



Traffic Stops

San José 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 San José Facts:

HAVING NO REGISTRATION
is the third most common reason for a Latino driver to be stopped in San José. Yet only...

30%

of Latino drivers stopped for having no registration were given a ticket.

FIGURE 1

Latinx drivers made up 48% of all traffic stops in San José, despite Latinx people making up just 32% of the city's population.

San José Traffic Stops by Race and Ethnicity

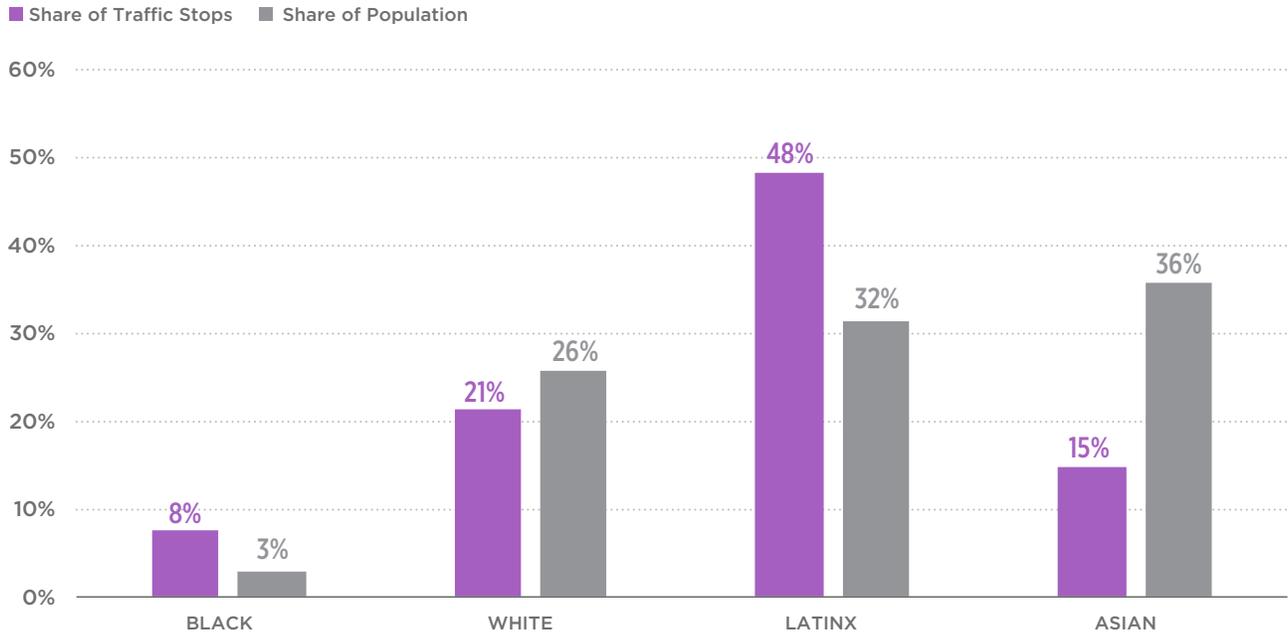


FIGURE 2

Latinx men made up 36% of all traffic stops while making up just 16% of the population.

San José Traffic Stops by Race, Ethnicity and Gender

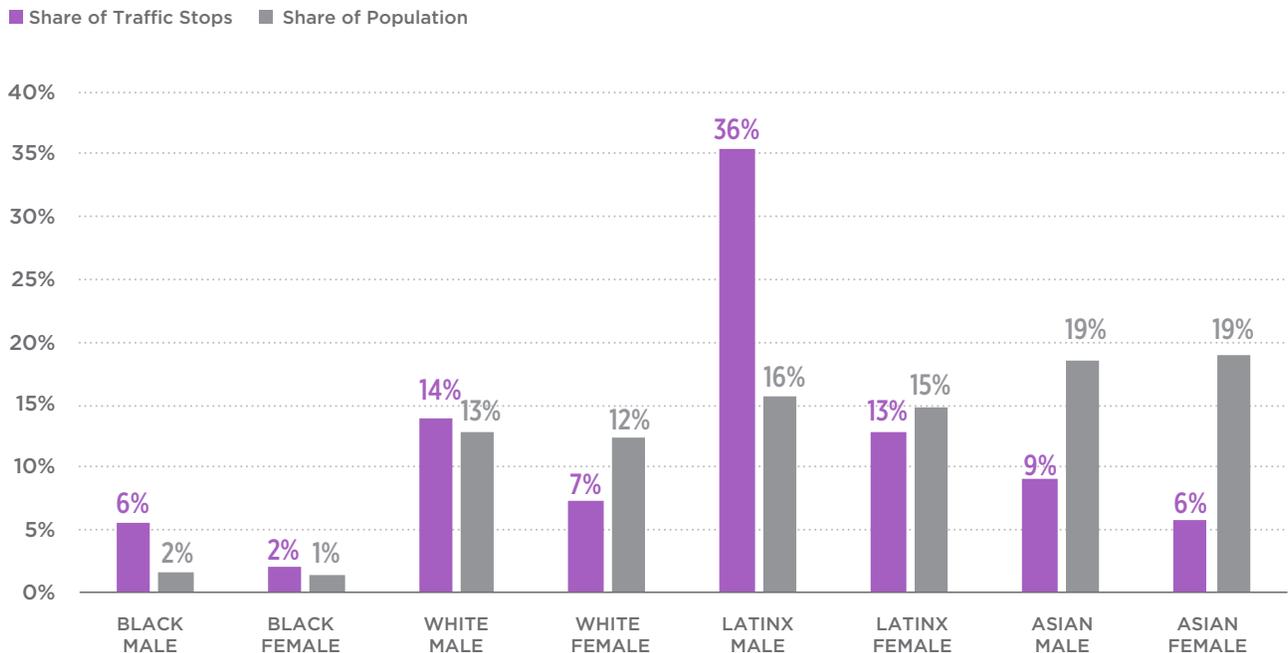


FIGURE 3

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 San José

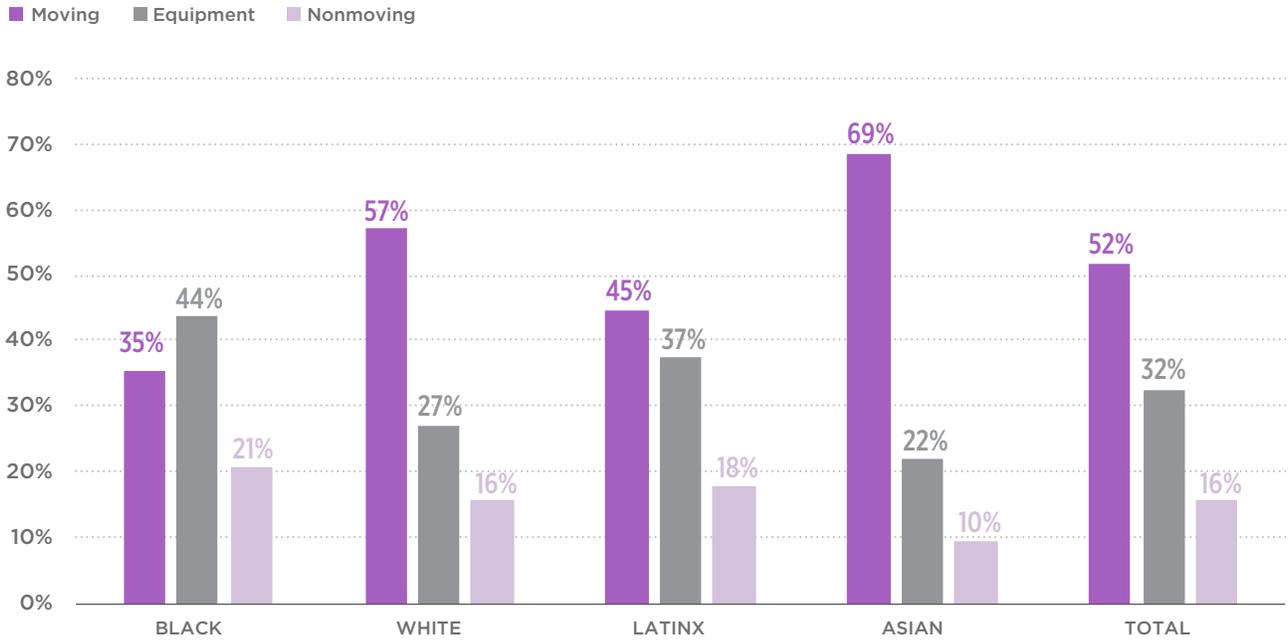


FIGURE 4

Nearly half of all Black men were stopped for equipment reasons.

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

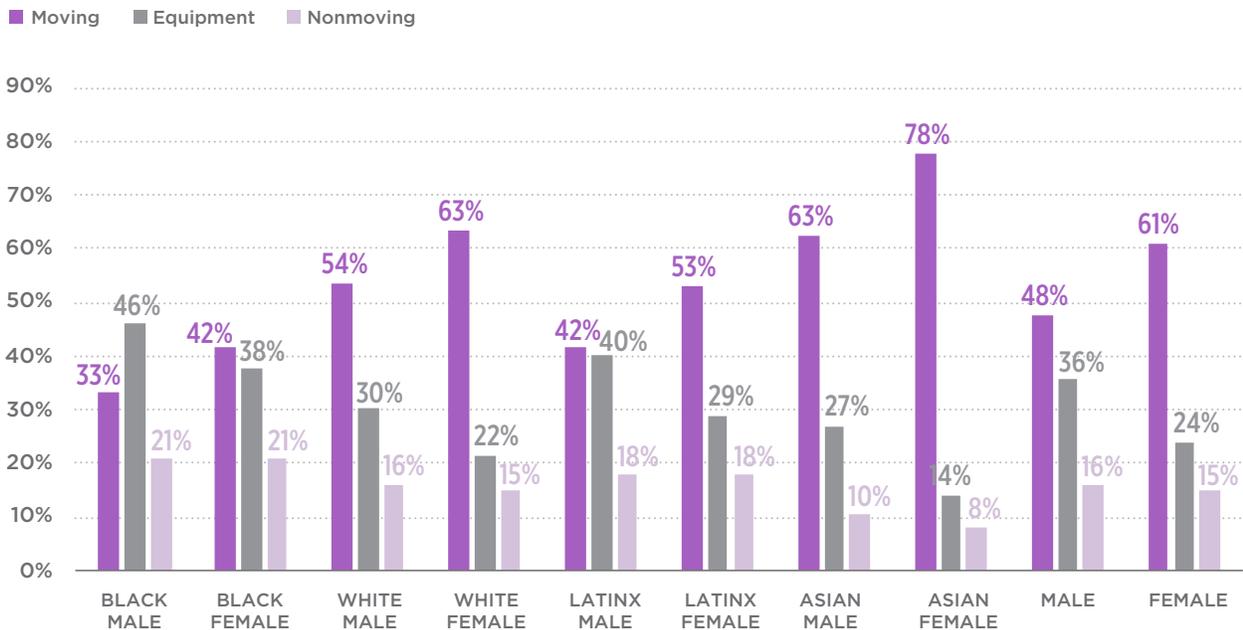


FIGURE 5

A majority of Black drivers stopped by police were not given a traffic citation.
Result of Traffic Stop by Race and Ethnicity in San José*

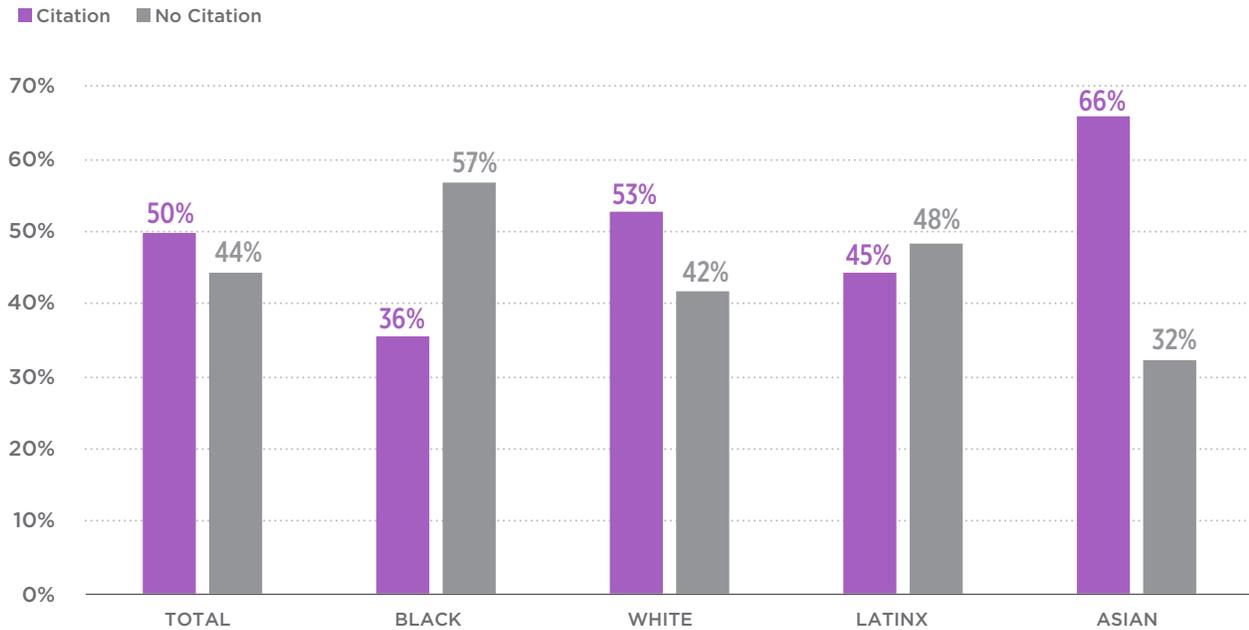
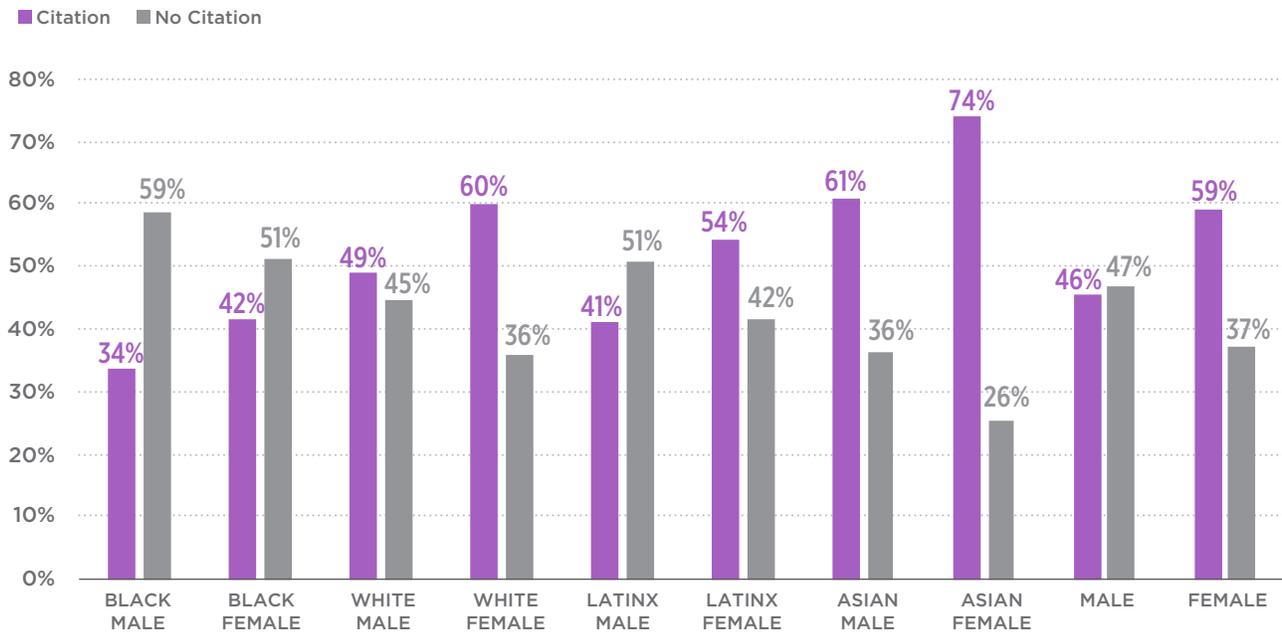


FIGURE 6

59% of Black men and 51% of Latinx men stopped by police were not given a ticket.
Result of Traffic Stop by Race, Ethnicity and Gender in San José*



* 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 to be stopped by police for having out of date registration than for any other reason.

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

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

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.