



Watertown, CT 2025

Follow-Up Justice Navigator Assessment

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SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This assessment analyzes policing data, along with demographic and crime data, to identify which policing practices show patterns of racial disparities, and what factors may be contributing to those disparities.

CPE's Partnership with the Watertown Police Department

Watertown Police Department (WPD) began working with the Center for Policing Equity (CPE) in 2019 under previous Departmental leadership. WPD continued its partnership with CPE under its current Chief Joshua Bernegger, who began leading the Department January 1, 2021. The Department officially joined [CPE's National Justice Database](#) project in February 2021. WPD voluntarily shared data with CPE in order to receive a [Justice Navigator Assessment](#).

Justice Navigator Assessments examine data from law enforcement agencies that partner with CPE to receive standardized analyses that [put policing data to work](#) and serve as a starting point for addressing the kinds of racial [disparities that persist in policing across the country](#). The vast majority of law enforcement agencies in the United States do not choose to [share their policing data](#) publicly or receive independent analyses of these data. CPE therefore commends WPD for its commitment to transparency and its engagement in our partnership to address racial disparities in policing.

[Watertown's first Justice Navigator Assessment](#) was released in 2022. This assessment analyzed vehicle stop data from October 2013 – December 2020 and calls for service and officer-initiated activity data from January 1, 2014 – June 30, 2020. WPD continued sharing data with CPE to receive follow-up analyses that can serve as a benchmark for measuring progress in the Department's ongoing work toward racial equity.

About This Justice Navigator Assessment

This follow-up assessment analyzes WPD's use of force data from January 1, 2020 – December 31, 2023, vehicle stop data from January 1, 2021 – December 31, 2023, and calls for service and officer-initiated activity data from July 1, 2020 – December 31,

2023. Where possible, findings from this assessment period are compared to the corresponding findings from WPD's previous assessment period.

Changes in policing outcomes over time can be driven by a variety of factors both inside and outside of Departments' control. Assessment findings should therefore be interpreted alongside context on local factors that can impact policing in Watertown. See the [Context section](#) of this assessment for further information that should be used to inform interpretations of assessment findings.

Some key findings from this assessment are displayed below. These findings are described and explained in detail in the tabbed sections found at the top of this page. All findings are based on data recorded by WPD officers.

CONTEXT

Why is CPE analyzing Watertown Police Department's data?

Watertown Police Department (WPD) voluntarily shared data with CPE in order to receive analyses intended to support data-informed efforts to advance equitable outcomes in policing and public safety. Insights from Justice Navigator Assessments can be used to inform data-driven decision making and facilitate harm reduction efforts at police departments, as well as help communities and policymakers build more equitable public safety systems for all.

WPD's first assessment from CPE analyzed vehicle stop data from October 2013 – December 2020 and calls for service and officer-initiated activity data from January 1, 2014 – June 30, 2020. This follow-up assessment analyzes WPD's use of force data from January 1, 2020 – December 31, 2023, vehicle stop data from January 1, 2021 – December 31, 2023, and calls for service and officer-initiated activity data from July 1, 2020 – December 31, 2023.

What recent changes has the state of Connecticut made to address inequities in policing?

After most of the data in WPD's first Justice Navigator Assessment were recorded, new legislation went into effect that impacts policing in the state of Connecticut. WPD implemented changes to their departmental policies in accordance with state law. The [legislative changes](#) most likely to impact the findings in this assessment include:

- A near-total ban on consent searches, which are searches officers conduct based on the consent of the person stopped by police rather than on the basis of probable cause and [often disproportionately target](#) Black people;
- the legalization of recreational marijuana usage for adults aged 21 and older, which is likely to reduce searches based on "odor of contraband"; and
- the implementation of new, standardized use of force reporting requirements, which facilitate improved use of force data collection.

What recent changes has WPD made to address inequities in policing?

Since 2020, WPD has updated its policies in accordance with changes to state law. These include additional restrictions on the use of certain types of force, limits to non-evidence-based searches, and improved use of force data collection practices and review procedures. These also include new requirements for officers to receive implicit bias training and utilize body and dashboard cameras.

In addition to what is required by state law, WPD has also updated its policies to clarify expectations for its school resource officers, implemented new use of force incident review procedures, held “Citizens Academies” for adults and youth, and partnered with Watertown’s Opioid Task Force to implement an initiative for addressing overdoses. Visit the Context section of this assessment for more information on WPD’s racial equity and community outreach initiatives.

USE OF FORCE

How did officers use force?

17% of use of force incidents during this time period were against **Black people**, who make up **2%** of Watertown’s resident population.

The total number of use of force incidents recorded each year varied from a low of **12** in **2020** to a high of **25** in **2023**. This increase may be related to improvements in WPD’s use of force reporting practices.

The 3 most common force types recorded overall were “**Firearm Point**,” “**Holds**,” and “**Takedown**.” Further investigation of the policies and training practices related to these force types may reveal opportunities to reduce use of force.

When did officers use force?

81% of all use of force incidents occurred during police responses to **Calls for Service**, while **19%** occurred during **Officer-Initiated Activities**.

34% of all use of force incidents occurred while officers were addressing a **Domestic Disturbance**, and **17%** of all incidents occurred while officers were addressing events recorded as a **Mental Health Incident**.

This suggests that investing in [community-based initiatives to address domestic violence](#) and [alternative responses to mental health emergencies](#) may have an outsized impact on reducing use of force.

How have policies related to use of force changed since WPD's first assessment?

WPD's first Justice Navigator Assessment from CPE analyzed policing data recorded from October 2013 to July 2020. However, racial disparities in use of force could not be reliably analyzed during this period due to insufficient data collection practices. These analyses are now possible due to [improvements in WPD's use of force reporting policy and practices](#), which coincide with new, state-wide standardized use of force reporting requirements.

As of April 2019, WPD began subjecting all use of force incidents to review by Departmental leadership to assess compliance with policy and impose discipline where necessary. In recent years, WPD also implemented updates to Departmental policies designed to reduce use of force in accordance with updates to state law. These include new requirements for officers to attempt to de-escalate before using force, only use force when necessary, and intervene if they witness uses of excessive force. As of October 2020, Connecticut also implemented a near-total ban on consent searches—a type of discretionary search that is known to [disproportionately target Black people](#). Conducting a discretionary search has been shown to substantially [increase the likelihood of use of force](#), so policies reducing consent searches can help reduce disparities in use of force rates and decrease use of force overall.

How can departments reduce disparities in use of force?

- ☐ [Improve use of force reporting requirements](#)
- ☐ [Improve use of force policies](#)
- ☐ [Improve racial profiling policy](#)

Watertown Police Department has reported implementing most of the recommendations for improving use of force policies that are currently listed on CPE's Justice Navigator companion site. Visit the Use of Force section to learn more about [the Department's use of force policies](#) and [what counts as force for these analyses](#).

[Visit the Use of Force section for full analysis](#)

VEHICLE STOPS

Who did officers stop and search?

From 2014 – 2020, **7%** of all drivers stopped were **Black**. Officers searched Black drivers who were stopped **more than 4 times as often** as White drivers during this time period.

From 2021 – 2023, **12%** of all drivers stopped were **Black**. However, officers only searched Black drivers who were stopped **half as often** as White drivers during this time period, after Connecticut's near-total ban on consent searches went into effect.

Why were drivers stopped?

Vehicle stop reasons were relatively similar for drivers of each racial group during both assessment periods.

89% of all vehicle stops recorded from 2014 – 2020 and 91% of stops recorded from 2021 – 2023 were for Moving Violations. This reflects a focus on the types of stops most directly related to [traffic safety](#).

How have policies related to stops and searches changed since WPD's first assessment?

Beginning October 2020, Connecticut's [Police Accountability Bill](#) substantially limited the way police interact with community members, particularly at vehicle stops. In particular, the Police Accountability Act sought to curb pretextual stops by limiting officers' ability to initiate searches at vehicle stops made for solely vehicle violations. Officers are no longer allowed to initiate investigative activity at stops made solely for vehicle violations. This is most pronounced in the state's banning of consent searches—a type of discretionary search that is usually conducted when officers request consent to search people or their vehicles without probable cause. Officers must now have probable cause to search individuals, and any searches of vehicles stopped solely for traffic violations require either probable cause or the driver's unsolicited consent.

[Research](#) shows that consent searches drive racial disparities in search rates and result in the discovery of contraband much less often than probable cause searches, so banning them can reduce disparities in searches and facilitate more efficient uses of departmental resources. Connecticut also legalized recreational marijuana usage in July 2021, which is likely to decrease searches conducted based on “odor of contraband.” Moreover, additional changes in the policy landscape, such as the legalization of marijuana, have likely impacted the Department’s vehicle stop activity. Importantly, no single organizational or policy change can be neatly linked to the observed changes in the racial demographics of WPD’s vehicle stops and searches.

How can departments reduce disparities in vehicle stops?

- ☐ [Investigate which stop reasons are associated with disparities](#)
- ☐ [Partner with community groups to consider more effective responses to traffic safety](#)
- ☐ [Reinforce policy through changes to organizational culture](#)

[Visit the Vehicle Stops section for full analysis](#)

CALLS FOR SERVICE AND OFFICER ACTIVITY

How did officers spend their time?

From **January 2014 – June 2020**, officers recorded an average of **13,379** events per year. Of these events:

- **5%** involved reports of **Bodily Harm, Property Harm, or Threats**. All other events did not involve reports of Bodily Harm, Property Harm, or Threats.

From **July 2020 – December 2023**, officers recorded an average of **16,381** events per year. Of these events:

- **8%** involved reports of **Bodily Harm, Property Harm, or Threats**. All other events did not involve reports of Bodily Harm, Property Harm, or Threats.

Some of these calls—such as requests related to public assistance, nuisances, and medical/fire assistance—may not require an armed response or may be better addressed via [community-centered response models](#).

What should be investigated further?

Officers intervened in an average of **89 mental health incidents** per year from **January 2014 – June 2020**, which increased to an average of **145 mental health incidents** per year from **July 2020 – December 2023**. This suggests Watertown would benefit from investments in [alternative responses to mental health emergencies](#).

This analysis only includes incidents coded with labels clearly indicating a mental health-related event, which is likely an [underestimate](#). The number of these incidents recorded at any given time is related to officers' and dispatchers' ability to recognize whether individuals are experiencing mental health crises.

How have policies related to Calls for Service changed since WPD's first assessment?

Effective July 2020, Connecticut's [Police Accountability Bill](#) required that law enforcement agencies conduct a feasibility study of the potential impact of the use of social workers by the department and consider whether their municipality would benefit from engaging social workers to assist the department. The Bill additionally increased penalties for misuse of 911 based on bigotry or bias.

WPD also partnered with Watertown's Opioid Task Force to provide officers for a team that helps address overdoses, connect affected individuals with appropriate resources, and provide harm reduction services.

How can public safety resources be better aligned with community needs?

- ☐ [Investigate how non-police services can respond to Calls for Service](#)
- ☐ [Explore CPE's resources on redesigning public safety](#)
- ☐ [Collaborate with policymakers and service providers to implement community-based mental health emergency responses](#)

[Visit the Calls for Service and Officer Activity section for full analysis](#)

NEXT STEPS TO REDUCE DISPARITIES

What next steps does CPE recommend for WPD and the City of Watertown?

This section contains recommendations that assessment findings suggest may help reduce racial disparities and adverse policing outcomes in Watertown.

- **Investigate firearm protocols to ensure alignment with best practices.** Analysis of [the types of force that officers recorded using](#) shows that “Firearm Point” was the most commonly used force type. Many [guidelines](#) related to officers’ use of firearms stipulate that officers should only draw firearms when they reasonably believe use of deadly force may be necessary to protect themselves or others from serious and imminent danger. Firearms should not be pointed at someone as a mere intimidation or compliance tactic. Although WPD already subjects all use of force incidents to review, the Department should review and consider revisions to its firearm policies and training protocols to ensure alignment with best practices.
- **Explore proactive outreach programs for addressing domestic violence and invest in community-based initiatives for domestic violence reduction.** Analysis shows that police responses to Calls for Service involving a Domestic Disturbance were the [most common reason for police contact preceding use of force](#) incidents. Investing in initiatives that help [address domestic violence without police](#) may therefore have an outsized impact on reducing use of force. WPD may also be able to help by exploring ways other agencies have established [proactive initiatives](#) and [co-response models](#) to address domestic violence in the community.
- **Establish more stringent criteria for conducting stops based on perceived Suspicious Persons or Behavior.** Analysis of [use of force incidents during Officer Initiated Activities](#) shows that the type of activity most often preceding use of force was police investigations of Suspicious Persons/Behavior. This vaguely defined stop reason [has been shown](#) to contribute to racial disparities in police contact because Black people in the United States are disproportionately viewed as suspicious. WPD therefore may be able to reduce disparities in police contact and use of force by establishing clear and objective criteria for conducting these otherwise highly discretionary stops.
- **Explore opportunities to continue progress toward more equitable and public-safety-related traffic enforcement.** More than 90% of vehicle stops across both assessment periods were for Moving Violations, which tend to be

related to traffic safety. However, the majority of these stops ended with a Warning or No Action Taken, which suggests WPD should [further examine these stops](#) to assess whether there are opportunities to [continue reducing stops that are not based on clear public safety risks](#). Analyses also show that disproportionate stops of Black and Latinx drivers appear to be increasing despite the lack of any apparent disparity in stop reasons. This suggests that addressing disparities in vehicle stops may require Watertown to [consider additional strategies](#) such as investing in public health approaches to road safety and alternatives to police enforcement of traffic violations.

- **Collect data on pedestrian stops.** WPD did not collect data on pedestrian stops during either assessment period. CPE recommends that all departments [collect data on all types of stops](#) in order to gain critical insights on factors contributing to inequities in policing, which can help identify targeted interventions to reduce disparities and adverse outcomes. [Strengthening data collection](#) also helps shed light on which risk factors for disparities are driven by departmental policies and officer behaviors, rather than things beyond a department's control.
- **Divert calls for service that do not require an armed response to non-police responders.** Analysis of [WPD's Calls for Service](#) showed that most calls officers responded to across both assessment periods were requests related to public assistance, nuisances, or medical/fire assistance, which may not require an armed response. Watertown should explore opportunities to [address these calls using non-police resources](#). This can help reduce inequitable policing while freeing up police resources for more critical, public-safety-related matters.
- **Invest in community-based mental health first response models.** People with mental health conditions are no more likely than anyone else to act violently but are far more likely to be [injured or killed](#) by police. Analyses show WPD officers intervened in [more than 500 mental health crises](#) from July 2020 to December 2023, and [nearly 1 in 5 use of force incidents](#) occurred while officers were addressing mental health incidents. CPE recommends that all jurisdictions invest in alternative responses to mental and behavioral health emergencies. If [community-based crisis responses](#) are unavailable, police should engage with policymakers and mental health service providers to implement co-responder teams as a harm reduction measure.
- **Ensure the origin of each event is recorded in computer aided dispatch systems.** CPE was [unable to include some analyses](#) that would have compared Officer-Initiated Activity to Calls for Service because the data provided did not explicitly distinguish between these types of events. These analyses can reveal areas where there might be a mismatch between direct community requests for police presence and deployment directed by the department, as well

as what types of enforcement police are initiating that the community has not directly asked for via Calls for Service. WPD should collaborate with dispatchers to ensure the data necessary for these analyses are recorded in the future.

- **Improve location data collection in computer aided dispatch systems.** CPE was [unable to conduct analyses](#) that assess the distribution of certain types of police activity throughout the jurisdiction because location data were not recorded with enough detail to geocode most events. These analyses can help departments identify [deployment patterns and enforcement priorities that may be contributing to disparities](#) in police contact. WPD should explore strategies to improve location data collection for Officer-Initiated Activities and work with dispatchers to ensure sufficient location data for Calls for Service in computer aided dispatch systems.

How can CPE help communities and law enforcement agencies take action?

- [CPE's resource library](#) includes evidence-based data briefs, reports, toolkits, and white papers that guide stakeholders across the country in efforts to improve their public safety systems.
- The [Justice Navigator companion site](#) helps communities and law enforcement agencies understand their Justice Navigator Assessments, assess solutions, and take action to reduce racial disparities in policing and design more equitable public safety systems.
- CPE also partners directly with [communities](#), [policymakers](#), and [law enforcement agencies](#) to consider and test innovations for safer, more just communities.

OUR METHODOLOGY

[CPE's approach](#) to assessing racial disparities in policing uses population benchmarking combined with other strategies that allow us to perform standardized analyses across law enforcement agencies. Population benchmarking cannot account for non-residents or out-of-town visitors to Watertown, but it can provide meaningful information about the experiences of people interacting with Watertown Police Department officers, even if some people who are stopped or subjected to force may have come from out of town.

Visit the Justice Navigator homepage to learn more about the methodologies we use.

GLOSSARY

Visit our [glossary of terms](#) for definitions of unfamiliar words and phrases used in the Justice Navigator.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Funding for this platform was provided by Google.org, Players Coalition, Joyce Foundation, Silicon Valley Community Foundation, and Lyda Hill Philanthropies. Funding for development of the National Justice Database infrastructure and the original analytic plan upon which these analyses are based was provided by the National Science Foundation, under awards led by Principal Investigators Phillip Atiba Goff, Jack Glaser, Amanda Geller, Steven Raphael, and Amelia Haviland.

Suggested citation: Center for Policing Equity (2025). *Watertown, CT*. Justice Navigator, justicenavigator.org.

CONTEXT

Findings should be interpreted alongside context about the demographics of local residents, the demographics of sworn officers, and the department's work toward racial equity.

This section outlines key information on Watertown Police Department's (WPD) ongoing partnership with CPE, the types of data included in this assessment, the demographics of local residents and sworn officers, and factors that may impact analysis findings.

This section also contains information on departmental initiatives related to equitable policing practices that was provided by the Department through a survey and an interview with CPE staff. WPD submitted its responses to CPE's context survey on March 20, 2025.

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4. OFFICER DEMOGRAPHICS
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6. DEPARTMENT SUMMARY OF ITS KEY INITIATIVES
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8. DEPARTMENT SUMMARY OF ITS COMMUNITY OUTREACH INITIATIVES
9. REDESIGNING PUBLIC SAFETY IN WATERTOWN

PARTNERSHIP HISTORY

Watertown Police Department (WPD) began working with CPE in 2019 under previous Departmental leadership. WPD continued its partnership with CPE under current Chief Joshua Bernegger, who began leading the Department January 1, 2021.

WPD officially joined CPE's [National Justice Database](#) project in February 2021. WPD voluntarily shared data with CPE in order to receive analyses intended to support community and law enforcement collaboration on data-informed efforts to advance equitable outcomes in policing and public safety.

WPD received their first [Justice Navigator Assessment](#) from CPE in 2022. That assessment analyzed vehicle stop data from October 2013 – December 2020 and calls for service and officer-initiated activity data from January 1, 2014 – June 30, 2020.

Racial disparities in WPD's use of force could not be analyzed prior to 2020 due to insufficient reporting practices that resulted in the total number of incidents recorded being below CPE's minimum sample size requirements for analysis. WPD did not collect data on pedestrian stops.

ABOUT THIS ASSESSMENT

This Justice Navigator Assessment analyzes WPD's use of force data from January 1, 2020 – December 31, 2023, vehicle stop data from January 1, 2021 – December 31, 2023, and calls for service and officer-initiated activity data from July 1, 2020 – December 31, 2023. Where possible, findings from this assessment period are compared to the corresponding findings from WPD's previous assessment period to illustrate changes over time.

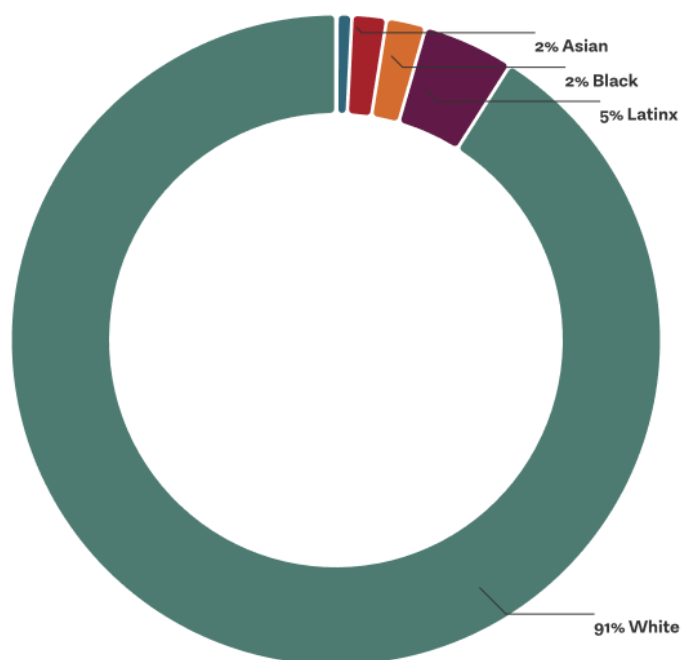
Differences in the findings between each assessment period may be driven by a variety of legal, socioeconomic, and departmental factors. These include factors within the Department's control (such as data collection practices, policies, and organizational culture) as well as factors outside of the Department's control (such as changes in state law, public services, and poverty or crime rates). Assessment findings should be interpreted alongside context on local [factors that can impact policing outcomes](#).

Justice Navigator analyses cannot conclusively establish the causal mechanisms behind changes in any given policing outcome over time. However, this assessment can be used to shed light on factors contributing to disparities and measure progress in the Department’s ongoing work toward racial equity.

The following sections provide additional context that should be used to inform interpretations of the findings in this assessment.

RESIDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

Resident Demographics



Center for Policing Equity | Data provided by US Census Bureau

The resident population of Watertown is 91% White, 5% Latinx, 2% Black, 2% Asian, and 0.1 % Multiple Racial Groups. The total resident population of Watertown is 21,832.

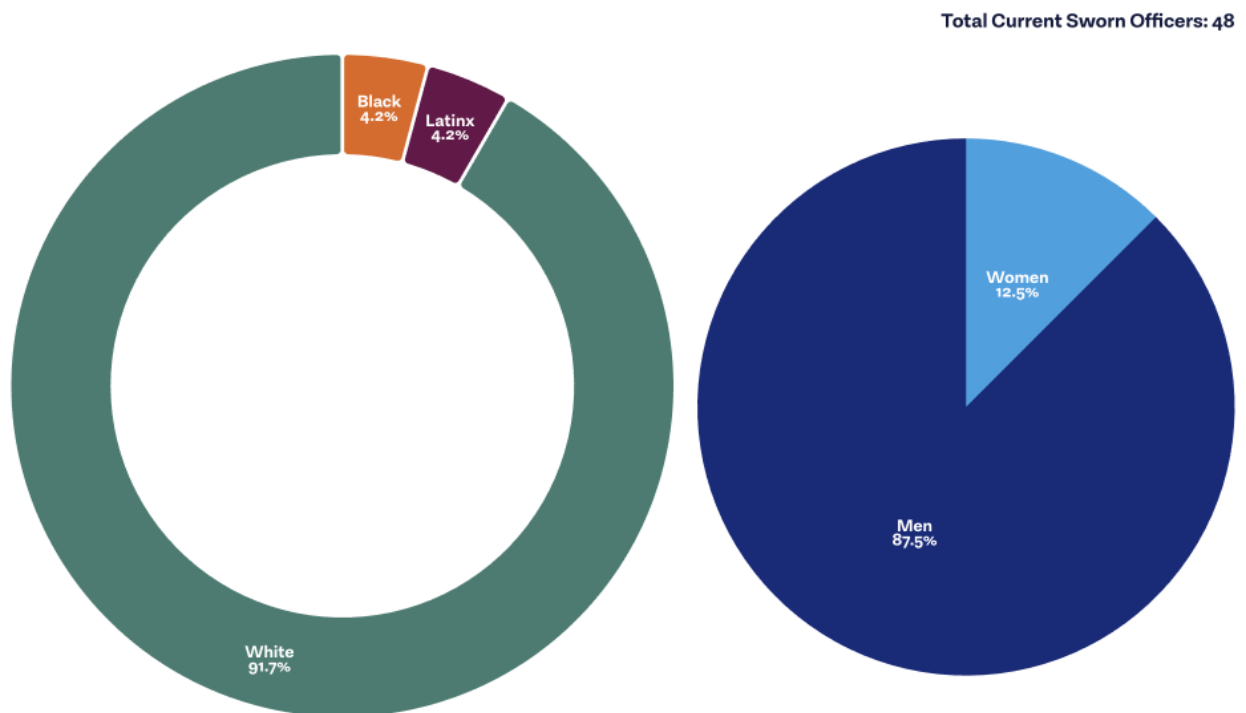
These city demographics were taken from the Census Bureau’s American Community Survey 2018 five-year estimates. The “Other” category, if applicable, matches the Census Bureau’s definition of “Other” racial group. See the Data Notes tab for information on how CPE defines racial groups.

[CPE’s approach](#) to assessing racial disparities in policing uses [population benchmarking](#) in combination with other strategies that allow us to perform

standardized analyses across law enforcement agencies. Population benchmarking cannot account for out-of-town visitors. However, it can provide meaningful information about the experiences of people interacting with Watertown Police Department officers, even if some people who are stopped or subjected to force may have come from out of town.

OFFICER DEMOGRAPHICS

Officer Demographics



Center for Policing Equity | Data provided by the Watertown Police Department

These demographics were provided by the Department as of July 16, 2025.

LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT

The state of Connecticut enacted new legislation impacting policing in the state after most data in WPD's first Justice Navigator Assessment were recorded. This includes Connecticut's [Police Accountability Bill, HB6004](#), which was signed into law in July 2020 and later amended by Connecticut [HB6462](#) in March 2021. Connecticut also passed [SB1201, An Act Concerning Responsible and Equitable Regulation of](#)

Adult-Use Cannabis, in June 2021. WPD updated its departmental policies in accordance with state law. The state-wide policy changes most likely to impact the findings in this assessment are summarized in the sub-sections below.

Banned Consent Searches

Effective October 1, 2020, Connecticut's Police Accountability Bill (HB6004) substantially limited "consent searches," which are a type of discretionary search that officers conduct based on the consent of the person stopped by police rather than on the basis of probable cause. Specifically, the bill states that an individual's consent to conduct a search of his or her body is not justification for a law enforcement official to conduct a search, unless there is probable cause. For vehicles stopped solely for motor vehicle violations, the act prohibits a law enforcement official from asking for a driver's consent to conduct a search of the vehicle or its contents. Any search of the vehicle or its contents must be based on probable cause or the driver's unsolicited consent, which must be received in writing or recorded using body-worn or dashboard cameras. Research shows Black people are significantly more likely to be subjected to consent searches, and that these types of searches result in the discovery of contraband much less often than probable cause searches. Officers initiating a discretionary search has also been shown to substantially increase the likelihood of a use of force incident occurring during police contact. Banning consent searches can therefore reduce racial disparities in searches and use of force, as well as the overall volume of searches and use of force incidents.

Marijuana Legalization

Effective July 1, 2021, Connecticut SB1201 legalized recreational use of marijuana for adults in the state aged 21 or over. This is likely to reduce the number of searches conducted based on "odor of contraband."

Use of Force Reporting

Effective February 1, 2021, Connecticut's Police Accountability Bill (HB6004) began requiring police officers and corrections officers who witness or are otherwise aware of another officer using force that is unreasonable, excessive, or illegal to report such conduct to the force-using officer's agency. It also required that agencies electronically submit annual use of force reports to the Office of Policy and Management in a standardized method and form that allows the compilation of statistics on each use of force incident. This may contribute to the improved reporting of police use of force in Watertown.

DEPARTMENT SUMMARY OF ITS KEY INITIATIVES

WPD has updated much of its policy manual since 2020 to comply with changes to state law. The Department has also made updates that are not required by state law. In recent years, WPD has updated its policies on use of force, data collection, and racial profiling. In addition, WPD has implemented new training programs and programs to promote equity or community trust.

DEPARTMENT SUMMARY OF ITS RACIAL EQUITY INITIATIVES

Watertown Police Department (WPD) implemented changes to its policies and training practices in accordance with Connecticut mandates designed to help improve racial equity in policing outcomes throughout the state. These include the addition of policies explicitly prohibiting police from stopping anyone on the basis of their race, color, ethnicity, age, gender or sexual orientation, unless such factors are used in combination with other information to apprehend a suspect. Officers are also now required to receive implicit bias training, which the law defines as “training on how to recognize and mitigate unconscious biases against a particular segment of the population that might influence a police officer’s judgments and decisions when interacting with a member of such segment of the population.” The Department has also updated its policies and programs as detailed below.

Use of Force

As of April 2019, WPD began subjecting all uses of force to review by all sergeants, lieutenants, the deputy chief, and chief. These reviews are used to make determinations about whether the use of force was in accordance with policy. All uses of force are discussed and critiqued at a department-wide level, and willful violations of policy are disciplinary matters.

WPD has made significant updates to its use of force reporting policy and practices in accordance with statewide updates. The Department now uses a more comprehensive use of force reporting form with improved mechanisms for recording key demographic variables. All use of force incidents are also sent to the state for independent review, which is now done using a standardized method and form that allows the compilation of statistics on each incident. The Department has three designated use of force trainers

who receive quarterly in-service trainings on statewide policy updates and the safest, most up-to-date techniques.

WPD has also implemented updates to departmental policies governing officers' use of force in accordance with new state law. Officers are now required to attempt to de-escalate and mitigate before resorting to the use of force, only use force when necessary, and intervene if they witness another officer using excessive force. They are also now prohibited using arm bar holds unless there is threat of death to the officer. WPD already prohibited its officers from using chokeholds or neck restraints unless there is a threat of death to the officer before this restriction became state law.

School Resource Officers (SROs)

Since their last assessment, WPD has made updates to their school resource officer (SRO) orientation process. SROs are now required to review a memo about their role in their assigned school and the Department's expectations which explicitly states they are not school disciplinarians. School-based arrests must be approved by a supervisor and are only acceptable in extreme circumstances: serious physical injury, credible implied use of a weapon, and/or sexual assault.

The Police Accountability Act

In accordance with Connecticut's Police Accountability Act, WPD has purchased and implemented new body and vehicle cameras that auto-activate when a police car stops or firearm is drawn, new uniforms to make name tags and badge numbers more visible, and new training programs. Officers are required to review all policy updates and confirm their review through electronic signature.

DEPARTMENT SUMMARY OF ITS COMMUNITY OUTREACH INITIATIVES

Citizens Academy

In 2024, Watertown Police Department (WPD) held Citizens Academies for adults and youth. These were groups of around twenty people, some of whom were veterans of the program's initial installment five years ago. The youth program targeted middle and high school students, focusing on educating them on laws and rights surrounding domestic violence, search and seizure, use of force, and accident investigation, among others. Officers also familiarized the children with their specialized units and ride-alongs. The program aimed to bring together students who were interested in law enforcement as

well as those apprehensive of policing to promote discussion between opposing perspectives.

Policy Transparency

WPD makes all of its policies, other than those which are tactical in nature, available on their websites. They have also advertised these developments through their social media.

REDESIGNING PUBLIC SAFETY IN WATERTOWN

Community Law Enforcement Addiction Recovery (CLEAR)

Community Law Enforcement Addiction Recovery (CLEAR) is a partnership between the Department and Watertown's Opioid Task Force to provide a team for addressing fatal and non-fatal overdoses. Calls are directed to first responders (police, fire, and EMS) before being referred to CLEAR within 24-48 hours. CLEAR-trained officers, staffed on all shifts, are met by a team of clinicians to return to the call site to check in on impacted individuals and offer additional services. In non-fatal cases, CLEAR tries to connect directly with the individual(s) to direct them to recovery/treatment programs, housing, state services, or other relevant resources. In fatal cases, CLEAR works directly to identify dependents and provide ongoing contact with those impacted. CLEAR meets monthly with departments across the region to do trainings, share positive stories, and workshop opportunities for improving their co-response model. They also offer harm reduction services throughout the community on a regular basis, such as pop-up clinics and monthly needle exchanges.

Feasibility Study on Departmental Use of Social Workers

Effective July 31, 2020, Connecticut's Police Accountability Bill (HB6004) required law enforcement agencies to conduct a feasibility study of the potential impact of the use of Social Workers by the department and mandated that municipal police departments consider whether their municipality would benefit from employing, contracting with or otherwise engaging social workers to assist the department. WPD conducted this study in January 2021.

USE OF FORCE

Use of force occurs when an officer uses or threatens to use their body or an object against a person or in a way that could cause pain, injury, or death.

Data presented in this section reflect use of force incidents recorded by Watertown Police Department (WPD) officers from 2020 to 2023. Unlike the other sections of this assessment, these analyses do not include comparisons to a previous assessment period. [WPD's first Justice Navigator Assessment](#) from CPE analyzed policing data recorded from October 2013 to July 2020. However, racial disparities in use of force could not be reliably assessed during that period due to insufficient reporting practices that resulted in the total number of incidents recorded being below CPE's minimum sample size requirements for analysis. These analyses are now possible due to [improvements in WPD's use of force data collection practices](#), which coincide with Connecticut's implementation of new, state-wide standardized use of force reporting requirements.

Each law enforcement agency's policy manual requires that officers record use of force, and defines the behaviors that count as "force" which must be reported. The way the policy defines officers' obligation to report use of force has an impact on the number of incidents recorded, which provides important context for interpreting these analyses. Departments with more comprehensive reporting requirements may have more recorded incidents than departments with vague or incomplete requirements. For WPD's definition of reportable force, see the [What counts as force for these analyses?](#) section below.

CPE's guidance on improving use of force policy outlines policy recommendations that law enforcement agencies or policy makers can implement to help prevent and limit use of force. WPD reports employing most of these policies already. For more information on WPD's use of force policies, see "[What policies govern officers' use of force?](#)" at the bottom of this page.

1. [SUMMARY](#)
2. [USES OF FORCE BY RACIAL GROUP](#)

3. USES OF FORCE BY YEAR
4. TOTAL USES OF EACH FORCE TYPE
5. MAPPING USE OF FORCE
6. USE OF FORCE INCIDENTS BY REASON FOR POLICE CONTACT
7. WHAT COUNTS AS FORCE FOR THESE ANALYSES?
8. WHAT POLICIES GOVERN OFFICERS' USE OF FORCE?

SUMMARY

Though Watertown Police Department (WPD) officers use force rarely, their use of force rate increased every year between 2020 and 2023, doubling from 12 to 25 incidents per year. This increase may be related to changes in the Department's use of force reporting practices, which impact the number of incidents recorded. Unlike the other sections of this assessment, these analyses do not include comparisons to a previous assessment period because officers did not report enough incidents before 2020 to meet CPE's sample size requirements for analysis. These analyses are now possible due to improvements in WPD's use of force data collection and reporting practices, which coincide with Connecticut's implementation of new, state-wide standardized use of force reporting requirements.

Black people comprise only 2% of Watertown's population, but made up 17% of people officers used force against. This 2% population estimate comes from Census data on Watertown residents, which does not account for out-of-town visitors and non-residents. However, this disparity persists even when using the demographics of drivers stopped during the assessment period as a more conservative benchmark that may better approximate the demographics of people with whom officers interact. Black people made up 12% of drivers stopped by WPD during this assessment period but were even more overrepresented in use of force incidents, further affirming the disparity in use of force rates.

Eighty percent of use of force incidents occurred when officers were responding to calls for service. More than a third of all incidents took place when officers were addressing domestic disputes or disturbances, with all but three of these events beginning in

response to a call for service. This suggests use of force could be reduced by investing in [community-based initiatives to reduce domestic violence](#) and exploring ways other agencies have established [proactive initiatives](#) and [co-response models to address domestic violence](#) in the community. The second largest category of events leading to use of force was mental health incidents, which suggests that investing in [community-based mental health response systems](#) may also have an outsized impact on reducing use of force.

Of the 20% of use of force incidents that occurred during officer-initiated activities, the largest category of incidents began when officers decided to stop someone they perceived to be “suspicious” or engaged in “suspicious behavior.” This vaguely defined stop reason affords officers considerable leeway in deciding who to stop and has been shown to [contribute to racial disparities in police contact](#). Black people in the United States, particularly young Black men, are [more likely to be viewed as suspicious](#) or threatening compared to other racial groups. WPD may be able to reduce use of force rates and racial disparities by establishing more stringent, clear, and objective criteria for conducting these otherwise highly discretionary stops.

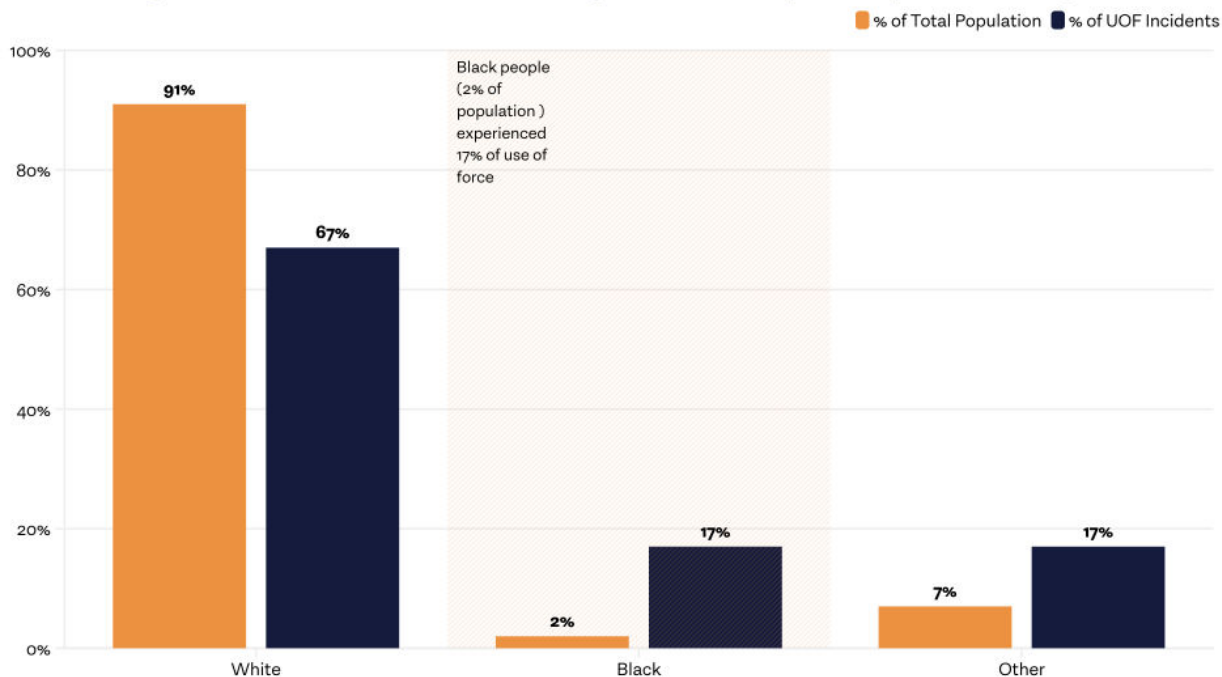
The types of force most often used against Black people were “Taser Point” and “Takedown.” WPD may be able to identify opportunities to reduce disparities by investigating their policies and practices related to these force types. The most common type of force officers recorded using overall was “Firearm Point,” which made up 25% of all recorded uses of force. The act of pointing a firearm at someone risks psychological harm, unnecessary escalation, and carries a threat of death well beyond other types of force, so the best practice is to restrict firearm usage to scenarios in which officers reasonably believe the use of deadly force may be necessary to protect themselves or others from imminent danger. Although WPD already subjects all use of force incidents to review, the Department should review its policies on firearm usage and ensure clear and specific guidelines are implemented in accordance with [best practices](#).

As is shown in the Vehicle Stops section of this assessment, WPD has made substantial progress in reducing the types of [low-level stops](#) and [non-evidence-based searches](#) that are known to drive racial disparities in stop rates, search rates, and [use of force](#). The persistence of racial disparities despite this progress suggests a need for increased partnerships and community resources to address socioeconomic risk factors for disparities and other [factors that contribute to inequities](#) in public safety more broadly, such as issues related to housing, education, and public health.

In the future, WPD can gain additional insights on strategies to reduce disparities in police contact, and thus use of force, by [collecting data on pedestrian stops](#) and working with dispatchers to [improve data quality](#) in computer aided dispatch systems. The best harm reduction strategy is to reduce police involvement in situations that do not require an armed response or would be better addressed by community-based response systems. Our [analyses of WPD's policing activity](#) suggests there is opportunity to do so in Watertown.

USES OF FORCE BY RACIAL GROUP

Percentage of Use of Force Incidents, by Racial Group, Compared to Population



Center for Policing Equity | Data provided by the Watertown Police Department 2020 - 2023

According to Watertown Police Department data on use of force incidents recorded between 2020 and 2023:

- 17% of all people officers used force against were Black, compared to 2% of the population of Watertown.
- 67% of all people officers used force against were White, compared to 91% of the population of Watertown.
- 17% of all people officers used force against were Other, compared to 7% of the population of Watertown.

The resident demographics included in this analysis are determined using local Census data, which likely do not capture the entire population of individuals with whom police interact. However, if the racial makeup of use of force incidents differs significantly from the resident population, it may indicate that there are racial disparities in use of force due to police behaviors or policies.

CPE recommends that all law enforcement agencies explore broad [interventions](#) to reduce racial disparities in use of force and decrease incidents of force overall, such as changes to departmental policy and organizational culture.

More information

What does this show?

Each dark blue bar shows the percentage of the total use of force incidents recorded in the assessment period that were against people in each racial group. The orange bars show the percentage of the resident population that are people of the same racial group. Hovering over the blue bars shows the number of incidents that makes up that percentage.

Departments have varying definitions of force and requirements for when officers must report their use of force, so those with more comprehensive reporting requirements may have more recorded incidents than departments with vague or incomplete requirements. For example, some departments do not require officers to report use of hands-on force unless it results in injury or complaint of injury; others do not require officers to report pointing a weapon if it was not discharged. Departments also use different forms to record data on use of force incidents, and forms that encourage more comprehensive or efficient data collection can provide more useful information for analysis than those that solicit fewer, or less specific, incident details.

Our [guidance](#) encourages officers to report every incident in which an officer uses or threatens to use their body, a tool, or a weapon against a person, or in any way that could cause pain, injury or death, regardless of the officer's motivation or whether any injury or complaint results. For more information on the types of incidents officers were required to report during this assessment timeframe, see **“What counts as force for these analyses?”** at the bottom of this page.

How was this calculated?

We first took the average total recorded incidents per year and calculated the percentage against people of each racial group. Then we compared those percentages to the percentages of the resident population that are of each racial group. See the Data Notes tab for information on how we define racial groups. We count a use of force incident as a single incident in which any use of force against a person was recorded, regardless of the number of officers, types of force involved, or number of times force was applied. If more than one person had force used against them at the same time, each person who was

subjected to force is counted as a separate incident. Our analyses exclude incidents where the only reported type of force is handcuffing, verbal commands, or de-escalation.

Most of our analyses use all use of force data provided by departments, including incomplete years of data. However, certain analyses require complete years of data, so time periods may vary across charts. We use local demographic data (from the Census Bureau's *American Community Survey* 5-year estimates) as the most straightforward and complete representation of the local population. The use of Census data also allows us to perform standardized analyses across law enforcement agencies. We recognize that this measure of demographics may not capture the entire population of individuals with whom police interact. However, the analyses on this page can help shed light on the role that local demographics may play in any observed disparities.

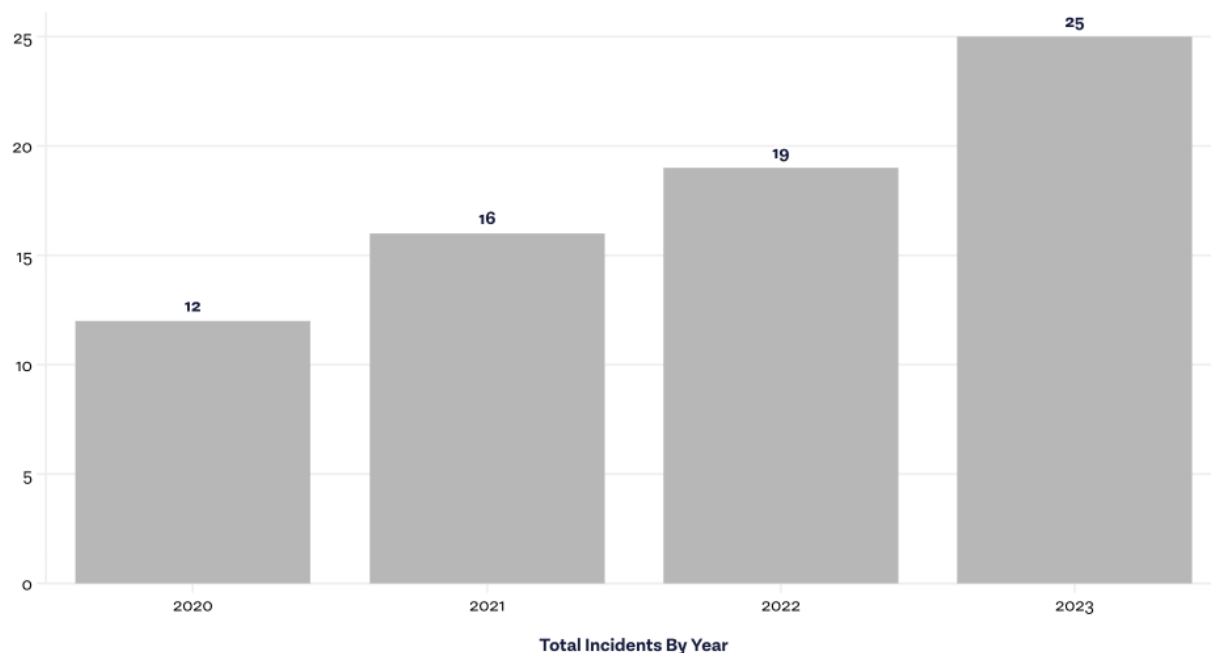
Since the majority of police-community interactions in the U.S. occur at vehicle stops, the racial makeup of a department's vehicle stops may better approximate the demographics of people with whom officers interact (and thus could use force against) compared to Census data. The limitations of using local demographic data in this analysis may therefore be mitigated by using the racial makeup of a department's vehicle stops as a comparison to the racial makeup of their use of force incidents. This would result in a more conservative estimate of racial disparities in use of force if there are any existing racial disparities in vehicle stops. Any disparities that persist under this measure would thus further affirm the existence of racial disparities in use of force.

Data required for this analysis:

- Incident unique identifier
- Date of incident
- Racial group of the person subjected to force

USES OF FORCE BY YEAR

Total Use of Force Incidents per Year



Center for Policing Equity | Data provided by the Watertown Police Department 2020 - 2023

The number of use of force incidents recorded each year with complete data varied from a low of 12 in 2020 to a high of 25 in 2023. There were a total of 72 uses of force in the assessment period.

Each law enforcement agency's policy manual requires that officers record use of force, and defines the behaviors that count as "force" which must be reported. For this reason, the number of incidents recorded each year may fluctuate due to changes in officers' use of force practices or departments' reporting policies.

Effective February 1, 2021, Connecticut's Police Accountability Bill implemented [new, state-wide standardized use of force reporting requirements](#), among other changes to use of force policies. Watertown Police Department updated its use of force policies and reporting form to comply with changes to state law, which likely contributes to the increase in use of force incidents recorded in Watertown.

More information

What does this show?

This chart shows the number of use of force incidents recorded during each year of the assessment period for all racial groups combined.

Departments have varying definitions of force and requirements for when officers must report their use of force, so those with more comprehensive reporting requirements may have more recorded incidents than departments with vague or incomplete requirements. Departments should investigate whether variations in use of force may be related to policy changes that govern officers' use of force or define the types of behavior that count as force which officers are required to report.

Disruptions related to the COVID-19 pandemic may have affected the volume of police-community interactions recorded in 2020 and 2021, although the extent of this impact likely varies by jurisdiction according to the local policies and restrictions implemented in response to the outbreak. It is worth noting whether or the extent to which racial disparities persisted over this time period, despite the reduction in overall police activity.

How was this calculated?

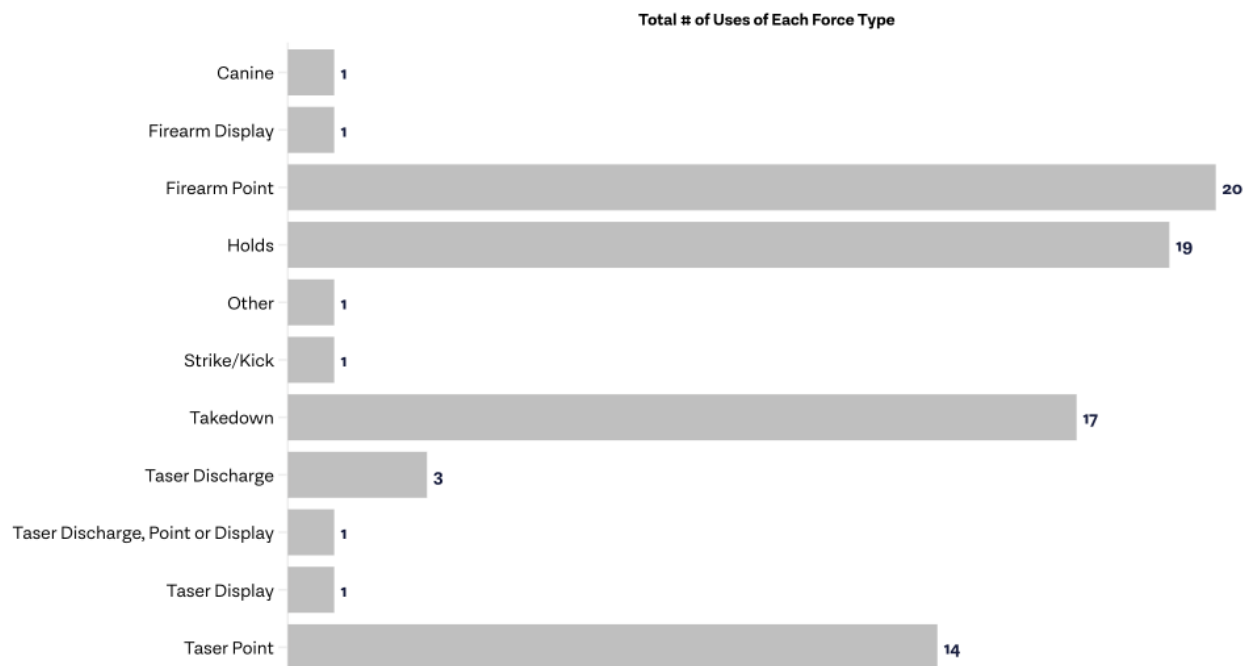
We count a use of force incident as a single incident in which any use of force against a person was recorded, regardless of the number of officers, types of force involved, or number of times force was applied. If more than one person had force used against them at the same time, each person who was subjected to force is counted as a separate incident. Our analyses exclude incidents where the only reported type of force is handcuffing, verbal commands, or de-escalation.

Data required for this analysis:

- Incident unique identifier
- Date of incident

TOTAL USES OF EACH FORCE TYPE

Total Uses of Each Force Type



Center for Policing Equity | Data provided by the Watertown Police Department 2020 - 2023

According to Watertown Police Department data on the types of force that officers recorded using:

- **The 3 most common force types recorded overall were "Firearm Point," "Holds," and "Takedown."**

Identifying officers' most commonly used force types can serve as a starting point for reducing racial disparities and decreasing use of force overall. Departments should investigate their policies and training practices relating to the types of force used most often or that are of most concern to the community.

Many [guidelines](#) related to officers' use of firearms stipulate that officers should only draw firearms when they believe use of deadly force may be justified. Departments that record a significant number of uses of "firearm point" should review those incidents to ensure alignment with departmental policy and investigate their firearm policies and training protocols to ensure alignment with best practices.

Note: Force types used less than 5 times are not included in the finding text for this analysis.

More information

What does this show?

This chart shows the total number of uses of each particular force type recorded for all racial groups combined. Any force type that was recorded in high numbers, or that was more often used against people in racial groups experiencing disparities, will influence racial disparities in use of force and the volume of incidents overall.

How was this calculated?

To investigate which force types were most common overall, we took the total recorded uses of force and separated them by force type. To investigate which force types may have an outsized impact on racial disparities, we then calculated the percentage of uses of each type of force that were against people of each racial group.

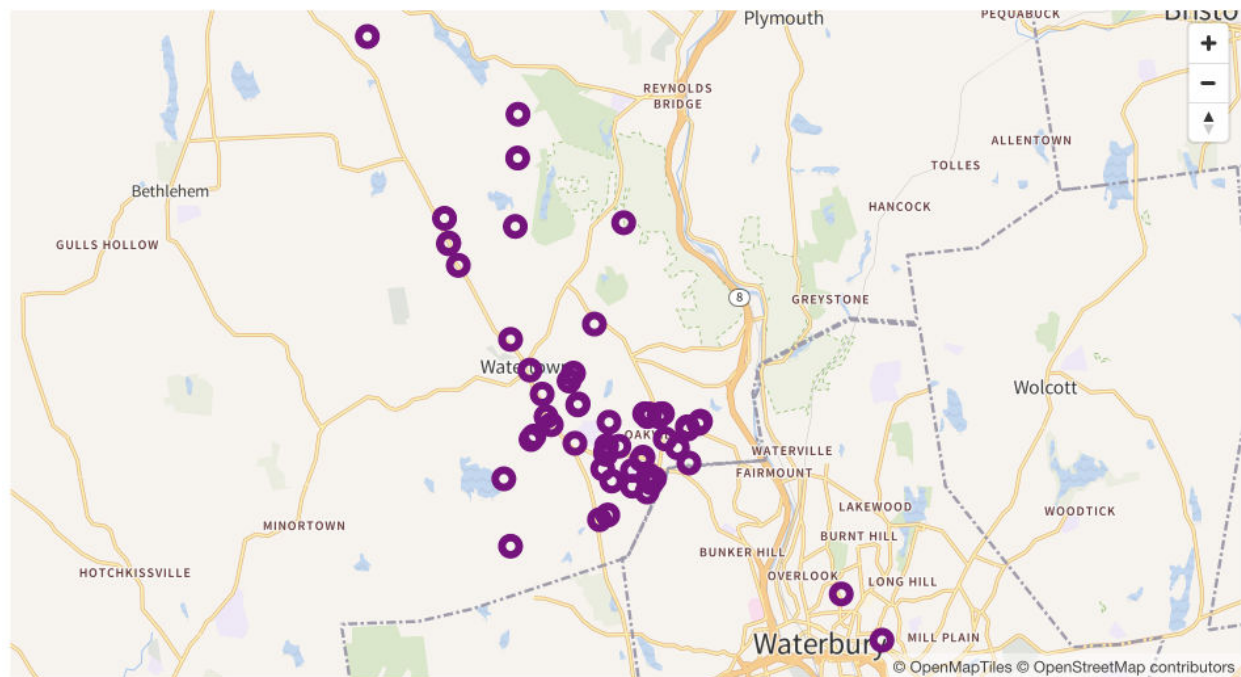
We count each distinct type of force that was recorded against any person as one force type, regardless of the number of other force types recorded against said person, the number of officers who applied it, or the number of times it was applied. We combine categories for easier interpretation. See the Data Notes tab for details on how we sort force types provided by the department into these categories, and how we define racial groups.

Data required for this analysis:

- Incident unique identifier
- Date of incident
- Racial group of the person subjected to force
- Type(s) of force recorded in incident, including police weapons/tools used, if any

MAPPING USE OF FORCE

Use of Force Incident Locations



Center for Policing Equity | Data provided by the Watertown Police Department 2020 - 2023

This interactive map shows where in the jurisdiction Watertown police officers recorded using force.

Note: Locations are slightly offset to avoid identifying individual properties. Areas with relatively high concentrations of use of force incidents may warrant further investigation related to potential interventions for reducing use of force.

More information

What does this show?

This map shows where in the jurisdiction each recorded use of force incident took place. All locations are slightly offset so as to avoid identifying individual properties. If there are any areas with high concentrations of use of force incidents, police leadership should investigate these further and consider potential intervention strategies.

How was this calculated?

We plotted where each use of force incident occurred using either addresses or latitude and longitude indicators provided by the law enforcement agency. Where addresses were provided, we translated them

into coordinates. We then add or subtract small, randomly generated amounts to these coordinates to offset the locations just enough to prevent the identification of incidents at any particular properties.

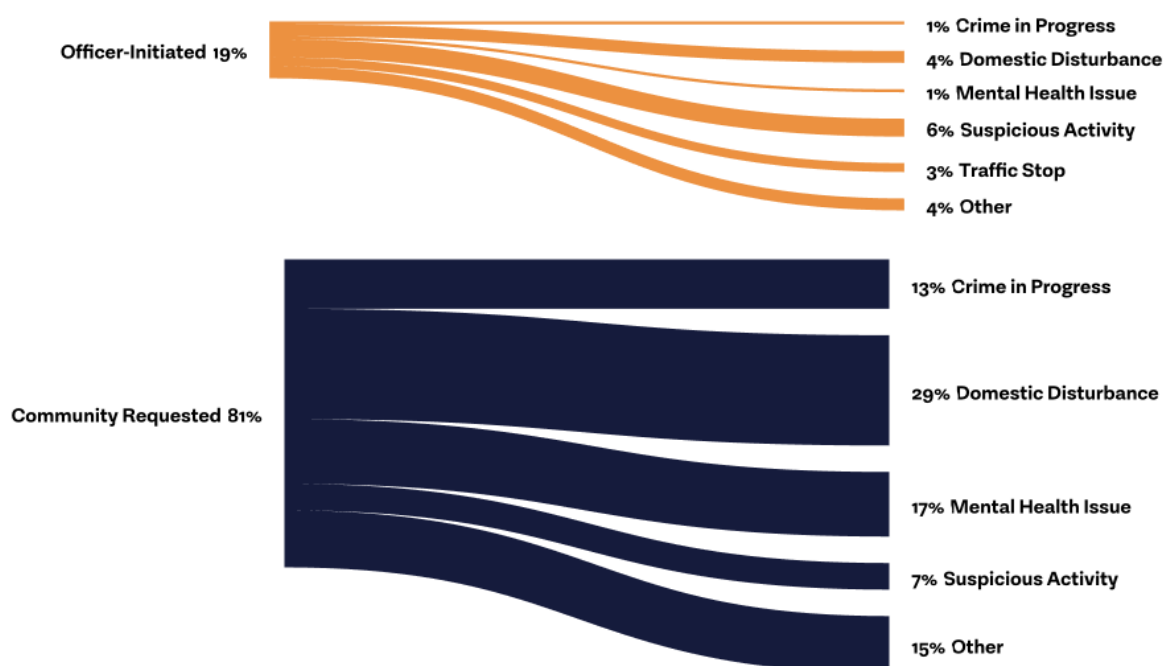
Data required for this analysis:

- Incident unique identifier
- Incident address or latitude and longitude data

USE OF FORCE INCIDENTS BY REASON FOR POLICE CONTACT

Use of Force Reason for Initial Contact

Percentage of Use of Force Events



Center for Policing Equity | Data provided by the Watertown Police Department 2020 - 2023

This analysis examines the recorded reasons for police contact that preceded use of force incidents. This includes use of force incidents recorded during Officer-Initiated Activities and those recorded during police responses to Calls for Service. According to Watertown Police Department (WPD) data:

- **81% of all use of force incidents occurred during police responses to Calls for Service, while 19% occurred during Officer-Initiated Activities.**
- **34% of all use of force incidents occurred while officers were addressing events involving a Domestic Disturbance.**

- **17% of all use of force incidents occurred while officers were addressing events involving a Mental Health Incident.**

A note on mental health emergency response: Understanding the types of events most often preceding use of force can serve as a starting point for identifying targeted interventions for reducing use of force overall. The relatively large proportion of incidents stemming from Domestic Disturbances and Mental Health Incidents suggests Watertown may benefit from investments in [alternative responses to domestic violence](#) and [mental health emergencies](#).

The Mental Health Incident category in this analysis only includes incidents coded with labels that clearly indicate a mental health-related event, which may [underestimate](#) the full extent of police interventions in mental or behavioral health-related incidents. For more information on how events were categorized, visit the [Calls for Service and Officer-Initiated Activity section](#) of this assessment.

Note: Force types used less than 5 times are not included in the finding text for this analysis.

More information

What does this show?

This figure is meant to illustrate the reasons recorded for police-community interactions that escalated to use of force, and whether they were initiated by officers or community requests for police responses. This includes data on incidents recorded during Officer-Initiated Activities and those recorded during police responses to Calls for Service. The labels on the left side of the chart represent the reason recorded for each call or activity in the corresponding row. The percentages displayed in the chart represent the proportion of all use of force incidents originating from each event type.

“Calls for Service” are events reported via 911 calls, non-emergency calls to the department, direct contact with officers, or 311 calls that were routed to the police for response. We request data only for events involving police, and not those solely addressed by fire or emergency medical responders.

“Officer-Initiated Activities” are events that officers initiated based on their own observations or assignment, rather than in response to Calls for Service. This includes officers being assigned to particular activities (such as a patrol or school resource assignment), any requests for assistance from other officers or from outside agencies, and other activities police typically have some discretion over (such as vehicle and pedestrian stops).

How was this calculated?

We categorized all incidents according to the reasons for police contact that preceded the incident, including whether the interaction was initiated by officers. Event categories are based on the initial call

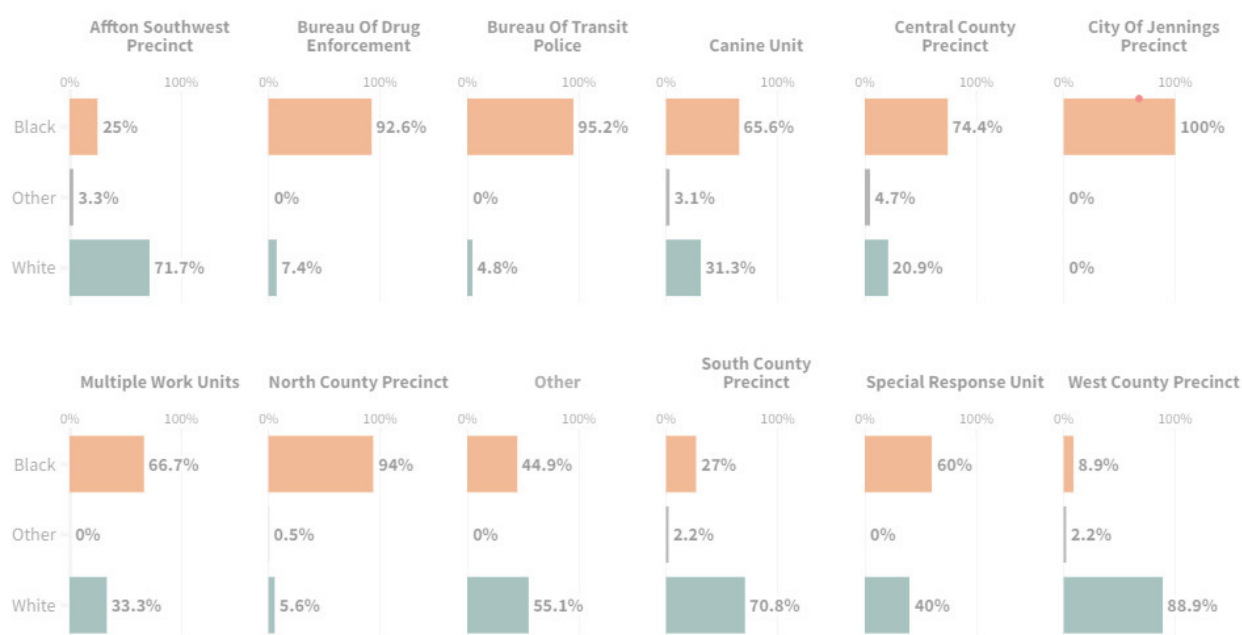
reason (provided to the dispatcher) or activity description (provided by the officer). Visit the Data Notes tab for details on the exact call types included and how they were categorized.

Data required for this analysis:

- Incident unique identifier
- Call origin or officer-initiated flag
- Incident type/initial reason for police contact

USE OF FORCE INCIDENTS BY WORK UNIT AND RACIAL GROUP

Incident Totals For Each Work Unit, Separated by Racial Group



Center for Policing Equity | Data provided by St. Louis County Police Department 2019 - 2021

- [Most work units/Every work unit] recorded using force against Black people at a disproportionate rate relative to their share of the population. Black people made up XX% of the population of JURISDICTION, but more than XX% of the people officers recorded using force against in [most work units/every work unit].
- "X" and "X" recorded the highest percentages of use of force incidents against Black people. For example, XX% of incidents recorded by "X" and X% of incidents recorded by "X" were against Black people.
- "X" and "X" recorded the most incidents of force overall.

More information

What does this show?

“Work unit” describes the work groups in a department. It can refer to the assignment of the officer who applied force (e.g. Detective Unit, Narcotics, Traffic, etc.), or the geographic areas where incidents occurred (e.g. precincts, districts, zones, etc.).

Each colored bar shows the percentage of use of force incidents recorded by each work unit of people of each racial group. The Multiple Work Units category, if used, represents incidents involving officers from two or more work units. Hovering over a colored bar shows the number of incidents that make up that percentage. Any work unit that records a large number of use of force incidents or records large racial disparities will influence overall racial disparities in use of force. If disparities are present among most or all work units, the different racial makeup of various neighborhoods is likely not the whole explanation for the observed disparity.

How was this calculated?

We took the total recorded incidents of force and first separated them by the work unit that recorded the incident. We then calculated what percentage of incidents was recorded for people of each racial group.

The “Other Work Units” category, if used, combines the work units recording less than 2% of incidents. See the Data Notes tab for information on how we define racial groups.

Data required for this analysis:

- Incident unique identifier
- Date of incident
- Racial group of the person subjected to force
- Officer assignment, beat, precinct, district, or other designated police service zone

WHAT COUNTS AS FORCE FOR THESE ANALYSES?

We reviewed Watertown Police Department’s policies that defined the behaviors officers were required to report as force during the assessment timeframe. Understanding what types of incidents were required to be recorded, as well as gaps in what was required to be recorded, can help determine whether any incidents might have been missing from the provided dataset and reveal opportunities for improving data collection policies and practices.

We encourage departments to adopt use of force policies that clearly define what counts as reportable “force” and explicitly include every type of behavior that officers are required to report as a use of force incident. A comprehensive use of force reporting policy would require officers to record every incident in which they use their body, a tool, or a weapon to overcome resistance, secure compliance, or in any way that could

cause pain, injury or death, regardless of the officer's motivation or whether any injury or complaint results. CPE's resources provide further details on how law enforcement agencies can effectively [collect use of force data](#) and communities can [advocate for comprehensive use of force reporting](#).

Departmental definition of force

In this section, we list reportable uses of force according to the policy provided by the department.

According to the policy manual provided by The Watertown Police Department, "physical force" is defined as: "any intentional contact used upon or directed toward the body of another person, including restraint and confinement."

While this is the definition for the term "Physical Force," it should be noted that the policy does not define the word "force" alone ((General Order 8.1, Section (III)(16)).

Also according to the policy manual, "a reportable use of force to the State shall be the following:

- a. Striking another person with an open or closed hand, elbow, knee, club or baton, or kicking another person
- b. Using OC spray, CEW, or less lethal projectile
- c. Using a chokehold or neck restraint
- d. Pointing a firearm, less lethal launcher, or CEW laser sight at a person
- e. The discharge of a firearm, for other than training, testing, or to dispatch an animal
- f. Any incident where a police officer uses physical force that is likely to cause serious physical injury, as defined in C.G.S. 53a-3, to another person or the death of another person" (General Order 8.1, Section (X)(1)).

WHAT POLICIES GOVERN OFFICERS' USE OF FORCE?

CPE's guidance on improving use of force policy outlines policy recommendations that law enforcement agencies or policymakers can implement to help prevent and limit use of force. Watertown Police Department (WPD) provided CPE with information on policies that governed officers' use of force. In this section, we list CPE's

recommendations for improving use of force policy that WPD has reported implementing as of May 15, 2025:

- ☒ Require officers to promptly intervene in the moment and report if they see a fellow officer using excessive force.
- ☒ Mandate that officers provide or call for medical care for any person injured by police use of force, as well as anyone in police custody who requires medical attention.
- ☒ State that use of deadly force is a last resort, and is only authorized when other reasonable alternatives have been exhausted or would clearly be ineffective at preventing an immediate threat of death or serious bodily injury.
- ☒ Prohibit the use of chokeholds and neckholds.
- ☒ Restrict the use of restraint methods that can cause breathing impairment or positional asphyxia.
- ☒ Mandate the use of de-escalation tactics.
- ☒ Require officers to use the minimal amount of force necessary.

For more information on WPD's use of force policies and work to promote more equitable policing practices, see the [Context section](#) of this assessment.

VEHICLE STOPS

Vehicle stops refer to when an officer stopped a member of the public who was driving.

Data presented in this section reflect vehicle stops recorded by Watertown Police Department (WPD). These analyses include data on vehicle stops conducted during the current assessment period (January 2021 – December 2023) and stops conducted during [WPD's previous assessment period](#) (October 2013 – December 2020). Where possible, findings from the current assessment period are compared to the corresponding findings from WPD's previous assessment period. Some analyses require complete years of data, so time periods may vary across charts.

Changes in policing outcomes over time can be driven by a variety of factors both inside and outside of Departments' control, so these findings should be interpreted alongside context on local [factors that can impact policing in Watertown](#). See the Context section of this assessment for further information that should be used to inform interpretations of these findings.

For details on how we define vehicle stops, see “More information” under the first chart in this section.

1. [SUMMARY](#)
2. [VEHICLE STOPS BY RACIAL GROUP](#)
3. [VEHICLE STOPS BY YEAR](#)
4. [VEHICLE STOP REASONS BY RACIAL GROUP](#)
5. [SEARCH RATES AT VEHICLES STOPS BY RACIAL GROUP](#)
6. [COMPARING SEARCH OUTCOMES AT VEHICLE STOPS](#)
7. [VEHICLE STOP OUTCOMES BY RACIAL GROUP](#)

SUMMARY

Watertown Police Department's (WPD) first Justice Navigator Assessment from CPE analyzed vehicle stop data from October 2013 – December 2020. WPD continued sharing data with CPE to receive this follow-up assessment, which analyzes vehicle stop data from January 2021 – December 2023. Using years with complete data, analyses in this section compare findings from WPD's first assessment period (2014 – 2020) to the corresponding findings from this second assessment period (2021 – 2023). The total number of vehicle stops recorded each year reached a high of 2,923 in 2019 before decreasing by 60% in 2020, likely in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic. The annual number of vehicle stops then reached a low of 831 in 2022 before returning to pre-pandemic levels in 2023.

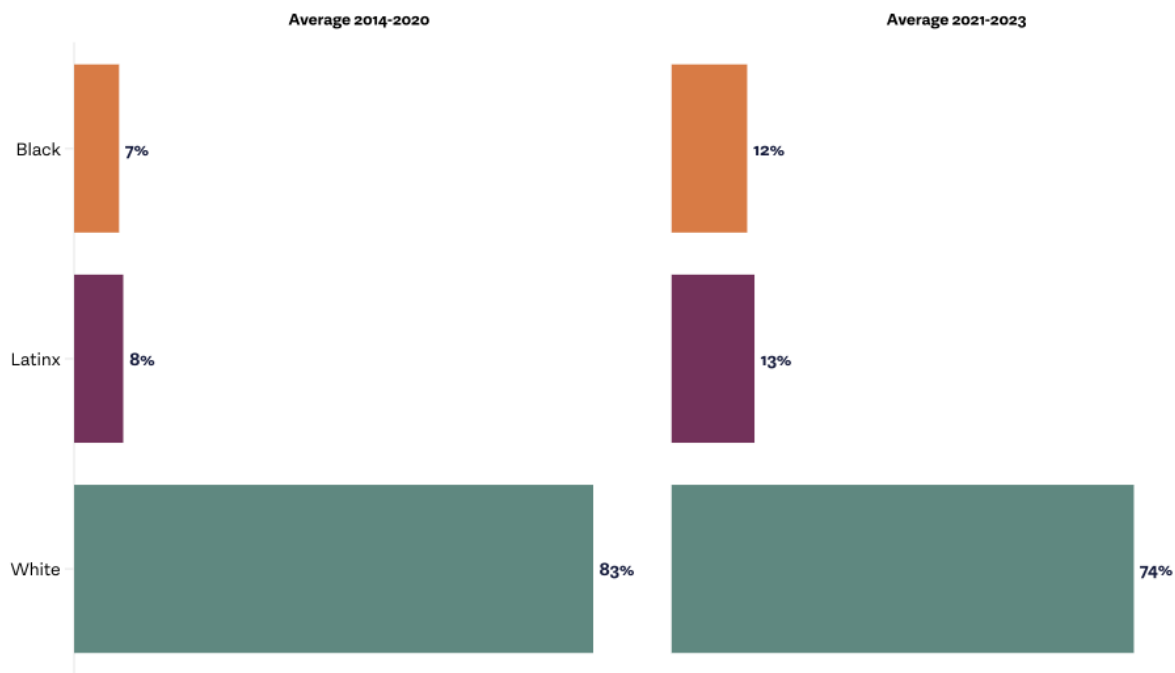
Black and Latinx drivers were stopped at disproportionately high rates compared to their shares of the resident population, and this disparity appeared to increase after the first assessment period. For example, Black people are 2% of Watertown's resident population, but made up 7% of all drivers stopped during the first assessment period and 12% of all drivers stopped during the second period. The driving population in any jurisdiction is likely to include commuters and other non-residents who may have a different racial makeup than local Census data, so using local demographics as a benchmark can only provide a rough estimate of racial disparities in vehicle stops. However, given the increased proportions of stops made up of Black and Latinx drivers between the two reporting periods, this apparent disparity warrants further investigation. Despite the apparent stop rate disparities, there do not seem to be any disparities in stop reasons. Drivers of each racial group were stopped for similar reasons, with more than 90% of all stops across both assessment periods conducted for moving violations. The proportion of stops for non-moving violations—such as those conducted for broken tail lights, expired license plates, or investigatory reasons—decreased from 15% of stops during the first assessment period to 9% of stops during the second period. These types of low-level stops are often pretextual and [have been shown](#) to drive racial disparities in police contact without benefitting public safety. Moving Violations, on the other hand, include things like speeding or running a red light that have clear implications for road safety. WPD's increased prioritization of moving violations represents progress toward more equitable and [safety-related traffic enforcement](#). The persistence of apparent stop rate disparities despite this progress suggests Watertown, like any jurisdiction, may benefit from investments in [public health approaches to road safety](#).

WPD also made considerable progress in addressing racial disparities in search rates, which may be largely attributed to changes to state law in recent years. During the first assessment period, WPD officers searched Black and Latinx drivers more than 4 times as often as White drivers once stopped. After [Connecticut banned the vast majority of consent searches](#), Black and Latinx drivers were only searched half as often as White drivers once stopped. These are searches conducted based on the consent of the person stopped, rather than on the basis of probable cause, and they have been shown to [drive racial disparities](#) in search rates around the country. Consent searches are also much [less likely](#) to result in the discovery of contraband than probable cause searches, so limiting them is a promising strategy to reduce disproportionate searches of Black and Latinx drivers without adversely affecting public safety.

During both assessment periods, officers released most drivers they stopped with a warning or no action taken. Across all racial groups combined, the proportion of stops ending with a warning or no action increased from 68% during the first assessment period to 77% during the second period. There are two possible explanations for this stop outcome: either the officer had reason to take further action—for example, by arresting or citing the driver—but decided not to, or the officer had no cause for further action, calling into question whether the stop was necessary. Given the fact that more than 90% of stops were for moving violations, which are inherently ticketable offenses, the relatively low citation rate is more likely to be driven by officer leniency than unnecessary stops. However, WPD should further analyze these stops to determine whether there are opportunities to continue reducing non-safety-related stops.

VEHICLE STOPS BY RACIAL GROUP

Vehicle Stops by Racial Group, Segmented by Assessment Period



Center for Policing Equity | Data provided by Watertown PD 2014 - 2023

This analysis compares the racial makeup of Watertown Police Department's vehicle stops recorded during the first assessment period (from 2014 – 2020) with those recorded during the second assessment period (from 2021 – 2023).

- **Black people made up 7% of all drivers stopped during the first assessment period and 12% of all drivers stopped during the second assessment period.**
- **Latinx people made up 8% of all drivers stopped during the first assessment period and 13% of all drivers stopped during the second assessment period.**
- **White people made up 83% of all drivers stopped during the first assessment period and 74% of all drivers stopped during the second assessment period.**

This analysis does not directly compare traffic stops to local demographics because the local driving population is more likely to include commuters and other non-resident people that may have a different racial makeup than local Census data. However, if the share of people stopped while driving differs significantly from the [resident population](#), it may indicate that there are racial disparities in vehicle stops due to police behaviors or policies.

More information

What does this show?

Each bar in the first column shows the average percentage of stops recorded for each racial group during the entire assessment period. The bars in each of the following columns show the percentages of stops recorded for each racial group during each year of the assessment period. Hovering over a bar shows the number of stops that makes up that percentage.

How was this calculated?

We took the average number of stops recorded per year and calculated the percentage of stops that were made of people of each racial group. See the Data Notes tab for information on how we define racial groups.

We measure a vehicle stop as a single record of a driver being stopped by police, regardless of the number of officers or passengers involved. We recognize that departments may collect vehicle stop data in other ways (for example, not distinguishing between searches of drivers and passengers). Our [guidance](#) on collecting data has more information on how to effectively report vehicle stops.

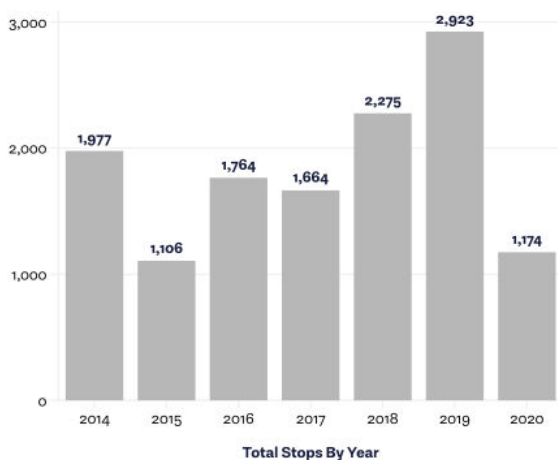
We generally use all vehicle stops data provided by departments, including incomplete years of data. However, certain analyses require complete years of data, so time periods may vary across charts.

Data required for this analysis:

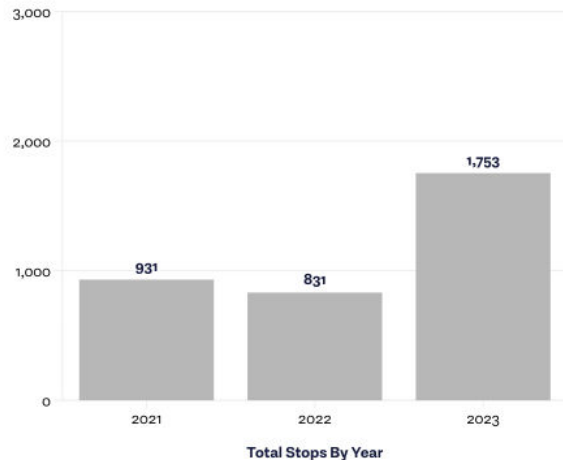
- Incident unique identifier
- Date of incident
- Driver's racial group

VEHICLE STOPS BY YEAR

Vehicle Stops Per Year, Segmented by Assessment Period



Center for Policing Equity | Data provided by Watertown PD 2014 - 2020



Center for Policing Equity | Data provided by Watertown PD 2021 - 2023

During the first assessment period, the total number of vehicle stops recorded each year reached a high of 2,923 in 2019 before decreasing by 60% in 2020, likely in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic. During the second assessment period, the annual number of vehicle stops reached a low of 831 in 2022 before returning to pre-pandemic levels in 2023.

More information

What does this show?

This chart shows the number of vehicle stops recorded during each year of the assessment period for all racial groups combined.

Disruptions related to the COVID 19 pandemic may have affected the volume of police-community interactions recorded in 2020 and 2021, although the extent of this impact likely varies by jurisdiction according to the local policies and restrictions implemented in response to the outbreak. It is worth noting whether or the extent to which racial disparities persisted over this time period, despite the reduction in overall police activity.

How was this calculated?

We measure a vehicle stop as a single record of a driver being stopped by police, regardless of the number of officers or passengers involved.

Data required for this analysis:

- Incident unique identifier
- Date of incident

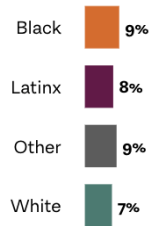
VEHICLE STOP REASONS BY RACIAL GROUP

Vehicle Stop Reasons by Racial Group, Segmented by Assessment Period

Share of Stops for Each Racial Group, %

Stops from 2014-2020

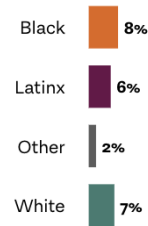
Equipment / License / Registration Stops



Total # of stops 993 (8% of all stops)

Stops from 2021-2023

Equipment / License / Registration Stops



Total # of stops 240 (7% of all stops)

Moving Violation Stops



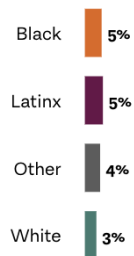
Total # of stops 11,657 (89% of all stops)

Moving Violation Stops



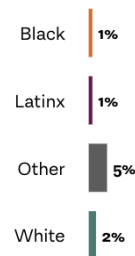
Total # of stops 3,210 (91% of all stops)

Investigatory Stops



Total # of stops 446 (3% of all stops)

Investigatory Stops



Total # of stops 65 (2% of all stops)

Center for Policing Equity | Data provided by Watertown PD 2014 - 2023

This analysis compares the stop reasons most often recorded for drivers of each racial group during each assessment period.

- **Vehicle stop reasons were relatively similar for drivers of each racial group during both assessment periods.**

- **Moving Violation Stops made up 89% of all vehicle stops recorded during the first assessment period and increased to 91% of stops during the second assessment period.**
- **Investigatory Stops and Equipment / License / Registration Stops made up 11% of all vehicle stops recorded during the first assessment period and decreased to 9% of stops during the second assessment period.**

Stops that are not based on any direct risks to road safety or evidence of criminal activity—such as investigatory stops, equipment stops, and license or registration checks—are less likely to be efficient uses of departmental resources and more likely to [contribute to racial disparities](#). Watertown Police Department’s increasing focus on Moving Violations therefore represents progress toward more equitable and [public-safety-related traffic enforcement](#).

More information

What does this show?

Each of the above graphs show the racial distribution of stops recorded for a different stop reason. The colored bars within each graph show the percentage of all stops of drivers of that racial group for which that stop reason was recorded. Hovering over a colored bar shows the number of stops that make up that percentage. Any stop reason that was recorded in a high number of stops, or that has large disparities, will influence the racial makeup of vehicle stops overall.

The most common reason for contact with the police in the United States is being the driver in a traffic stop, and Black people are more likely to be stopped by police. Black people may also be more likely to be stopped for reasons that tend to be less related to public safety –such as equipment stops and license or registration checks– which unnecessarily increases their likelihood of being [searched](#), experiencing police use of [force](#), and being [killed](#) by police. Jurisdictions should invest in [evidence-informed practices](#) that reduce the footprint of policing on traffic safety to address persistent racial disparities in traffic enforcement that pose an ongoing public safety risk to Black people.

How was this calculated?

We took the total recorded stops of drivers of each racial group and calculated the percentage made for each reason. We then grouped these percentages according to stop reason.

We combine categories of reasons for easier interpretation. See the Data Notes tab for details on how these categories are created and how racial groups are defined.

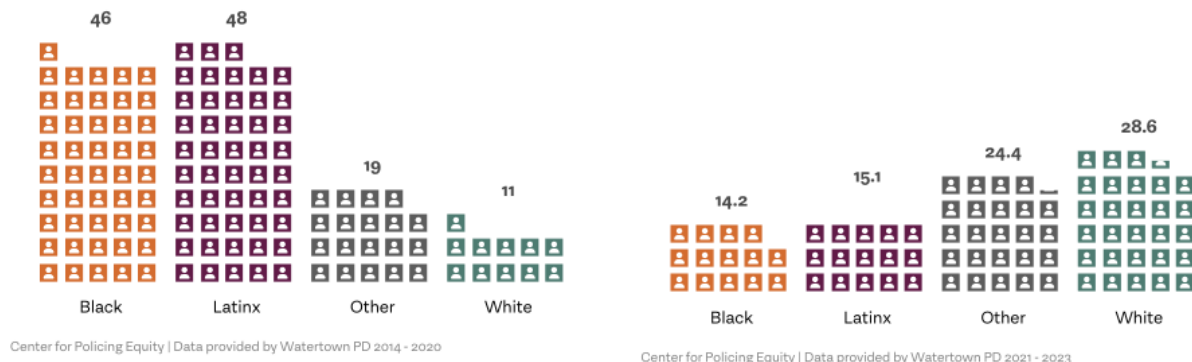
Data required for this analysis:

- Incident unique identifier
- Date of incident
- Driver's racial group
- Stop reason

SEARCH RATES AT VEHICLE STOPS BY RACIAL GROUP

Search Rates by Racial Group, Segmented By Assessment Period

Searches per 1,000 stops



This analysis compares how often officers recorded searching drivers in each racial group during each assessment period.

- During the first assessment period, officers searched Black and Latinx drivers more than 4 times as often as White drivers once stopped.
- During the second assessment period, officers searched Black and Latinx drivers 0.5 times as often as White drivers once stopped.

Effective October 1, 2020, the state of Connecticut enacted a [near-total ban on consent searches](#), which are searches conducted based on the consent of the person stopped by police rather than on the basis of probable cause. [CPE's research](#) shows that Black people are more likely to experience consent searches, so banning them is likely to help reduce racial disparities in search rates. Connecticut also legalized recreational use of marijuana for adults aged 21 or over as of July 1, 2021, which may reduce searches conducted based on “odor of contraband.”

More information

What does this show?

Each colored bar shows the percentage of all stops of drivers of that racial group for which that stop outcome was recorded. Hovering over a bar shows the number of stops that makes up that percentage.

Findings on recorded traffic stop outcomes should be interpreted in context with findings on racial disparities in recorded stop reasons and searches at traffic stops. People of racial groups who are stopped more frequently are often also more likely to be stopped for reasons that tend to be less related to public safety, which may increase their likelihood of being released with a warning or no action taken, as well as decrease their likelihood of receiving a citation. People who are more likely to be stopped despite not committing any crime or infraction are subject to a greater burden of police contact, which increases the likelihood of a cascade of [interrelated harms](#) including arrest, criminalization, and even injury or death.

How was this calculated?

We took the total recorded stops of drivers in each racial group and calculated the percentages for which each enforcement outcome was recorded. We then grouped these percentages according to enforcement outcome.

We combine categories of outcomes for easier interpretation. See the Data Notes tab for details on how these categories are created and how racial groups are defined.

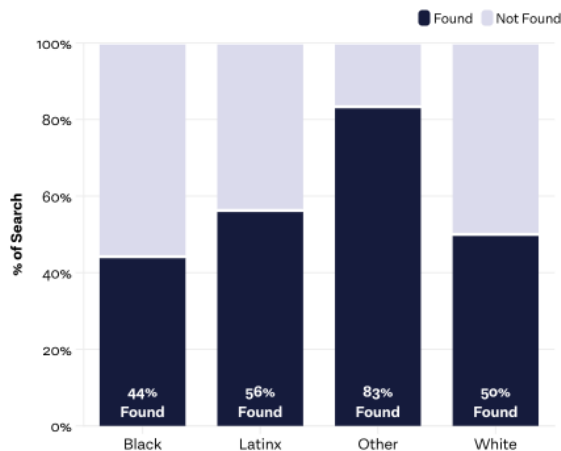
Data required for this analysis:

- Incident unique identifier
- Date of incident
- Driver's racial group
- Stop outcome (e.g. arrest, citation, or warning/no action)

COMPARING SEARCH OUTCOMES AT VEHICLE STOPS

Search Outcomes by Racial Group, Segmented by Assessment Period

Search Outcomes from 2014-2020



Center for Policing Equity | Data provided by Watertown PD 2014 - 2020

Search Outcomes from 2021-2023

Watertown Police Department officers only conducted 88 [discretionary searches](#) from 2021 – 2023. There were too few of these searches of Black, Latinx, and Other drivers to analyze search outcomes by racial group during this time period.

Officers discovered contraband in 2 of these searches, resulting in a contraband discovery rate of 2%.

One common explanation for racial disparities in stops and searches is that members of some racial groups may be more likely to have contraband. To assess this, this analysis examines how often officers recorded discovering contraband (such as alcohol or stolen goods) in searches of drivers in each racial group during each assessment period.

- During the first assessment period, the discovery rate for Black drivers who were searched was less than the rate for White drivers.
- During the second assessment period, officers conducted a total of 88 discretionary searches, 2 of which resulted in the discovery of contraband. Officers did not conduct enough discretionary searches of Black, Latinx, and Other drivers to assess racial disparities in discovery rates during this period, after Connecticut's near-total ban on consent searches went into effect.

When discovery rates are lower for searches of people experiencing disparities, this may indicate that officers more frequently decide to search members of this group at a lower level of suspicion. When discovery rates are relatively similar across racial groups, it suggests that significant racial disparities in stop and search rates cannot be justified by differences in the outcomes of those searches. It's also important to note that the discovery of contraband at traffic stops is generally [rare](#) and not indicative of a

serious crime. For details on the types of contraband most often discovered, please see “More Information” below.

More information

What does this show?

One common explanation for why members of some racial groups are stopped or searched at different rates is that they may be more likely to have contraband. To assess this, we looked at whether searches of people of different racial groups resulted in contraband being found at different rates for each assessment period. For each racial group, we separated all searches into the percentage that resulted in contraband found and the percentage that resulted in no contraband found.

The darker portion of each bar (on the bottom) shows the percentage of all searches of people of that racial group that ended with contraband found, while the lighter portion of the bar (at the top) shows the percentage where no contraband was found. Hovering over a bar shows the number of searches that make up that percentage.

It is important to compare this chart to the percentage of traffic stops of each racial group, above, to identify which groups may be experiencing a high volume of stops that may lead to high totals of contraband found. It's also important to note that discovered contraband is not necessarily indicative of serious crime. It's **rare** that contraband of any kind is found during a search, and an **even smaller fraction** of discovered contraband is related to serious criminal activity. Many instances of discovered contraband are simple drug possession, gun registration issues, or open containers of alcohol. While more substantial discoveries do occur, they come at the expense of thousands of stops that yield nothing; contraband searches are fundamentally **unproductive** and **do not prevent serious crime**. As such, police are considering more cost-effective strategies to prevent and respond to impaired driving, as well as address other issues like gun violence that more directly implicate public safety.

How was this calculated?

We took the total recorded searches of drivers of each racial group and calculated the percentage that did and did not reveal contraband. This analysis only includes years with complete data. See the Data Notes tab for information on how we define racial groups.

Police are typically required to search people they arrest and vehicles they impound or tow. When the search reason is provided in the law enforcement agency's data, these mandatory searches are excluded from this analysis because they are not necessarily based on an officer's discretionary evaluation of whether they expect to find contraband. Otherwise, this analysis includes any search that was not recorded as mandatory, including both discretionary searches and those with no search reason provided.

See the Data Notes tab for information on how we define racial groups.

Data required for this analysis:

- Incident unique identifier
- Date of incident
- Racial group of person stopped

- Search(es) conducted
- Reason for search
- Contraband found in each search

VEHICLE STOP OUTCOMES BY RACIAL GROUP

Vehicle Stop Outcomes by Racial Group, Segmented by Assessment Period

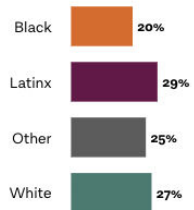
Stops from 2014-2020

Arrest



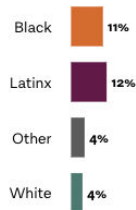
Total # of stops 66 (1% of all stops)

Citation



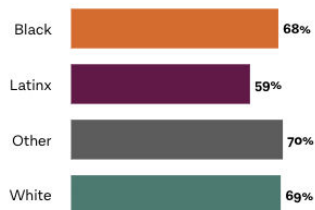
Total # of stops 3,436 (26% of all stops)

Summons



Total # of stops 640 (5% of all stops)

Warning / No Action Taken



Total # of stops 8,954 (68% of all stops)

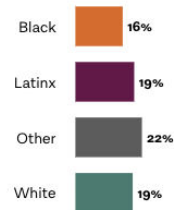
Stops from 2021-2023

Arrest



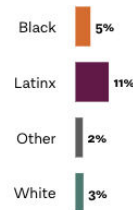
Total # of stops 14 (0.4% of all stops)

Citation



Total # of stops 654 (19% of all stops)

Summons



Total # of stops 142 (4% of all stops)

Warning / No Action Taken



Total # of stops 2,705 (77% of all stops)

This analysis compares the stop outcomes recorded for drivers of each racial group during each assessment period.

- Officers released most stopped drivers in each racial group with a Warning or No Action Taken during both assessment periods. 68% of all drivers stopped during the first assessment period and 77% of drivers stopped during the second assessment period were released with a Warning or No Action Taken.
- During the first assessment period, officers issued Summons to Black and Latinx drivers who were stopped 2.8 and 3 times as often as White drivers, respectively. During the second assessment period, Latinx drivers received Summons 3.7 times as often as White drivers, while Black drivers received Summons at similar rates to White drivers.
- Officers arrested drivers who were stopped in each racial group at similar rates during both assessment periods. 0.5% of all drivers stopped during the first assessment period and 0.4% of all drivers stopped during the second assessment period were arrested.

Drivers who are stopped despite not posing any clear risk to public safety are unnecessarily exposed to a risk of harmful stop outcomes including searches, arrests, and use of force. Continuing to reduce [low-level stops](#) can help reduce racial disparities in policing and free up departmental resources for more critical public safety needs.

More information

What does this show?

The above charts show the outcomes of vehicle stops of drivers in each racial group during each assessment period. The charts on the left show stop outcomes recorded during the first assessment period, while the charts on the right show the stop outcomes recorded during the second assessment period. Each colored bar shows the percentage of all stops of drivers of that racial group for which that stop outcome was recorded. Hovering over a bar shows the number of stops that makes up that percentage.

Findings on recorded vehicle stop outcomes should be interpreted in context with findings on racial disparities in recorded stop reasons and searches at vehicle stops. People of racial groups who are stopped more frequently are often also more likely to be stopped for reasons that tend to be less related to public safety, which may increase their likelihood of being released with a warning or no action taken, as well as decrease their likelihood of receiving a citation. People who are more likely to be stopped despite not committing any crime or infraction are subject to a greater burden of police contact, which increases the likelihood of a cascade of [interrelated harms](#) including arrest, criminalization, and even injury or death.

How was this calculated?

For each assessment period, we took the total recorded stops of drivers of each racial group and calculated the percentages for which each enforcement outcome was recorded. We then grouped these percentages according to enforcement outcome.

We combine categories of stop outcomes for easier interpretation. This analysis only includes years with complete data. See the Data Notes tab for details on how these categories are created and how racial groups are defined.

Data required for this analysis:

- Incident unique identifier
- Date of incident
- Driver's racial group
- Stop outcome (e.g. arrest, citation, or warning/no action)

PEDESTRIAN STOPS

Pedestrian stops refer to when an officer stopped a member of the public who was walking on foot.

The Watertown Police Department did not collect data on pedestrian stops during the assessment period. CPE recommends that departments collect data on all types of stops in order to receive analyses that serve as a starting point for addressing disparities in policing.

Learn [why policing data collection matters](#) and [how departments can collect data](#) required to receive Justice Navigator results on pedestrian stops.

CALLS FOR SERVICE AND OFFICER-INITIATED ACTIVITY

This section analyzes recorded police activity and Calls for Service to understand community requests for public safety services and identify areas where police activity may not be aligned with Calls for Service.

Data presented in this section reflect Watertown Police Department's (WPD) police activities recorded during the current assessment period (July 1, 2020 – December 31, 2023) and during [WPD's previous assessment period](#) (January 1, 2014 – June 30, 2020). Where possible, findings from this assessment period are compared to the corresponding findings from WPD's previous assessment period. Changes in police activity over time can be driven by a variety of factors both inside and outside of Departments' control, so these findings should be interpreted alongside context on local [factors that can impact policing in Watertown](#).

We include data on all **Calls for Service** (events reported via 911 calls, non-emergency calls to the department, direct contact with officers, or 311 calls that were routed to the police for a response) as well as all other recorded police activity, including **Officer-Initiated Activities** (events that officers initiated based on their own observations or assignment, rather than in response to Calls for Service). We request data only for events involving police, and not those solely addressed by fire or emergency medical responders. This data comes from Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) systems, a central recording platform used by dispatchers to record Calls for Service and by officers to record their self-initiated activity, such as vehicle and pedestrian stops. In most jurisdictions, events recorded in CAD systems are not linkable to incidents recorded in police datasets on stops or use of force.

Insights on the type and volume of Calls for Service initiated by community members help identify the scope of community needs and the extent to which police are being asked to perform activities that should or could be handled by non-police responders. Mismatches between Calls for Service and deployment can shed light on potential inefficiencies that may be contributing to inequitable policing. It is important to note that

Officer-Initiated Activity may also be influenced by community requests for public safety services that are not captured in the Calls for Service data, such as public safety concerns communicated to officers in community forums or council meetings. Calls for Service data also do not capture public safety concerns that community members did not call 911 or seek police services to address, making them an incomplete measure of community members' public safety priorities.

It is important to note that Officer-Initiated Activity may be influenced by community requests for public safety services that are not captured in the Calls for Service data, such as public safety concerns communicated to officers in community forums or council meetings. Calls for Service data also do not capture public safety concerns that community members did not call 911 or seek police services to address, making them an imperfect measure of community members' public safety priorities.

Note: CPE was unable to conduct some analyses that compare Officer-Initiated Activity to Calls for Service because Watertown Police Department's data did not explicitly distinguish events initiated by police from events initiated by a Call for Service. When data provided by the department do not distinguish between Officer-Initiated Activities and police responses to Calls for Service, our analyses will primarily examine events by event type. Mapping Calls for Service against Officer-Initiated Activity can reveal areas where officers are disproportionately initiating police activity, as well as what types of enforcement police are initiating that the community has not directly asked for via a Call for Service.

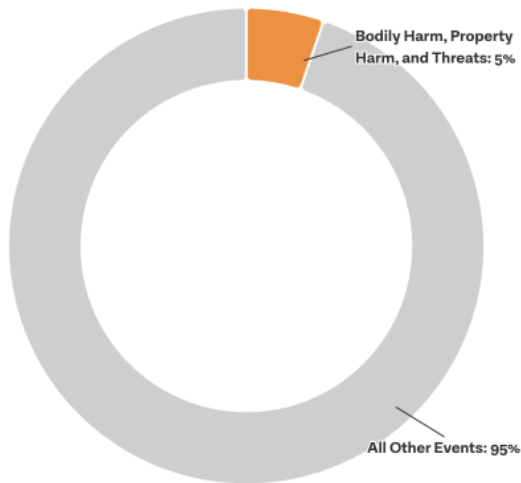
For more details on the types of events included in these analyses, see "More information" under the first chart in this section.

1. [CALLS FOR SERVICE AND OFFICER-INITIATED ACTIVITIES BY EVENT TYPE](#)
2. [CALLS FOR SERVICE](#)
3. [POLICE INTERVENTIONS IN MENTAL HEALTH CRISES](#)
4. [PUBLIC ORDER CONCERNS, NUISANCES, AND SUSPICIOUS BEHAVIOR](#)
5. [DENSITY OF OFFICER-INITIATED ACTIVITIES RELATIVE TO CALLS FOR SERVICE](#)

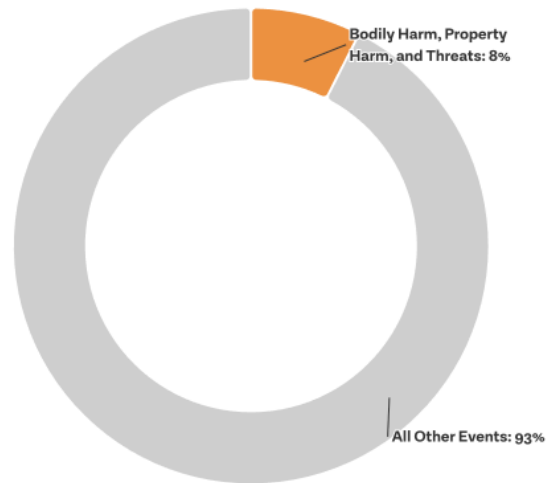
CALLS FOR SERVICE AND OFFICER-INITIATED ACTIVITIES BY EVENT TYPE

Percentage of Calls for Service and Officer-Initiated Activities by Event Type, Segmented by Assessment Period

Jan. 2014 - June 2020



July 2020 - Dec. 2023



Center for Policing Equity | Data provided by the Watertown Police Department 2014 - 2023

This analysis compares the number and types of events officers were involved in during the first assessment period (from January 2014 – June 2020) and the second assessment period (from July 2020 – December 2023). This includes both Officer-Initiated Activities and police responses to Calls for Service.

- **Officers were involved in an average of 13,379 events per year during the first assessment period, which increased to an average of 16,381 events per year during the second assessment period.**
- **5% of events recorded during the first assessment period involved Bodily Harm, Property Harm, or Threats, compared to 8% of events recorded during the second assessment period. All Other Events during both assessment periods involved no report of Bodily Harm, Property Harm, or Threats.**

For more detail on how events were categorized, see the More Information drop down.

More information

What does this show?

The pie chart above shows three categories of events: those involving Bodily Harm, Property Harm, or Threats; Other Officer-Initiated Activity; and Other Calls for Service. The percentages are based on the number of events police recorded in each category, rather than the amount of time officers spent on each event type.

“Bodily Harm, Property Harm and Threats” includes all events involving either Bodily Harm (such as assault, robbery, or kidnapping), Property Harm (such as theft, burglary, arson, or vandalism), or Threats (such as harassment, shots heard, or extortion), regardless of whether the event was Officer-Initiated or initiated by a Call for Service. “Bodily Harm” is meant to capture events involving Bodily Harm crimes where a police response is required. This is not meant to include events involving accidental injuries where emergency medical services are the necessary responder, such as auto accidents not involving any serious or violent crime.

“Other Calls for Service” includes any events that did not involve Bodily Harm, Property Harm, or Threats and that were reported via 911 calls, non-emergency calls to the department, direct contact with officers, or 311 calls that were routed to the police for response.

“Other Officer-Initiated Activity” includes any events that did not involve Bodily Harm, Property Harm, or Threats that officers initiated based on their own observations or assignment, rather than in response to Calls for Service. This includes officers being assigned to particular activities (such as a patrol or school resource assignment), any requests for assistance from other officers or from outside agencies, and other activities police typically have some discretion over (such as vehicle and pedestrian stops).

How did we calculate this?

This data comes from Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) systems, a central recording platform for all Officer-Initiated Activity and responses to Calls for Service. CAD is used by dispatchers to record Calls for Service and by officers to record their self-initiated activity, such as vehicle and pedestrian stops.

First, we categorized all recorded events into one of the three categories: those involving Bodily Harm, Property Harm, or Threats Other Officer-Initiated Activity; or Other Calls for Service. We then determined the number of events officers recorded in each of these event types. Finally, we calculated the percentage of all events officers recorded in each category by dividing the number of events in each category by the total number of events in all three categories.

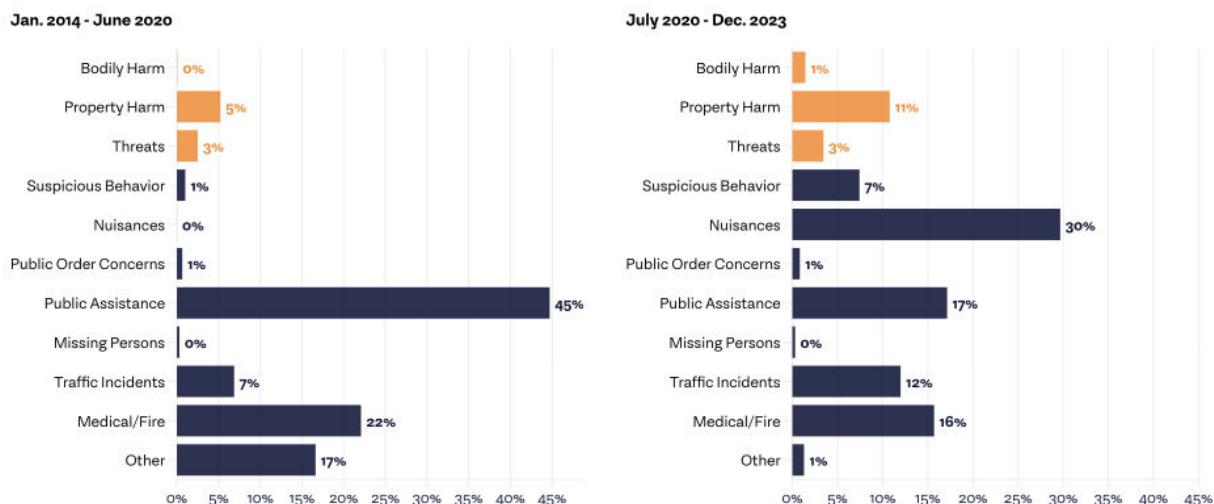
Event categories are based on the initial call reason (provided to the dispatcher) or activity description (provided by the officer). Visit the Data Notes tab for details on the exact call types included and how they were categorized.

Data required for this analysis:

- Incident unique identifier
- Call origin or officer-initiated flag
- Incident type/reason

CALLS FOR SERVICE

Calls for Service by Call Reason, Segmented by Assessment Period



Center for Policing Equity | Data provided by the Watertown Police Department 2014 - 2023

This analysis compares the reasons for which community members most often called emergency services during each assessment period.

- **The proportion of Calls for Service involving Bodily Harm, Property Harm, or Threats increased from 8% during the first assessment period to 15% during the second assessment period.**

Some of these calls may not require an armed response or may be better addressed via [community-centered response models](#). For more detail on how events were categorized, see the “More Information” drop down below.

More information

What does this show?

This figure only includes Calls for Service (events that were requested via 911 calls, non-emergency calls to the department, direct contact with officers, or 311 calls that were routed to the police for response). It does not include any events categorized as Officer-Initiated Activity.

This figure is meant to highlight the reasons for which community members are most often calling emergency services. This can help evaluate how often a police response is necessary, and whether there are sufficient Calls for Service that may not require a police response to warrant considering the use of alternative response models.

How did we calculate this?

First, we excluded all events categorized as Officer-Initiated Activity. If the data provided by the police do not indicate which events were Officer-Initiated, we categorized event type descriptions involving warrants, alarms or non-dispatched calls as Officer-Initiated, and then grouped all other event types as Calls for Service. Non-dispatched calls include requests for assistance from other officers or outside law enforcement agencies, activities that appear to be officer assignments (such as “directed patrol” or “walking the beat”), and other activities police typically have some discretion over (such as “traffic stop,” “subject stop,” “area check,” or “follow up”).

Then we categorized the Calls for Service based on the caller’s complaint type and calculated the percentage of calls in each category.

Data required for this analysis:

- Incident unique identifier
- Call origin or officer-initiated flag
- Incident type/reason

POLICE INTERVENTIONS IN MENTAL HEALTH CRISES

From January 2014 through June 2020, officers intervened in a total of 580 events recorded as involving individuals experiencing mental health crises, averaging 89 mental health events per year.

From July 2020 through December 2023, officers intervened in a total of 507 events recorded as involving individuals experiencing mental health crises, averaging 145 mental health events per year.

Center for Policing Equity | Data provided by Watertown Police Department 2014 – 2023

The average number of police interventions in mental health crises per year increased from 89 during the first assessment period to 145 during the second assessment period. This suggests an increased need for community mental health services, but may also reflect improvements in officers’ and dispatchers’ ability to identify individuals experiencing mental health crises.

Officers and 911 dispatchers are often not equipped to recognize or assist people experiencing mental health crises, so the number of “mental health” events reported above may underestimate the full extent of opportunities to reduce police interventions in the types of health and social issues that are routinely handled by existing unarmed community-based response programs around the country. Relying on police to address

incidents related to mental health issues can unnecessarily escalate a mental health emergency to an incident ending in [incarceration, use of force or death](#).

More information

What does this show?

This figure shows the number of times officers recorded being involved in or responding to reports of people who were perceived as experiencing mental health crises. This figure only represents incidents that police or dispatchers coded with labels that clearly indicate a mental health-related event. Therefore, these findings likely underestimate the full extent of police interventions in the types of health and social issues that are routinely handled by existing unarmed community-based response programs around the country. The events in this figure include both Officer-Initiated Activities and police responses to Calls for Service.

Community-based response models — such as CAHOOTS (Eugene, Oregon), STAR (Denver, Colorado), BHEARD (New York City), and Portland Street Response — have generated early evidence showing that unarmed crisis services can effectively divert people experiencing mental health emergencies away from arrest and hospitalization, decrease the repeated use of such crisis services in the future, and improve the health of people who need emergency mental health care.

How did we calculate this?

To calculate this, we counted the number of events — both Officer-Initiated Activities and Calls for Service — in which a recorded event reason included terms such as “mental health,” “emotionally disturbed,” “suicide,” or “behavioral health.” This figure may undercount the number of police interventions in behavioral health-related incidents, as we did not include incidents police or dispatchers coded with labels such as “citizen assist,” “welfare check,” or “disturbance.” Such labels sometimes do — and sometimes do not — indicate a mental health-related event.

Data required for this analysis:

- Incident unique identifier
- Incident type/reason

PUBLIC ORDER CONCERNS, NUISANCES, AND SUSPICIOUS BEHAVIOR



Data on Public Order Concern, Nuisance, and Suspicious Behavior Events were provided by the Watertown Police Department. However, location data were not recorded with enough detail to geocode 64% of events in the data. This analysis requires location data for at least 85% of recorded events in order to reliably assess the distribution of these events throughout the jurisdiction. For details on how this analysis is calculated, see “More information” below.

More information

What does this show?

This figure shows where in the jurisdiction enforcement events recorded as involving “Public Order Concerns,” “Nuisances,” and “Suspicious Behavior” were most highly concentrated per capita. The events in this figure are Officer-Initiated Activities, and not police responses to Calls for Service.

Census tracts shaded in the darkest colors had the highest concentrations of these events. Areas shaded in the lightest or second-lightest colors represent census tracts with relatively low or average concentrations of these events, respectively. Areas shaded in the darker third, fourth and fifth colors have high enough concentrations that they are respectively considered low-level, moderate or high statistical outliers relative to other tracts in the jurisdiction. Not all jurisdictions will include tracts shaded in each of these five colors. For example, a city with no high outliers would not have tracts in the fifth (darkest) color; a city with no moderate outliers would not have tracts in the fourth color, and so on.

How did we calculate this?

To assess the distribution of these events, we calculated the number of events recorded as involving Public Order Concerns, Nuisances, and Suspicious Behavior per 1,000 residents in each census tract—

small geographic areas of approximately 4,000 residents — as defined by the Census Bureau. We then sort these into five even, ordinal categories (“quintiles”). The 20% of census tracts with the fewest number of events are in the first quintile and the 20% of census tracts with the most events are in the last category, with the remaining 60% evenly divided across the three middle quintiles in order relative to their frequencies of events. Both Officer-Initiated Activities and Calls for Service are included in this calculation.

To examine whether police recorded more of these events per capita in areas with a higher proportion of Black residents, we used publicly available Census data to measure the percentage of Black residents in each census tract. We compare the number of events to the percentage of Black residents in each tract to see if tracts with higher percentages of Black residents also have more of these events.

We take into account the share of Black residents in an area because this factor affects the likelihood that a person of any racial group in an area will have police contact. This relationship between police presence and the percentage of Black residents in an area is, in part, a result of systemic racism and structural disadvantage. For example, disinvestment in disproportionately Black communities often means police are called in to deal with issues, like infrastructure failure, that could otherwise be resolved through effective resourcing. But police-driven factors, such as departmental policy or officer behavior, also contribute to increased police activity in areas with more Black residents.

Data required for this analysis:

- Incident unique identifier
- Incident type/reason
- Officer-initiated flag
- Incident location

DENSITY OF OFFICER-INITIATED ACTIVITIES RELATIVE TO CALLS FOR SERVICE



Data on Public Order Concern, Nuisance, and Suspicious Behavior Events were provided by the Watertown Police Department. However, location data were not

recorded with enough detail to geocode 64% of events in the data. This analysis requires location data for at least 85% of recorded events in order to reliably assess the distribution of these events throughout the jurisdiction. For details on how this analysis is calculated, see “More information” below.

More information

What does this show?

This figure shows where in the jurisdiction there might be a mismatch between direct community requests for police presence and deployment directed by the department. Areas shaded in the lightest or second-lightest colors represent census tracts with relatively low or average ratios of Officer-Initiated Activities to Calls for Service, respectively. Areas shaded in the darker third, fourth and fifth colors have high enough ratios that they are considered respectively low-, moderate-, and high-level statistical outliers relative to other tracts in the jurisdiction. Not all jurisdictions will include tracts shaded in each of these five colors. For example, a city with no high outliers would not have tracts in the fifth (darkest) color; a city with no moderate outliers would not have tracts in the fourth color, and so on.

How did we calculate this?

First, we calculated the number of recorded events that were Officer-Initiated Activities and the number that were police responses to Calls for Service using the department’s indication of which events were Officer-Initiated. If the data provided by the police had an indicator of which events were Officer-Initiated, we used that. If the data do not explicitly indicate which events were Officer-Initiated, we categorized event type descriptions involving warrants, alarms, or non-dispatched calls as Officer-Initiated, and then grouped all other event types as Calls for Service. Non-dispatched calls include requests for assistance from other officers or outside law enforcement agencies, activities that appear to be officer assignments (such as “directed patrol” or “walking the beat”), and other activities police typically have some discretion over (such as “traffic stop,” “subject stop,” “area check,” or “follow up”).

Next, we calculate the number of Officer-Initiated Activities per 1,000 Calls for Service by dividing the number of Officer-Initiated Activities by the number of Calls for Service and multiplying by 1,000. We sort these into five categories of census tracts — small geographic areas of approximately 4,000 residents, as defined by the Census Bureau — so that the 20% of tracts with the lowest ratio of Officer-Initiated Activities to Calls for Service are in the first category, the 20% of tracts with the highest ratio are in the last category, and the remaining 60% are divided evenly across the middle three categories in order relative to their ratios. Finally, we map these census tracts, with darker colors indicating tracts with higher levels of Officer-Initiated Activity relative to the number of Calls for Service.

Data required for this analysis:

- Incident unique identifier
- Incident type/reason
- Incident location

DATA NOTES

This section contains information on how CPE defines and categorizes the data collected from departments.

DEFINING RACIAL GROUPS AND STANDARD CATEGORIES

Defining racial groups:

CPE uses “racial group” to refer to groups described in departmental records by racial category (e.g., Hispanic or Latino, Asian, Black, Native, White). When we compare departmental records of incidents to local demographic data, these racial groups are mapped onto Census data for the following groups: Hispanic (referred to as “Latinx” in this assessment), non-Hispanic Asian, non-Hispanic Black, non-Hispanic Native American, and non-Hispanic White. The “Other” category, if used, combines racial groups making up less than 2% of incidents (except when referring to the resident population, in which case it matches the Census Bureau’s definition of “Other” racial group).

Our use of “racial” as a shorthand for these groups does not represent a claim that any person belongs to any monolithic “race,” or indeed that the category of “race” has any objective or biological meaning, apart from its social and political context. We acknowledge the historic and deliberate use of racial categories in crime statistics to link criminality to Black people, a bias that continues to affect marginalized communities and people in the criminal justice system today. We also recognize that the terms we use to describe racial groups are not universally accepted or preferred by members of the groups they describe. We aim to use terms which are inclusive, widely understood, and unlikely to offend.

Standardizing categories:

Each law enforcement agency collects stop, search, use of force, and racial data in its own way. In order to interpret data consistently across departments, we sort the data

received from departments into standardized categories. The following tables show the categories used by the department and how we translate them into CPE categories. The “LEA-Provided Value” column contains the categories that the department provided to CPE, and the “CPE Standardized” column shows the corresponding category CPE used in this assessment.

Stop data collected under California’s Racial and Identity Profiling Act (RIPA) do not separate vehicle stops from pedestrian stops; however, they do indicate whether a stop was initiated due to a traffic violation. Therefore, when using data collected under RIPA, we categorize any stops for which the recorded reason is “traffic violation” as “vehicle stops,” and all other stops are categorized as “pedestrian stops.” However, we acknowledge that some reasons categorized under pedestrian stops in this assessment could also apply to vehicle stops (such as “reasonable suspicion” or “knowledge of outstanding arrest/wanted person”).

For more information about why certain results were not displayed, a detailed list of data requirements for each analysis is available under “More information,” beneath the relevant chart.