

Using force in arrests against those who are not resisting can mean more violent prisoners.

Recent events have seen a re-evaluation of the relationship between the police and citizens, with increased concern about the use of force during arrests. In new research, [Charles Klahm](#), [Benjamin Steiner](#), and [Benjamin Meade](#) find another consequence of police using violent force during arrests: once in prison, inmates who did not resist their arrests were more likely to be involved in rule violations, including acts of violence. They argue that these inmates' beliefs that their treatment was unfair mean that they may no longer believe in the legitimacy of the police, leading them to be less likely to cooperate with authorities.



A considerable amount of research has been generated on police use of force, including examinations of policy structuring the [use of force](#), correlates of its [use](#), citizen [complaints](#), and officer and suspect [injuries](#) resulting from encounters involving force. Despite these advances in our understanding of police use of force, one area remains underdeveloped; the short and long term consequences of police use of force on suspects' subsequent behavior. Although the typical use of force situation is relatively short in duration, police encounters resolved using some form of *violent* physical force are potentially traumatic events, and thus, recipients might experience psychological and/or behavioral consequences, even if the use of force was justified. In new research, we find that prison inmates who have force used against them during their arrest, but do not resist, are more likely to commit violent offenses in prison.



There is [evidence](#) that suggests direct exposure to violence or experiencing victimization is associated with higher odds of aggressive and antisocial behavior, and it is logical to expect that exposure to police use of force might increase individuals' odds of offending. Police use of force is different in at least one respect from most other forms of violence because it is typically [applied legitimately](#). Thus, while exposure to police use of force in general may have long-term consequences for recipients, it could be that the magnitude of the effect of exposure to force on individuals' subsequent behavior may depend, in part, on whether they *perceived* that the force applied by the police was legitimate.



The capacity to use legitimate force stems from the legal authority [conferred](#) upon police officers, but also from [shared agreement](#) among citizens that police officers may use force. Thus, the legitimacy of police use of force depends in part on the strength of individuals' beliefs regarding officers' legal authority to use force. Legitimate force, [from a legal perspective](#), is the amount of effort required to compel an unwilling suspect to comply, and there is [evidence](#) to suggest that police officers act lawfully in the vast majority of police-citizen encounters that involve force. However, the legal legitimacy of police use of force may be irrelevant for shaping recipients' perceptions of whether the police acted legitimately. Individual perceptions regarding the legitimacy of police use of force might hinge on cognitive appraisals that ignore whether force was necessary to affect an arrest, and instead, [center](#) on whether the offender thinks he/she deserved such treatment. That is to say, when officers use force, they do so based on legally motivated factors most of the time, but these legally grounded inducements might not coincide with recipients' perception of fair or legitimate treatment.

A considerable amount of research suggests that individuals' perceptions regarding the legitimacy of legal authorities are influenced by their experiences with those authorities, and when individuals believe they have been treated fairly they [typically hold stronger beliefs](#) regarding the legitimacy of legal authorities. As a result, individuals' perceptions regarding the legitimacy of police officers' use of force are likely to be tied to whether they perceive that they deserved to have force used against them. One way to tap into individuals' perceptions of the deservedness of force is to examine individuals' perceptions of whether they resisted arrest; an antecedent of legitimate force.



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The data for our study were collected as a part of the 2004 Survey of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities, which was conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau for the Bureau of Justice Statistics. The sample includes 12,002 inmates housed in 242 facilities. These data allowed us to examine whether inmates who had force used against them during their arrest (i.e., the one for which they were incarcerated) were more likely to offend in prison. We also examined whether the magnitude of the potential effect of exposure to police use of force varied by whether these inmates perceived that the force used against them was legitimate. Although our use of an incarcerated sample restricted the generalizability of the study results to arrestees who warranted imprisonment, an incarcerated sample was also advantageous for this study because it included: 1) the individuals most likely to [experience police use force](#); and, 2) the individuals who experience the [most serious forms of force](#).

Violent police force has negative consequences

Our analyses indicated that exposure to police use of violent force has lingering, negative consequences on inmates' offending behavior, especially when inmates do not consider the forceful outcome legitimate. Inmates who had force used against them, but did not offer resistance, were significantly more likely to commit assaults and other nonviolent offenses (e.g., not complying with staff directives, disrespecting staff, or being out of place) than inmates who did not experience a forceful outcome or inmates who had force used against them, but resisted police authority. Inmates who had force used against them but did not resist arrest also committed a higher number of assaults, drug/alcohol violations, and other nonviolent infractions than other inmates. Our findings suggest that police use of physical force has an effect on the recipient's subsequent behavior, especially when he/she feels they were treated unfairly.

Our results are not meant to imply that the police typically act unlawfully in encounters involving force. Indeed, there is [evidence](#) to suggest that police officers act lawfully in the vast majority of police-citizen encounters that involve force; however, we argue that the legality of police use of force may be irrelevant for shaping recipients' perceptions of whether the police acted legitimately, but instead center on whether [individuals perceive that they deserved such treatment](#).

The results of this study are consistent with the broader literature regarding the consequences of exposure to violence, which [suggests](#) that violent events are traumatic and can lead to adverse behavioral outcomes such as aggressive and/or antisocial tendencies. Our findings that prisoners who experienced police use of force were more likely to offend while incarcerated lends further evidence to theories supporting the exposure to violence-offending relationship (e.g., cycle of violence), and suggests the effect: 1) extends to violence perpetrated by legal

authorities; and, 2) is not localized to the general population.

The results reported here are also consistent with the theoretical perspectives on procedural fairness and legitimacy, and suggest that the negative consequences of police use of force are more pronounced when the recipient perceives his or her treatment was unfair. Legitimacy is the subjective appraisal by citizens about “[the rightfulness of police conduct](#)”, and within the justice system it is [paramount](#) for effective social control. There is a growing body of research that [suggests](#) when citizens feel they have been treated fairly they are more likely to cooperate with and support police practices, not to mention report greater satisfaction with police services. Our data supports this.

Our findings offer valuable insights for police and prison administrators. Police administrators should be cognizant of the potential negative externalities of using physical force, and may wish to revisit existing policy and training protocols in an effort to limit the use of physical force to situations in which the suspect physically resists police authority. Police training protocols could focus more directly on refining communication skills that can de-escalate potentially volatile encounters with suspects before physical force is used.

Prison and jail administrators might also find our results to be informative and be able to take steps to alleviate the negative consequences of police use of physical force. For instance, inmate assessment tools might be adapted to include queries about prisoners’ exposure to police use of force, in general, and their level of resistance. Learning that an inmate was exposed to physical force would allow prison officials to monitor him/her more closely and make more appropriate placement decisions to protect staff and other inmates. Relatedly, knowing whether the exposure to force was accompanied by resistance would allow prison administrators the opportunity to provide counseling services in an effort to alleviate feelings of mistrust and resentment that might manifest into anger and dissatisfaction, and result in rule violating behavior while incarcerated.

*This article is based on the paper ‘[Assessing the Relationship Between Police Use of Force and Inmate Offending \(Rule Violations\)](#)’, in *Crime & Delinquency*.*

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