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U.S. RESIDENTS CONTACT WITH POLICE WAS LOWER IN 2020 THAN 2018

The Bureau of Justice Statistics is announcing its report on [Contacts Between Police and the Public, 2020](#). Of note, an estimated 21% of U.S. residents age 16 or older (about 53.8 million persons) reported experiencing contact with police during the past 12 months in 2020, down from 24% in 2018. Approximately 10% of residents had experienced contact where police approached or stopped them (police-initiated contact), while 11% experienced contact where they reached out to police (resident-initiated contact) and 3% were involved in a traffic accident that led to a police contact.

Among other reasons, resident-initiated contacts involve reporting a possible crime or seeking help with a noncrime emergency or a nonemergency. Examples of police-initiated contacts include being stopped by police while driving or riding as a passenger in a motor vehicle (a traffic stop) or being stopped by police while in a public place or parked vehicle (a street stop).

The decline in U.S. residents experiencing any type of police-initiated contact reflects a pattern of decline in the percentage of residents experiencing police contact as drivers in traffic stops. In 2020, an estimated 7% experienced a traffic-stop contact, down from 8% in 2018 and 9% in 2015.

In 2020, female residents (12%) were more likely than males (11%) to initiate contact with police, while males (11%) were more likely than females (9%) to experience police-initiated contact. Persons ages 18 to 24 were the most likely age group to have police-initiated contact (17%) and police contact related to a traffic accident (5%).

Among U.S. residents who initiated their most recent contact with police, almost half (49%) did so to report a possible crime. Most residents who initiated police contact (88%) were satisfied with the police response. The majority of persons whose most recent contact with police was a street stop did not experience any enforcement action (75%).

In general, there was no statistically significant difference in the percentage of residents experiencing the threat of force or nonfatal use of force during their most recent contact with police in 2018 and 2020 (3% each year). The threat or use of force involves actions such as handcuffing, pushing, grabbing, hitting, kicking, using a chemical spray or pointing/shooting a gun.

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In 2020, black (6%) and Hispanic (3%) persons were more likely than white persons (2%) to experience the threat of force or nonfatal use of force during their most recent contact with police. The threat or use of force was more commonly experienced by those who were male (4%) than female (1%). Persons ages 16 to 24 (4%) were twice as likely as those age 45 or older (2%) to report the threat or use of force.

In 2020, about 31% of residents who were most recently involved in a police-initiated or traffic accident-related contact perceived police's threat or use of force as necessary, while 46% saw it as excessive. These percentages are not statistically different from 2018.

The data in this report are based on BJS's 2020 Police-Public Contact Survey, with selected data from the 2018 and 2015 PPCS data collections. The PPCS is a supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey, which collects information from a nationally representative sample of persons age 12 or older in U.S. households.

[Contacts Between Police and the Public, 2020](#) (NCJ 304527) was written by BJS Statisticians Susannah N. Tapp, PhD, and Elizabeth J. Davis. The report, related documents and additional information about BJS's statistical publications and programs are available on the BJS website at [bjs.ojp.gov](https://www.bjs.ojp.gov).

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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. Alexis R. Piquero, PhD, is the director. More information about BJS and criminal justice statistics can be found at [bjs.ojp.gov](https://www.bjs.ojp.gov)

The Office of Justice Programs provides federal leadership, grants, training, technical assistance and other resources to improve the nation's capacity to prevent and reduce crime, advance racial equity in the administration of justice, assist victims and enhance the rule of law. More information about OJP and its components can be found at www.ojp.gov.