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Office of Justice Programs

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BUREAU OF JUSTICE STATISTICS
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CONTACT BETWEEN POLICE AND THE PUBLIC FELL OVER A 4-YEAR PERIOD

WASHINGTON — The portion of U.S. residents age 16 or older who had experienced contact with the police in the preceding 12 months declined from 26 percent in 2011 to 21 percent in 2015, the Bureau of Justice Statistics announced today. The number of residents who had experienced contact with police dropped by more than 9 million people, from 62.9 million to 53.5 million during the period.

From 2011 to 2015, the number of persons who had contact that was police-initiated fell by 8 million, and the number of persons who initiated contact with police fell by 6 million. Persons could have had both police-initiated and resident-initiated contact during the period.

In 2015, whites (23 percent) were more likely than blacks (20 percent) or Hispanics (17 percent) to have had contact with police in the prior 12 months. Police were equally likely to initiate contact with blacks and whites (11 percent each) but were less likely to initiate contact with Hispanics (9 percent). Police were more likely to initiate contact with males (12 percent) than with females (9 percent), while females (11 percent) were more likely to initiate contact with police than males (10 percent).

Among those who had contact with police, two percent experienced a nonfatal threat or use of force by police. The majority of those who experienced a threat of force (84 percent) perceived the action to be excessive, as did most of those who were pushed, grabbed, hit or kicked (78 percent), or had a gun pointed at them (65 percent) by police.

When police initiated the contact, blacks (5.2 percent) and Hispanics (5.1 percent) were more likely to experience the threat or use of physical force than whites (2.4 percent), and males (4.4 percent) were more likely to experience the threat or use of physical force than females (1.8 percent).

Being a driver in a traffic stop (8.6 percent) was the most common form of police-initiated contact. The primary reason police gave for pulling over a driver was speeding (41 percent). Most drivers who were stopped for speeding said the stop was legitimate (91 percent) and that police behaved properly (95 percent). A lower percentage of drivers believed that police behaved properly (56 percent) or that the stop was for a legitimate reason (37 percent) when police did not give a reason for the stop.

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The report, [*Contacts Between Police and the Public, 2015 \(NCJ 251145\)*](#), was written by BJS Statisticians Elizabeth Davis and Anthony Whyde and former BJS Statistician Lynn Langton, Ph.D. Findings are based on data from BJS's 2015 Police-Public Contact Survey, which is conducted about every three years as a supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey. The report, related documents and additional information about BJS's statistical publications and programs can be found on the BJS website at www.bjs.gov.

The Bureau of Justice Statistics of the U.S. Department of Justice is the principal federal agency responsible for collecting, analyzing and disseminating reliable statistics on crime and criminal justice in the United States. Jeffrey H. Anderson is the director.

The Office of Justice Programs, headed by Matt Dummermuth, provides federal leadership in developing the nation's capacity to prevent and control crime, administer justice and assist victims. OJP has six bureaus and offices: the Bureau of Justice Assistance; the Bureau of Justice Statistics; the National Institute of Justice; the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention; the Office for Victims of Crime; and the Office of Sex Offender Sentencing, Monitoring, Apprehending, Registering and Tracking (SMART). More information about OJP and its components can be found at www.ojp.gov.

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