



INDIANAPOLIS METROPOLITAN POLICE DEPARTMENT **USE OF FORCE REPORT**

2024



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INTRODUCTION

When officers respond to emergencies that put them and the public in high-stress environments, they must make quick decisions that are in the best interests of everyone involved. Officers must rely on training, morale, and guidance from their agencies to determine the best, most appropriate response. Multiple factors play into the officer’s decisions on how to react, including cultural instincts, systemic culture, and organizational culture, which all guide quick decision-making. The “use of force” becomes necessary only as a last resource for police officers, although no universally agreed-upon definition exists. According to The International Association of Chiefs of Police, use of force means the “amount of effort required by police to compel compliance by an unwilling subject”.¹ Research on police force becomes critical to understanding the legal framework and societal impacts of how and why law enforcement apply force during an incident. More specifically, how does the frequency and perception of the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department using force impact community trust and cooperation in diverse communities?

To better understand the data in this report, it’s best to first comprehend where the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department (IMPD) patrols and how they came to be. In 2012, IMPD officers could not replace officers who left the agency due to a hiring freeze, and they had to expand their patrol areas. This resulted in large zoning areas, where officers had to cover, on average, 11 square miles (about the area of Chicago O’Hare airport).

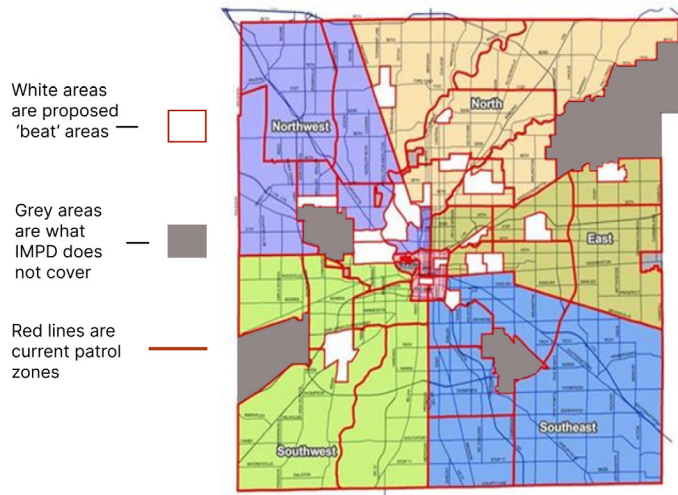
In 2016, IMPD moved away from a zone policing model after Joe Hogsett was appointed Mayor, and moved towards more traditional, smaller ‘beats’. This was after Indianapolis had 144 victims of homicide in 2015, the highest in recorded Indianapolis history.² According to Mayor Joe Hogsett, “Every citizen of Indianapolis should know their IMPD officer by name. Simply put, this return to beat policing will make Indianapolis a greater city than it already is”. The proposal created smaller areas for officers to cover, allowing them to supplement connections with the citizens and create positive environments within their patrol community.³ This was not nearly as tangible when patrolling larger areas. The new zoning was rolled out in April of 2016, hoping to create more areas like this as more officers are recruited.

IMPD moved away from a larger zone policing model in 2016 towards a smaller ‘Beat’ model.

It was an attempt to reduce crime by having officers patrol smaller areas, and hopefully create a connection with the community they patrolled.

Figure 1. IMPD's Patrol Districts, Zones, and Proposed 'Beat' Areas

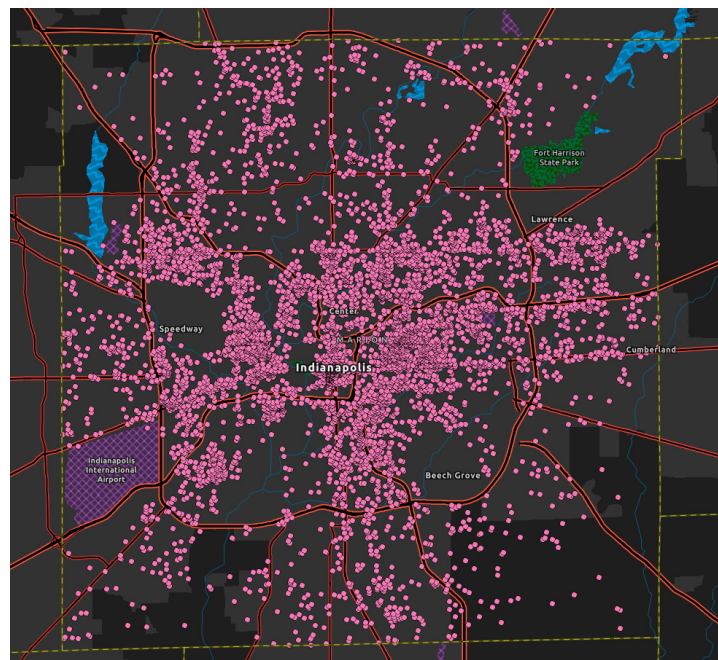
IMPD is currently divided into 6 district boundaries: Northwest, North, East, Southeast, Southwest, and Central. Within those boundaries are zones where an officer has an average of 11 square miles to cover. Within the 'Beat' areas, officers only have an average of 1.14 square miles to patrol. Figure 1 below shows the dissection of Marion County and what IMPD covers. The gray areas, such as Speedway, Beech Grove, and Lawrence, are not covered by the IMPD. The white areas are the proposed beat zones, where officers may have a smaller area to patrol.⁴



IMPD debuts new 'beat' policing map, 2016. Access link: <https://www.wrtv.com/news/local-news/impd-debuts-new-beat-policing-map>

Figure 2. Distribution of IMPD Use of Force Incidents (2015-2021)*

When patrolling smaller areas, the likelihood of officers interacting with citizens for trivial things, such as noise complaints or tinted car windows, increases substantially. When looking at Figure 2, there are more incidents that result in officers using force where there is an increased population, such as downtown Indianapolis, as well as the beat areas. The data in figure 2 only includes incidents that occurred at the IMPD jurisdiction, and exclude areas such as Speedway and Beech Grove. Additionally, limited incident data is shown from 2021 to 2023, as IMPD's updated policy does not require adding location to use of force incident reports.

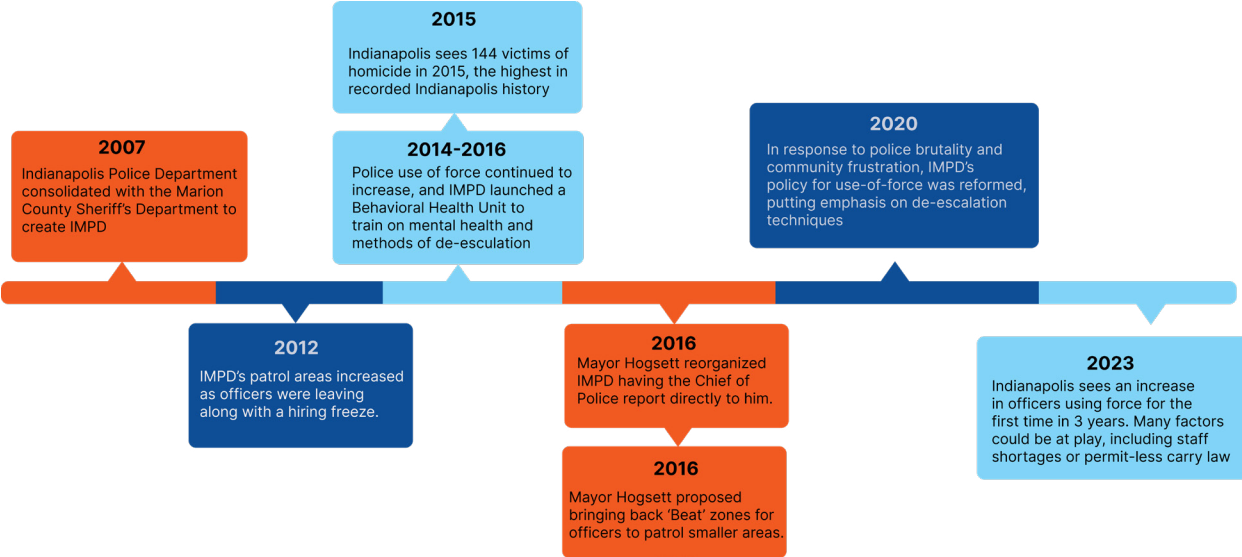


*In 2020, IMPD updated their reporting policy in which officers do not need to report the location of the incident. Because of this, many incidents from 2021 to 2023 are not on this map.

HISTORY OF IMPD

The Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department (IMPD) was created in 2007 after being consolidated with Marion County’s Sheriff’s Department to reduce costs and create better management.⁵ Despite attempts, combining roles and shifting agency responsibilities within the consolidation created tension that can still be felt today. Over the next 12 years, IMPD saw a gradual increase in their numbers of use of force on suspects, with the highest numbers between 2017 and 2020. In attempts to combat this growing concern, IMPD launched its behavioral health unit that helped train officers on mental illness, implicit bias, and methods of de-escalation. “In 2016, IMPD was reorganized again making it a department within the City of Indianapolis with a direct reporting line to the Mayor.⁵ Although fatal shootings decreased during this time, use of force numbers continued to rise and were more directed towards African Americans. In 2020, which saw the highest recorded number of IMPD officers using force in a single year, IMPD responded to protests and frustration towards police brutality with a new set of guidelines for use of force, which replaced a previous policy from August 2016.⁶ This was also aligned with IMPD’s policy of adjusting their policies every four years. Figure 3 gives an overview of the history of IMPD, how it came to be, and how it has responded to crime, brutality, and community pushback over time.

Figure 3. Timeline of IMPD’s History



WHAT IMPD DETERMINES AS USE OF FORCE

“Use of force” is a vague term that is interpreted differently between agencies and is up to interpretation. IMPD’s policy change in 2020 included a commitment to de-escalation techniques before using force (which was not mentioned in the 2016 policy), and the statement “the minimum amount of force that is required, based on the circumstances known to the officer, to achieve the officer’s legitimate law enforcement

objectives”.⁷ What IMPD determines as less lethal techniques include physical force, a less-lethal device or improvised weapon, or any use of force that causes or is alleged to have caused injury or complaint of pain.

There are seven procedures that officers will follow when determining how and when to use force on suspects.⁷ Those procedures are as follows:

1. When feasible, officers will attempt to de-escalate situations to resolve encounters without force.

De-escalation techniques can involve multiple approaches, such as communication, distance, barriers, and other techniques. Officers must be situationally aware to seek opportunities to maximize advantages and keep themselves and the public safe.

2. Officers will only use force that is objectively reasonable and proportionate to the circumstances.

The policy reports ‘proportionate’ as the minimum amount of force required based on circumstances known to the officer to achieve law enforcement objectives. They must rely on their training, experience, and situation assessment to determine the appropriate force level.

3. Officers will only use force for legitimate law enforcement objectives.

IMPD officers can only use force in certain situations such as protection, overcoming assault, prevention, intervention, or any other legitimate law enforcement purpose. Additionally, officers may not use or threaten use of force for many reasons, including punishment, biasness, or to expedite resolution. Physical force cannot be used when a suspect is restrained and controlled.

4. Deadly force is prohibited except for certain circumstances.

5. As soon as reasonably possible following use of force, officers will evaluate the subject for injuries request Emergency Medical Services (EMS) as needed or requested.

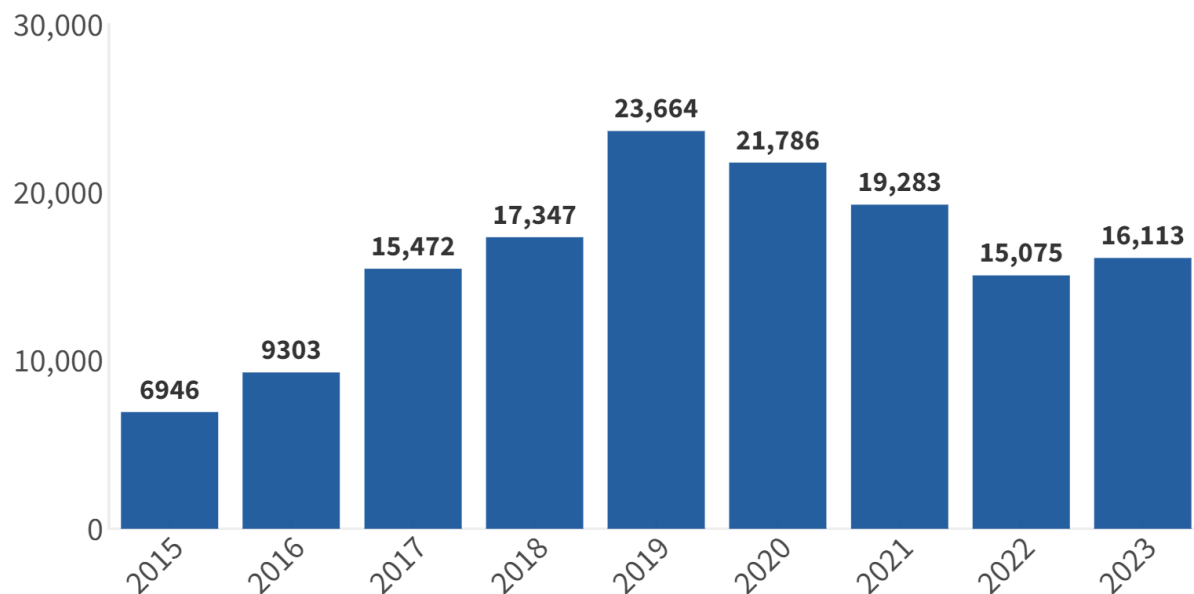
Officers will not restrain subjects in custody and under control in a manner that restricts their ability to breathe and shall continually observe subjects for signs of distress.

6. Officers will stop and report any use of force performed by themselves or another officer that violates applicable laws or department policies.

7. Officers will receive training, at least annually, on IMPD’s use of force policy and related legal updates.

The training is designed to reinforce the importance of de-escalation techniques and permissible and prohibited uses of force, as well as enhance officers’ discretion and judgment in accordance.

Figure 4. Distribution of Annual Number of IMPD Incidents Involving Use of Force.



Source: Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department (IMPD) Use of Force, 2015-2023

The number of reported incidents where IMPD used force were highest in 2019 and 2020, and saw an increase for the first time in 3 years in 2023.

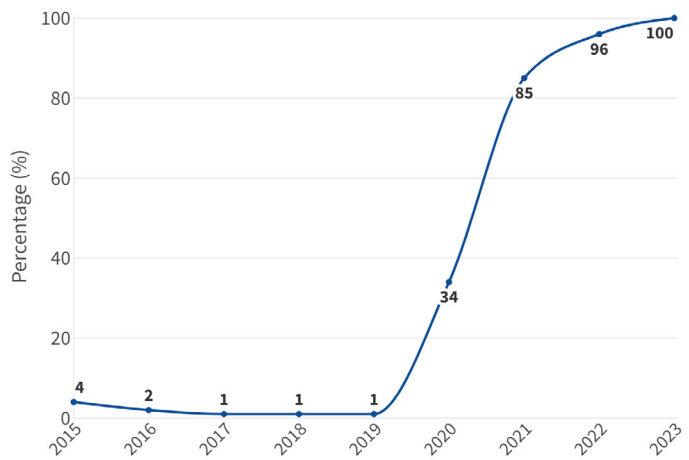
POSSIBLE FACTORS AT PLAY

Many possible factors could be at play as to why there is an increase in officers using force in 2023, especially when the number dropped so much from 2021 to 2022. A possible factor could be that Governor Eric Holcomb signed a bill into law in 2022 that allowed Hoosiers to carry guns without permits. That has taken a large toll on both citizens and officers, as gun crimes are more likely to require officers to use force.

Additionally, with IMPD facing increasing officer shortages every year, officers on duty must increase their workload during their shifts. WRTV reported that IMPD was 322 officers short in 2023 despite bringing in new recruits.⁸ This means one officer may have increased investigations, reports, accidents, and risk of facing dangerous situations during their shift. This is dangerous not only to officers but also to the public. WRTV noted that Rick Snyder, president of the Fraternal Order of Police Local 86, stated that the officer shortage is a public safety crisis and that IMPD has curtailed property crime investigations and traffic enforcement efforts. Due to this, officers must prioritize their tasks and oftentimes duties like completing reports fall to the bottom of the list.⁸

Figure 5. Percentage (%) of IMPD Reports that resulted in use of force, but do not provide the location of the incident.

Figure 5 breaks down the percentage (%) of yearly IMPD reports that resulted in use of force on a suspect, but do not have the location of the incident filled out. In the past three years, officers who did not document the location of the incident where they used force on a suspect went up from around 1% in 2019 to 100% in 2023. That means in 2023, every report filled out by officers using force did not include the location.



Source: Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department (IMPD) Use of Force, 2015-2023

Many factors could be causing this lack of reporting, including IMPD's policy, which was updated in 2020 which does not state that officers need to add a location when reporting the use of force. According to the policy, officers who use a less-lethal use of force techniques (including physical force, a less-lethal device or improvised weapon, or any use of force that causes or is alleged to have caused injury or complaint of pain) must report a Blue Team Report that includes a description of each use of force, the effectiveness, a description of events leading up to using force and injuries resulting from it, as well as a diagram.⁹ Their supervisor must also complete interviews with any involved officers, citizens, and witnesses, then determine a finding of either compliance or not in compliance.⁹ Despite lack of reporting location when using force on individuals since the 2020 policy update, over 99% of reports were determined to be in compliance.

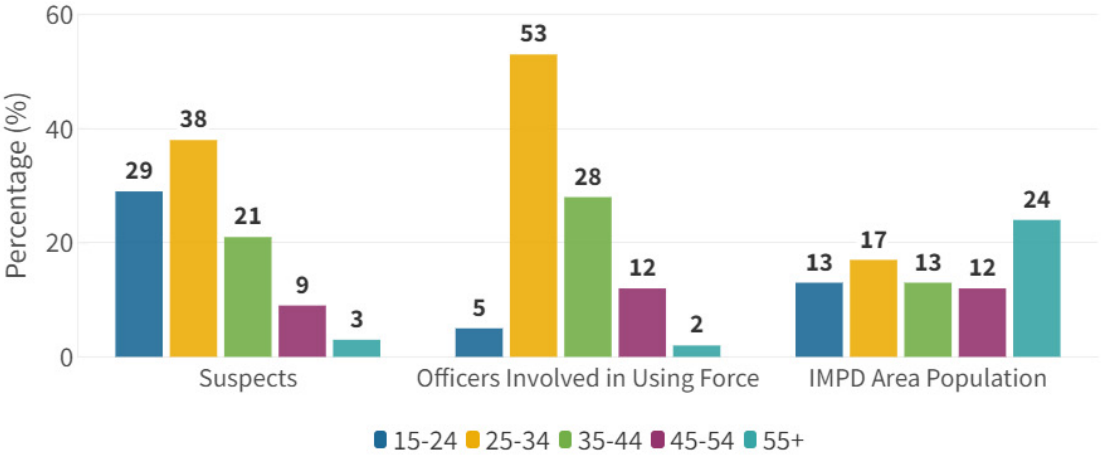
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DEMOGRAPHICS

IMPD covers a large proportion of Marian County, excluding Speedway, Beech Grove, and other areas. The population of the areas IMPD covers is around 882,000, and it is growing.¹⁰ The largest part of the population is millennial-aged, with nearly 30% between the ages of 25 and 45. Over half of the population is White (50%+), with over a quarter being Black (25%+), and 11% being Latino.¹⁰ Despite the Black population being around half of the White population within the IMPD patrol area, incidences where police use force is over double when comparing Black individuals to White, and nearly 10x more when comparing Black individuals to Hispanic.¹⁰

Disparities with the IMPD using force with different demographics could have a multitude of different factors, including lack of clear regulations, possible lack of training, different views of acceptable police treatment and the wider justice system, or understaffing. In 2023, for every 104 White individuals residing in the IMPD patrolling area, 1 was a victim to police use of force, while only 1 in 25 Black individuals were victims and 1 in 51 Hispanic individuals were victims to use of force. The data may be related to over-policing of Black and Brown communities notes Bree Spencer, the Leadership Conference’s police program manager. Black citizens are more likely to be stopped for trivial things, which leads to more interactions with law enforcement that wouldn’t have had to happen if they hadn’t been stopped for something trivial.¹¹

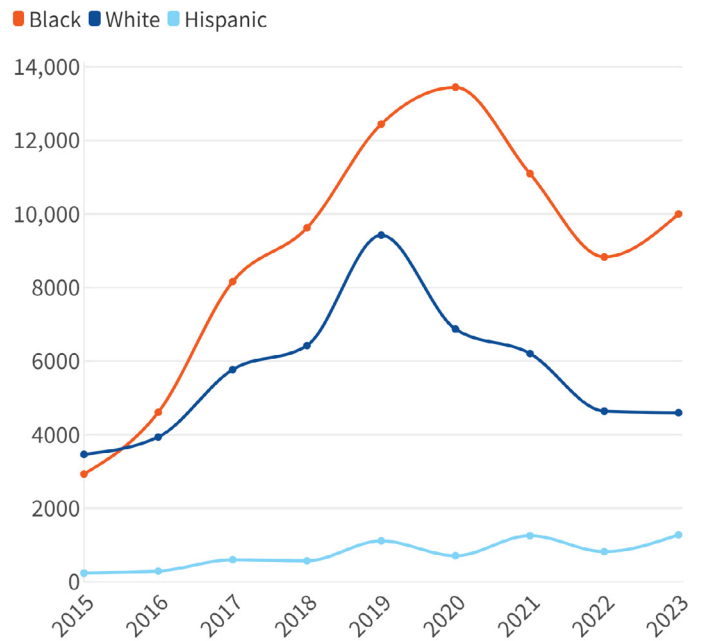
Figure 6. Age Breakdown of Suspects, Officers Involved in Using Force, and IMPD Patrol Area Population.



Source: Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department (IMPD) Use of Force, 2015-2023 and ACS 2021

Figure 7. Number of IMPD Incidents Resulting in Using Force By Race

While incidents of use of force have increased across all racial groups, police have used force on Black residents at a higher rate than White and Hispanic residents.



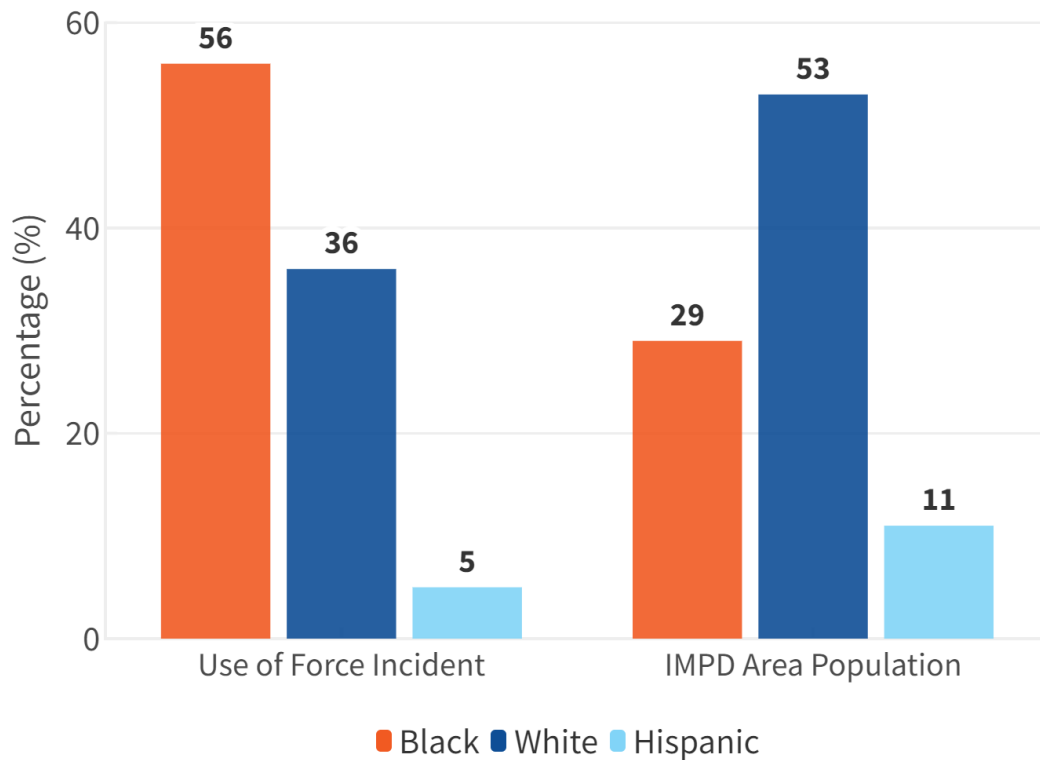
Source: Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department (IMPD) Use of Force, 2015-2023

When officers use force on a person, they tend to use a similar level of force regardless of race. However, police officers use force more frequently on Black individuals. Therefore, officers use more total force on Black individuals.¹² Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department Public Information Officer Lt. Shane Foley reports in a 2021 WRTV article that “IMPD is engaging with the Black community in hopes of bridging the gap, improving race relations, and working with the community to prevent and address violent crime”.¹³ Figures 7 and 8 compare the demographic breakdown of suspects who have received use of force from IMPD. All suspect demographics had a decrease in numbers from 2020-2022, but Black individuals, specifically, have seen a large increase in being involved in the use of force from 2022 to 2023. Additionally, when comparing the demographics of the suspects and officers involved in use

of force, suspects are largely Black individuals, while officers are largely White individuals.

Figure 8. Race of People Whom IMPD Officers Used Force Compared To Race of IMPD Patrol Area Population

Police mostly used force on Black residents, although most residents that reside within the IMPD patrol area are White.

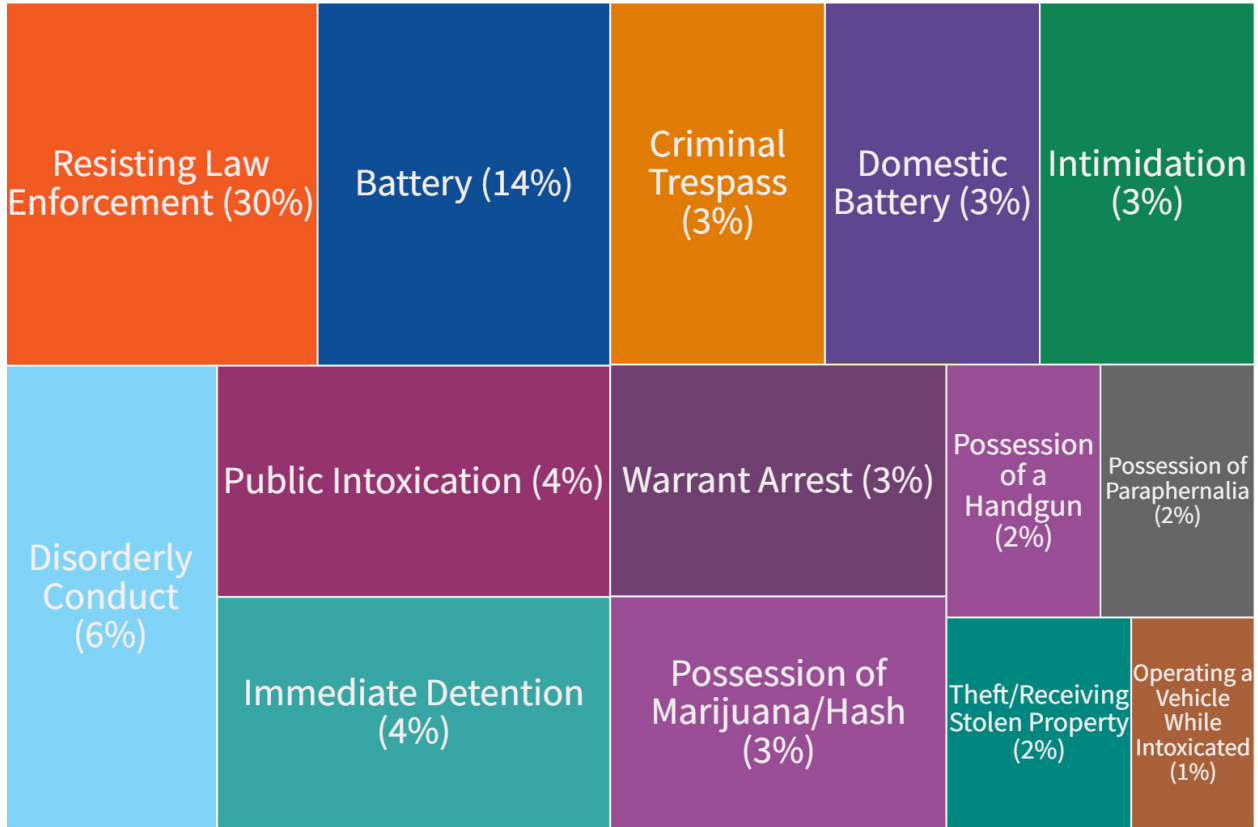


Source: Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department (IMPD) Use of Force, 2015-2023 and SAVI 2021

TYPES OF FORCE

There are multiple ways police can use force, and what might seem like everyday duties, such as handcuffing a resident, might seem like an excessive use of force. What IMPD determines as less-lethal techniques include physical force (such as weight leverage, handcuffing, striking, etc.), a less-lethal device or improvised weapon, or any use of force that caused or alleged to have caused injury or complaint of pain.¹⁴

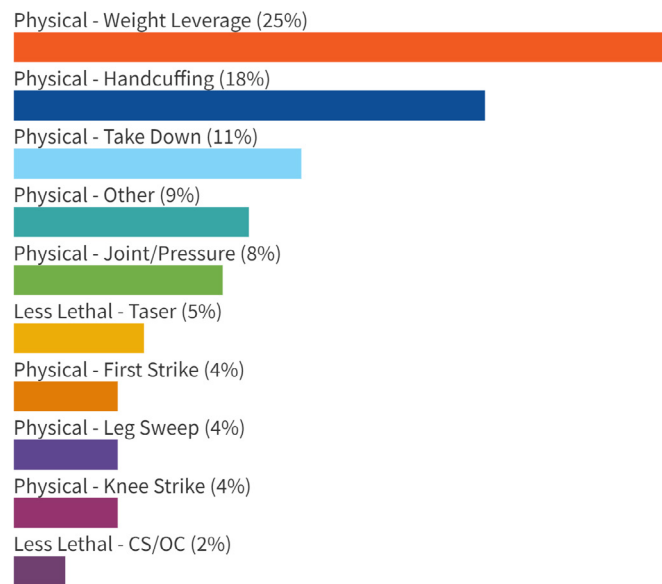
Figure 9. Top Offenses Involved With Use of Force Incidents.



Source: Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department (IMPD) Use of Force, 2015-2023

These 14 offenses account for 80% of all bookings since 2015. Many bookings have multiple charges for different offenses.

Figure 10. Top Percentage (%) of Force Types Used By IMPD Officers



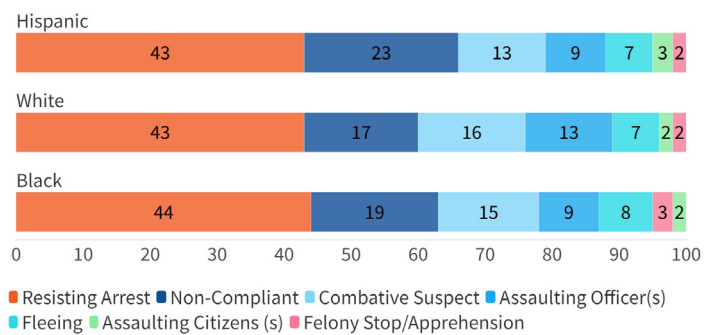
Source: Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department (IMPD) Use of Force, 2015-2023

These 10 use-of-force types account for 90% of all incidents since 2015.

Figure 9 shows that nearly one-third of the charge types for suspects are related to resisting law enforcement, followed by battery, then disorderly conduct. Figure 10 shows that IMPD officers most often use physical weight leverage, handcuffing, and takedowns as the top three main force types used on suspects. For example, Figure 9 shows that 30% of suspect charges that resulted in IMPD using force are related to offenders resisting law enforcement, while figure 10 shows that cops use physical weight as leverage in 25% of incidents that resulted in use of force.

Figure 11. Top Use of Force On Suspects By Race

Despite discrepancies and bias from IMPD, suspects tend to have similar reasons why IMPD resulted in use of force on them, despite race. Figure 11 shows that nearly the same percentage of Black, White, and Hispanic suspects resisted arrest, were combative, or attempted to flee the scene despite Black and Hispanic suspects being more likely to have police force used on them.



Source: Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department (IMPD) Use of Force, 2015-2023

CONCLUSION

The role of a police officer is undeniably challenging, often facing high-stress situations where quick decisions can have life-altering consequences. The evolution of IMPD’s approach to policing, from zone-based patrol areas to smaller beat areas, reflects an effort to foster stronger connections with the communities where they serve. Initiatives such as behavioral health units and updating their use of force policy show the importance of equipping officers with the tools and training to navigate dangerous encounters while avoiding implicit bias. However, despite these efforts, challenges persist, and the use of force used on citizens, particularly among Black residents continues to rise. The data exposes underlying factors driving such disparities, such as officer shortages, legislature changes, and systemic inequalities. Addressing these challenges created greater transparency and accountability in the use of force incidents. By building trust and collaboration between law enforcement agencies and their communities, Indianapolis can work towards a safer and more equitable future for all.

ENDNOTES

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- 3 IMPD focuses patrol areas to improve community trust, fight crime. March 23, 2016. <https://www.indystar.com/story/news/crime/2016/03/23/impd-shrinks-patrol-areas-improve-community-trust-fight-crime/82176144/>
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- 7 Indy.gov. Police Administration, IMPD Rules and Regulations. Page 83-87. <chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://media.graphassets.com/1LW1VOfROSRJNVrevsFf>
- 8 Police union president says IMPD staffing is dangerously low. <https://www.wrtv.com/news/public-safety/police-union-president-says-impd-staffing-is-dangerously-low-despite-new-recruit-class>
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- 10 Community Profiles Share. SAVI. <https://profiles.savi.org/sharabledashboard.html?boundaryId=4070239>
- 11 Study: Indiana police disproportionately use force against Black people. <https://www.wrtv.com/news/local-news/crime/study-points-to-disparities-in-police-use-of-force-against-black-people-in-indianapolis-bloomington>
- 12 Police Used Force on 1.3 percent of Black residents Since 2015. July 29, 2020. <https://www.savi.org/police-use-of-force-doubled-since-2015/>
- 13 Study: Indiana police disproportionately use force against Black people. <https://www.wrtv.com/news/local-news/crime/study-points-to-disparities-in-police-use-of-force-against-black-people-in-indiaapolis-bloomington>

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