



EXECUTIVE BRIEF

Changes in Police Use of Force Following Statewide Reform Efforts

In December of 2020, the New Jersey Office of the Attorney General (NJOAG) announced a statewide reform package to [reduce police use of force](#). This Initiative included changes to the statewide use of force policy, mandatory use of force training, and the collection and publication of systematic use of force data. Through external funding, researchers from the National Policing Institute and the University of Cincinnati collaborated with NJOAG to conduct an independent, multi-year evaluation using multiple analytical approaches to assess implementation fidelity, impacts on perceptions, and behavioral outcomes across New Jersey's 520+ law enforcement agencies.

The evaluation examined whether the Initiative achieved its primary goals of reducing use of force incidents and minimizing injuries to officers and community members while reviewing available data on civilian complaints. Researchers analyzed statewide data from 2018 to 2024, representing one of the most comprehensive evaluations of statewide police reform efforts to date.

WHAT WE FOUND

Use of Force Trends

- **No uniform statewide decline.** Use of force reports did not decrease consistently after Initiative implementation. Some agencies decreased, others increased, and many remained stable.
- **Force rose with other police activities.** From 2021 to 2024, total statewide use of force reports increased by approximately 9.5% alongside similar increases in arrests and serious offenses.
- **No statewide effects of training.** Mandated use of force training did not produce direct, statewide reductions in use of force or officer injuries.
- **Increase in use of force incidents involving Hispanic subjects, likely reflecting changes in data collection.** The share of use of force reports identifying Hispanic subjects rose after the statewide data collection mandate, with a corresponding decrease in "White/Other" subject reporting. These differences are likely produced by changes in how officers report use of force, rather than changes in actual use of force.

Force-Related Injury Trends

- **Injuries followed force patterns.** Reports of officer and subject injuries rose in step with use of force. However, statewide patterns suggest that officers' and subjects' risk for injury within individual interactions did not significantly increase.
- **Context matters for subject injuries.** In the long term, subject injuries increased modestly following training; however, greater adherence to mandated peer intervention training was associated with fewer subject injuries, but only in those agencies already at low risk for reporting subject injuries.



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WHAT WE FOUND (continued)

Additional Findings

- **Agency variation is the rule.** Analyses demonstrated mixed, place-specific changes. Where changes were statistically significant, increases in use of force and force-related injuries were more common than decreases.
- **Use of force counts are small for most agencies.** In nearly three-quarters of agencies, force events were so infrequent that detecting statistically significant changes was difficult.
- **Reporting transition.** The shift to a statewide use of force reporting portal improved data quality but created a data gap for many agencies, complicating comparisons of outcomes before and after the Initiative.
- **Civilian force-related complaints are rare.** Complaints concerning improper use of force were infrequent (~9%) but remained relatively stable from 2021 to 2023. Fewer than 1% of all force-related complaints were sustained.

LESSONS FOR THE FIELD

- **Match interventions to local contexts.** Law enforcement agencies are not at uniform risk for use of force. Some may benefit from additional training, while others may need to consider structural or organizational factors as part of effective interventions. Problem analysis can help identify local issues that influence force patterns.
- **Prioritize high-risk places.** To use resources more effectively, focus intervention efforts on the smaller number of agencies or units that generate a large portion of force and injuries (following the 80/20 rule).
- **Interpret force counts alongside other police activities.** Review trends in use of force and injuries alongside trends in arrests, calls for service, and offenses.

For a complete discussion of the research methodology, findings, implications, and limitations of this evaluation, see the full report [Examining Police Reforms in New Jersey: Impacts on Use of Force and Other Police Activities](#) or [access the other reports in this series](#).

