



# CONTACTS BETWEEN POLICE AND THE PUBLIC

*Findings from the Alaska Police – Public Contact Survey, 2022*

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# KEY FINDINGS

1. Past-year contact with police is common among Alaskans age 18 or older, and extends beyond formal interactions with police.
2. Police-public contacts should be understood as both interactional (person-level) and institutional (organization-level) encounters.
3. Alaskans age 18 or older are more likely to encounter police within the context of resident-initiated contacts than police-initiated contacts.
4. Police-public contacts display discernable seasonal patterns as well as clear temporal patterning by time of day.
5. Prejudicial behavioral misconduct on the part of police officers is exceedingly rare according to adult Alaskans who had contact with police in the past year.
6. Police use-of-force was rarely reported by those who contacted police in the past year. The vast majority of police-public contacts involved no use-of-force by police at all.
7. A majority of Alaskans age 18 or older who interacted with police in the past year provided positive assessments of police conduct, and a large majority indicated that they would be just as likely or more likely to contact police again in the future.
8. While those who had contact with police viewed their encounters positively, they were nevertheless skeptical that the circumstances that prompted police contact were improved with police involvement.

In 2022, an estimated 63.9% of Alaskans aged 18 or older experienced at least one informal or formal contact with police in the preceding year. Informal contacts included interactions with police in informal, casual settings – that is, settings in which officers were not enacting their official role as police. An estimated 32.7% of Alaskan adults had one or more informal contacts with police in the previous year. Formal contacts with police were official in that they were initiated, by residents or by police, with the intent to solicit or deploy police services in some way, or occurred within some other context (e.g., a meeting or community event) in which police were enacting their formal role. An estimated 52.1% of Alaskan adults had at least one formal contact with police in the preceding year.

These findings, as well as others included in this report, are based on data from the 2022 Alaska Police—Public Contact Survey conducted by the Alaska Justice Information Center.

# THE ALASKA POLICE-PUBLIC CONTACT SURVEY

The Alaska Justice Information Center (AJIC) administered the Alaska Police—Public Contact Survey (PPCS) from May 1, 2022 through September 30, 2022. The primary aims of the PPCS were to develop an Alaska-specific estimate of adult Alaskans who came into contact with police in the preceding 12 months, to describe the nature and outcomes of police—public encounters, and to assess the attitudes and perceptions of adult Alaskans as they pertain to police. The Alaska PPCS survey instrument was developed using modified versions of survey questions included in the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics’ [Police-Public Contact Survey](#), which is the primary data source for police—public contacts in the United States.

## ALASKA ADULT RESIDENTS’ CONTACTS WITH POLICE

### Past-Year Police—Public Contacts

The Alaska PPCS included a variety of questions designed to measure the frequency with which Alaska adults contacted police in the past 12 months (see Table 1). Survey participants were asked about both informal and formal police contacts, as well as contacts that were resident-initiated and contacts that were police-initiated. Participants’ survey responses were used to estimate the percentage of Alaskans aged 18 and over who contacted the police in the preceding year. Table 1 provides estimates for specific police—public contact types (e.g., reporting a crime or disturbance), aggregate estimates for police-initiated and resident-initiated police—public contacts, formal and informal police—public contacts, and an overall police—public contact composite that is inclusive of all police—public contact types. The first data column in Table 1 presents weighted<sup>1</sup> estimates of the percentage of Alaska adults who experienced these various forms of contact with police in the previous 12-months. The second data column shows the margin of error for each police—public contact estimate.

<sup>1</sup>Base weights including place of residence, respondent age, and respondent sex were computed, followed by a correction for survey non-response. In addition, post-stratification weights including place of residence and racial group membership were applied to correct for sampling coverage error. Weights were computed using U.S. Census population data for Alaska, obtained from the [Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development](#).

**Table 1.** Estimated percentage of Alaska residents aged 18 or older who had police contact, by type of police contact.

*Police public contact, past 12 mo.<sup>b</sup>*

Type of police contact, past 12 months	% adult population	Margin of Error
Any Informal or formal contact with police	63.9	± 6.4
Any informal (casual) police-public contact	32.7	± 6.0
Any formal police-public contacts	52.1	± 6.4
Any resident-initiated contact	39.8	± 6.1
Report crime, disturbance	24.1	± 5.1
Report non-crime emergency	14.7	± 4.6
Anti-crime program	1.4	± 1.1
Non-emergency assistance	12.6	± 3.7
Traffic accident	2.2	± 2.5
Any police initiated contact	14.9	± 4.7
Traffic stop (driver)	11.1	± 4.4
Traffic stop (passenger)	4.0	± 2.4
Pedestrian stop	2.3	± 1.7
Police or resident-initiated: Other (unspecified)	15.6	± 4.6

## Notes

a. Data source: Alaska Police-Public Contact Survey (PPCS), 2022.

b. Police public contact measures are not mutually exclusive and therefore estimates do not sum to 100%

## Informal Contact With Police

Survey participants were presented with a single question intended to estimate the percentage of adult Alaskans who interacted with police in informal, casual settings – that is, interactional settings in which officers were not enacting their official role as police. Participants were asked if, in the past 12 months, they had informally socialized with one or more police officers – officers who were family members, friends, neighbors, or acquaintances. Results show that nearly a third of Alaska adults – an estimated 32.7% – had at least one unofficial, casual encounter with one or more police officers in the preceding year.

## *Formal Contact With Police*

All of the remaining police contact questions included in the 2022 PPCS focused on formal encounters with police – that is, contacts with the police that were “official” in that they were initiated, by residents or by police, with the intent to solicit or deploy police services. Formal police-public contacts were separated into two categories: (1) police-public contacts that were initiated by members of the public (“resident-initiated”), and (2) police-public contacts that were initiated by police (“police-initiated”). A total of nine formal police-public contact questions were included in the survey – five resident-initiated contact measures, three police-initiated contact measures, plus one question that asked respondents about any police contact other than the five pre-defined resident-initiated contact and three police-initiated contact measures. Each of the nine formal police-public contact measures are shown in Table 1.

An estimated 52.1% of Alaska residents aged 18 or older had at least one formal contact with police in the past year. Among residents who had contact with police, resident-initiated contacts with police were much more likely than police-initiated contacts: an estimated 39.8% of Alaskan adults had one or more resident-initiated contacts with police in the preceding year, whereas 14.9% were estimated to have had a police-initiated encounter.

Among the nine types of formal police-public contact examined, adult residents were most likely to contact police to report a crime, a disturbance, or some suspicious activity (24.1%). It was also relatively common for adult residents to contact police to report non-crime emergencies (14.7%) and to seek non-emergency assistance (12.6%). An estimated 11.1% of adult Alaskans interacted with police within the context of a traffic stop as drivers, and 4.0% of adult residents encountered police in traffic stops as passengers. Much less common were police-public contacts occurring within the context of anti-crime programs such as Neighborhood Watch (1.4%), traffic accidents (2.2%), and pedestrian stops (2.3%). Finally, an estimated 15.6% of adult Alaska residents had formal encounters with police in other, unspecified circumstances.



## Face-To-Face Contact With Police

Table 2 presents the estimated percentages of Alaskan adults who had face-to-face contact with police officers in the preceding year. More than half of Alaskan adults – an estimated 56.1% – had at least one face-to-face contact with a police officer in the past year, either within the context of a formal interaction or in an informal casual setting.

As noted previously in Table 1, nearly a third of Alaskan adults (32.7%) interacted face-to-face with one or more police officers in informal, social situations in which police were not enacting their official role as police.

A slightly higher percentage of adults (39.8%) had a face-to-face encounter with police in situations whereby an officer was enacting their formal, official capacity. Importantly, formal police—public contacts were much more likely to be initiated by residents than by police. An estimated 26.1% of Alaskan adults experienced face-to-face interactions with police as the result of a resident-initiated contact (e.g., reporting a crime or disturbance, seeking non-emergency assistance from police). In contrast, just 14.9% of Alaskan adults had a face-to-face encounter with police within the context of a police-initiated contact (e.g., traffic or pedestrian stop).

**Table 2.** Estimated percentage of Alaska residents age 18 or older who had face-to-face contact with police, by type of police contact.

*Face-to-face contact w/ police, past 12 mo. (%)<sup>b</sup>*

Context of face-to-face contact w/ police, past 12 mo.	% adult population	Margin of Error
Any Informal or formal contact with police	56.1	± 6.6
Any informal (casual) police-public contact <sup>c</sup>	32.7	± 5.9
Any formal police-public contacts <sup>d</sup>	39.8	± 6.8
Any resident-initiated contact	26.1	± 6.2
Report crime, disturbance	13.1	± 5.3
Report non-crime emergency	8.5	± 4.0
Anti-crime program	1.1	± 1.1
Non-emergency assistance	8.7	± 3.1
Traffic accident	1.9	± 1.1
Any police initiated contact <sup>c</sup>	14.9	± 4.7

### Notes

a. Data source: Alaska Police-Public Contact Survey (PPCS), 2022.

b. Police public contact measures are not mutually exclusive and therefore estimates do not sum to 100%

c. Face-to-face contact with police not directly measured but assumed for police-initiated contacts and informal, casual socializing with police officers. Estimates the same as that provided in table 1.

d. Excludes police or resident-initiated contacts for which a determination of face-to-face contact prevalence was not possible.

The data presented in Table 2 illustrate an important aspect of police—public contacts in Alaska: they were both interactional (person-level) and institutional (organization-level) encounters. Police—public contacts are interactional in that they frequently, although certainly not always, involve face-to-face interaction between residents and one or more police officers. However, police—public contacts are also institutional in that they involve interactions between residents and police agencies, departments and organizations, but not necessarily police officers, and quite often these contacts occur outside the context of direct, face-to-face interactions at all (e.g., using a phone to call police dispatch, accessing an electronic form on a web page to make a report).

To illustrate these dual aspects of police—public contacts in Alaska, consider reporting a crime or disturbance. As shown in Table 1, an estimated 24.1% of Alaskan adults contacted police to report a crime or disturbance. However, as shown in Table 2, just 13.1% engaged in a face-to-face encounter with a police officer when making such a report. Thus, just over half of all Alaskan adults who contacted the police to report a crime or disturbance ended up having a face-to-face interaction with a police officer. Similarly, while 14.7% of Alaskan adults contacted the police for assistance with non-crime emergencies (see Table 1), just 8.5% of Alaskan adults had a face-to-face interaction with a police officer upon reporting a non-crime emergency (see Table 2). These findings are not surprising given the multiple ways residents can initiate contact with police agencies in Alaska and elsewhere to report crimes, disturbances, and suspicious activities as well as other requests for police assistance such as medical emergencies and mental or behavioral health crises. Oftentimes, such contacts are resolved without a member of the public directly interacting with police officers.

Still, some types of police—public contact have much higher rates of direct, face-to-face interaction with police officers. Certainly, police-initiated contacts such as traffic and pedestrian stops result in face-to-face interactions. But even some categories of resident-initiated contacts – for example, traffic accidents, participation in anti-crime programs, and non-emergency requests for assistance – also have relatively high rates of face-to-face exchange.

But the point remains: Alaskan adults' contacts with police are not confined to face-to-face interactions with officers. When people are asked about their contact with "the police," their point of reference is not limited to their encounters with sworn officers. Rather, when people report on their contacts with "the police," they often think about their interface with the institution, the department, the agency. And those contacts with the police are often with non-sworn personnel such as call-takers, dispatchers and clerks, and due to advances in web-based technologies, sometimes outside the context of an interpersonal interaction at all.

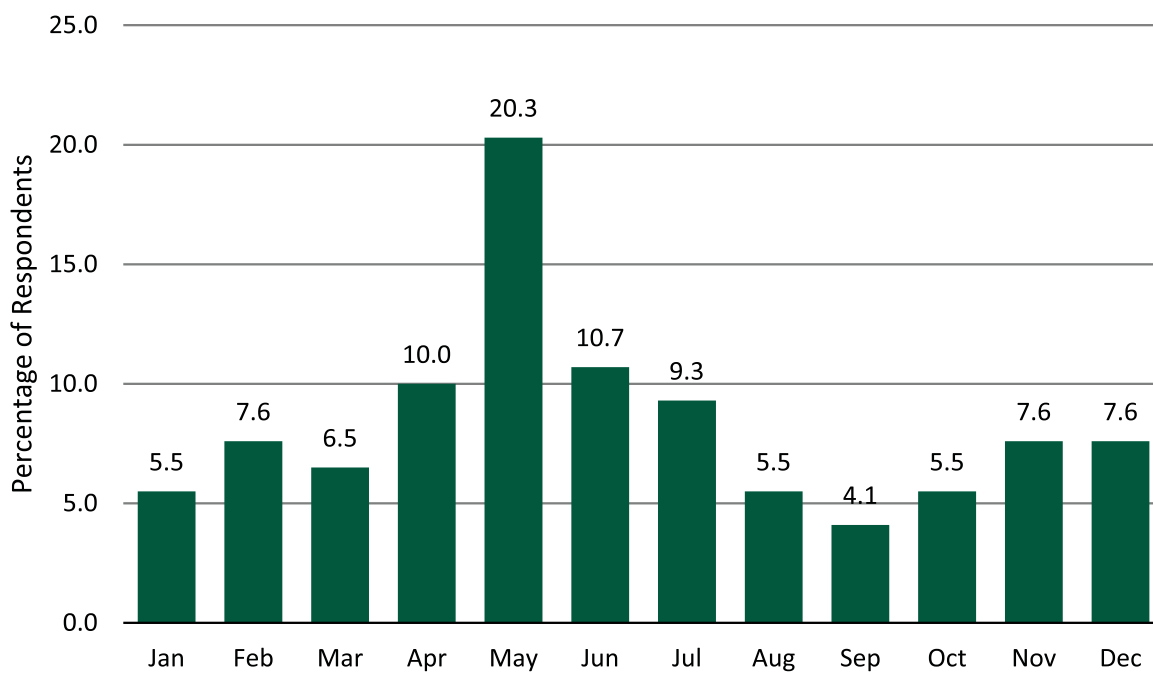
# Most Recent Police-Public Contacts, Past Year

## Month and Time-of-Day

PPCS participants who had formal contact with police in the preceding year (an estimated 52.1% of Alaskan adults; see Table 1) were asked to provide additional information about their most recent contact with police in the past 12 months, including in what month their most recent contact with police occurred. More than 20% of those who had contact with police in the preceding year experienced their most recent contact in the month of May (see Figure 1), a contact rate far exceeding that of any other month. In fact, the months with the second-, third-, and fourth-highest prevalence of police contact (10.7%, 10.0%, 9.3%) were roughly half the rate of contact with police in the month of May.

A discernable pattern in the likelihood of police-public contacts can be seen in Figure 1. The likelihood of police-public contact increases steadily beginning in mid-winter (January), peaks in the period immediately following spring “break-up” (May), decreases steadily through the summer months and into autumn (September), and then there is a modest rebound in the likelihood of police contact as autumn gives way to winter. While the 2022 PPCS provides data for only a single year, the data shown in Figure 1 suggest that frequency with which the police and the public come into contact follows a seasonal pattern.

**Figure 1.** Percentage distribution of most recent police-public contacts, by month

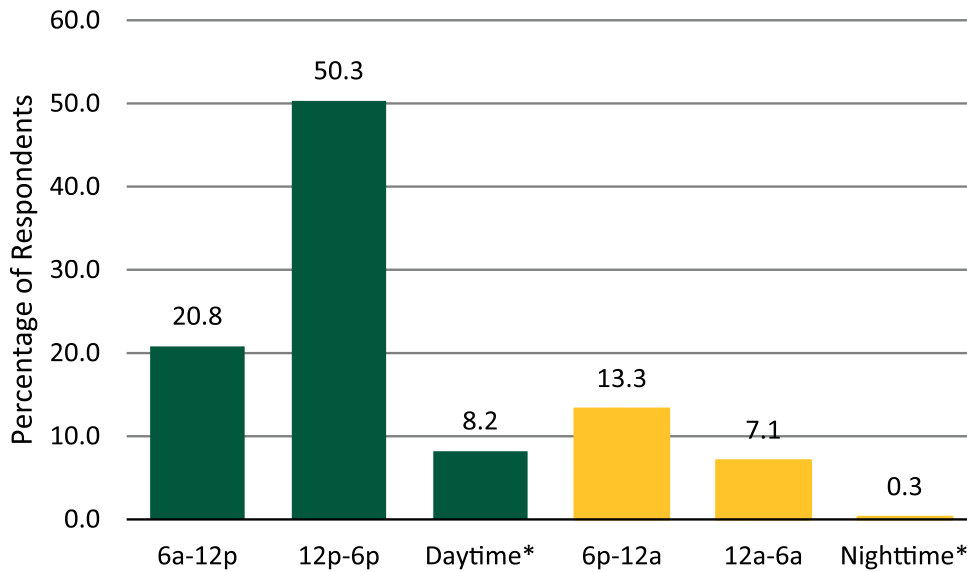


### Notes

a. Data source: Alaska Police-Public Contact Survey, 2022.

In addition to the month of their most recent contact with police, PPCS participants were asked to provide their best estimate of the time of day they interacted with police. By far, Alaska residents were most likely to come into contact with police during daytime hours – between 6:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. (see Figure 2). Nearly 80% reported encountering police during daytime hours, with a majority of study participants reporting contacts with police between noon and 6:00 p.m.

**Figure 2.** Percentage distribution of most recent police-public contacts, by time of day.



**Notes**

\* Specific time of day/night not specified.  
 a. Data source: Alaska Police-Public Contact Survey, 2022

*Police–Public Contact Initiation*

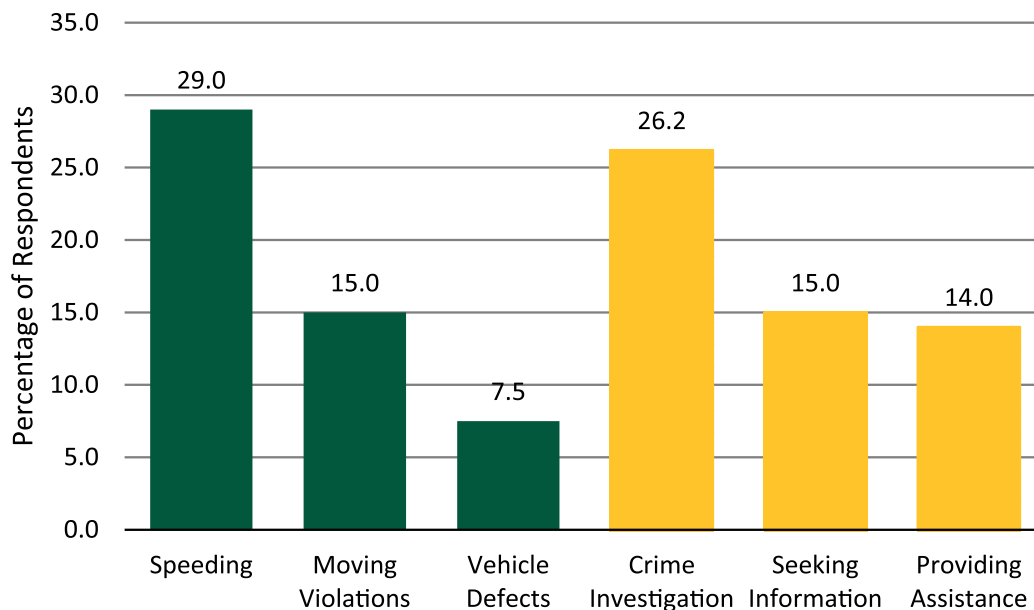
Survey participants were also asked how their most recent contact with police was initiated. Participants’ contacts with police were most often initiated by residents who called the police (28.5%), followed by officer-initiated traffic stops (driver or passenger; 13.2%), someone else contacting the police (7.4%), participants approaching an officer in a public place (5.8%), and participants going to a police station or an Alaska State Trooper post in person (5.0%). Additional police—public encounter catalysts included being stopped by police while standing, walking, or sitting in a public place or sitting in a parked vehicle (2.6%), employment related interaction with police (1.4%), and unofficial, casual contact with an officer (1.4%), among a wide variety of other reasons for residents’ most recent contacts with police.

Overall, among study participants who encountered police in the past 12 months, 38.2% reported that their most recent contact was police-initiated, while the remaining 61.8% reported that their most recent contact was resident-initiated. Among participants indicating that their most recent interaction was police-initiated, 95% reported that officers explained the reason for initiating contact with them.



Police initiated contact with residents for a variety of reasons (see Figure 3). Within the context of traffic stops, the most common reasons police initiated contact with residents were violations of the posted speed limit (29.0%), various non-speeding moving violations (15%), and vehicle defects (e.g., faulty head/tail light) (7.5%). The most common non-traffic reasons for police initiating contact with residents included investigating a crime or other suspicious activity (26.2%), seeking information about another person (15.0%), and providing (unspecified) assistance to the resident (14.0%).

**Figure 3.** Most common reasons police initiated contact with adult Alaska residents, by traffic-related contacts and non traffic contacts.



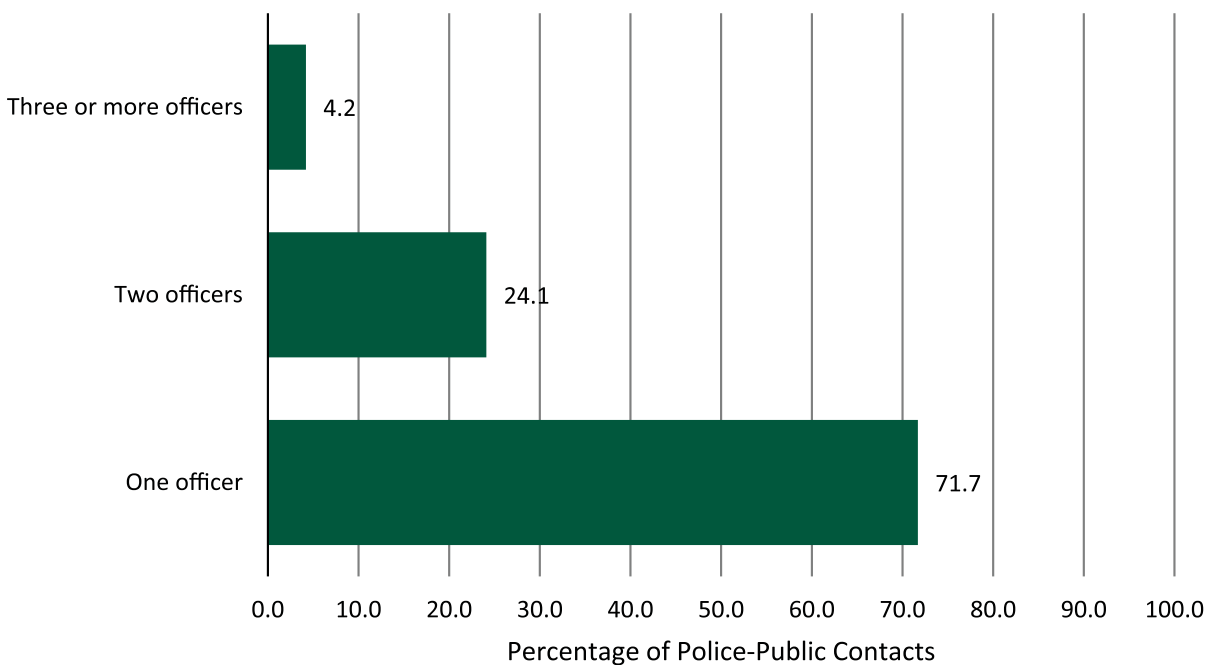
#### Notes

a. Data source: Alaska Police-Public Contact Survey, 2022.

b. Data limited to officer-initiated contacts with residents in which police officer explained/provided resident a reason for contacting them.

### *Police Officer Characteristics*

Almost three-quarters (71.7%) of participants' most recent face-to-face interactions with police involved only one officer, 24.1% included two officers, and 4.2% involved three or more officers (see Figure 4). Within the context of single-officer contacts, 91.8% of the police officers that residents interacted with were identified by PPCS participants as male and 75.9% were identified as White/Caucasian. Very similar demographic patterns extended beyond single-officer interactions as well – that is, in multi-officer encounters with members of the public, officers were much more likely to be identified by PPCS participants as White/Caucasian and male than non-White/Caucasian and/or female.

**Figure 4.** Percentage of police-public contacts, by number of police officers involved in encounter.**Notes**

a. Data source: Alaska Police-Public Contact Survey, 2022.

b. Estimates based on PPCS participants' most recent contact with police in the past 12 months.

*Police Behavior*

PPCS participants who reported past-12 month contact with police were presented with several questions pertaining to inappropriate conduct on the part of officers with whom they interacted. Participants were asked if, in their most recent encounter with police in the preceding 12 months: police referred to them using a slur or called them a degrading name; police made a sexual comment to them; and, if police touched them in a sexual way or had any physical contact with them that was sexual in nature. Just four PPCS participants who interacted with police in the past year reported that an officer referred to them using a slur or a degrading name, and only one participant reported that a police officer made a sexual comment. Zero PPCS participants reported that police touched them in sexual way or had any physical contact with them that was sexual in nature.

The PPCS also included four questions asking participants about their perceptions of police prejudice and/or bias as potential motivating factors for contact with residents, and the subsequent actions of officers in residents' encounters with them. Participants who reported at least one contact with police in the past 12 months were asked if they believed the behavior of police during their most recent encounter was "motivated by prejudice or bias against you due to": (a) your actual or perceived race or ethnicity? (b) your actual or perceived gender or sexual orientation? (c) your actual or perceived religion? and, (d) your actual or perceived

disability? Very few PPCS participants indicated that they believed that the behavior of police was the result of prejudice and/or bias. Just six respondents reported that they felt police were motivated by prejudice/bias against them because of their actual or perceived gender or sexual orientation, four PPCS participants indicated that police acted as a result of racial bias/prejudice, three reported police bias stemming from a disability, and one participant reported religious prejudice/bias on the part of police.

### *Police Use-Of-Force*

The PPCS included 12 separate questions to capture police use-of-force. Participants were asked to indicate if, in their most recent contact with police in the past 12 months, the police: shouted at them, cursed at them, threatened to arrest them, threatened them with a ticket, threatened to use force against them, pushed or grabbed them, handcuffed them, kicked or hit them, sprayed them with chemical or pepper spray, used an electroshock weapon against them, pointed or fired a gun at them, or used any other type of force against them.

Participants could select one police use-of-force measure, any combination of police use-of-force measures (for example: shout at you AND threaten to arrest you AND handcuff you), or none at all. These behaviors varied widely with respect to their potential for psychological and physical harm to residents, included both verbal and behavioral uses-of-force, and distinguished between behavioral threats and behavioral actions. Among study participants who interacted with police in the past year, 5.7% indicated that an officer used any type of force against them during their most recent interaction. Importantly, half of the use-of-force measures did not receive any endorsement from PPCS participants: curse at you; threaten to use force; kick or hit; use of mace/pepper spray; electroshock weapon; and, point or fire a gun.<sup>2</sup> Conversely, the following use-of-force items were endorsed at least once: shout at (n=4); threaten arrest (n=1); threaten ticket (n=6); push or grab (n=1); handcuff (n=5); some other type of force (n=4).

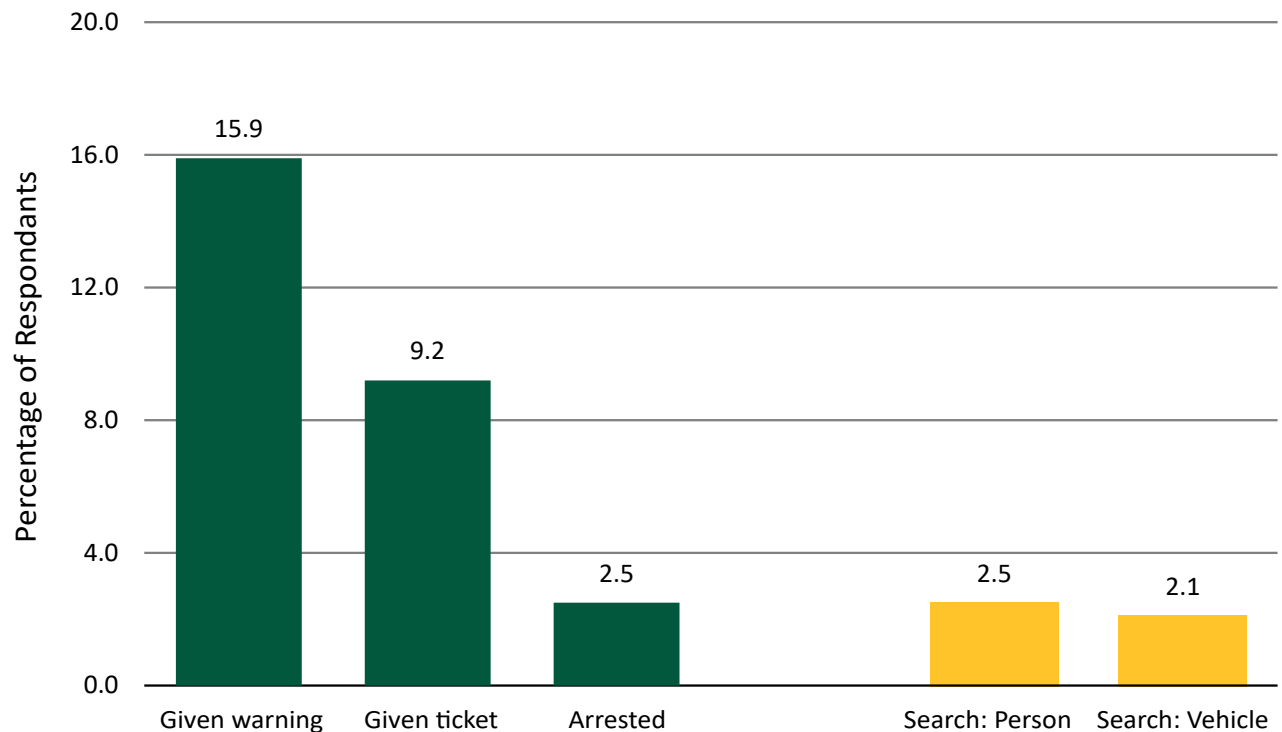
### *Encounter Outcomes*

The PPCS included five items capturing different outcomes or “culminating events” of police-public contacts. Participants were asked if, during their most recent interaction in the past 12 months, the police: conducted a search of their person, conducted a search of the vehicle they were riding in when contacted by police (as driver or passenger), gave them a warning, issued them a ticket/summons/citation, or arrested them. Results for these measures are shown in Figure 5.

Approximately 16% of PPCS participants who interacted with police in the past 12 months reported that their most recent encounter ended with an officer giving them a warning, 9.2% indicated that they received a ticket,

citation, or a summons, and 2.5% stated that they were arrested. With respect to police searches, 2.5% of respondents reported that the police searched their person, and 2.1% reported that the police conducted a search of the vehicle they were riding in when contacted by police.

**Figure 5.** Police-public contact outcomes, most recent interaction with police in past 12 months



#### Notes

- Data source: Alaska Police-Public Contact Survey, 2022.
- Estimates based on PPCS participants' most recent contact with police in the past 12 months.

### *Resident Assessments of Interactions With Police*

Taken together, the findings presented regarding police behavior within the context of their interactions with members of the public, as well as the results of those police-public interactions, provide important context for how residents assessed their contacts with police. PPCS participants were presented with four questions asking them to judge their most recent encounters with police in the past year. More specifically, participants were asked: (a) if they were satisfied with the police response, (b) if the situation improved after their contact with police, (c) if the police had a legitimate reason for interacting with them, and (d) if they felt the police behaved properly.

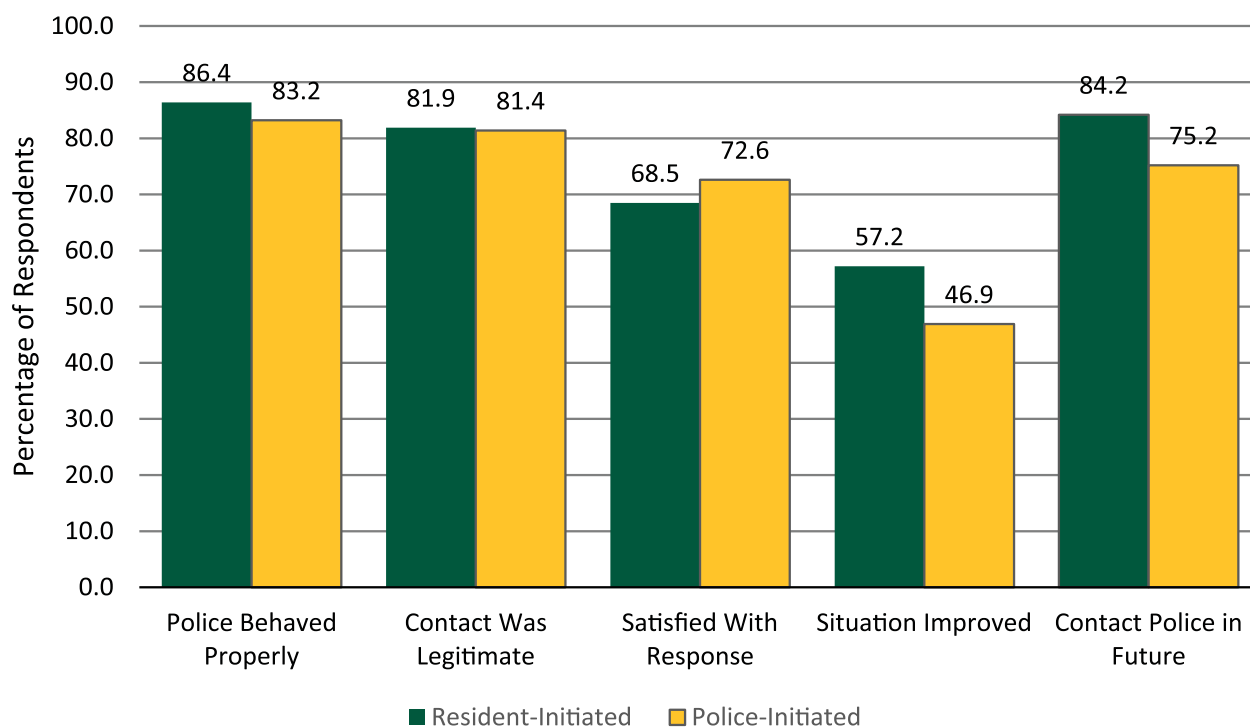
<sup>2</sup> While these results should not be interpreted as indicating that Alaska residents do not experience these police behaviors, they do highlight the rarity with which these police behaviors occur amongst the adult population. While a much larger sample size would likely produce endorsements of these items, these measures would still produce extraordinarily low base prevalence.



In addition, PPCS participants were asked if they would be more, equally, or less likely to contact police in the future, given the nature of their most recent interaction with police in the past 12 months.

Figure 6 presents the results for each of these measures, categorized by whether residents' most recent contact with police in the past year was initiated by them or initiated by the police. Large majorities of PPCS respondents – more than 80% – reported that the police behaved properly, and that the police had a legitimate reason for interacting with them. Notably, these results did not differ according to who initiated the encounter – the police, or residents. A smaller, but still sizeable, majority of participants (68.5%) whose most recent encounter with police was resident-initiated stated that they were satisfied with the police response. A slightly higher percentage of study participants (72.6%) whose most recent encounter was police-initiated reported satisfaction with the police response. Overall, a slim majority of PPCS participants (53.9%) reported that the situation that prompted a police response was improved at the conclusion of the encounter. Residents who initiated the contact with police were slightly more likely (57.2%) than residents whose most recent contact with police was initiated by police (46.9%) to say that the situation improved. Finally, more than 8 out of 10 residents who initiated their most recent contact with police in the past year, and more than 7 out of 10 residents involved in police-initiated encounters, indicated that they would be just as likely or more likely to contact the police in the future.

**Figure 6.** PPCS participants' assessments of most recent contact with police in the past 12 months, by residents or police-initiation.



#### Notes

a. Data source: Alaska Police-Public Contact Survey, 2022.

b. Estimates based on PPCS participants' most recent contact with police in the past 12 months.

# SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

## Past-year contact with police is relatively common among Alaskans age 18 or older, and extends beyond formal interactions with police.

- Altogether, nearly two-thirds (63.9%) of Alaskan adults had one or more contacts with police in the past year, an estimate which includes both formal and informal (casual) interactions.
- An estimated 52.1% of Alaskan adults had one or more formal police contacts in the past year.
- An estimated 32.7% of Alaskans age 18 or older experienced one or more encounters with police in informal, casual settings in the preceding year.

## Police-public contacts should be understood as both interactional (person-level) and institutional (organization-level) encounters.

- Police-public contacts are interactional in that they frequently (but not always) involved direct, face-to-face interaction between residents and police officers. More than half of Alaskan adults (56.1%) experienced a face-to-face interaction with a police officer – in either a formal or informal setting – in the preceding year.
- Police-public contacts are also institutional in that they involve the interaction with police agencies and departments, but not police officers per se. Quite often, Alaskans' contacts with "the police" are limited to non-sworn personnel (e.g., call-takers, dispatchers, clerks), and often outside the context of an interpersonal interaction at all (e.g., submitting information or a request online).

## Alaskans age 18 or older are more likely to encounter police within the context of resident-initiated contacts than police-initiated contacts.

- An estimated 39.8% of Alaskan adults interacted with police in resident-initiated contacts in the preceding year, compared to just 14.9% who encountered police within the context of a police-initiated contact.
- Importantly, however, the likelihood of interacting with police varies widely according to the type of contact both within and across resident- and police-initiated encounters.

## Police-public contacts display discernable seasonal patterns as well as clear temporal patterning by time of day.

- Alaskans age 18 or older are much more likely to come into contact with police in spring and summer months than at other times of the year.
- A large majority of adult Alaskans (almost 80%) who had at least one formal contact with police in the past year contacted police during daytime hours – that is, between 6:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m.

## Prejudicial behavioral misconduct on the part of police officers is exceedingly rare according to adult Alaskans who had contact with police in the past year.

- Just four PPCS participants who interacted with police in the past year reported that an officer referred to them using a slur or a degrading name during their most recent interaction, and only one participant reported that a police officer made a sexual comment. Zero PPCS participants reported that police touched them in sexual way or had any physical contact with them that was sexual in nature.
- Just six respondents reported that they felt police were motivated by prejudice/bias against them because of their actual or perceived gender or sexual orientation, four PPCS participants indicated that police acted because of racial bias/prejudice, three reported police bias stemming from a disability, and only one participant reported religious prejudice/bias on the part of police.

## Police use-of-force was rarely reported by those who contacted police in the past year. The vast majority of police-public contacts involved no use-of-force by police at all.

- Among study participants who interacted with police in the past year, just 5.7% indicated that an officer used any type of force against them.
- Half of the use-of-force measures did not receive any endorsement from AK-PPCS participants: curse at you; threaten to use force; kick or hit; use of mace/pepper spray; electroshock weapon; and point or fire a gun.
- The following use-of-force items were endorsed at least once: shout at (n=4); threaten arrest (n=1); threaten ticket (n=6); push or grab (n=1); handcuff (n=5); some other type of force (n=4).

A majority of Alaskans age 18 or older who interacted with police in the past year provided positive assessments of police conduct, and a large majority indicated that they would be just as likely or more likely to contact police again in the future.

- More than 80% of Alaskan adults who had contact with police in the past year reported that the police behaved properly.
- More than 80% of Alaskan adults who had contact with police in the past year indicated that they believed their contact with police was for a legitimate reason.
- Approximately 7 out of 10 Alaskan adults who had contact with police in the past year were satisfied with the police response.
- Approximately 8 out of 10 Alaskan adults who had contact with police in the past year stated they would be just as likely, or more likely, to contact police again in the future.

While those who had contact with police viewed their encounters positively, many were nevertheless skeptical that the circumstances that prompted police contact were improved with police involvement.

- Only slightly more than half of Alaskan adults who had contact with police in the past year indicated that they believed that the situation that prompted police contact was improved by police involvement.

# DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The 2022 Alaska Police—Public Contact Survey (PPCS) represents the state’s first comprehensive, statewide effort to empirically document the frequency with which adult Alaskans encounter police, the nature and outcomes of police—public contacts, and public attitudes and perceptions of police.

The data obtained from the PPCS show that **past-year contact with police is a common occurrence among Alaskans aged 18 or older**. In 2022, nearly two-thirds of Alaskan adults (63.9%) had contact with police. Furthermore, the data make clear that **adult Alaskans’ contacts with police were often not limited to formal encounters**. While substantially more people had formal contact with police (52.1%), it is worth noting that almost one-third of Alaskan adults (32.7%) had at least one contact with one or more police officers in informal, casual social settings in which the officers were not there in their official capacity but rather as just another member of the community. Whereas in other contexts and jurisdictions it may be unusual for people to interact with police, it appears that in Alaska contacts with police – both informal and formal – are rather routine. The data reported here lend credence to the maxim, “Alaska is the biggest small town in America” in that the nature of everyday life and routines in Alaska lends itself to regular interactions between police and members of the public.

Results also make clear that **Alaskan adults’ encounters with police are much more likely to be initiated by members of the public, not police**. In fact, adult Alaskans were more than twice as likely to initiate contact with police themselves (39.8%) than to have an encounter that was initiated by police (14.9%). The preponderance of reactive police—public contacts may help to explain the generally positive assessments Alaska residents have of police in that residents sought out and/or requested police intervention. It is also likely that the rarity with which Alaska residents experienced behavioral misconduct by police exerts a profound influence on residents’ positive attitudes and assessments of police. **Overt prejudice/bias and police use-of-force were only rarely reported by PPCS respondents**. These are important findings to the extent that there may be public concern with proactive crime prevention strategies and tactics engaged by police – strategies and tactics that may produce community alienation and increase the likelihood that community members will feel that they and their neighbors are “under siege.” As has been observed for nearly a decade in the U.S., incidents of police misconduct – and especially excessive (and sometimes criminal) use-of-force by police – has negatively impacted public attitudes toward the police, and in many jurisdictions has threatened the very legitimacy of the institution. While the data presented here do not rule out the possibility

that over-policing may occur in some communities, they do, however, show that in Alaska cities, towns, and villages police—public encounters are typically reactive in nature, occurring as the result of residents actively seeking police assistance and/or intervention, and that police behavior within the context of interactions with members of the public is not inappropriately assertive or coercive.

Given the exceptionally low rates of police misconduct evidenced in the PPCS results, coupled with the predominantly resident-initiated contacts experienced by Alaskans and the regularity with which Alaskans come into contact with police in informal, casual settings where police are not enacting their formal authority as police, it is not surprising that **the overall tenor of attitudes toward police was, on balance, positive**. Taken together, the PPCS data demonstrate the extent to which Alaska police are embedded in, and play an active part in, the ebb and flow of life in their communities. The widespread prevalence of police—public contacts suggests that, generally speaking, community policing is not just an empty catchword but rather an embedded feature of policing in Alaska.

Despite the generally positive experiences and resulting positive assessments of police revealed by these PPCS data, it is important to make note of the substantial percentages of Alaskans (approximately 15%-30%) who were not satisfied with their contact with police, who did not think the police behaved properly, who did not think there was a legitimate reason for police contact, and who would not be likely to contact the police in the future. While it is important to emphasize, and to build on, the strengths in police practice highlighted by PPCS participants (vis-à-vis contacts with police), it remains incumbent on both police leaders and individual officers to continually make efforts to reduce levels of public dissatisfaction and distrust whenever possible – efforts that will, in turn, bolster confidence and support for police, and improve the relationships police have with the communities they serve.

# APPENDIX

## SURVEY SAMPLE

A random sample of 3,000 non-institutionalized, adult residents were invited to participate in the survey, 900 of whom completed and returned the PPCS. Because the PPCS was designed to capture the frequency and nature of encounters members of the public have with police in Alaska, survey participants were sampled according to the availability of police services located in their community, as follows: neither a local police department nor an Alaska State Trooper post; local police department only; Alaska State Trooper post only; both a local police agency and an Alaska State Trooper post; or Anchorage Police Department. Table 1 details the survey disposition within each of the five police services strata.

The overall response rate for the 2022 PPCS was 32.2%, with the highest response rate (34.6%) for respondents living in communities with neither a local police agency nor an Alaska State Trooper post and the lowest response rate (28.1%) for respondents residing in communities falling within the Anchorage Police Department's jurisdiction. As the data shown in Table 1 illustrate, the final analytic sample was balanced across all five of the police services strata; no single service area type dominated survey returns.

**Table A1**

Sample attrition and response rate, by police services strata: Alaska Police-Public Contact Survey (2022).

	Initial Sample	Returned undeliverable	Valid sample	Declined/ Unreturned	Analytic sample	Response rate (%)
Neither Local PD nor AST post	600	37	563	3/365	195	34.6
Local PD only	600	55	545	3/372	170	31.2
AST post only	600	22	578	5/379	194	33.6
Both local PD and AST post	600	53	547	2/361	184	33.6
APD	600	41	559	2/400	157	28.1
Totals	3,000	208	2,792	15/1,877	900	32.2

**Notes:**

In addition to displaying balance across police services strata, the PPCS sample also had excellent geographic coverage. In total, PPCS participants resided in 108 [Alaska communities](#). Exhibit A1, below, lists each of the communities represented by PPCS participants. Survey participants lived as far north as Utqiagvik, as far west as Mekoryuk, and as far south and east as Ketchikan. The PPCS included participants residing in both coastal and inland communities, including many communities in the heart of the Interior, on the road system and off the road system, and in urban cities and towns as well as in rural hub communities and small villages.

## Exhibit A1

Geographic coverage: Alaska Police-Public Contact Survey (2022).

Akiak	Delta Junction	Healy	Nanwalek	Sitka
Anchor Point	Denali Park	Holy Cross	Nenana	Skagway
Anchorage	Dillingham	Homer	Nikiski	Soldotna
Anderson	Douglas	Houston	Nikolaevsk	Sterling
Aniak	Eagle River	Hydaburg	Ninilchik	Sutton
Auke Bay	Edna Bay	JBER	Nome	Talkeetna
Bethel	Eek	Juneau	Noorvik	Thorne Bay
Big Lake	Elim	Kalskag	North Pole	Togiak
Cantwell	Elmendorf AFB	Kaltag	Northway	Tok
Central	Emmonak	Kasilof	Nulato	Trapper Creek
Chefornak	Ester	Kenai	Palmer	Two Rivers
Chickaloon	Fairbanks	Ketchikan	Pelican	Unalakleet
Chignik	Fritz Creek	Klawock	Petersburg	Utqiagvik
Chiniak	Fort Richardson	Kodiak	Pilot Point	Valdez
Chugiak	Fort Wainwright	Kotlik	Port Alsworth	Ward Cove
Circle	Galena	Kwethluk	Port Lions	Wasilla
Clam Gulch	Girdwood	Kwigillingok	Saint Marys	Whittier
Coffman Cove	Glennallen	Marshall	Salcha	Willow
Cooper Landing	Goodnews Bay	McGrath	Sand Point	Wrangell
Copper Center	Grayling	Mekoryuk	Selawik	Yakutat
Cordova	Gustavus	Moose Pass	Seldovia	
Craig	Haines	Naknek	Seward	

Table A2 presents summary statistics for three key demographic measures: participant age; participant sex/gender; and participant race/ethnicity. Overall, the PPCS sample was largely representative of the overall adult population in Alaska according to race/ethnicity and sex/gender. For example, 13.3% of respondents self-reported their race/ethnicity as Alaska Native or American Indian, either alone or in combination with one or more races/ethnicities. These results compare well to 2021 U.S. Census data, which show that 17.8% of the Alaska adult population self-identifies as Alaska Native or American Indian, either alone or in combination with one or more races/ethnicities. Similarly, 76.6% of the PPCS sample included participants who identified as White or Caucasian, either alone or in combination with one or more races/ethnicities. U.S. Census data show that 72.9% of the Alaska adult population self-identifies as White or Caucasian, either alone or in combination with one or more races/ethnicities.

Very small sub-sample sizes for specific other races/ethnicities prevent reliable comparisons with U.S. Census statistics but, again, the aggregate percentage of PPCS respondents who self-identified as members of racial groups other than Alaska Native/American Indian or White/Caucasian corresponds well with U.S. Census figures. In general, while the differences were small, the PPCS analytic sample included slightly more Whites/Caucasians than the overall population, and slightly fewer members of non-White racial/ethnic groups.



Two additional race/ethnicity measures are also shown in Table A2. When reporting their racial/ethnic identities, PPCS respondents could select any combination of the racial/ethnic categories listed, as well as add an additional race/ethnicity that wasn't listed. A total of 51 respondents (5.7% of the sample) reported membership in two or more racial/ethnic groups. In addition, PPCS participants were asked in a separate item if they were a shareholder, or the descendant of a shareholder, of an Alaska Native corporation. Slightly more than 10% of the sample responded in the affirmative to this question.

Sampling bias was more evident with respect to the sex/gender distribution of the PPCS sample. While U.S. Census data show that 48.6% of the adult Alaska population is female, well over half of the PPCS sample (54.9%) self-identified as female. Conversely, only 40.2% of the PPCS sample self-identified as male, compared to 51.4% of the adult Alaska population according to U.S. Census data.

Importantly, while the 2021 Census data did not include population estimates for people who do not identify as male or female, the PPCS did ask participants if they identified as transgender female, transgender male, gender variant/non-conforming, if their gender identity was something else, or if they preferred not to answer. Results of these items are included in Table A2. Three respondents identified as gender variant/non-conforming, two identified as transgender female, and one reported a gender identity not listed in the survey. Nineteen respondents preferred not to report a gender identity, and an additional nineteen respondents left the survey item blank.

Age data for the sample are presented in the top panel of Table A2. These data highlight that the PPCS sample was highly skewed with respect to respondent age. More specifically, the survey sample includes disproportionately high percentages of adults 55 years of age and older, and disproportionately low percentages of respondents between the ages of 18 and 34. (The analytic sample includes approximately representative percentages of respondents between 35-44 and 45-54 years of age.) The average age of AK-PPCS participants was approximately 58 years. The youngest respondent was 18; the oldest was 96.

**Table A2**

Survey Participant demographic characteristics (n=900):  
Alaska Police Police-Public Contact Survey (2022)

Age	Number	Percentage <sup>a</sup>
18-24 years	10	1.1
25-34 years	64	7.1
35-44 years	122	13.6
45-54 years	123	13.7
55-64 years	205	22.8
65 years and older	338	37.6
Missing	38	4.2
Average age:	57.8	
Minimum age:	18	
Maximum age:	96	
Sex/gender	Number	Percentage <sup>a</sup>
Female	494	54.9
Male	362	40.2
Gender Variant/non-conforming	3	0.3
Transgender: female	2	0.2
Sex/gender not listed	1	0.1
Prefer not to answer	19	2.1
Missing	19	2.1
Race/ethnicity <sup>b</sup>	Number <sup>b</sup>	Percentage <sup>a</sup>
Alaska Native/American Indian (any)	120	13.3
Asian (any)	31	3.4
Black/African American (any)	13	1.4
Hispanic/Latino/a (a)	10	1.1
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander (any)	7	0.8
White/Caucasian (any)	690	76.77
Other race/ethnicity (any)	20	2.2
Missing	45	5.0
Two or more races/ethnicities	51	5.7
Alaska Native corporation shareholder <sup>c</sup>	94	10.4

**Notes**

- Percentages may not sum to 100.0% due to rounding error.
- Survey participants could select multiple race/ethnicities. Counts and percentages reflect the number of participants who selected any of the race/ethnicities listed in the questionnaire. Therefore, the sum total of the number of participants in each racial/ethnic category do not sum to the analytic sample size (n=900), and percentages do not sum to 100.0%.
- Questionnaire item: "Are you a shareholder or a descendant of a shareholder of an Alaska Native corporation?"

## Sample Data Weighting

After the collection and cleaning of the data set was completed, and comprehensive univariate analyses were performed, weighting procedures were utilized to correct for sampling bias. Base weights were calculated reflecting the probability of selection into the initial sample. Respondent place of residence, age, and sex were included in the computation of base weights. These base weights were then adjusted for non-response (i.e., participation) among those who were formally invited to participate in the survey. Finally, post-stratification weighting was then performed to make a final correction for overall population coverage. Post-stratification weights included place of residence and racial group membership. All weights were computed using U.S. Census Bureau population data for Alaska, obtained from the [Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development](#).

The use of these weights is important for accurate population prevalence (and margin of error) estimations.

### Exhibit A2.

Past 12 months contact with police (any) questionnaire item text

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#### Informal (casual) contact with police

- *In the past 12 months, have you interacted with one or more police officers outside of their official capacity? For example, have you informally socialized with a police officer who is a family member, a friend, a neighbor, or an acquaintance?*

#### Formal contact with police (citizen-initiated)

- *Have you reported any kind of crime, disturbance, or suspicious activity to the police in the past 12 months?*
- *Have you reported an emergency that was NOT a crime to the police in the past 12 months? These could include medical emergencies, mental health crises, or a traffic accident that you witnessed but were not involved in.*
- *In the past 12 months, have you participated in an organized neighborhood watch or other anti-crime programs WITH police?*
- *In the past 12 months, have you contacted or approached police for NON-EMERGENCY assistance such as asking directions, custody enforcement, court orders, or any other non-emergency situation?*
- *In the past 12 months, have you been involved in a traffic accident in which the police came to the scene?*

#### Formal contact with police (officer-initiated)

- *In the past 12 months, have you been pulled over by the police while driving a motor vehicle, NOT including any driving violations captured by camera and ticketed by mail?*
- *In the past 12 months, have you been riding in a motor vehicle that was pulled over by police while someone else was driving?*
- *In the past 12 months, have you been stopped by the police while standing, walking, or sitting in a public place or sitting in a parked vehicle? This could include being stopped because the police were looking for information, were asking about a crime or disturbance, suspected you of something, or if they stopped you for some other reason.*

#### Other contact with police (officer- or citizen-initiated)

- *Other than what you have already told me about, in the past 12 months, have you contacted the police or did the police initiate contact with you for any other reason?*



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