

# Race Data and Traffic Stops in Ottawa, 2013-2015: A Report on Ottawa and the Police Districts

## Executive Summary

This report provides a city overview of the findings of the Ottawa Police Service's Traffic Stop Race Data Collection Project (TSRDCP), a pioneering community-based research project that involved undertaking the largest race based data collection in Canadian policing history. The project arose from an agreement between the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) and the Ottawa Police Services Board (Board), the Ottawa Police Service (OPS). The OHRC and the OPS believe that race based data collection is part of an organizational approach to ensuring bias-neutral policing services. Full information regarding the agreement is available online at [ottawapolice.ca/race](http://ottawapolice.ca/race).

The Traffic Stop Race Data Collection Project required police officers to record their perception of the driver's race, by observation only, for traffic stops over a two-year period from June 27, 2013 to June 26, 2015. A total of 81,902 records of traffic stops were examined for this Report. Each record included complete information on race, sex and age, along with complete information on police districts, reasons for traffic stops and outcomes. The record did not include the time of day nor the neighbourhood where the stop occurred. The officers entering the race data reported perceiving the race of the driver prior to the stop in 11.4% of the cases.

This research project addresses three issues:

**INCIDENCES OF TRAFFIC STOPS** - Do drivers of different race groups have disproportionately high incidences of traffic stops, when compared with their respective driver populations in Ottawa? Research findings showed that:

- The study examines 81,902 traffic stops where officers recorded their perception of the driver's race: 69.3% White (56,776), 12.3% Middle Easterner (10,066), 8.8% Black (7,238), 4.7% E.Asian/SE Asian (3,875), 2.7% S. Asian (2,195), 1.9% Other racialized minorities (1,545), and .3% Indigenous Peoples (207).
- In Ottawa, Middle Easterner and Black groups, irrespective of their sex and age, are the two race groups with disproportionately high incidences of traffic stops. Middle Easterner Drivers were stopped 10066 times, which constituted about 12.3% of the total stops over the two year period. However, these drivers represent less than 4% of the total driving population in Ottawa. This means that Middle Easterner Drivers were stopped 3.3 times more than what you would expect based on their population. Black

Drivers were stopped 7238 times, which constituted about 8.8% of the total stops over the two-year period. However, these drivers represent less than 4% of the total driving population in Ottawa. This means that Black Drivers were stopped 2.3 times more than what you would expect based on their population.

- With the exception of Indigenous peoples, men aged 16-24 of all race groups (including White) have disproportionately high incidences of traffic stops. The disproportionalities ranged from 64.21% (E. Asian/ S.E. Asian) to 1100.39% (Middle Easterner).
- Middle Easterner Male Drivers aged 16-24 were stopped 2302 times, which constituted about 2.8% of the total stops over the two year period. However, these drivers represent less than 0.25% of the total driving population in Ottawa. This means that young Middle Easterner male drivers were stopped 12 times more than what you would expect based on their population. Black Male Drivers aged 16-24 were stopped 1238 times, which constituted about 1.5% of the total stops over the two year period. However, these drivers represent less than 0.2% of the total driving population in Ottawa. This means that young Black male drivers were stopped 8.3 times more than what you would expect based on their population. White Male Drivers aged 16-24 were stopped 6172 times, which constituted about 7.5% of the total stops over the two year period. However, these drivers represent about 4.3% of the total driving population in Ottawa. This means that young White male drivers were stopped 1.7 times more than what you would expect based on their population.

**REASONS FOR TRAFFIC STOPS** - Do racialized minority drivers experience disproportionately high incidences of specific reasons for traffic stops when compared with their White counterparts in Ottawa? Research findings showed that:

- The findings showed that the reason most used by police officers in traffic stops is “provincial and municipal offenses”. It was used in 79,603 of the 81,902 traffic stops (97.19%). Police officers did not utilize “provincial and municipal offenses” for traffic stops in a disproportional manner for any racial minority groups.
- When compared with the White group, “criminal offences” reason has been used disproportionately by police officers for five of the six racialized minority groups. The data is inconclusive about Indigenous peoples with regard to this issue because the number of stops citing “criminal offenses” was too low to draw any conclusions.
- Similarly, “suspicious activities” reason has been used disproportionately by police officers for four racialized minority group - Indigenous peoples (99.37%), Black (148.40%), Middle Easterner (133.70%), and other racialized minorities (132.78%).

**OUTCOMES OF TRAFFIC STOPS** - Do racialized minority drivers experience disproportionately high incidences of specific outcome of traffic stops when compared with their White counterparts in Ottawa? Research findings showed that:

- All race groups (including White) have received similar proportions of charges (44.65%) from police officers after traffic stops.
- All race groups (including White) have received similar proportions of warnings (41.29%) from police officers after traffic stops.
- Indigenous peoples (37.77%), Black (47.28%), Middle Easterner (36.84%), and other racialized minorities (28.21%) groups experienced disproportionately high incidences of “final (no action)” outcomes of traffic stops.

This study is a correlational study on the relationship between race, sex, age, and traffic stops in Ottawa. It does not deal with the issue of causality. That is to say, it does not explain why and how these factors are related or not related. For this reason, the findings only provide a big picture of traffic stops in the entire capital city of Ottawa, covering a two-year period from 2013 and 2015 – a picture which provides a fresh and pioneering perspective on race and traffic stops in Canada.

## **Recommendations**

It is recommended that the Ottawa Police Services Board and Ottawa Police Service:

- (1) Determine the sources of the disproportionately high incidences identified in this study through additional research on psychological, organizational, and social issues within the Ottawa Police Service – systemic biases in police practices; police leadership and corporate culture; organizational policing strategies and tactics; human resources policies and practices; institutional mindsets about the association between race and crime; the diversity of the Ottawa Police Service workforce; and race relations dynamics with the diverse communities that constitute the City of Ottawa.
- (2) Develop and implement solutions to address the anomalies of disproportionately high incidences through a review of research findings gathered through the implementation of Recommendation # 1 in consultation with stakeholder groups, race and ethnic communities, and the public.

- (3) Increase positive police-community contact by holding monthly, or regular, relationship-building meetings; train officers and community members together; promote joint police and community committee work particularly in advisory areas; and hold “critical incident” discussions and trainings and annual conferences on police-community relations.
- (4) Continue collecting race data in traffic stops with improved tools and processes; monitor regularly traffic stops issues; place data reports as a regular agenda item on meetings at the level of staff, senior management, and board; and communicate data related to race and traffic stops regularly to the public through quarterly bulletins, press releases, annual reports, and other media.
- (5) Build on its extensive and successful experience with community engagement and develop a multi-year action plan to address the issues of racial disparities in traffic stops raised in this report.
- (6) Make readily available the data collected for this research project on race and traffic stops. The raw data made available should allow for analysis that goes beyond the scope and methodology of this report, but within the legal limits of the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* and the *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*.

SOURCE:

Race Data and Traffic Stops in Ottawa, 2013-2015: A Report on Ottawa and the Police Districts. Submitted by Dr. Lorne Foster, Dr. Les Jacobs, and Dr. Bobby Siu, October 2016.

Full report and data available at [ottawapolice.ca/race](http://ottawapolice.ca/race).