

From 2002 to 2011, an annual average of 44 million U.S. residents age 16 or older had one or more face-to-face contacts with police. Among them, an estimated 1.6% experienced the threat or use of nonfatal force by police, including shouting, cursing, threatening force, pushing or grabbing, hitting or kicking, using pepper spray, using an electroshock weapon, pointing a gun, or using other force during the most recent contact. Residents who experienced the use of force (44%) were more likely to have had multiple contacts with police than those who did not experience force (28%). Nearly 75% of those who said police used force during the contact described it as excessive.

The experiences reported are average annual estimates from four data collections of the BJS Police–Public Contact Survey (PPCS), a self-report survey of U.S. residents age 16 or older. The PPCS is the only national source of data on the use of nonfatal force and excessive force by police.

Who experienced nonfatal force?

Among those who had contact with the police, blacks (3.5%) were 2.5 times more likely than whites (1.4%) and 1.7 times more likely than Hispanics (2.1%) to experience the threat or use of nonfatal force. Blacks (1.6%) were more likely than whites (0.6%) to experience verbal force. Similarly, a higher percentage of blacks (1.6%) experienced physical force than whites (0.7%) or Hispanics (0.9%). Use of force also varied by age and sex. Males and persons ages 16 to 25 were more likely to experience police contact and the use of nonfatal force than females and persons age 26 or older.

Perceptions that force was excessive

The perception that the force used by an officer was excessive varied by the type of action. Persons who were hit or kicked were more likely to perceive the police action to be excessive (97%) than those who had a gun pointed at them (81%), were pushed or grabbed (79%), were threatened with force (76%), or were shouted or cursed at (49%). Additionally, those who were injured (94%) were more likely to believe the force was excessive than those who were not injured during the contact with police. (74%). Overall, blacks (2.8%) were more likely than whites (1.0%) and Hispanics (1.4%) to perceive the threat or use of nonfatal force was excessive.

Residents with police contact who experienced threat or use of force, by race or Hispanic origin, 2002–11

Race or Hispanic origin	Face-to-face contact	Force threatened or used ^a	Excessive force ^a
All races ^b	43.9 million	715,500 (1.6%)	535,300 (1.2%)
White ^c	32.9 million	445,500 (1.4%)	329,500 (1.0%)
Black ^c	4.6 million	159,100 (3.5%)	128,400 (2.8%)
Hispanic	4.4 million	90,100 (2.1%)	59,600 (1.4%)

Note: Average annual number and percent for U.S. residents age 16 and older. See appendix table 1 in the report for standard errors.

^aBased on most recent police contact in prior 12 months.

^bAlso includes American Indian or Alaska Natives; Asian, Native Hawaiian, or other Pacific Islanders; and persons of two or more races.

^cExcludes persons of Hispanic or Latino origin.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Police–Public Contact Survey, 2002, 2005, 2008, and 2011.

Perceptions of police behavior

During the 2002–11 period, 87% of residents who experienced force did not believe police behaved properly, regardless of race or Hispanic origin. However, 90% of residents believed the police behaved properly during contacts that did not involve force. Blacks (84%) were less likely to believe the police behaved properly during contacts without force than whites (91%) and Hispanics (88%).

Traffic and street stops

Police-initiated stops accounted for the majority (51%) of face-to-face contacts during the 2002–11 period. Among them, street stops (7.6%) were more likely than traffic stops (1.1%) to involve nonfatal force. Blacks (4.9%) were more likely than whites (1.8%) and Hispanics (2.5%) to experience nonfatal force during these police-initiated contacts. Additionally, blacks (14%) were more likely than Hispanics (6%) to experience nonfatal force during street stops.

The full report (*Police Use of Nonfatal Force, 2002–11*, NCJ 249216), related documents, and additional information about the Bureau of Justice Statistics can be found at www.bjs.gov.

