



# Police Pursuit Fatalities in the United States, 2009–2023

Andrew Hendrix MD, Tamriage Martin MD, Joshua Gazzetta DO, Jade Nunez MD, MSc  
University of Virginia Department of Surgery

## Introduction

- Police pursuits are an underrecognized cause of motor vehicle fatalities.
- Approximately 68,000 pursuits occur annually in the US.
- There are currently no reporting guidelines following a pursuit.
- The majority of police pursuits start from a minor traffic violation.
- Pursuits expose suspects, officers, and uninvolved bystanders to harm and represent a preventable source of public risk.

## Objectives

- To evaluate the characteristics of and trends in fatal vehicle crashes involving police pursuit in the US between 2009 and 2023 and the factors associated with these crashes.

## Methods

- Cross-sectional study analyzing the FARS database from January 2009 to December 2023.
- A negative binomial regression was used to model fatality rates controlling for population and crash frequency.

## Results

Variable	IRR (95% CI)
<b>Census region</b>	
Northeast	1 [Reference]
South	4.36 (3.84-4.95)
Midwest	2.10 (1.84-2.40)
West	1.95 (1.70-2.23)
<b>Interstate</b>	
No	1 [Reference]
Yes	4.34 (3.93-4.79)
Unknown	0.72 (0.42-1.19)
<b>Day or night</b>	
Day	1 [Reference]
Night	1.94 (1.80-2.10)
Unknown	0.43 (0.10-1.33)
<b>Rural or urban</b>	
Rural	1 [Reference]
Urban	1.75 (1.62-1.89)
Unknown	0.75 (0.36-1.55)
<b>Weekend or weekday</b>	
Weekend	1 [Reference]
Weekday	0.79 (0.73-0.80)
Unknown	1.26 (0.06-12.13)
<b>Speeding</b>	
Yes	1 [Reference]
No	0.38 (0.35-0.41)
Year	1.02 (1.01-1.03)

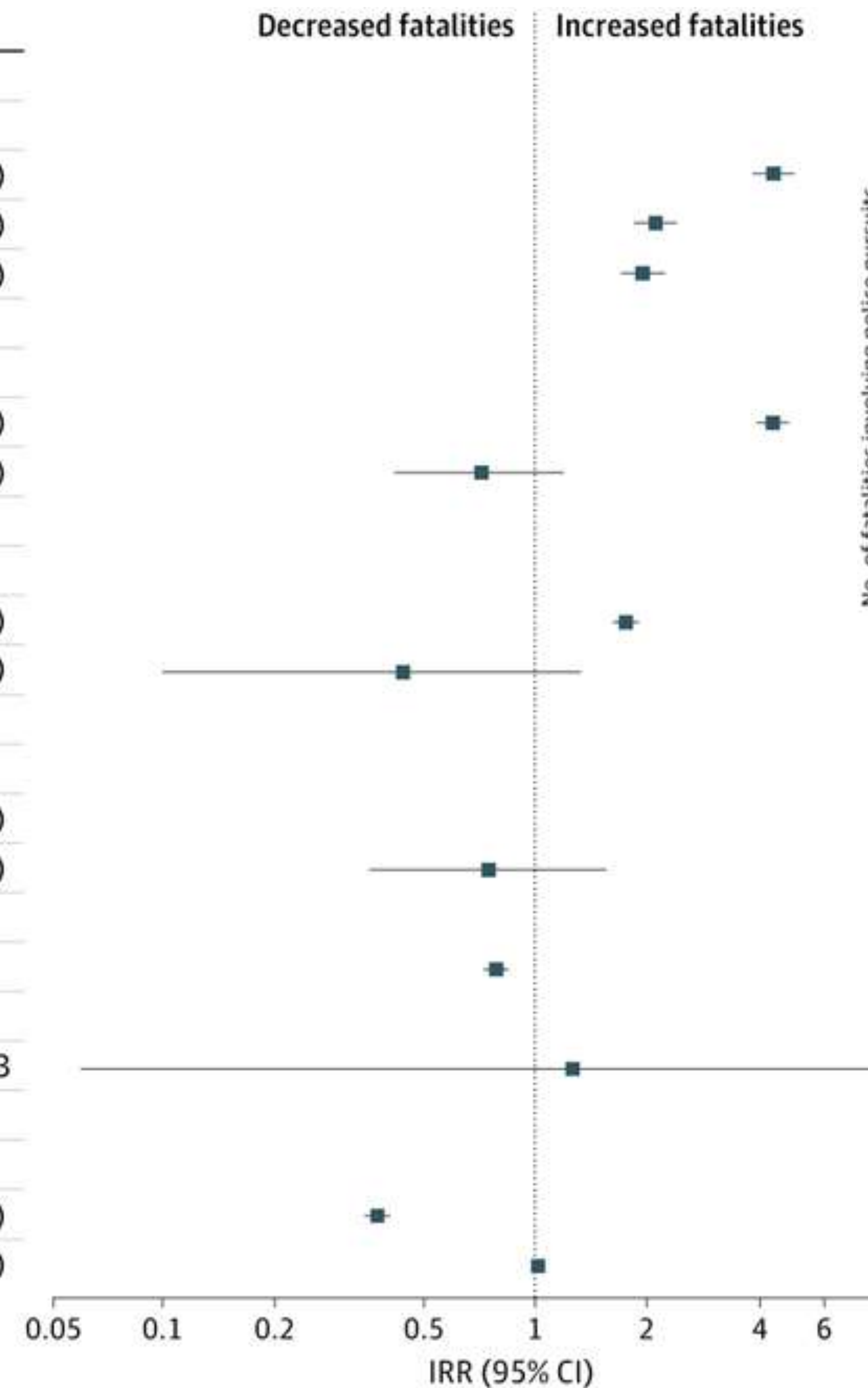


Figure 1. Forest Plot of Incident Rate Ratios of Police Pursuit Crash Fatalities

Table. Summary of Fatality Counts Per Year by US Census Region, 2009 to 2023<sup>a</sup>

Region	Fatalities, No.		
	Total	Per million per year, mean (SD) <sup>b</sup>	State level, median (IQR) (range)
Midwest	1410	1.35 (6.55)	7 (2-12) [0-29]
Northeast	498	0.57 (4.03)	2 (1-6) [0-18]
South	3191	1.60 (16.80)	8 (3-15) [0-128]
West	1253	1.04 (12.16)	2 (1-5) [0-73]

Table. Summary of Fatality Counts Per Year by US Census Region, 2009 to 2023

## Results (cont.)

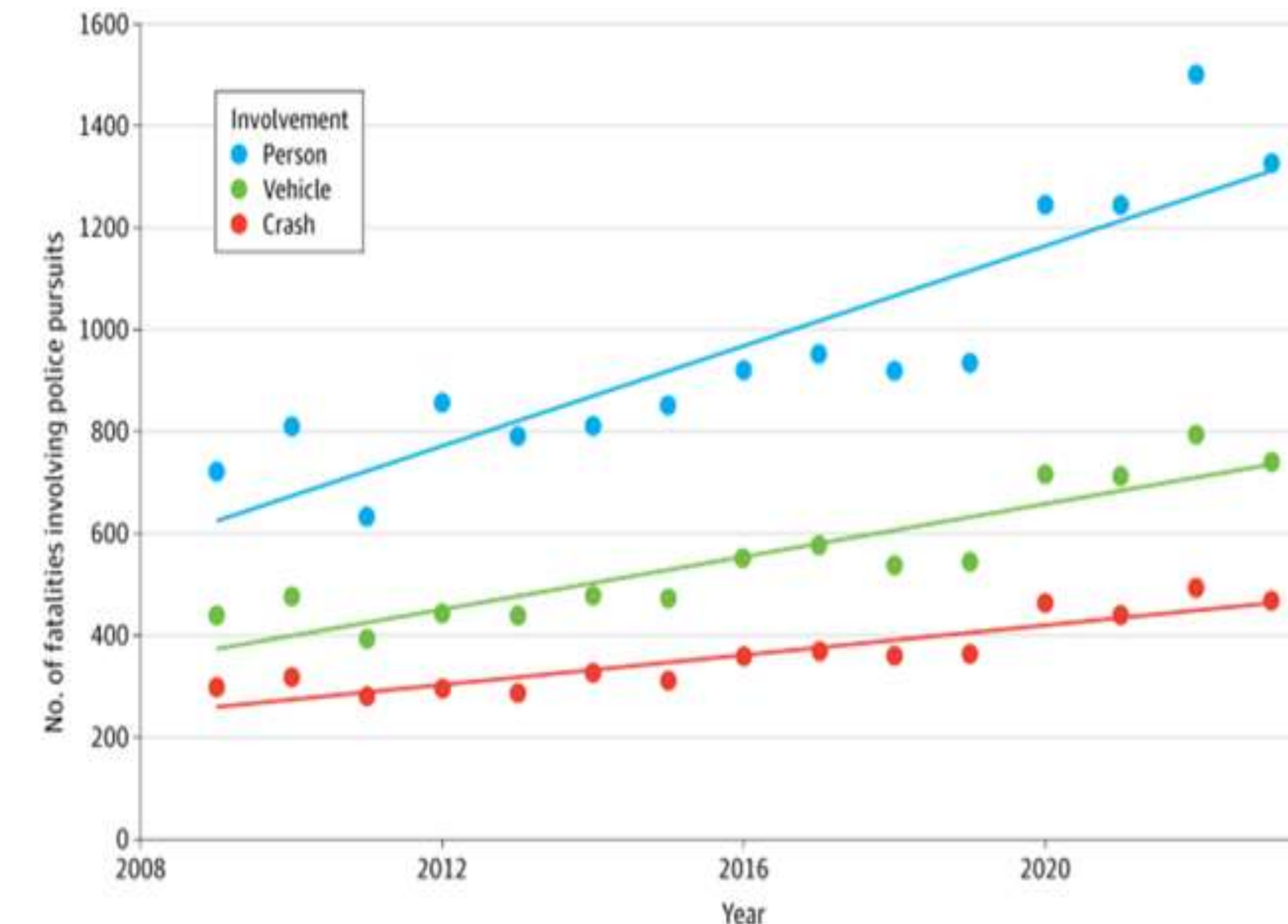


Figure 2. Line Graph of Trends of Fatal Police Pursuit Crashes, Vehicles, and Persons Involved

## Discussion

- Fatal pursuit crashes are common, have increased 2% each year, and occur in predictable high-risk settings.
- Fatal police pursuits occurred more often in Southern states, urban settings, at nighttime, on non interstate roads and frequently involved documented speeding.
- Limitations:
  - FARS does not capture non-fatal pursuits.
  - Data reflect the terminal crash, not the full pursuit.
  - Data is subject to underreporting.
- Future Directions:
  - Call for nationwide mandatory reporting and updated policy making.
  - Call for increased adoption of non-pursuit options.