



CONTACTS BETWEEN POLICE AND THE PUBLIC: TRAFFIC STOPS 2002

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In April 2005, the Bureau of Justice Statistics released the report *Contacts between Police and the Public: Findings from the 2002 National Survey*. The report is based on the Police-Public Contact Survey. Contained within this report are data on traffic stops, which are the most common reason for police-resident contact. In 2002, law enforcement pulled over 16.8 million drivers, or 8.7 percent of the Nation's driving population. This accounted for 37.1 percent of police-resident contact with residents age 16 and over. The following traffic stop data are taken from this report. The data are broken into three demographic categories: gender, race/Hispanic origin, and age. Differences within each category are noted.

Characteristic of drivers¹ pulled over by law enforcement in 2002

- Of the 16.8 million drivers stopped by law enforcement during the year:
 - Gender: 61 percent of all drivers stopped in 2002 were male.
 - Race/Hispanic origin: 77 percent were White; 11 percent were Black, and 10 percent were Hispanic
 - Age: 37.9 percent were age 29 or under

Likelihood of driver being stopped

- Nearly 1 out of every 11 drivers (8.7 percent) was pulled over by law enforcement in 2002. Of these:
 - Gender. Male drivers were more likely than female drivers to be stopped by law enforcement. 10.6 percent of all male drivers were stopped by law enforcement, whereas 6.8 percent of all female drivers were stopped by law enforcement in 2002.
 - Race/Hispanic origin. The likelihood of being stopped by police did not differ significantly among White, Black, and Hispanic drivers. 8.7 percent of all White drivers, 9.1 percent of all Black drivers, and 8.6 percent of all Hispanic drivers were stopped by law enforcement in 2002.
 - Age. Generally, the younger the driver, the greater the likelihood that he or she was pulled over by law enforcement. More than 27 percent of drivers age 16-29 were stopped by police.

Reason for being stopped

- The most frequently cited reason for being stopped was speeding (54.8 percent), followed by a record check (11.5 percent), a vehicle defect (9.3 percent), and a stop sign or stoplight violation (7.1 percent).

¹ "driver" refers to an estimate of those in the U.S. population age 16 or older who drive a few times a year or more.

- Gender. Females were more likely than males to indicate the reason was “speeding,” whereas males were more likely to indicate the reason was “vehicle defect,” and somewhat more likely to indicate the reason was “seatbelt violation.”
- Race/Hispanic origin. Whites were more likely than Blacks and Hispanics to say the reason was “speeding.” Hispanics were more likely than Whites and somewhat more likely than Blacks to say “vehicle defect.” Blacks were more likely than Whites or Hispanics to say “record check.”
- Age. Drivers in their teens were more likely than drivers in their forties, fifties, or sixties to give “speeding” as their reason for being stopped. Drivers in their teens and twenties were also more likely than those in the older age categories to say “vehicle defect” was their reason for being stopped. Drivers in their teens and twenties were less likely than those in the older categories to say they were stopped for a “record check.”

Table 8. Reasons police gave for stopping vehicle, by gender, race/Hispanic origin, and age of stopped drivers, 2002

Characteristic of stopped driver	Reason police gave for traffic stop									
	Total	Speeding	Vehicle defect	Roadside check for drunk drivers	Record check	Seatbelt violation	Illegal turn/ lane change	Stop sign/light violation	Other traffic offense	Other
Total	100%	54.8%	9.3%	1.3%	11.5%	4.4%	4.9%	7.1%	4.2%	2.5%
Gender										
Male	100%	52.8%	10.6%	1.4%	11.5%	4.8%	4.9%	6.7%	4.4%	2.9%
Female	100	57.9	7.4	1.1	11.5	3.7	4.9	7.6	3.9	1.9
Race/Hispanic origin										
White	100%	57.0%	8.7%	1.3%	11.3%	4.4%	4.5%	6.5%	4.0%	2.3%
Black	100	50.0	10.3	1.1*	17.4	3.5	5.1	5.9	3.7	2.9
Hispanic	100	44.4	14.0	1.6*	7.8	5.5	5.7	11.2	6.2	3.5
Other race	100	50.0	6.9	0	7.7	4.2*	11.9	12.9	4.4*	1.8*
Age										
16-19	100%	59.6%	14.1%	1.1%*	5.2%	2.4%*	2.6%	5.6%	6.5%	2.9%
20-29	100	56.1	11.9	1.1	8.8	4.0	5.3	7.3	3.3	2.3
30-39	100	56.7	7.3	1.3	12.8	4.8	4.4	5.8	4.4	2.6
40-49	100	53.4	7.8	1.5	12.2	4.3	5.4	8.8	4.1	2.5
50-59	100	49.1	8.2	1.6	16.0	5.2	5.2	7.3	4.5	2.8
60 or older	100	51.4	6.0	1.2*	16.2	6.1	5.8	7.2	3.9	2.1
Estimated number	16,783,467	9,199,342	1,567,312	215,326	1,930,284	740,136	817,543	1,186,578	708,918	418,028

Note: Detail may not add to total because of rounding. Table excludes 2.1% of stopped drivers who said the police had not given a reason for the stop.
*Estimate is based on 10 or fewer sample cases.

Driver opinion on legitimacy of being stopped

- Overall, 84 percent of drivers felt they had been stopped for a legitimate reason. However, this opinion was not shared equally across different segments of the population.
 - Gender. Females were more likely than males to say they were stopped for a legitimate reason (86 percent vs. 82 percent).

- Race/Hispanic origin. Blacks were less likely than Whites and somewhat less likely than Hispanics to say they were stopped for a legitimate reason (73 percent vs. 86 percent and 82 percent, respectively).
- Age. There were no significant differences between age groups on whether they felt they were stopped for a legitimate reason.

Opinion on whether police acted properly during stop

- Overall, 88 percent of all drivers stopped by law enforcement felt the officer behaved properly during stop.
 - Gender. Females were more likely than males to say the officer behaved properly (90 percent vs. 87 percent).
 - Race/Hispanic origin. Black and Hispanic drivers were less likely than White drivers to feel the police behaved properly (78 percent and 85 percent vs. 90 percent, respectively)
 - Age. Drivers age 60 or older were more likely than drivers in their teens, twenties, thirties, or forties to believe the police behaved properly during the stop.

Stops and racial profiling

- One way to investigate whether racial profiling occurs during traffic stops is to look at the percentage of Black drivers stopped during the day (when the driver's race can be seen) and to compare this to the percentage of Black drivers stopped during the night (when profiling would be much more difficult). A larger percentage of stops during the day would be one possible indication that profiling occurred.
 - Blacks were a *smaller* percentage of daytime traffic stops than nighttime traffic stops (11 percent vs. 15 percent).
 - Based on the visibility of the driver's race, the results provide no specific evidence of differential stops between Blacks and Whites.

Warnings and tickets issued during traffic stops

- Overall, 58.6 percent of all stopped drivers received a traffic ticket, and another 25.3 percent received a warning (written or verbal).
 - Gender. Females were more likely than males to receive a warning (26.9 percent vs. 24.2 percent). Males were more likely to be ticketed than females (59.8 percent vs. 56.8 percent).
 - Race/Hispanic origin. White drivers were more likely than Black or Hispanic drivers to be issued a warning during a traffic stop (27.4 percent vs. 18.3 percent vs.

18.2 percent, respectively). Hispanics were more likely to be ticketed than either Whites or Blacks (71.5 percent vs. 56.5 percent and 58.4 percent, respectively). There was no significant difference in ticketing percentage between Whites and Blacks.

- Age. Drivers ages 50 and older were less likely to be ticketed than drivers in younger age groups.

Arrests resulting from traffic stop

- 2.7 percent of drivers stopped by the police were arrested for reasons including failing a sobriety test, having drugs or an illegal weapon on the driver or in the vehicle, having an outstanding warrant for arrest, and assaulting the officer.
 - Gender. Stopped males were more likely than stopped females to be arrested (3.7 percent vs. 1.1 percent).
 - Race/Hispanic origin. Blacks (5.8 percent) and Hispanics (5.2 percent) were more likely than Whites (2 percent) to be arrested. While Blacks made up 11 percent of all stopped drivers, they made up 23.8 percent of all arrested drivers. Similarly, Hispanics made up 9.5 percent of all stopped drivers but 18.4 percent of those arrested.
 - Age. Drivers in their twenties (3.7 percent) or thirties (2.9 percent) were more likely than drivers in their fifties (1.5 percent) to be arrested during a traffic stop.

Use of force against driver

- Approximately 1.1 percent of the 16.8 million drivers stopped by police indicated force was used or threatened to be used against them.
 - Gender: Males were four times more likely than females to say police used or threatened force against them (1.6 percent vs. 0.4 percent).
 - Race/Hispanic origin. Police were more likely to use force against a Black or Hispanic driver than a White driver (2.7 percent and 2.4 percent vs. 0.8 percent)
 - Age. The younger the driver's age, the more likely that law enforcement used or threatened force. The percentage of those who indicated force was used or threatened against them decreased as the age group increased.
- About 87 percent of those who had force used against them felt the force was "excessive."

Driver, vehicle searches

- 5 percent of all traffic stops involved the officer searching the driver, the car, or both.
 - Gender. Police were more likely to search the driver/vehicle of males than of females (7.1 percent vs. 1.8 percent)

- Race/Hispanic origin. Blacks and Hispanics were more likely than Whites to be searched or to have their vehicle searched (10.2 percent and 11.4 percent vs. 3.5 percent, respectively).
- Age. Drivers in their teens, twenties, and thirties were more likely than drivers in their forties and fifties to be subject to search.

Table 9. What police did during the traffic stop, by gender, race/Hispanic origin, and age of stopped drivers, 2002

Characteristic of stopped drivers	What police did during traffic stop								
	Issued a warning	Ticketed the driver	Searched —			Handcuffed the driver	Arrested the driver	Used force against the driver ^a	Used excessive force against the driver ^a
			Driver or vehicle	Driver	Vehicle				
Total	25.3%	58.6%	5.0%	3.6%	4.0%	2.8%	2.7%	1.1%	1.0%
Gender									
Male	24.2%	59.8%	7.1%	5.4%	5.6%	3.8%	3.7%	1.6%	1.4%
Female	26.9	56.8	1.8	0.9	1.6	1.1	1.1	0.4*	0.3*
Race/Hispanic origin									
White	27.4%	56.5%	3.5%	2.5%	2.9%	2.0%	2.0%	0.8%	0.7%
Black	18.3	58.4	10.2	8.1	7.1	6.4	5.8	2.7	2.5
Hispanic	18.2	71.5	11.4	8.3	10.1	5.6	5.2	2.4	2.0*
Other race	20.3	73.1	2.9*	1.3*	2.3*	0*	0*	1.1*	0.5*
Age									
16-19	31.0%	58.6%	8.9%	6.1%	8.2%	3.0%	2.9%	2.9%	2.9%
20-29	24.8	64.3	6.6	5.4	5.0	3.9	3.7	1.3	1.1
30-39	23.8	61.3	6.4	4.5	5.0	3.1	2.9	1.2	1.0
40-49	23.3	58.5	3.4	1.9	2.8	2.3	2.5	0.8*	0.6*
50-59	26.5	50.2	1.5	1.2*	1.1*	1.8	1.5	0.5*	0.4*
60 or older	26.7	44.9	0*	0*	0*	0*	0.5*	0*	0*
Estimated number	4,241,229	9,843,043	837,809	609,278	671,957	461,582	448,094	188,882	164,255

^aEstimate is based on 10 or fewer sample cases.
^aForce includes threat of force.

A link to this report can be found on the Bureau of Justice Statistics' web site:
<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/cpp02.pdf>.