



Traffic Stops

San Bernardino County Sheriff's 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 San Bernardino County Fact:

\$1,052,778

Cost to drivers in San Bernardino County for displaying their license plates incorrectly and not having their registration.

FIGURE 1

Black and white drivers were disproportionately stopped by the sheriff's department in San Bernardino County.

San Bernardino County Traffic Stops by Race and Ethnicity

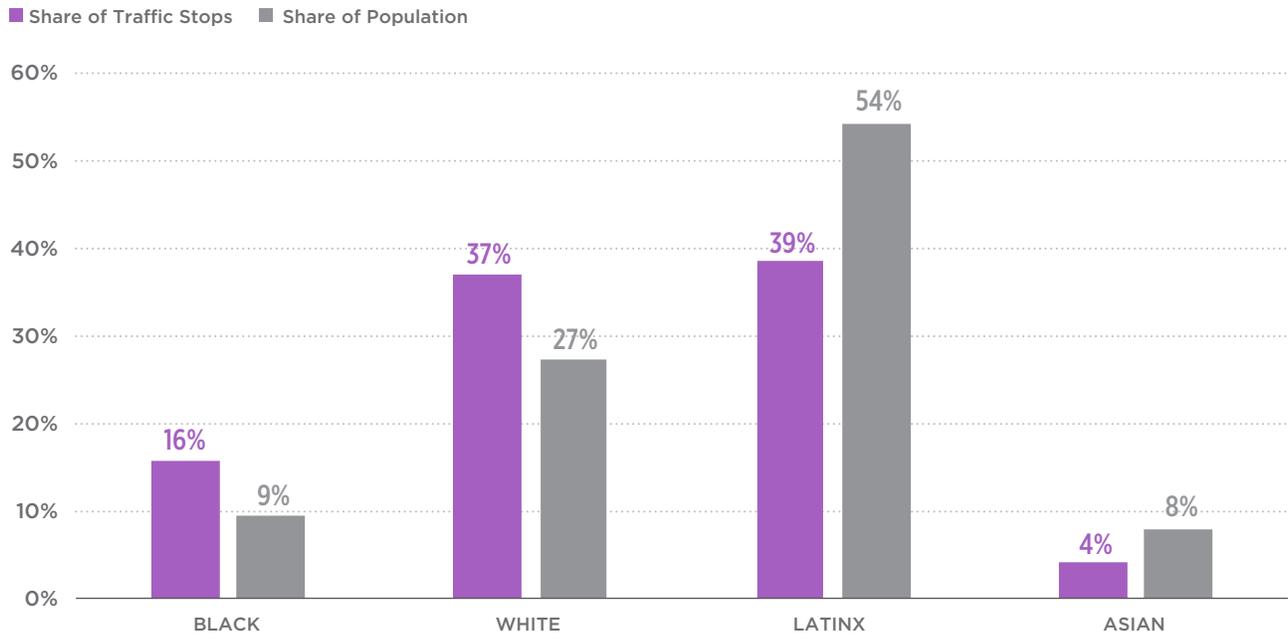


FIGURE 2

Black and white men were disproportionately stopped by the sheriff's department in San Bernardino County.

San Bernardino County Stops by Race, Ethnicity and Gender

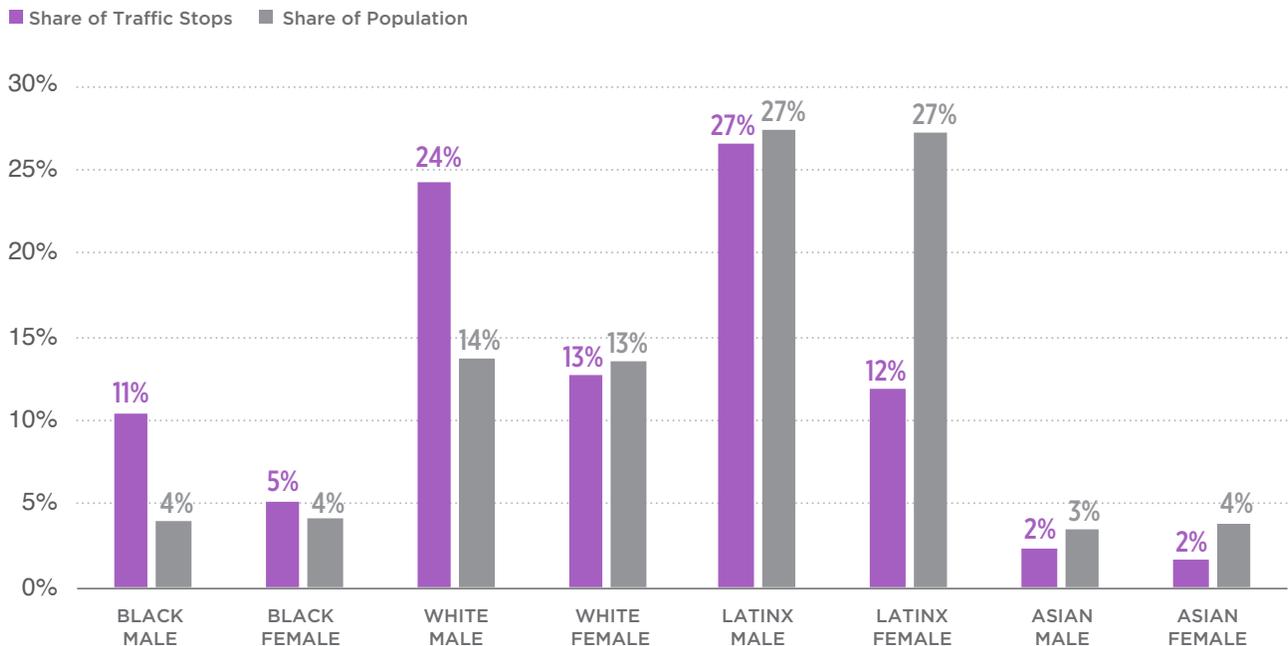


FIGURE 3

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 San Bernardino County

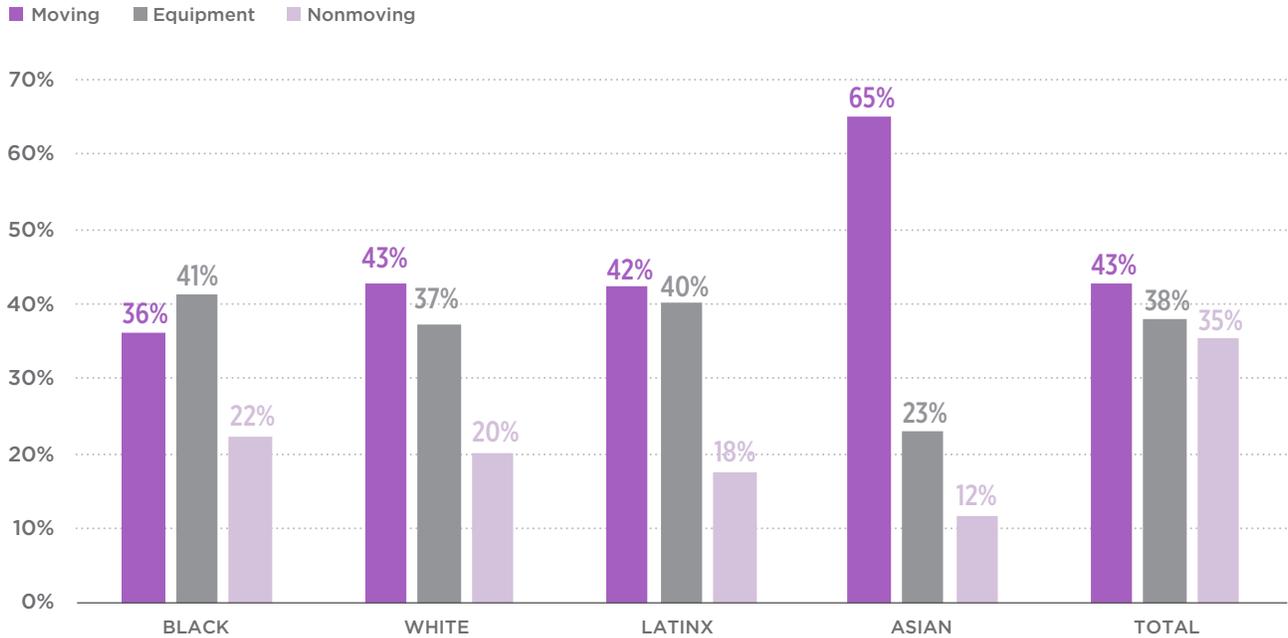


FIGURE 4

A plurality of Black and Latinx men were stopped for reasons related to equipment problems.

Reasons for Traffic Stop by Race, Ethnicity and Gender in San Bernardino County

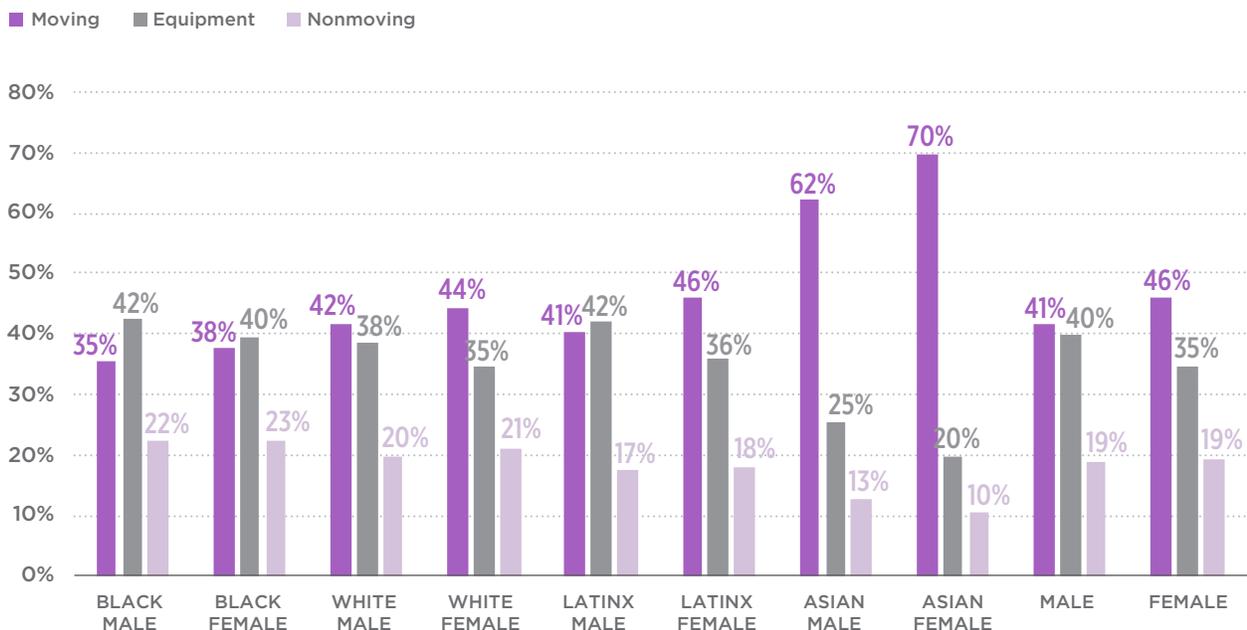


FIGURE 5

A majority of drivers stopped by San Bernardino County Sheriff’s Department were not given a traffic citation.

Result of Traffic Stop by Race and Ethnicity in San Bernardino County*

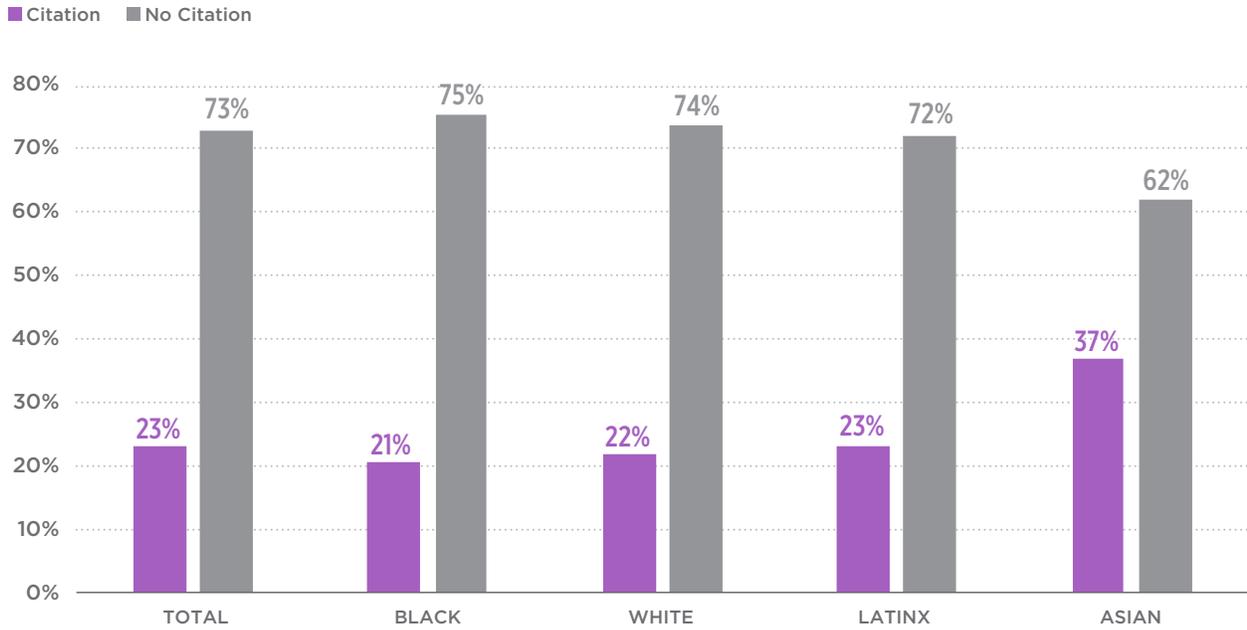
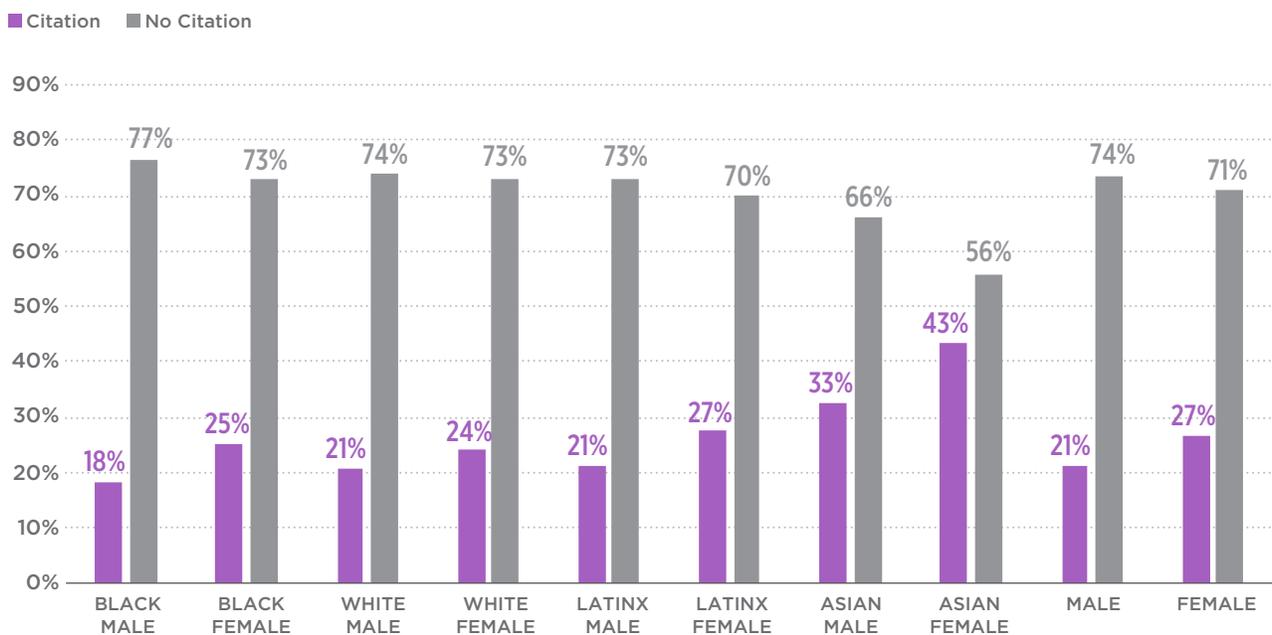


FIGURE 6

Black men were the group least likely to be ticketed following a traffic stop in San Bernardino County.

Result of Traffic Stop by Race, Ethnicity and Gender in San Bernardino County*



* 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 and Latinx drivers were most likely to be stopped by police for displaying license plates incorrectly or for not having an up-to-date car registration. White and Asian drivers were most likely to be stopped for speeding.

Most Common Reasons for Traffic Stop by Race and Ethnicity in San Bernardino County

	FIRST	SECOND	THIRD
BLACK	Display license plates incorrectly	No registration for vehicle, trailer, etc.	Unsafe speed for prevailing conditions
WHITE	Unsafe speed for prevailing conditions	No registration for vehicle, trailer, etc.	No registration for vehicle, trailer, etc.
LATINX	Display license plates incorrectly	Unsafe speed for prevailing conditions	No registration for vehicle, trailer, etc.
ASIAN	Unsafe speed for prevailing conditions	Failure to stop vehicle at stop sign, crosswalk, etc.	Display license plates incorrectly
TOTAL	Unsafe speed for prevailing conditions	Display license plates incorrectly	No registration for vehicle, trailer, etc.

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.