

# Driving While Black and Brown:

## The Case for Banning Racially Biased Traffic Stops in Sacramento



Most people only ever interact with the police during a traffic stop. While police officers are authorized to stop drivers for moving violations, they also have discretion to enforce minor vehicle equipment and non-moving violations. That's where racial bias, whether implicit or explicit, can creep in.

An analysis of 2023-2024 traffic stop data collected under California's Racial and Identity Profiling Act found that the Sacramento Police Department disproportionately stopped Black drivers. Most of these stops were for minor traffic violations that pose little risk to road safety, such as expired registration tags and tinted windows. Sacramento police also were more likely to search Black and Latino motorists.

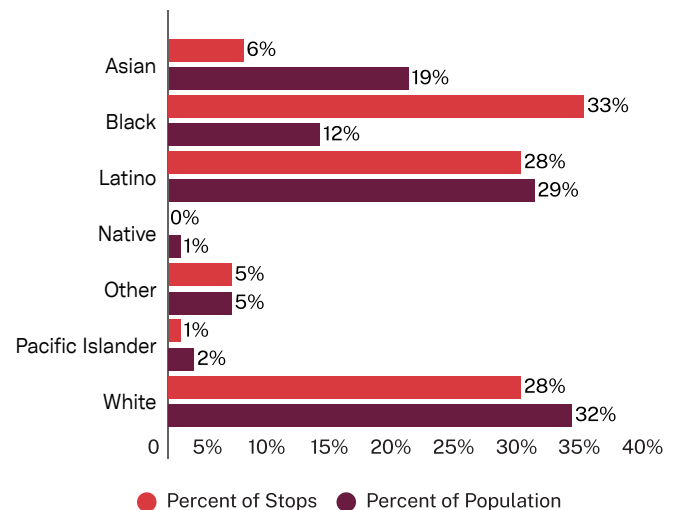
Police officers often use these stops as a "pretext" to look for evidence of criminal activity when they don't have reasonable suspicion a crime has been committed or probable cause for a search. The data shows that during most of these searches Sacramento police did not recover contraband or weapons.

Pretext traffic stops do little to improve public safety. But they can have deadly consequences, particularly for Black people.

## Key Findings

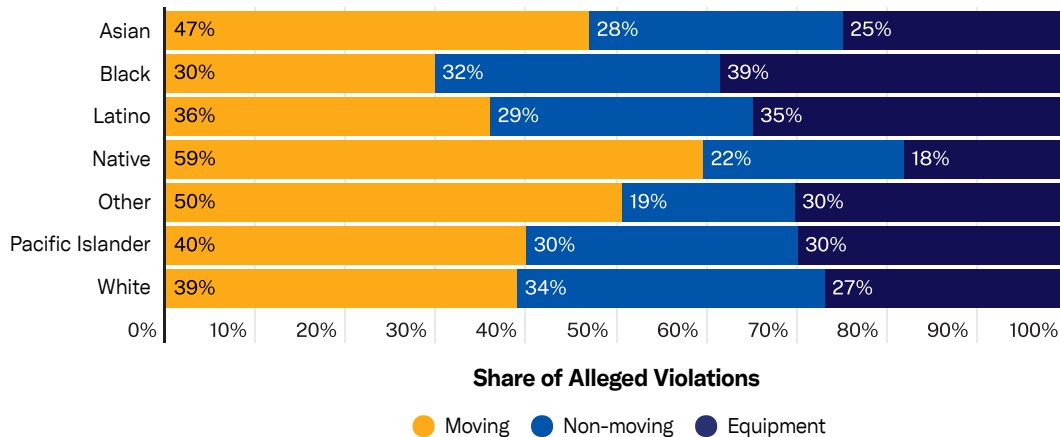
- Across all stops, more than 1 in 4 (28%) did not result in a warning, citation, or arrest. Black drivers were overrepresented in these "no-result" stops.
- More than 1 in 3 stops for window obstruction and display tags/plates resulted in no warning, citation, or arrest.
- Across all searches, only 5% resulted in drugs seized (equivalent to 0.7% of all stops) and only 2% in guns seized (equivalent to 0.2% of all stops).
- Black drivers had the lowest rate of citations despite being stopped and searched more than all other racial groups while white drivers had the highest share of citations relative to their share of stops.

**Black drivers made up 33% of stops but only 12% of the population of Sacramento.**



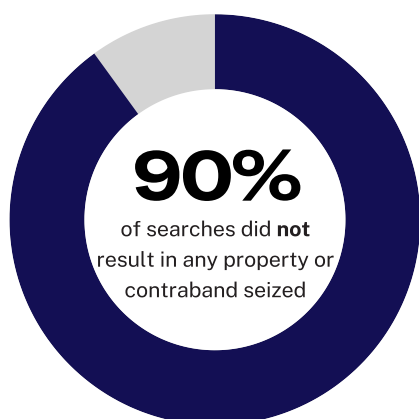
**Black drivers were 3.1x more likely to be stopped than white drivers.**

Of the Black drivers who were stopped, about 70% of the stops were for vehicle equipment or non-moving violations, meaning most were stopped for reasons not directly related to traffic safety.

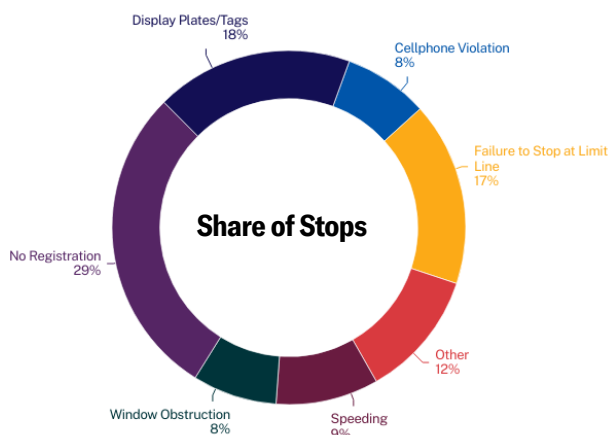


Traffic stops were analyzed by the ACLU using data from the Sacramento Police Department, which was released in accordance with [the Racial and Identity Profiling Act](#) for 2023-2024.

Black and Latino drivers were 2.1 and 1.5 times more likely to be searched than white drivers.



Three violations not directly related to safety—no registration, display plates/tags, and window obstruction—alone accounted for more than half of all stops.



## Recommendation

These racial disparities are damning and paint a clear picture that the Sacramento Police Department uses minor traffic violations as a pretext to stop and search Black and Latino drivers.

The ACLU of Northern California recommends that Sacramento adopt a policy prohibiting its police department from stopping drivers for non-safety related violations, such as tinted windows and failure to illuminate a license plate. Other California cities that have implemented such reforms have reduced racial disparities in traffic enforcement with no negative impact on public safety.

