

GOVERNMENT

UPDATED: NJ State Police more likely to give white drivers a pass, Latino drivers tickets

UPDATE: New Jersey State Police provided a statement regarding the police stop data from Stanford University, which has been updated in the story.



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Asbury Park Press

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Latino and black drivers were more likely than white drivers to be ticketed by New Jersey State Police troopers in the eight years since federal monitoring of the agency ended, the Asbury Park Press found.

Since 2009, Latino drivers have received summonses for about 64 percent of traffic stops where records show the outcome. That's compared with 54 percent of white drivers and 58.4 percent of black drivers who received summonses from their traffic stops.

The Press analyzed police stop data that Stanford University obtained and released through its Open Policing Project, an initiative that is collecting and standardizing data on vehicle and pedestrian stops by law enforcement. New Jersey State Police is the only law enforcement agency from which the university researchers collected data so far in New Jersey.

New Jersey State Police said it has "made great strides in assuring quality and non-bias police service to the citizens of this state" and welcomed insight such as that provided by Stanford's data to help them guide as it analyzes and adapts its policies.

"The New Jersey State Police is one of the most actively monitored law enforcement organizations in the country," according to the agency's statement issued Sunday.

"From both an internal and external perspective, this high level of scrutiny requires the organization to address many questions, analyze existing policy and continually adapt its

police practices. In order to achieve our goals of quality and non-bias policing, trend analyses on an organizational and individual trooper level are conducted."

Civil rights advocates within the Latino community say the findings mirror their research as well as their anecdotal experiences.

"It sounds very sickeningly familiar," said Frank Argote Freyre, director of the Latino Coalition of New Jersey, whose organization studied bicycle laws in Freehold that they believe targeted the Latino community.

UPDATED: Fugitive Asbury cop seen loading U-Haul before skipping trial

The Press reviewed 2.7 million traffic stops from 2009 to 2016 where it was clear the driver received either a warning or a summons. There were about 800,000 additional stops where it was not clear what the outcome was. The review found:

A consistent gap of about 10 percentage points between all summons issued to Latino and white drivers over an eight-year period from 2009 to 2016. There's a 3 to 6 percentage point gap between black and white drivers.

When it comes to speeding, the data since 2010 show that most drivers will end up with a citation from State Police troopers. White drivers, however, have a one in four chance of getting a warning. The odds of getting a warning drop to one in six for black and Latino drivers.

There were still gaps with Latino drivers even in instances where white and black drivers have similar ticketing rates. For example, white and black drivers were cited for cellphone violations at similar rates, 56.1 and 56.7 percent respectively, but Latino drivers were issued summonses 62.7 percent of the time.

The exception is drunken driving violations. Virtually all drivers, regardless of race or ethnicity, received summonses.

The biggest disparity in ticketing between white and Latino drivers happened in Salem County, where 36.6 percent of white drivers got summonses compared with 56.1 percent for Latinos.

Ocean County was among the top five in terms of disparity between summonses issued to white and Latino drivers, at 53.5 percent and 68.2 percent, respectively. Monmouth County was in the middle of the pack with 59.3 percent of white drivers getting summonses compared with 69.7 percent of Latino drivers.

In Little Egg Harbor, which has the Garden State Parkway running through it, white drivers received summonses 46 percent of the time compared with Latino drivers getting tickets 61 percent of the time.

Police: Brick seat belt stop leads to Interpol homicide arrest

In Millstone Township, which is patrolled by State Police, white drivers got summons 53 percent of the time compared with 64 percent for Latino drivers.

One civil rights advocate said State Police leaders in recent years have been more willing to discuss and address concerns about trooper practices with residents, which can help reduce distrust of law enforcement and lessen fears about racial bias.

"They're really committed to doing the outreach. They really committed to looking at all of this," said Richard Rivera, the chairman of the Civil Rights Protection Project at the Latino Leadership Alliance and the former chairman of the New Jersey Human Relations Council.

Immigration: Long Branch dad, facing deportation, enters Trump-era limbo

"Are the numbers concerning? They're concerning enough that they need to be discussed. Is there trust there that we can have a candid conversation? Yes."

Researchers at Stanford June 19 released stop data from 20 states as a part of the project. Nationally, they found that black drivers were 1.4 times more likely to be stopped than white drivers. Hispanic were stopped less frequently than white drivers.

But the university's research overall found that minority drivers nationally were more likely to be ticketed and searched than white drivers.

More: Neptune vet who tried to join ISIS gets 35 years

The researchers emphasized that disparities in the data may be the result of complex factors and can't necessarily be attributed to racial bias.

The paper's authors include Emma Pierson, Camelia Simoin, Jan Overgoor, Sam Corbett-Davies, Vignesh Ramachandran, Cheryl Phillips and Sharad Goel.

The New Jersey findings related to minority drivers being ticketed at higher rates are similar to those nationally. The data related to New Jersey trooper searches following traffic stops could not immediately be analyzed.

More: DWI Checkpoint in Bradley Beach on Friday

That data, however, is an important indicator of what might be happening, said Rivera, a former police officer who now is a consultant in police practices, policy and training.

Rivera agreed there are many factors beyond race that could contribute to the discrepancy in summons rates.

He said statistics about incidents where a trooper asked a driver to get out of the vehicle, conducted a vehicle search or made an arrest would give a better picture if racial bias is happening.

More: Effort to legalize marijuana touches on the question of race

State Police agreed to federal oversight in 1999 after widespread allegations of racial profiling by troopers, including a 1998 traffic stop on the New Jersey Turnpike that ended when troopers shot at a van carrying four black and Latino athletes, injuring three of them.

The federal monitoring continued through 2007. Federal courts dissolved a consent decree between State Police and the U.S. Department of Justice in 2009.

State police undergo multiple levels of internal and external review, starting with its supervisors who have the ability to review each stop. The data is then reviewed by the New Jersey Office of Law Enforcement Professional Standards, an agency created in the wake of the consent decree.

Its reports are released quarterly online for the public to review. Both agencies are then monitored by the New Jersey Comptroller's Office, which issues regular reports.

Below is New Jersey State Police's full statement.

The New Jersey State Police, along with the State of New Jersey Attorney General's Office, has made great strides in assuring quality and non-bias police service to the citizens of this State. The New Jersey State Police is one of the most actively monitored law enforcement organizations in the country.

From both an internal and external perspective, this high level of scrutiny requires the organization to address many questions, analyze existing policy and continually adapt its police practices. In order to achieve our goals of quality and non-bias policing, trend analyses on an organizational and individual trooper level are conducted.

Supervisors have the ability to review each and every stop. In addition to internal supervisory review, the Office of the Attorney General provides insight into these reviews and trend analysis through independent oversight by its Office of Law Enforcement Professional Standards (OLEPS). The findings of OLEPS are published for public consumption on a quarterly basis.

Further, the Office of the State Comptroller conducts reviews of motor vehicle stops that underwent State Police and OLEPS review and publishes its findings.

We welcome insight from others, to include higher education institutions, to help guide our analysis on variables such as police practices and other outside influences that affect trends in law enforcement.

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