



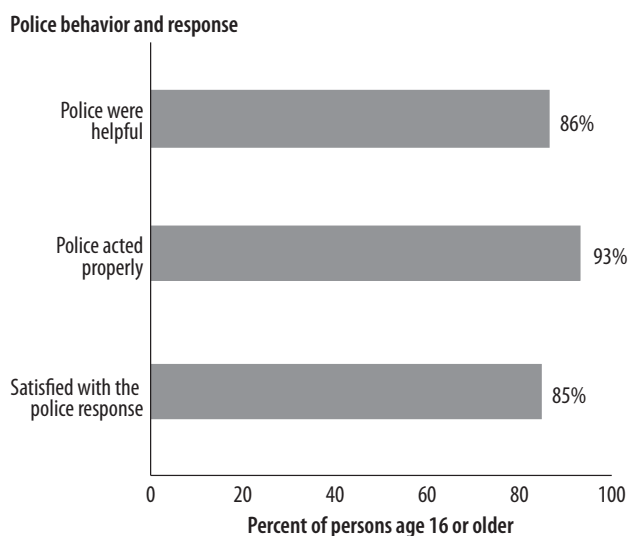
Requests for Police Assistance, 2011

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In 2011, an estimated 31.4 million U.S. residents age 16 or older, or 13% of the population, requested assistance from the police at least once. About 93% of persons who requested police assistance thought the officers acted properly, 86% felt the police were helpful, and 85% were satisfied with the police response (figure 1). About 93% of persons who requested police assistance reported that they were just as likely or more likely to contact the police again for a similar problem.

The findings in this report are based on the Bureau of Justice Statistics' (BJS) 2011 Police-Public Contact Survey (PPCS), a supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), which collects information from a nationally representative sample of persons in U.S. households. The PPCS collects information on contact with police during a 12-month period. This report presents the characteristics and experiences of persons who contacted law enforcement for assistance in 2011, examining perceptions of officer behavior and response during these encounters. It details requests for police assistance to (1) report a crime, suspicious activity, or neighborhood disturbance; (2) report a noncrime emergency; and (3) seek help for a nonemergency or other reason.

FIGURE 1
Perceptions of police behavior and response following requests for assistance, 2011



Note: Data based on the person's most recent contact with police in 2011. Percentages exclude 1.7% of respondents who did not know or report whether the police were helpful, 2.9% who did not know or report whether the police acted properly, and 0.8% who did not know or report whether they were satisfied with the police response. See appendix table 4 for standard errors.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, Police-Public Contact Survey, 2011.

HIGHLIGHTS

Among persons requesting assistance from the police in 2011:

- An estimated 1 in 8 U.S. residents age 16 or older, or 31.4 million persons, requested assistance from police at least once, most commonly to report a crime, suspicious activity, or neighborhood disturbance.
- The majority of persons who requested police assistance felt the officers acted properly (93%) and were helpful (86%).
- About 85% of persons who requested police assistance were satisfied with the police response.
- No statistical differences were found between the percentage of Hispanics (86%), blacks (85%), and whites (83%) who reported a crime or neighborhood disturbance and felt the police were helpful.
- Most (93%) persons who requested police assistance felt the officers spent an appropriate amount of time with them during the contact.
- About 9 in 10 persons who requested police assistance reported that they were just as likely or more likely to contact the police again for a similar problem.

An estimated 1 in 8 persons requested police assistance in 2011

During 2011, an estimated 26% of the 241.4 million U.S. residents age 16 or older had one or more contacts with police, such as calling to report a crime, being stopped in a moving vehicle, or being approached by an officer in a public place (table 1). About 13% of the population requested assistance from the police at least once in 2011. For information on involuntary contacts with police that occurred during a traffic or street stop, see *Police Behavior during Traffic and Street Stops, 2011*, NCJ 242937, BJS web, September 2013.

The most common reason persons sought assistance from the police in 2011 was to report a crime, suspicious activity, or neighborhood disturbance (about 19.7 million persons or 8% of the population), followed by reporting a noncrime emergency (12.6 million or 5%), such as a medical issue or traffic accident. About 3.9 million persons, or 2%, sought help from the police for other reasons, such as having a problem with an animal, returning a lost item, or nonemergency matters (e.g., asking for directions).

In 2011, a similar percentage of females (13%) and males (13%) requested some type of assistance from the police (table 2). A greater percentage of non-Hispanic white persons (14%) than Hispanic persons (10%) contacted the

TABLE 1
U.S. residents age 16 or older who had contact with police, by reason for contact, 2011

Reason for contact with police	Number	Percent
Total	62,937,000	26.1%
Requested assistance	31,405,000	13.0%
Reported crime/disturbance/suspicious activity	19,737,000	8.2
Reported noncrime emergency	12,566,000	5.2
Other reason ^a	3,900,000	1.6
Stopped/approached by police^b	35,425,000	14.7%
Involved in a traffic accident reported to police	7,434,000	3.1%
Participated in an anti-crime program with police	3,490,000	1.4%

Note: Data based on the 241,404,000 U.S. residents age 16 or older in 2011. Numbers and percentages include persons who experienced contact with police anytime during 2011. Detail sums to more than total because some persons had more than one type of contact with police in 2011. Number of persons who requested police assistance rounded to nearest thousand. See appendix table 1 for standard errors.

^aIncludes other reasons for approaching or seeking help from police, such as asking for directions, having a problem with an animal, or returning a lost item.

^bIncludes persons who had involuntary contact that was initiated by the police such as being pulled over in a moving vehicle, being arrested for a crime, or being approached for some other reason (e.g., police were providing a service or conducting a criminal investigation).

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, Police-Public Contact Survey, 2011.

police for assistance. A slightly larger percentage of white persons (14%) than black persons (12%) requested police assistance. In 2011, persons ages 25 to 44 contacted the police to request assistance at higher rates than younger persons (ages 16 to 24) and older persons (age 65 or older). The rates among persons ages 25 to 44 and 45 to 64 were not statistically different.

A similar percentage of males (8%) and females (9%) contacted the police to report a crime or neighborhood disturbance in 2011. Across all races and Hispanic origin, American Indians and Alaska Natives (15%) and persons of two or more races (15%) had the highest rates of reporting crime or neighborhood disturbances to the police. No statistical difference was observed between the percentage of white (9%) and black (7%) persons reporting a crime or neighborhood disturbance to police in 2011.

TABLE 2
U.S. residents age 16 or older who requested assistance from police, by reason for contact and demographic characteristics, 2011

Demographic characteristic	Total	Reason for police contact		
		Reported crime/disturbance/suspicious activity	Reported noncrime emergency	Other reason ^a
Total	13.0%	8.2%	5.2%	1.6%
Sex				
Male	12.5%	7.8%	5.0%	1.5%
Female	13.5	8.5	5.4	1.7
Race/Hispanic origin				
White ^b	13.9%	8.6%	5.7%	1.8%
Black/African American ^b	12.0	7.5	4.5	1.4
Hispanic/Latino	10.1	7.0	3.6	0.9
American Indian/Alaska Native ^b	17.0	15.2	4.8!	3.1!
Asian/Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander ^b	8.5	5.2	3.1	1.3
Two or more races ^b	22.2	15.1	8.2	2.9
Age				
16-17	5.5%	2.3%	2.8%	0.6% !
18-24	12.7	7.5	5.2	1.5
25-34	15.0	10.1	5.8	1.4
35-44	15.1	9.7	6.0	1.7
45-54	14.1	8.8	6.0	2.1
55-64	13.3	8.3	5.1	2.0
65 or older	9.1	5.5	3.4	1.2
Number requesting assistance	31,405,000	19,737,000	12,566,000	3,900,000

Note: Data based on the 241,404,000 U.S. residents age 16 or older in 2011. Numbers and percentages include persons who requested assistance from police anytime during 2011. Number of persons who requested assistance from police rounded to nearest thousand. See appendix table 2 for standard errors.

! Interpret with caution. Estimate based on 10 or fewer sample cases, or coefficient of variation is greater than 50%.

^aIncludes other reasons for approaching or seeking help from police, such as asking for directions, having a problem with an animal, or returning a lost item.

^bExcludes persons of Hispanic or Latino origin.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, Police-Public Contact Survey, 2011.

About 6 in 10 requests for police assistance involved face-to-face contact with an officer

In 2011, persons who requested assistance from law enforcement were asked about the methods used to contact the police and whether the contact was face-to-face. Persons who reported more than one contact with police in 2011 were asked to describe the most recent contact. About 24.2 million persons reported that their most recent or only contact in 2011 was to request assistance from the police (table 3).

About 6 in 10 (62%) persons who requested police assistance in 2011 had face-to-face interaction with an officer during their most recent contact. Among persons who requested police assistance and had face-to-face contact with an officer, about 3 in 4 persons (75%) initiated the contact by telephone (not in table). The other 25% of contacts were initiated by the person approaching the police in public (e.g., the police station or on the street), the police coming to the person's house, a third party (e.g., a company or another person contacting the police), or another method.

The majority (93%) of persons who requested police assistance felt the officers acted properly

Persons who requested assistance from the police (either in-person or not in-person) for any reason were asked if they felt police acted properly during the contact, were helpful, spent an appropriate amount of time with them, and improved the situation. In addition, persons were asked if they were satisfied with the police response and if they were likely to contact the police again for a similar problem.

TABLE 3
Persons who requested police assistance who had face-to-face contact with an officer, by reason for most recent contact, 2011

Reason for most recent contact	Number requesting assistance	Percent who had face-to-face with police after requesting assistance		
		Total	Yes	No
Total	24,227,000	100%	62.1	37.9
Reported crime/disturbance/suspicious activity	14,523,000	100%	67.0	33.0
Reported noncrime emergency	6,477,000	100%	46.2	53.8
Other reason*	3,228,000	100%	72.1	27.9

Note: Percentages based on the 24.2 million persons who reported that their most recent contact in 2011 was to request assistance from the police. Percentages exclude less than 0.1% of respondents who did not report whether the contact was face-to-face. Number of persons who requested assistance from police rounded to nearest thousand. See appendix table 3 for standard errors.

*Includes other reasons for approaching or seeking help from police, such as asking for directions, having a problem with an animal, or returning a lost item.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, Police-Public Contact Survey, 2011.

During 2011, the majority of persons who requested assistance from the police for any reason felt the responding officers acted properly (93%) and were helpful (86%) (table 4). About 85% of persons who had contact with police to request assistance were satisfied with how the police handled the situation. The percentage of persons who were satisfied with the police response was not statistically different among requests for assistance that involved face-to-face contact with an officer (85%) and contacts that were not in-person (84%) (not in table).

While most people who requested police assistance believed the officers were helpful, a larger percentage of persons reporting noncrime emergencies (93%) than persons reporting crimes or neighborhood disturbances (84%) thought the police were helpful. Similarly, a larger percentage of persons reporting noncrime emergencies (91%) than persons reporting crimes or neighborhood disturbances (82%) were satisfied with the police response.

TABLE 4
Perceptions of police behavior and response during contacts to request assistance, by reason for most recent contact and race/Hispanic origin of persons, 2011

Reason for most recent contact	All ^a	White ^b	Black/African American ^b	Hispanic/Latino
Police were helpful				
Total	86.4%	86.7%	83.2%	87.9%
Reported crime/disturbance/suspicious activity	84.0	83.5	85.0	86.0
Reported noncrime emergency	93.2	93.9	82.6	95.6
Other reason ^c	83.9	85.5	75.1	81.5
Police acted properly				
Total	93.1%	93.5%	90.4%	92.8%
Reported crime/disturbance/suspicious activity	92.4	92.3	92.6	92.5
Reported noncrime emergency	95.6	96.3	88.1	96.0
Other reason ^c	90.9	92.5	83.5	86.9
Satisfied with police response				
Total	84.7%	85.8%	80.1%	81.4%
Reported crime/disturbance/suspicious activity	82.0	82.7	80.5	79.0
Reported noncrime emergency	91.4	92.5	79.2	90.9
Other reason ^c	83.6	85.4	80.0	73.9

Note: Data based on the person's most recent contact with police in 2011. Percentages exclude 1.7% of respondents who did not know or report whether the police were helpful, 2.9% who did not know or report whether the police acted properly, and 0.8% who did not know or report whether they were satisfied with the police response. See appendix table 4 for standard errors.

^aIncludes estimates for persons identifying as white, black, Hispanic, American Indian, Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian, or other Pacific Islander, and persons of two or more races. Separate statistics on American Indians, Alaska Natives, Asians, Native Hawaiians, or other Pacific Islanders, and persons of two or more races are not shown due to too few sample cases to obtain reliable estimates.

^bExcludes persons of Hispanic or Latino origin.

^cIncludes other reasons for approaching or seeking help from police, such as asking for directions, having a problem with an animal, or returning a lost item.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, Police-Public Contact Survey, 2011.

Among persons reporting noncrime emergencies, Hispanics (96%) and whites (94%) were more likely than blacks (83%) to feel the police were helpful. Among persons reporting a crime or neighborhood disturbance in 2011, no statistical differences were found between the percentage of Hispanics (86%), blacks (85%), and whites (83%) who felt the police were helpful.

While the large majority of white, black, and Hispanic persons who reported noncrime emergencies to law enforcement felt the officers provided a satisfactory response, blacks (79%) were less likely than whites (93%) and somewhat less likely than Hispanics (91%) to feel satisfied with the response. Among persons reporting a crime or neighborhood problem, a similar percentage of whites (83%), blacks (80%), and Hispanics (79%) were satisfied with the police response.

A similar percentage of males (86%) and females (86%) who requested assistance from the police felt the officers were helpful (table 5). No statistical differences were observed across age groups of persons who believed the police were helpful during requests for assistance.

Among persons who requested assistance from the police in 2011, about 61% felt the police improved the situation, 21% felt the police did not improve the situation, and 18% were unable to say whether the situation did or did not improve (table 6). A larger percentage of persons reporting noncrime emergencies (70%) than persons reporting crimes or neighborhood disturbances (58%) felt the police improved the situation.

TABLE 5
Perceptions of police behavior and response during contacts to request assistance, by sex and age of person, 2011

Demographic characteristic	Police were helpful	Police acted properly	Satisfied with police response
Total	86.4%	93.1%	84.7%
Sex			
Male	86.5%	93.4%	84.8%
Female	86.4	92.8	84.6
Age			
16–17	89.9%	94.7%	88.4%
18–24	87.1	94.3	81.5
25–34	85.0	91.0	82.9
35–44	87.4	93.6	85.2
45–54	85.4	92.9	84.4
55–64	86.4	93.4	84.8
65 or older	88.2	94.7	89.1

Note: Data based on the person's most recent contact with police in 2011. Percentages exclude 1.7% of respondents who did not know or report whether the police were helpful, 2.9% who did not know or report whether the police acted properly, and 0.8% who did not know or report whether they were satisfied with the police response. See appendix table 5 for standard errors.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, Police-Public Contact Survey, 2011.

About 9 in 10 persons who requested police assistance felt the police spent an appropriate amount of time with them during the contact

Overall, most (93%) persons who requested police assistance in 2011 felt the officers spent an appropriate amount of time with them during the contact (table 7). An estimated 2% of persons felt the police spent too much time with them, and 6% felt the police spent too little time with them.

TABLE 6
Persons who felt police improved the situation during contacts to request assistance, by reason for most recent contact, 2011

Reason for most recent contact	Percent who felt the police improved the situation			
	Total	Yes	No	Don't know
Total	100%	61.3	20.9	17.8
Reported crime/disturbance/ suspicious activity	100%	57.7	25.6	16.7
Reported noncrime emergency	100%	69.9	8.4	21.7
Other reason*	100%	60.3	25.3	14.4

Note: Data based on the person's most recent contact with police in 2011. Percentages exclude 0.1% of respondents who did not report whether the police improved the situation. See appendix table 6 for standard errors.

*Includes other reasons for approaching or seeking help from police, such as asking for directions, having a problem with an animal, or returning a lost item.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, Police-Public Contact Survey, 2011.

TABLE 7
Persons who felt police spent an appropriate amount of time with them after requesting assistance, by perceptions of police behavior and response, 2011

Police behavior and response	Percent who felt police spent an appropriate amount of time with them			
	Total	Yes	No, too much	No, too little
Total	100%	92.9	1.5	5.6
Police were helpful				
Yes	100%	97.6	0.6	1.8
No	100%	60.0	8.1	31.8
Police acted properly				
Yes	100%	97.4	0.8	1.8
No	100%	36.7	11.7	51.5
Satisfied with police response				
Yes	100%	98.5	0.6	0.9
No	100%	59.3	7.0	33.8

Note: Data based on the person's most recent contact with police in 2011. Percentages exclude 3.5% of respondents who did not know or report whether the police spent an appropriate amount of time with them. See appendix table 7 for standard errors.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, Police-Public Contact Survey, 2011.

Perceptions about whether police spent an appropriate amount of time responding to requests for assistance were related to views about the behavior and response of police during the contact. Among persons who believed the police had not behaved properly, about 37% thought the police spent an appropriate amount of time with them. In comparison, among persons who felt the police acted properly, 97% felt the police spent an appropriate amount of time with them. Among persons who felt the police did not provide a satisfactory response during a request for assistance, about 59% believed the officers spent an appropriate amount of time with them, compared to about 98% of persons who were satisfied with the police response.

About 9 in 10 persons who requested police assistance in 2011 stated they were just as likely or more likely to contact police again for a similar problem

The large majority of persons who requested police assistance to report a crime or neighborhood disturbance (93%) or a noncrime emergency (96%) stated they were just as likely or more likely to contact the police again for a similar problem (table 8). In addition, the majority of persons reported being just as likely or more likely to contact the police again for a similar problem, even when the police were not helpful (65%), did not behave properly (53%), or did not provide a satisfactory response (66%). However, negative perceptions of police behavior were related to a lower likelihood of persons contacting the police in the future. For example, among persons requesting police assistance in 2011, about 47% of those who believed the police had not acted properly reported that they were less likely to contact the police again for a similar problem, compared to 4% of persons who felt the police behaved properly (table 9).

TABLE 8
Persons who requested police assistance who reported how likely they were to contact police again for a similar problem, by reason for most recent contact, 2011

Reason for most recent contact	How likely to contact police again for a similar problem			
	Total	More likely to call	Just as likely to call	Less likely to call
Total	100%	33.9	59.2	6.9
Reported crime/disturbance/suspicious activity	100%	34.1	58.4	7.5
Reported noncrime emergency	100%	34.0	61.7	4.2
Other reason*	100%	33.0	57.5	9.5

Note: Data based on the person's most recent contact with police in 2011. Percentages exclude 1.8% of respondents who did not know or report how likely they were to contact the police again for a similar problem. See appendix table 8 for standard errors.

*Includes other reasons for approaching or seeking help from police, such as asking for directions, having a problem with an animal, or returning a lost item.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, Police-Public Contact Survey, 2011.

TABLE 9
Persons who requested police assistance who reported how likely they were to contact police again for a similar problem, by perceptions of police behavior and response, 2011

Police behavior and response	How likely to contact police again for a similar problem			
	Total	More likely to call	Just as likely to call	Less likely to call
Total	100%	33.9	59.2	6.9
Police were helpful				
Yes	100%	36.8	60.6	2.7
No	100%	16.3	48.8	34.9
Police acted properly				
Yes	100%	36.0	60.4	3.6
No	100%	9.1	43.8	47.1
Satisfied with police response				
Yes	100%	37.2	60.6	2.2
No	100%	16.2	50.1	33.7

Note: Data based on the person's most recent contact with police in 2011. Percentages exclude 1.7% of respondents who did not know or report whether the police were helpful, 2.9% who did not know or report whether the police acted properly, 0.8% who did not know or report whether they were satisfied with the police response, and 1.8% of respondents who did not know or report how likely they were to contact the police again for a similar problem. See appendix table 9 for standard errors.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, Police-Public Contact Survey, 2011.

Methodology

Data collection

The Police–Public Contact Survey (PPCS) is a supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS). The NCVS annually collects data on crimes reported and not reported to the police against persons age 12 or older from a nationally representative sample of U.S. households. The sample includes persons living in group quarters (such as dormitories, rooming houses, and religious group dwellings) and excludes persons living in military barracks and institutional settings (such as correctional or hospital facilities) and the homeless. (For more information, see the *Survey Methodology in Criminal Victimization in the United States, 2008*, NCJ 231173, BJS web, May 2011.)

Since 1999, the PPCS has been administered every 3 years at the end of the NCVS interview to persons age 16 or older within households sampled for the NCVS. Proxy responders and those who complete the NCVS interview in a language other than English were not eligible to receive the PPCS.

The U.S. Census Bureau administered the 2011 PPCS questionnaire between July 1, 2011, and December 31, 2011, and processed the survey data. Respondents were provided a list of specific reasons for having contact with police and were asked if they had experienced any of those types of contacts during the prior 12 months. For example, persons interviewed in July 2011 were asked about contacts that occurred between August 2010 and July 2011. Persons who said they had a contact during 2011 were asked to describe the nature of the contact, and those who had more than one contact were asked about only their most recent contact during the period. To simplify the discussion of the findings, this report describes all contacts reported during the 12 months prior to the interviews as 2011 contacts.

PPCS nonrespondents consisted of persons whose household did not respond to the NCVS (NCVS household nonresponse), persons within an interviewed NCVS household who did not respond to the NCVS (NCVS person nonresponse), and persons who responded to the NCVS but did not complete the PPCS (PPCS person nonresponse). The NCVS household response rate was 89% and the person response rate was 88%. In 2011, PPCS interviews were obtained from 49,246 of the 62,280 individuals age 16 or older in the NCVS sample (79%). A total of 13,034 nonrespondents were excluded from the 2011 PPCS as noninterviews or as proxy interviews. Noninterviews (10,907) included respondents who were not available for the interview, those who refused to participate, and non-English-speaking respondents. (Unlike the NCVS interviews, PPCS interviews were conducted only in English.) The remaining 2,127 were proxy interviews representing household members who were unable to participate for physical, mental, or other reasons.

To produce national estimates on police–public contacts, sample weights were applied to the survey data so that the respondents represented the entire population, including the nonrespondents. After adjustment for nonresponse, the sample cases in 2011 were weighted to produce a national population estimate of 241,404,142 persons age 16 or older.

Despite the nonresponse adjustments, low overall response rates and response rates to particular survey items can still increase variance in these estimates and produce bias when the nonrespondents have characteristics that differ from the respondents. The Office of Management and Budget guidelines require a nonresponse bias study when the overall response rate is below 80%. The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) and the Census Bureau compared the distributions of respondents as well as nonrespondents and nonresponse estimates for various household and demographic characteristics, and examined their impact on the national estimates produced for the 2011 PPCS. The study looked at household-level and person-level response rates and found some evidence of bias in the rates among blacks and persons of Hispanic origin. Blacks accounted for 12% of the U.S. population in 2011 but about 11% of PPCS respondents after weighting adjustments. Hispanics accounted for 14% of the U.S. population but about 12% of the PPCS respondents after weighting adjustments. Because the largest bias in person nonresponse was observed in the Hispanic origin characteristics, future iterations of the PPCS will address this issue by administering the survey in languages other than English and including Hispanic origin as a factor in the noninterview adjustment. Item nonresponse statistics were also computed for key survey questions from the PPCS, and no evidence of bias was found during the analysis.

Changes to the 2011 PPCS

Since its inception in 1999, the PPCS has captured information about in-person (i.e., face-to-face) contacts between police and the public. Telephone contacts were previously not included. The survey has also excluded face-to-face interactions in which persons approached an officer or an officer initiated contact with them in a social setting or because their work brought them into regular contact. In March of 2010, BJS hosted a series of meetings with subject-matter experts in the area of policing and police legitimacy to initiate discussion and work on substantive changes to the PPCS questionnaire. In 2011, based in part on these meetings, the PPCS was revised to expand the scope of the survey and to better capture contacts with police.

First, to determine if contact occurred and to enhance individuals' recollections about their interactions with police over a 12-month period, BJS implemented new screening procedures in the 2011 PPCS that describe a broad range of situations known to bring people in contact with police. Second, the scope of the PPCS was expanded to collect information about interactions that people had

with the police that did not result in a face-to-face contact (e.g., reporting a crime to the police by phone or email). Additionally, a new set of questions was added to the instrument to collect detailed information about requests for police assistance (e.g., reporting a crime or noncrime emergency) and contacts in which the police stopped someone in a public place or on the street but not in a motor vehicle (street stops).

The effects of these revisions, which included adding new questions and reordering existing questions, were significant when compared to the 2008 version of the questionnaire. To assess the impact of the survey redesign on trends in rates and types of contact, BJS administered a split-sample design in which a subset of the sample was interviewed using the 2008 version of the questionnaire, and the remaining sample was interviewed using the 2011 version. Based on the evaluation, it was determined that a 15/85 split would provide sufficient power to measure a 15% change in contact rate. In other words, about 85% of the 2011 sample was randomly assigned the revised questionnaire and the other 15% received the questionnaire designed for the 2008 survey. The Census Bureau completed interviews for 41,408 (79%) of the 52,529 persons who received the revised questionnaire.

The findings in this report are based on data collected from the revised questionnaire. An evaluation of the impact of the changes to the 2011 PPCS instrument on trends in contacts between the police and the public is underway, and the results of that assessment will be made available through the BJS website.

Police–Public Contact Survey questions pertaining to perceptions of police behavior and response following requests for assistance

Police behavior

Q. Looking back on this contact, do you feel the police behaved properly?

Q. Were the police helpful?

Police response

Q. Were you satisfied with the police response during your most recent contact?

Q. Did the situation improve after you contacted the police?

Amount of time police spent with the person during contact

Q. Do you believe the police spent an appropriate amount of time with you?

Likelihood of contacting the police again for a similar problem

Q. Would you be more likely, less likely, or just as likely to contact the police in the future for a similar problem?

Standard error computations

When national estimates are derived from a sample, as is the case with the PPCS, caution must be taken when comparing one estimate to another estimate. Although one estimate may be larger than another, estimates based on a sample have some degree of sampling error. The sampling error of an estimate depends on several factors, including the amount of variation in the responses, the size of the sample, and the size of the subgroup for which the estimate is computed. When the sampling error around the estimates is taken into consideration, the estimates that appear different may, in fact, not be statistically different.

One measure of the sampling error associated with an estimate is the standard error. The standard error can vary from one estimate to the next. In general, for a given metric, an estimate with a smaller standard error provides a more reliable approximation of the true value than an estimate with a larger standard error. Estimates with relatively large standard errors are associated with less precision and reliability and should be interpreted with caution.

In order to generate standard errors around estimates from the PPCS, the Census Bureau produces generalized variance function (GVF) parameters for BJS. The GVFs take into account aspects of the NCVS complex sample design and represent the curve fitted to a selection of individual standard errors based on the Jackknife Repeated Replication technique. The GVF parameters were used to generate standard errors for each point estimate (i.e., numbers or percentages) in the report.

In this report, BJS conducted tests to determine whether differences in estimated numbers and percentages were statistically significant once sampling error was taken into account. Using statistical programs developed specifically for the NCVS, all comparisons in the text were tested for significance. The primary test procedure used was Student's t-statistic, which tests the difference between two sample estimates. To ensure that the observed differences between estimates were larger than might be expected due to sampling variation, the significance level was set at the 95% confidence level.

Data users can use the estimates and the standard errors of the estimates provided in this report to generate a confidence interval around the estimate as a measure of the margin of error. The following example illustrates how standard errors can be used to generate confidence intervals:

According to the PPCS, an estimated 13% of persons age 16 or older requested assistance from the police in 2011 (see table 1). Using the GVs, BJS determined that the estimate has a standard error of 0.5 (see appendix table 1). A confidence interval around the estimate was generated by multiplying the standard error by ± 1.96 (the t-score of a normal, two-tailed distribution that excludes 2.5% at either end of the distribution). Thus, the confidence interval around the estimate is $13\% \pm (0.5 \times 1.96)$. In other words, if different samples using the same procedures were taken from the U.S. population in 2011, 95% of the time the percentage of persons age 16 or older who requested police assistance would be between 12% and 14%.

In this report, BJS also calculated a coefficient of variation (CV) for all estimates, representing the ratio of the standard error to the estimate. CVs provide a measure of reliability and a means to compare the precision of estimates across measures with differing levels or metrics. In cases where the CV was greater than 50%, or the unweighted sample had 10 or fewer cases, the estimate was noted with a “!” symbol (interpret data with caution; estimate is based on 10 or fewer sample cases, or the coefficient of variation exceeds 50%).

Many of the variables examined in this report may be related to one another and to other variables not included in the analyses. Complex relationships among variables were not fully explored in this report and warrant more extensive analysis. Readers are cautioned not to draw causal inferences based on the results presented.

APPENDIX TABLE 1**Standard errors for table 1: U.S. residents age 16 or older who had contact with police, by reason for contact, 2011**

Reason for contact with police	Number	Percent
Total	1,581,523	0.7%
Requested assistance	1,088,977	0.5%
Reported crime/disturbance/suspicious activity	822,688	0.3
Reported noncrime emergency	618,878	0.3
Other reason	289,181	0.1
Stopped/approached by police	1,167,506	0.5%
Involved in a traffic accident reported to police	440,856	0.2%
Participated in an anti-crime program with police	268,884	0.1%

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, Police-Public Contact Survey, 2011.

APPENDIX TABLE 2**Standard errors for table 2: U.S. residents age 16 or older who requested assistance from police, by reason for contact and demographic characteristics, 2011**

Demographic characteristic	Total	Reason for police contact		
		Reported crime/disturbance/ suspicious activity	Reported noncrime emergency	Other reason
Total	0.5%	0.3%	0.3%	0.1%
Sex				
Male	0.5%	0.4%	0.3%	0.1%
Female	0.6	0.4	0.3	0.2
Race/Hispanic origin				
White	0.5%	0.4%	0.3%	0.1%
Black/African American	0.8	0.6	0.5	0.2
Hispanic/Latino	0.7	0.6	0.4	0.2
American Indian/Alaska Native	3.4	3.2	1.8!	1.4!
Asian/Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander	0.9	0.7	0.5	0.3
Two or more races	2.7	2.2	1.6	0.9
Age				
16-17	0.8%	0.5%	0.6%	0.2%!
18-24	0.8	0.6	0.5	0.2
25-34	0.8	0.7	0.5	0.2
35-44	0.8	0.7	0.5	0.2
45-54	0.8	0.6	0.5	0.3
55-64	0.8	0.6	0.5	0.3
65 or older	0.6	0.5	0.3	0.2
Number requesting assistance	1,088,977	822,688	618,878	289,181

! Interpret with caution. Estimate based on 10 or fewer sample cases, or coefficient of variation is greater than 50%.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, Police-Public Contact Survey, 2011.

APPENDIX TABLE 3

Standard errors for table 3: Persons who requested police assistance who had face-to-face contact with an officer, by reason for most recent contact, 2011

Reason for most recent contact	Number requesting assistance	Percent who had face-to-face with police after requesting assistance	
		Yes	No
Total	932,827	1.6%	1.5%
Reported crime/disturbance/suspicious activity	678,514	1.8	1.7
Reported noncrime emergency	402,977	2.4	2.4
Other reason	255,515	2.9	2.7

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, Police-Public Contact Survey, 2011.

APPENDIX TABLE 4

Standard errors for table 4: Perceptions of police behavior and response during contacts to request assistance, by reason for most recent contact and race/Hispanic origin of persons, 2011

Reason for most recent contact	All	White	Black/African American	Hispanic/Latino
Police were helpful				
Total	1.2%	1.3%	2.7%	2.4%
Reported crime/disturbance/suspicious activity	1.4	1.6	3.1	2.9
Reported noncrime emergency	1.3	1.3	4.9	2.6
Other reason	2.4	2.5	7.3	7.1
Police acted properly				
Total	0.9%	1.0%	1.5%	1.7%
Reported crime/disturbance/suspicious activity	1.0	1.2	1.5	1.9
Reported noncrime emergency	1.5	1.7	4.3	3.3
Other reason	2.1	2.2	4.7	6.4
Satisfied with police response				
Total	1.2%	1.3%	2.9%	2.8%
Reported crime/disturbance/suspicious activity	1.5	1.6	3.4	3.4
Reported noncrime emergency	1.5	1.5	5.2	3.7
Other reason	2.4	2.5	6.8	8.1

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, Police-Public Contact Survey, 2011.

APPENDIX TABLE 5

Standard errors for table 5: Perceptions of police behavior and response during contacts to request assistance, by sex and age of person, 2011

Demographic characteristic	Police were helpful	Police acted properly	Satisfied with police response
Total	1.2%	0.9%	1.2%
Sex			
Male	1.5%	1.1%	1.5%
Female	1.4	1.1	1.5
Age			
16-17	5.8%	4.3%	6.0%
18-24	2.5	1.8	2.9
25-34	2.0	1.6	2.1
35-44	1.9	1.4	2.0
45-54	2.0	1.5	2.0
55-64	2.1	1.5	2.2
65 or older	2.2	1.5	2.1

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, Police-Public Contact Survey, 2011.

APPENDIX TABLE 6

Standard errors for table 6: Persons who felt police improved the situation during contacts to request assistance, by reason for most recent contact, 2011

Reason for most recent contact	Percent who felt the police improved the situation		
	Yes	No	Don't know
Total	1.6%	1.2%	1.1%
Reported crime/disturbance/suspicious activity	1.9	1.5	1.2
Reported noncrime emergency	2.3	1.1	1.9
Other reason	3.1	2.6	2.0

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, Police-Public Contact Survey, 2011.

APPENDIX TABLE 7

Standard errors for table 7: Persons who felt police spent an appropriate amount of time with them after requesting assistance, by perceptions of police behavior and response, 2011

Police behavior and response	Percent who felt police spent an appropriate amount of time with them		
	Yes	No, too much	No, too little
Total	0.9%	0.3%	0.6%
Police were helpful			
Yes	0.6%	0.2%	0.3%
No	3.2	1.5	2.9
Police acted properly			
Yes	0.6%	0.2%	0.3%
No	4.0	2.5	4.2
Satisfied with police response			
Yes	0.4%	0.2%	0.2%
No	3.1	1.3	2.8

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, Police-Public Contact Survey, 2011.

APPENDIX TABLE 8

Standard errors for table 8: Persons who requested police assistance who reported how likely they were to contact police again for a similar problem, by reason for most recent contact, 2011

Reason for most recent contact	How likely to contact police again for a similar problem		
	More likely to call	Just as likely to call	Less likely to call
Total	1.4%	1.6%	0.6%
Reported crime/disturbance/suspicious activity	1.7	1.9	0.8
Reported noncrime emergency	2.2	2.4	0.8
Other reason	2.9	3.1	1.6

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, Police-Public Contact Survey, 2011.

APPENDIX TABLE 9

Standard errors for table 9: Persons who requested police assistance who reported how likely they were to contact police again for a similar problem, by perceptions of police behavior and response, 2011

Police behavior and response	How likely to contact police again for a similar problem		
	More likely to call	Just as likely to call	Less likely to call
Total	1.4%	1.6%	0.6%
Police were helpful			
Yes	1.6%	1.7%	0.4%
No	2.1	3.2	3.0
Police acted properly			
Yes	1.5%	1.6%	0.4%
No	2.1	4.0	4.1
Satisfied with police response			
Yes	1.6%	1.7%	0.3%
No	2.0	3.0	2.8

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, Police-Public Contact Survey, 2011.



The Bureau of Justice Statistics, located in the Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice, collects, analyses, and disseminates statistical information on crime, criminal offenders, victims of crime, and the operation of justice systems at all levels of government. William J. Sabol is acting director.

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