

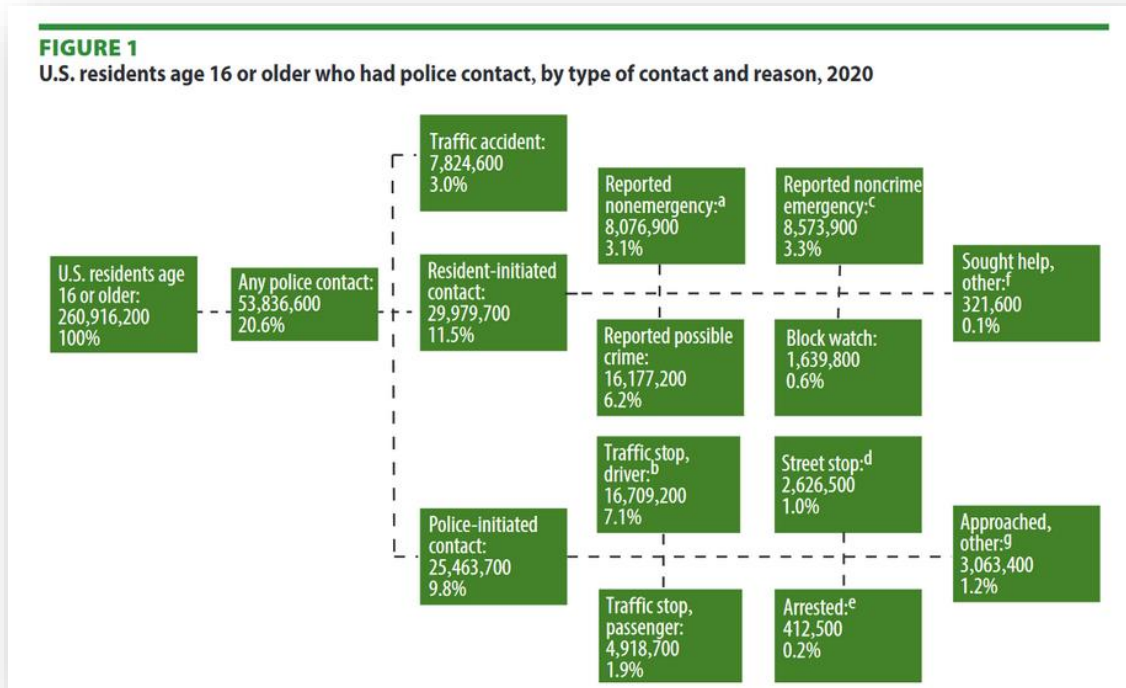
Contacts between Police & the Public

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In November 2022, the United States Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) issued a report,¹ [Contacts Between Police and the Public, 2020](#), summarizing data from the Police-Public Contact Survey (PPCS).² The PPCS collects information from U.S. residents sixteen or older about nonfatal contacts with police in the previous twelve months. “Contacts” include resident-initiated and police-initiated contacts. Resident-initiated contacts include reporting of a possible crime or non-crime emergency, seeking assistance with a non-emergency, participating in an anti-crime program like a block watch, and contacting police for another reason. Police-initiated contacts include traffic and street stops, arrests, and general stops for other reasons.

This briefing paper describes some of the report’s significant findings.³



(Source: BJS, Police-Public Contact Survey, 2020.)

¹ Susannah N. Tap, PhD, and Elizabeth J. Davis, U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Contacts Between Police and the Public, 2020*, NCJ 304527 (November 2022).

² The PPCS supplements data collected in National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS).

³ The survey was conducted from January through June 2020. Beginning in mid-March and continuing through June 2020, BJS altered the survey and interview process in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. Although the BJS report does not address the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on policing and police-public interactions in 2020, the pandemic may have impacted survey findings.

Overall, contacts in 2020 were lower than in 2018

- For several types of police-public contacts, the number of contacts dropped from 2018 to 2020.⁴
- In 2020, an estimated 21% of residents (about 53.8 million people) reported contacts with police during the past year, as compared to 24% in 2018 (about 61.5 million people).
- According to the report, the decrease in police-public contact was driven by a lower percentage of resident-initiated contacts in 2020 (11% versus 14% in 2018).

Different experiences for minority groups

- Black (7%) and Hispanic (5%) residents were more likely to experience at least one type of police action than White (3%) residents.
- Black (6%) and Hispanic (3%) residents were more likely to experience the threat of force or use of nonfatal force during their most recent police contact than White residents (2%).
- In 2020, nearly half of residents (46%) involved in police-initiated or traffic accident-related contacts reported that they felt police used excessive force.
- White residents (<1%) were less likely than Black residents (5%), Hispanic residents (1%), or residents of another race (2%) to report experiencing police misconduct.
- A higher percentage of White residents (77%) than Black residents (63%) experienced no enforcement action during street stops.⁵

Younger residents were most likely to have police-initiated contact

- Of the residents who reported police contact in the past year, eighteen to twenty-four year olds were the most likely age group (17%) to experience police-initiated contact.
- Twenty-five to forty-four year olds were the most likely to initiate police contact (13%).

Residents most often contacted police to report crime; most were satisfied with the response

- Among residents who initiated their most recent contact with police, almost half (49%) did so to report a possible crime, and most (88%) were satisfied with the police response.
- Males (93%) were more likely than females (90%) to report that police behaved properly.
- There was no significant change, between 2018 and 2020, in the number of people who reported police misconduct during their most recent contact (1% each year).
- A majority of residents (75%) whose most recent police contact was a street stop experienced no enforcement action.

Females were more likely to initiate contact with the police and get a traffic warning

- Females were more likely than males to initiate contact with police (12% versus 11% respectively), while males were more likely than females to experience police-initiated contact (11% versus 9%).
- Female drivers (41%) were more likely to receive a warning from police at traffic stops than their male counterparts (6%).

⁴ Other findings showed a drop in certain measures from 2018 to 2020 but were not statistically significant.

⁵ BJS defines a “street stop” as “. . . [a stop] by police while in a public place or parked vehicle.”

- There were no statistically significant differences between males and females with regards to the percentage of drivers who received a traffic ticket.

Those with lower household incomes were more likely to be searched or arrested

- Residents with household incomes of \$49,000 or less (17.4%) were more likely to be searched or arrested in 2018 and 2020 than residents with household incomes of \$75,000 or more (6.2%).

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