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BUREAU OF JUSTICE STATISTICS
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STUDY FINDS SOME RACIAL DIFFERENCES IN PERCEPTIONS OF POLICE BEHAVIOR DURING CONTACT WITH THE PUBLIC

WASHINGTON – An estimated 62.9 million U.S. residents age 16 or older, or about 26 percent of the population, had one or more contacts with police in 2011, the Justice Department’s Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) announced today.

Contact between police and the public was equally likely to be initiated by residents as by police. About half (51 percent) of police contacts occurred when persons requested police assistance, while the other half (49 percent) were police initiated, such as when police pulled over drivers during traffic stops or stopped persons in public places but not a moving vehicle (i.e., street stops).

The majority of persons with police contact believed the police behaved properly. In 2011, 93 percent of those who requested police assistance, 88 percent of drivers pulled over in traffic stops, and 71 percent of persons involved in street stops thought the police behaved properly during the contact. Regardless of the reason for the contact, less than 5 percent of persons who did not believe the police had behaved properly filed a complaint.

Black drivers (13 percent) were more likely than white (10 percent) and Hispanic drivers (10 percent) to be pulled over by police in a traffic stop; however, blacks, whites and Hispanics were equally likely to be stopped in a street stop (less than one percent each). Among those involved in street or traffic stops, blacks were less likely than whites and Hispanics to believe the police behaved properly during the encounter.

About eight in 10 drivers involved in traffic stops and 6 in 10 persons involved in street stops believed they were stopped for a legitimate reason. Regardless of the reason for the traffic stop, a smaller percentage of black drivers (67 percent) than Hispanic (74 percent) and white (84 percent) drivers believed the reason for the stop was legitimate.

When the street or traffic stops involved residents and officers of the same race or Hispanic origin, the individuals were more likely to believe the reason for the stop was legitimate and that police behaved properly than when the stops involved residents and officers of a different race or Hispanic origin.

About three percent of drivers in traffic stops and 19 percent of persons involved in street stops were searched or frisked by police. White drivers involved in traffic stops were searched at lower rates than

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black and Hispanic drivers. During both traffic and street stops, the majority of persons who were searched or frisked did not believe the police had a legitimate reason for the search.

An estimated 31.4 million persons, or one in eight U.S. residents, requested assistance from police at least once in 2011, most commonly to report a crime, suspicious activity or neighborhood disturbance. The majority of persons who requested police assistance in 2011 thought the officers spent an appropriate amount of time with them during the contact (93 percent) and were helpful (86 percent). About nine in 10 reported that they were just as likely or more likely to contact the police again for a similar problem.

A larger percentage of persons reporting noncrime emergencies (91 percent) than persons reporting crimes or neighborhood disturbances (82 percent) were satisfied with the police response. Similar percentages of whites, blacks and Hispanics who reported a crime or neighborhood disturbance thought the police were helpful. Among persons who reported a noncrime emergency, blacks (83 percent) were less likely than Hispanics (96 percent) or whites (94 percent) to think the police were helpful.

Other findings include•

- In 2011, there were small racial differences in the percentage of drivers who were ticketed. A greater percentage of black (7 percent) and Hispanic (6 percent) drivers were ticketed than white drivers (5 percent).
- About one percent of drivers pulled over in traffic stops had physical force used against them by police. Of these drivers, 55 percent believed the police behaved properly during the stop.
- About six in 10 requests for police assistance involved face-to-face contact with an officer.

These findings are based on the Police-Public Contact Survey (PPCS), a supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey, which asked a nationally representative sample of U.S. residents age 16 or older about experiences with police during the prior 12 months.

The reports, *Police Behavior during Traffic and Street Stops, 2011* (NCJ 242937) and *Requests for Police Assistance, 2011* (NCJ 242938), were written by BJS statisticians Lynn Langton and Matthew Durose. The reports, related documents and additional information about the Bureau of Justice Statistics' statistical publications and programs can be found on the BJS website at <http://www.bjs.gov/>.

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