



Traffic Stops

Fresno Police Department



California has some of the most expensive traffic citations in the country, with California drivers paying billions of dollars in fines and fees every year. The high cost of these citations puts a significant burden on lower income people, as they are less able to pay the hundreds or thousands of dollars in unexpected expenses that can arise from traffic stops. In order to understand the impact of traffic stops and citations on cities and counties across California, SPUR analyzed traffic stop data in seven locations across the state. Using 2019 data, most likely to be representative of true driving habits before the pandemic interrupted driver behavior, we looked at who was stopped by police, why they were stopped and whether or not they were given a citation.

While traffic stops and citations intend to make our roads safer by discouraging dangerous behavior, data show that in many cities and counties, traffic stops are not evenly distributed across racial or ethnic groups. Black and Latinx people are disproportionately stopped by police, and in many places are disproportionately stopped for traffic offenses that have little to no impact on public safety — such as displaying a license plate incorrectly. These stops are less likely to result in citations than stops of white and Asian drivers, possibly because white and Asian drivers are mostly stopped by police when they are engaging in moving violations that endangers themselves or others. Understanding how traffic stops are used and who is exposed to their potentially harmful effects is essential to considering ways to change the systems.

Key Fresno Facts:

\$592,150

Amount Fresno drivers paid for not having their vehicle registration

37%

Black drivers stopped for equipment failure reasons who were ticketed by Fresno police, meaning most stops probably weren't necessary for ensuring safety

FIGURE 1

Black drivers were overrepresented in Fresno traffic stops.

Fresno Traffic Stops by Race and Ethnicity

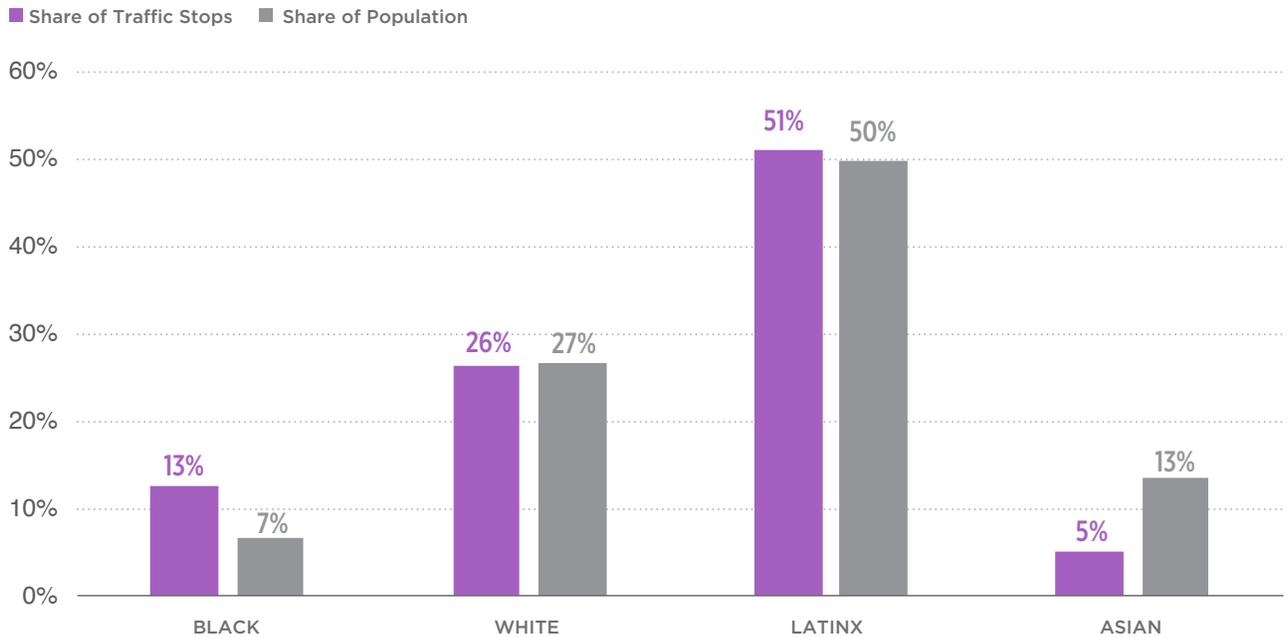


FIGURE 2

Latinx men made up 32% of all traffic stops while making up just 25% of the population.

Fresno Traffic Stops by Race, Ethnicity and Gender

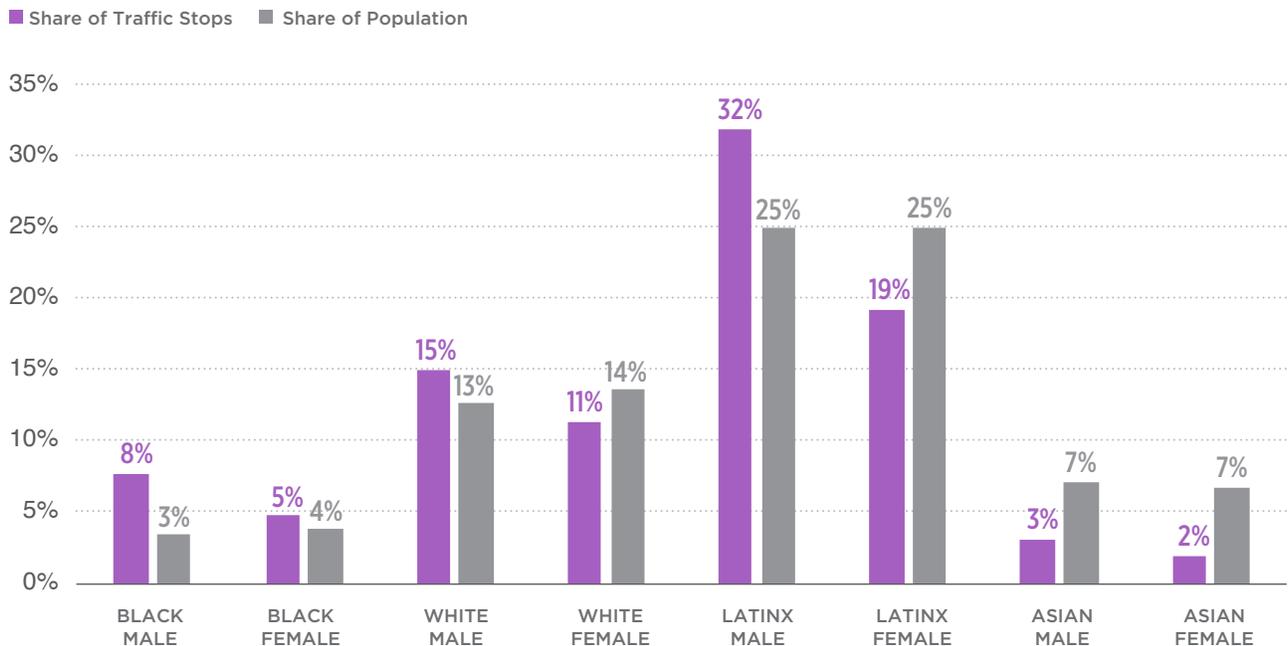


FIGURE 3

Black drivers were more likely than their neighbors to be stopped for reasons related to their car’s equipment, such as having a tail light out.

Reasons for Traffic Stop by Race and Ethnicity in Fresno

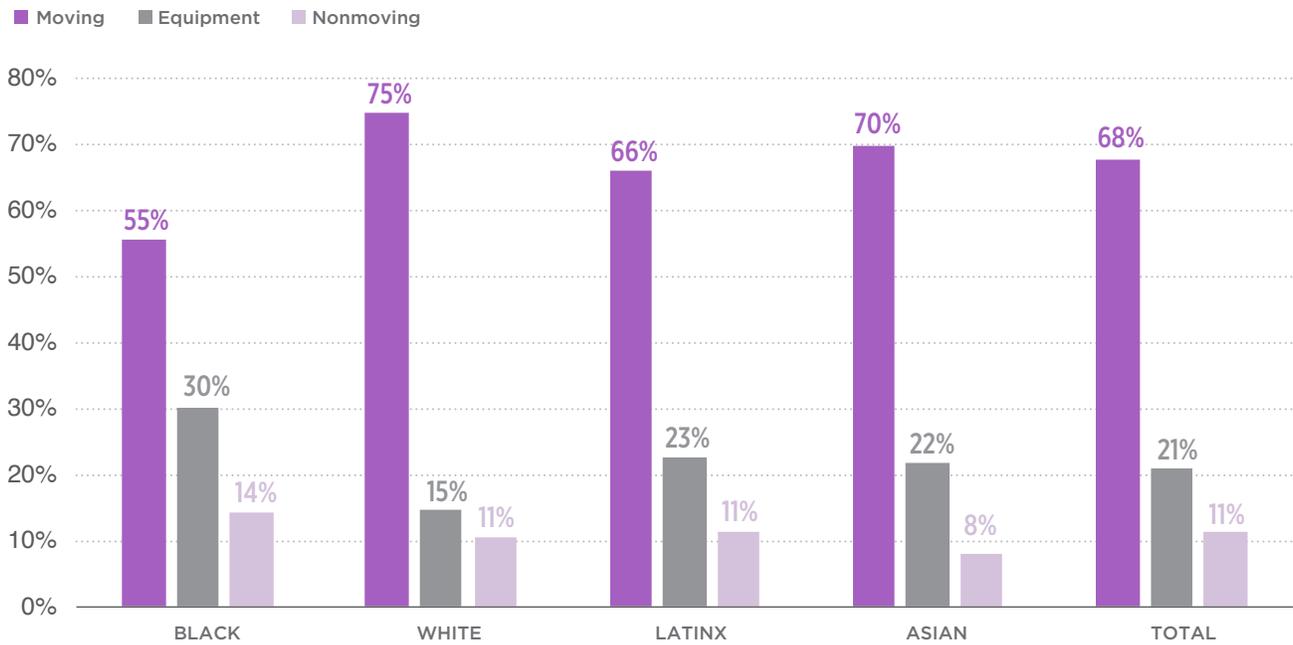


FIGURE 4

Black men were more likely to be stopped for reasons related to their car equipment than any other group.

Reasons for Traffic Stop by Race, Ethnicity and Gender in Fresno

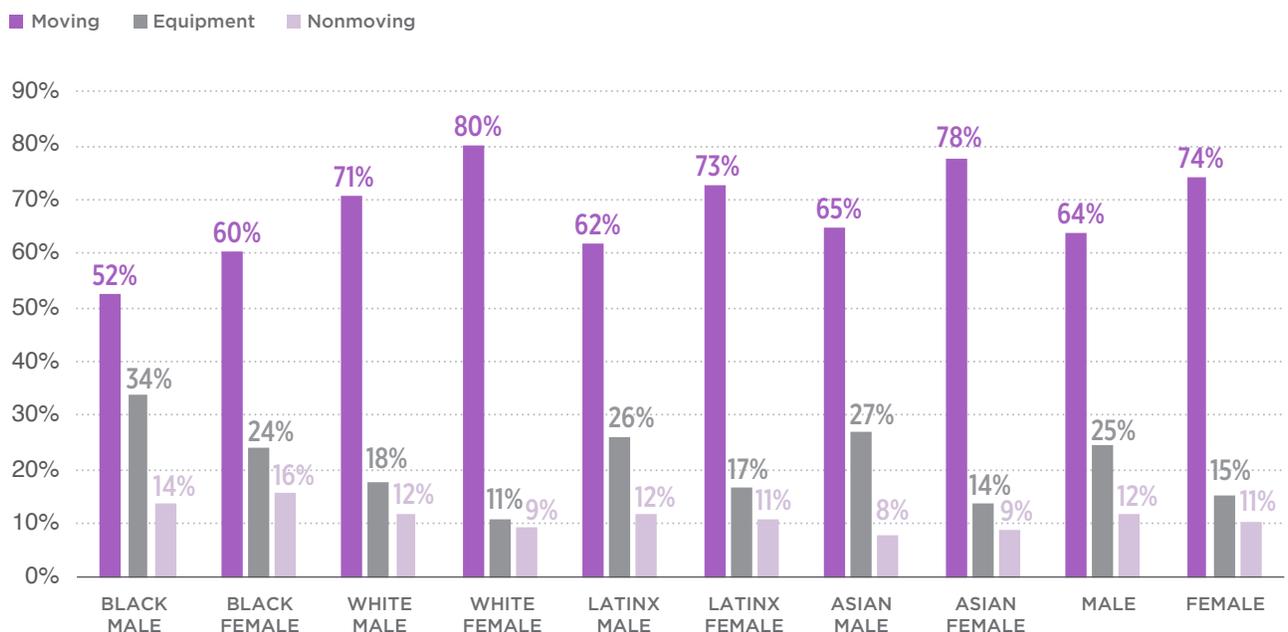


FIGURE 5

Black drivers were less likely to receive a citation than any other group.
Result of Traffic Stop by Race and Ethnicity in Fresno*

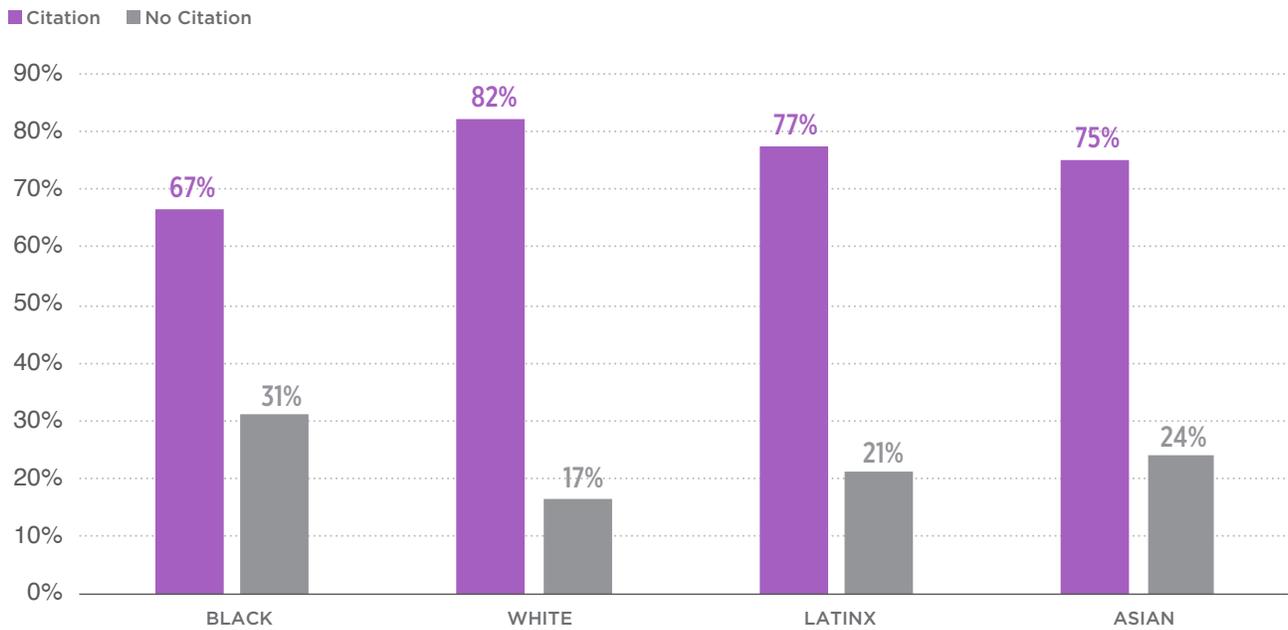
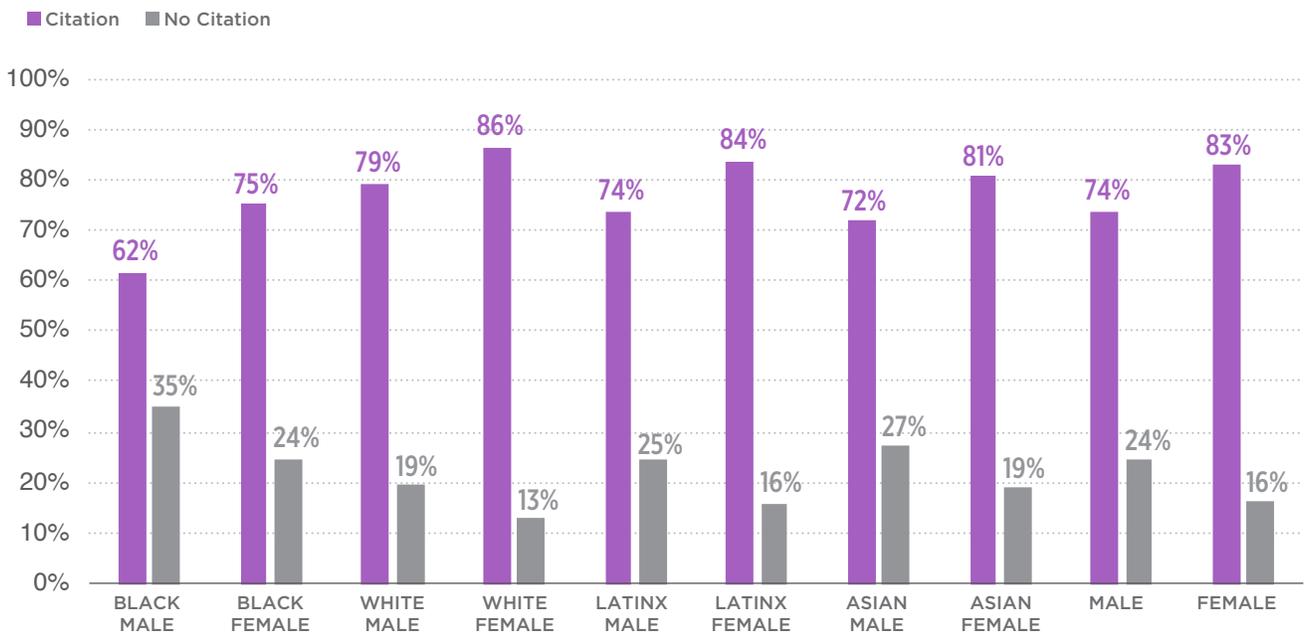


FIGURE 6

Black men were less likely than any other group to receive a traffic citation during a traffic stop.
Result of Traffic Stop by Race, Ethnicity and Gender in Fresno*



* Percentages may not equal 100%, as traffic stops can result in cases outside of a person being given a citation or not, such as being arrested.

FIGURE 7

Two of the top three most common reasons for a traffic stop were not related to moving violations.

Most Common Reasons for Traffic Stop by Race and Ethnicity in Fresno

	FIRST	SECOND	THIRD
BLACK	Unsafe speed for prevailing conditions	No registration for vehicle, trailer, etc.	Display license plates incorrectly
WHITE	Unsafe speed for prevailing conditions	Hand held device while driving	No registration for vehicle, trailer, etc.
LATINX	Unsafe speed for prevailing conditions	No registration for vehicle, trailer, etc.	Failure to maintain vehicle light equipment
ASIAN	Unsafe speed for prevailing conditions	Hand held device while driving	Failure to maintain vehicle light equipment
TOTAL	Unsafe speed for prevailing conditions	No registration for vehicle, trailer, etc.	Failure to maintain vehicle light equipment

SOURCES FOR THIS RESEARCH:
 Original analysis of 2019 RIPA stop data, <https://openjustice.doj.ca.gov/data>, and 2019 American Community Survey data, <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/>. All dollar estimates are based on the Judicial Council of California's Uniform Bail and Penalty Schedules, <https://www.courts.ca.gov/documents/UBPS-2021-Final.pdf>.

Through research, education and advocacy, SPUR works to create an equitable, sustainable and prosperous region. We are a member-supported nonprofit organization.