

# Vermont's BIPOC drivers are most likely to have a run-in with police, study shows

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University of Vermont Economics professor Stephanie Seguino is co-author of the new study that shows widespread racial bias persists among Vermont police departments after examining more than 800,000 vehicular stops over five years. Credit: Ian Thomas Jansen-Lonnquist

New research examining more than 800,000 traffic stops in Vermont

over the course of five years substantiates the term "driving while Black and Brown."

Compared to white [drivers](#), Black and Latinx drivers in Vermont are more likely to be stopped, ticketed, arrested, and searched. But they are less likely to be found with contraband than white drivers. The report finds evidence not only of [racial disparities](#) but also racial bias in policing. What's more, a number of these gaps widened over the years examined in the report. With such comprehensive data encompassing the state of Vermont, the authors also found that Vermont police stop cars at a rate of 255 per 1,000 residents, which is more than three times higher than the national average of 86 stops per 1,000 residents.

The report "Trends in Racial Disparities in Vermont Traffic Stops, 2014-19"—led by University of Vermont Economics professor and Gund Fellow Stephanie Seguino with Cornell University's Nancy Brooks and data analyst Pat Autilio—is a comprehensive review of racial disparities in the state's vehicular stops, tickets, arrests, searches, and contraband. As well, it analyzes the impact of 2018 legalization of cannabis—previously considered contraband—on these numbers.

Using data from 79 [law enforcement agencies](#) across the state, the report builds on Seguino and Brooks' past studies of [traffic stops](#) to include 50 more agencies and additional years of data. The authors first reported in 2017 that in 2015, for every white driver arrested, nearly two Black drivers were arrested. That statistic has remained roughly the same into 2019.

This study also provides a breakdown of the data by agency, revealing wide variation across those 79 agencies and regions.

For example, on average, Black drivers are about 3.5 times more likely and Hispanics 3.9 times more likely to be searched during a stop than

white drivers. But, in Brattleboro, Black drivers are almost 9 times more likely to be searched than white drivers; in Shelburne, 4.4 times greater; in South Burlington; 3.9 times greater; in Vergennes, 3.8 times greater; in Burlington, 3.6 times greater; and in Rutland, 3.45 times greater. This compares to Stowe, where Black drivers are less likely to be searched than white drivers.

The study finds that legalization of cannabis did little to narrow the Black and Latinx search rate disparities with white drivers. Even after legalization in 2018, Black drivers are 3 times as likely to be searched as white drivers, and Latinx drivers, 2.6 times more likely.

The researchers note there is a consistent issue with the quality of traffic stop data: some agencies don't always comply with the requirement to report the driver's race during a stop. "In fact," Autilio notes, "in more than a dozen agencies, the percentage of reports that exclude the driver's race is double the percentage of reports that indicate a BIPOC driver."

"This is concerning because the purpose of the legislation requiring agencies to collect data on traffic stops is to identify and track racial disparities in traffic policing," Brooks says. In a small state with few BIPOC communities, "just a small number of stops missing race of the driver can undermine the quality of the data and the ability to detect racial disparities."

Previous years' reports have been shared with Vermont's law enforcement officials, spurring racial bias training in some agencies and disputes in others. Seguino was recently unanimously appointed to the Burlington Police Commission for her work and expertise.

"Though this work is challenging, not the least because of the resistance of some law enforcement agencies to acknowledging these troubling racial disparities, we believe it important to continue to provide solid

evidence on which to assess [racial bias](#) in policing," Seguino said. Brooks added, "Our hope is that our analysis is useful to law enforcement agencies committed to bias free policing. And we hope community members find these data helpful in holding their local law enforcement agencies accountable."

**More information:** The report, "Trends in Racial Disparities in Vermont Traffic Stops, 2014-19," along with individual large law enforcement agency reports, is available online:

[www.uvm.edu/cas/economics/prof...es/stephanie-seguino](http://www.uvm.edu/cas/economics/prof...es/stephanie-seguino)

Provided by University of Vermont

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