In a press release sent out on May 1st, 2021, the Chicago Police Department claimed credit for a recent drop in vehicular hijackings, citing the creation of the Vehicular Hijacking Task Force on January 21st as the primary cause for a 55% decrease in vehicular hijackings between January and April 2021. In the press release, CPD claimed youth outreach workers and community partners were also a part of the task force’s intervention to reduce carjackings.

A closer analysis of carjacking data from the Chicago data portal does not support such a conclusion. Figure 1 shows carjacking began decreasing weeks prior to the task force’s January 21st intervention. If CPD’s task force intervention was effective, we should have seen the start of a steep decline immediately after January 21st.

**FIGURE 1**

![Graph showing carjacking data from January to May 2021, with marked start of decline and CPD task force intervention.]
CPD’s analysis also does not rule out plausible alternative explanations for the carjacking reduction, among them the second and third rounds of stimulus checks from the federal government. The start of the stimulus payments is shown by the blue line in Figure 2.

The bill approving a second round of stimulus checks was signed into law on December 27th, 2020, and all the checks went out between that date and January 15th, 2021. Anyone who did not receive their second stimulus check by January 15th was eligible to receive it once they filed their federal income tax returns.

Figure 2

A competing hypothesis is the possibility that the stimulus checks alleviated economic distress, contributed to a decline in economically motivated carjackings - a motivation CPD analysts have given little attention. Although our analysis here does not provide evidence of a causal relationship between stimulus checks and the carjacking reduction, the point is that there are multiple competing explanations for the carjacking reduction, and CPD’s analysis does not rule out alternative explanations.

To this day, CPD has inhibited scientific analyses of competing explanations by withholding data that would enable the public to assess the degree to which carjackings are economically motivated, specifically data on the number of cars that have not been recovered. Carjacked cars can be sold out of state or sold for parts, generating income that could help individuals or families survive the recent economic crisis. Instead, CPD analysts have emphasized that carjacking has been driven by youth joy rides, a claim based on information about just 15% of carjackers.