



Traffic Stops

Oakland 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 Oakland Fact:

\$1,189,768

Amount Oakland drivers were ticketed for having their license plates displayed incorrectly.

FIGURE 1

Black drivers made up a plurality of all traffic stops in Oakland.
Oakland Traffic Stops by Race and Ethnicity

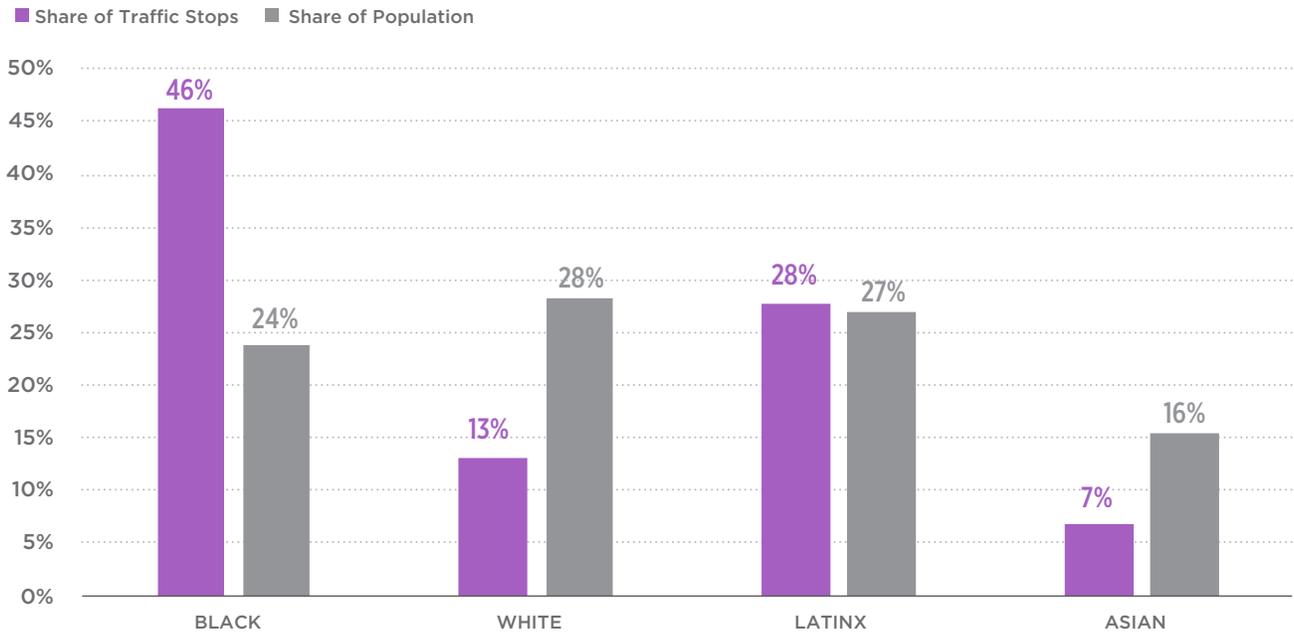


FIGURE 2

Black men made up 32% of all traffic stops while making up just 12% of the population.
Oakland Traffic Stops by Race, Ethnicity and Gender

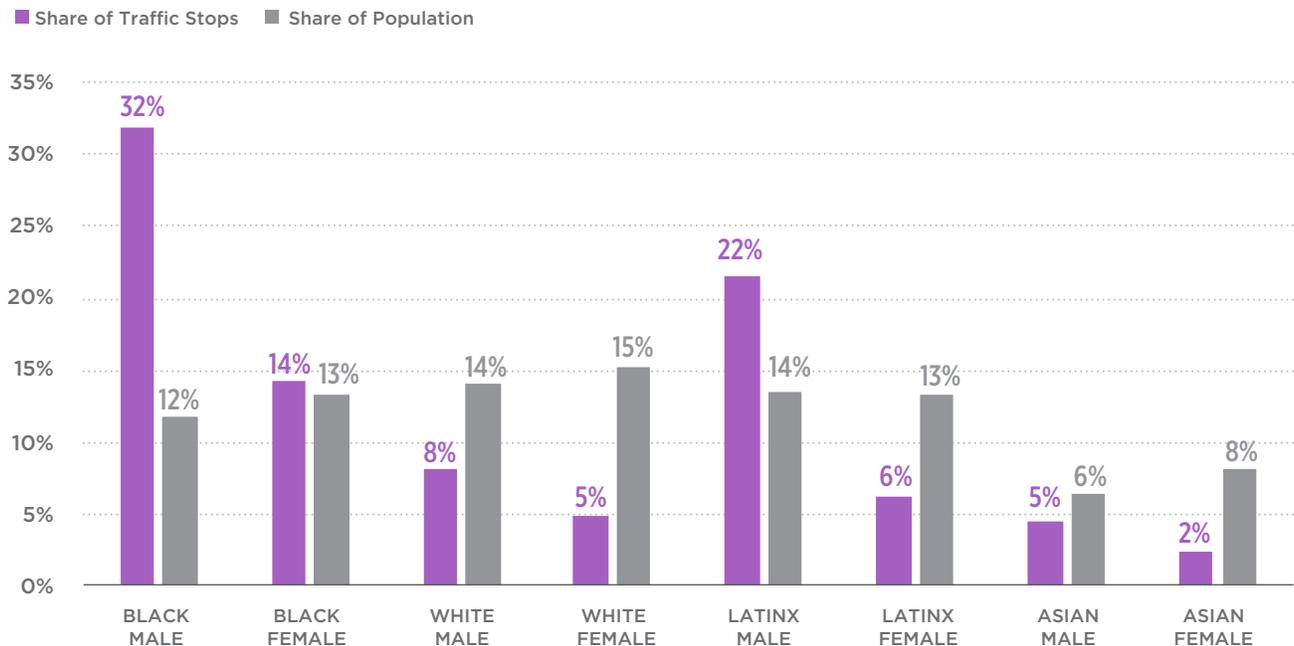


FIGURE 3

Black and Latinx 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 Oakland

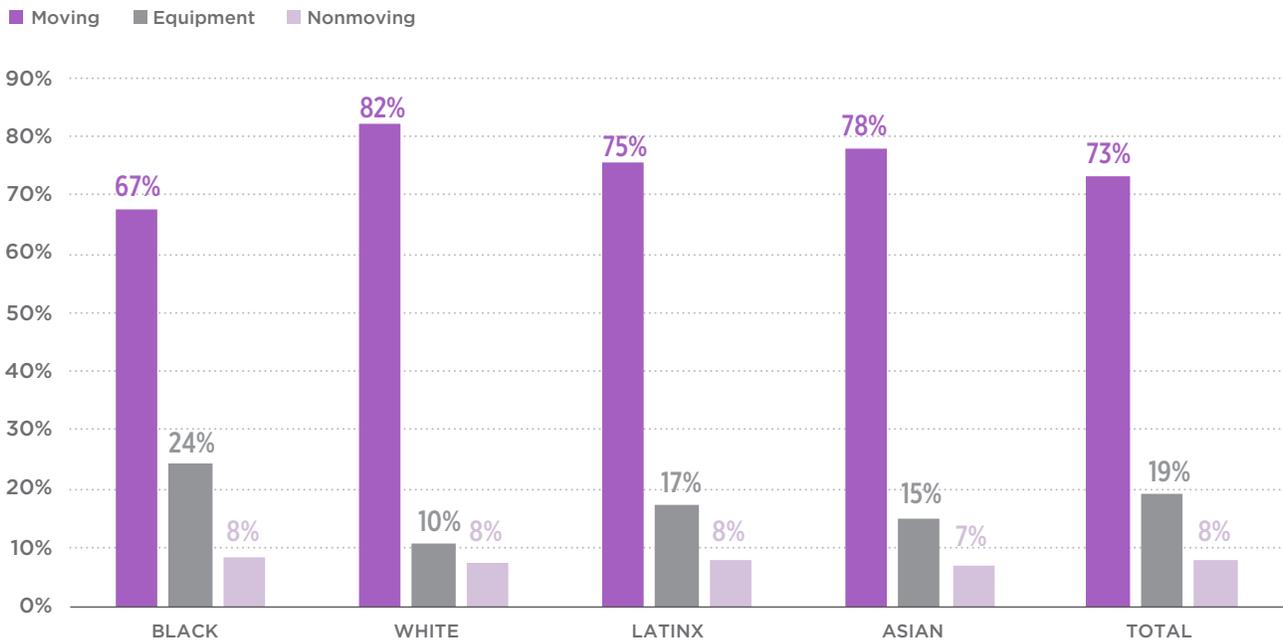


FIGURE 4

Black men were more likely to be stopped for equipment or nonmoving reasons than any other racial or ethnic group in Oakland.

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

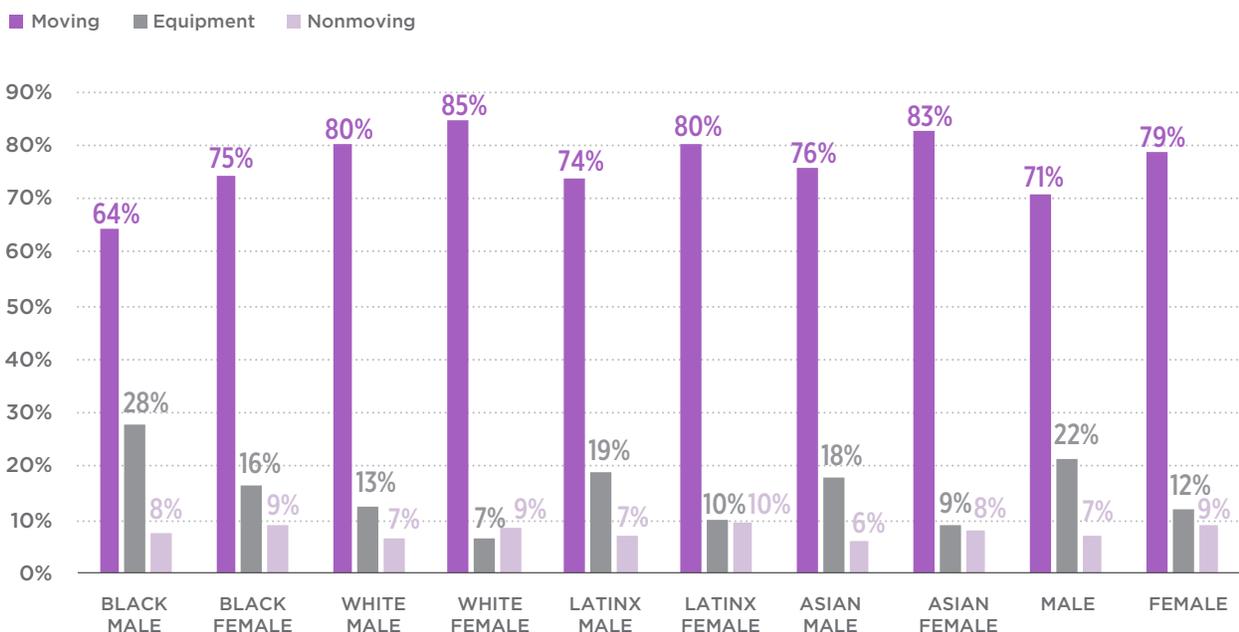


FIGURE 5

Just 57% of Black drivers stopped by police were given a citation.
Result of Traffic Stop by Race and Ethnicity in Oakland*

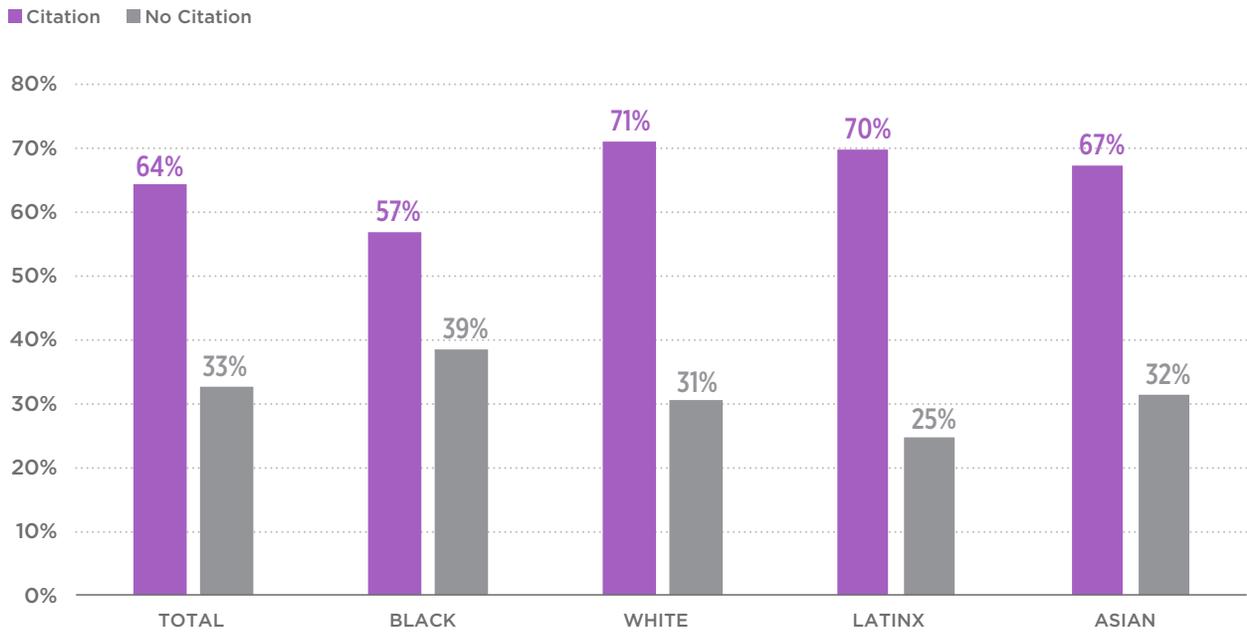
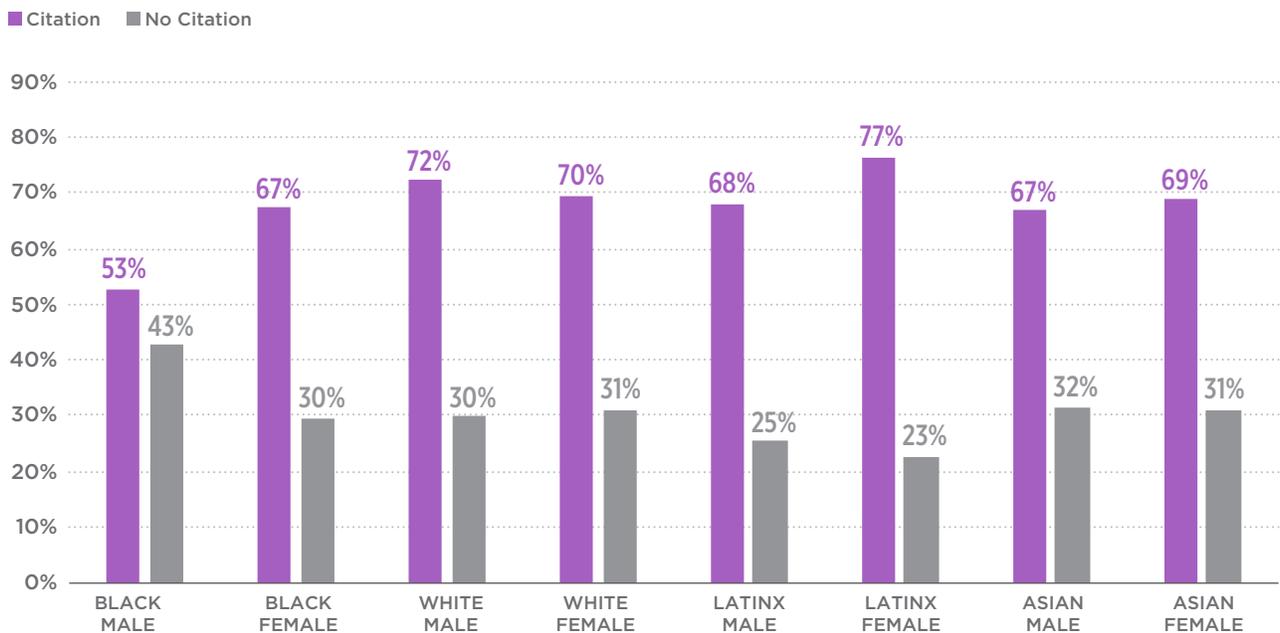


FIGURE 6

43% of all Black men, more than any other group, stopped by police in Oakland were not given a ticket.
Result of Traffic Stop by Race, Ethnicity and Gender in Oakland*



* 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

Black drivers were more likely than their neighbors to be stopped by police for displaying license plates incorrectly.

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

	FIRST	SECOND	THIRD
BLACK	Failure to stop vehicle at stop sign, crosswalk, etc.	Display license plates incorrectly	Hand held device while driving
WHITE	Hand held device while driving	Failure to stop vehicle at stop sign, crosswalk, etc.	Use of cellphone while driving
LATINX	Failure to stop vehicle at stop sign, crosswalk, etc.	Hand held device while driving	Display license plates incorrectly
ASIAN	Unsafe speed for prevailing conditions	No registration for vehicle, trailer, etc.	Failure to stop before line on red, etc.
TOTAL	Failure to stop vehicle at stop sign, crosswalk, etc.	Hand held device while driving	Display license plates incorrectly

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.