified even as Council Bill 26-0328 and the prior penalty reductions have moved in the opposite direction.

**FIGURE 7.**

| 2022 Hot Spot | Neighborhood | 2022 Arrests | 2023 Arrests | 2024 Arrests | 2025 Arrests | Change | vs. Citywide (+23.6%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Colfax Ave & Broadway | Civic Center | 34 | 50 | 57 | 76 | +123.5% | Far exceeds |
| S. Federal Blvd & W. Alameda Ave | Barnum | 10 | 6 | 15 | 19 | +90% | Far exceeds |
| S. Federal Blvd & W. Alameda Ave | Valverde | 11 | 9 | 17 | 14 | +27.3% | Modestly exceeds |
| MLK Jr. Blvd & N. Holly St | Northeast Park Hill | 39 | 33 | 48 | 48 | +23.1% | At baseline |
| S. Federal Blvd & W. Alameda Ave | Athmar Park | 16 | 13 | 15 | 19 | +18.8% | Below |
| E. Colfax Ave & Yosemite St | East Colfax | 37 | 29 | 47 | 42 | +13.5% | Below |
| E. 47th Ave & N. Peoria St | Montbello | 54 | 39 | 61 | 61 | +13% | Below |
| S. Federal Blvd & W. Alameda Ave | Westwood | 34 | 25 | 38 | 28 | -17.6% | Well below |

# DOWNTOWN QUALITY-OF-LIFE CONCERNS PREDATED THE RECENT ENFORCEMENT RESPONSE

Denver's 2023 Public Safety Survey, conducted across the city's seven police districts and 78 neighborhoods, found that **homelessness was the top public safety concern among CBD residents, and public order crime was the top narrative theme in their responses.** Civic Center and Union Station residents raised similar concerns. In District 6, which encompasses CBD, Union Station, Civic Center, Capitol Hill, North Capitol Hill, Five Points, City Park West, and Cheesman Park, homelessness and public order crime ranked first among resident concerns.[xxviii]

This survey was conducted from October through December 2023, roughly a year and a half before Mayor Johnston's Downtown Safety Action Plan launched in April 2025. **The sequencing indicates that the city's enforcement response followed a documented, pre-existing resident concern.**[xxix]

Central Park, by contrast, ranked these same concerns notably lower in the same survey: homelessness, third, and public order crime, fifth, among its residents' stated priorities. This is consistent with earlier findings in this report: Central Park's arrest volume reflects a concentrated shoplifting problem rather than the broader quality-of-life concern downtown residents were reporting.

# POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Match enforcement with consequences.** Denver's new working group on municipal-only offenses should restore meaningful penalty ranges where the law allows, and ensure victims, business owners, and neighborhood leaders voices are heard.
- **The legislature.** After the *Camp and Simons* decisions, the state effectively sets the ceiling on municipal penalties. If Colorado wants its cities to be able to address shoplifting and disorder, the fix runs through the Capitol, including a hard look at the theft thresholds and petty-offense caps adopted in SB21-271.
- **Focus on the few doing the most damage.** Ten of Denver's 78 neighborhoods account for 45% of nuisance arrests since 2024. In Central Park, 83% of arrests are for shoplifting; in Civic Center, the problem is public disorder. These call for different tools. Retail theft calls for targeting repeat and organized offenders. Disorder hot spots call for outreach and treatment backed by real consequences.
- **Measure outcomes, not just arrests.** This report makes clear that arrest counts alone cannot tell us whether Denver is getting safer. The city should publish what happens after an arrest: cases filed, failures to appear, dispositions, and repeat arrests.
- **Sustain the staffing gains.** The recovery in police staffing made renewed enforcement possible. The planned addition of officers in the 2026 budget will support the current efforts.

# BOTTOM LINE

Denver's nuisance crime arrest trend is substantially shaped by enforcement policy and priorities, not simply by underlying crime. Arrests fell 48.5% from 2019 to 2023 even as reported nonviolent crime increased, then rebounded 27% from 2023 to 2025 as reported activity increased alongside renewed enforcement. The divergence demonstrates that arrest totals are an enforcement outcome and cannot be used as a direct measure of underlying nuisance crime.

Denver's violent crime decline provides a contrasting example. Violent crime and nuisance crime both saw increased targeted enforcement and recovering police staffing, but the two categories moved in opposite directions. While nuisance crime enforcement intensified, Colorado and Denver reduced penalties for several of the offenses driving the nuisance arrest increase. The result is a growing disconnect between enforcement and consequences for some low-level offenses.

The data do not establish that these penalty changes directly caused nuisance crime to increase. They do, however, demonstrate that enforcement can materially change arrest activity even when underlying crime moves differently. When enforcement is not matched by meaningful consequences, the deterrent effect of that enforcement may be weakened. Denver's experience therefore suggests that sustained enforcement and meaningful consequences are both important components of an effective crime reduction strategy.

# APPENDIX

## Nuisance Crime Statutes Included in Dataset:

| | |
|---|---|
| **38-51.8** | Petty theft unlawful |
| **38-89(a)** | Disturbance of the peace - generally |
| **38-71** | Damaging, defacing or destruction of private property |
| **38-51.5** | Shoplifting unlawful; retail theft |
| **38-89** | Disturbance of the peace |
| **38-99** | Urinating or defecating in public |
| **38-51.8(a)** | Petty theft unlawful |
| **38-173** | Possession of injection devices |
| **38-175(c)** | Possession or consumption of marijuana - 1,000 ft from schools |
| **38-175(a)** | Possession or consumption of marijuana - under 21 |
| **38-175(b)** | Possession or consumption of marijuana - openly & publicly display |
| **38-172** | Disorderly intoxication |
| **38-89(b)** | Disturbance of the peace |
| **38-102(a)** | Possession of graffiti materials prohibited |
| **38-86.2** | Unauthorized camping on public or private property prohibited |
| **38-102** | Possession of graffiti materials prohibited |
| **38-86.1** | Sitting or lying down in the public right-of-way |
| **38-175.5** | Marijuana prohibited on the 16th Street Pedestrian and Transit Mall and adjacent streets. |
| **38-100(b)** | Panhandling |

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