

North Carolina Traffic Stop Reporting Program Series: Part 1

Traffic Stop Trends in North Carolina

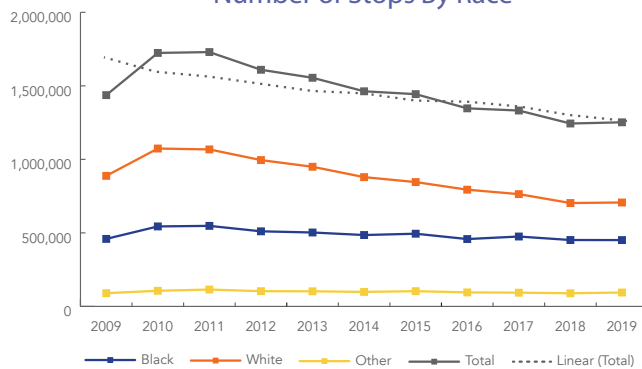
North Carolina began requiring state law enforcement agencies to collect data related to traffic stops in 2000. The program was expanded in 2002 to include all county sheriff offices and law enforcement agencies serving populations of at least 10,000 or employing five or more full-time sworn officers for every 1,000 in the population. Data has been collected for more than 25 million stops since the beginning of the program.¹

Data collected during traffic stops include the date, time, location, agency initiating stop, purpose of stop, actions taken, encounters of force, injuries, officer ID, searches, contraband and demographics (gender, race, age, ethnicity) of both the driver and passenger(s). With the abundance of traffic stop data available, this

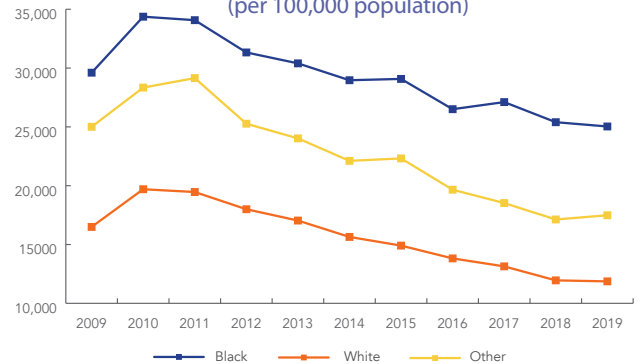
review will be the first of a multi-part series analyzing North Carolina traffic stops. Part 1 of this series presents the racial disparities among drivers being stopped and the purpose of the traffic stop.

Beginning in 2009, the number of overall stops reported annually increased for a few years and then decreased 13% by 2019, while the projected driving population increased 14% over the period.² The rate of stops for Black drivers decreased 15% between 2009 and 2019, while the rate of stops for white drivers fell by 28% and other/unknown races decreased 30% over the period.³ In 2019, the rate of stops for Black drivers was more than twice that of white drivers and almost 1.5 times that of other races (including unknown).

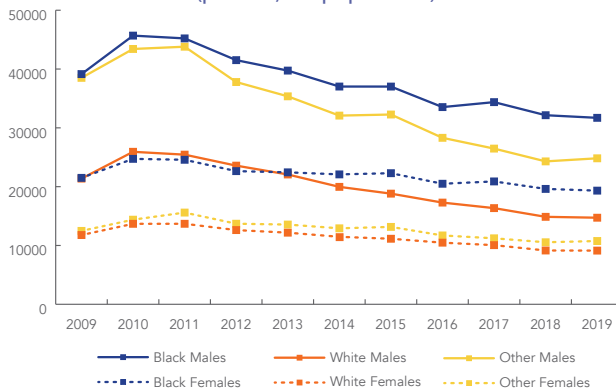
Number of Stops By Race



Rate of Traffic Stops By Race (per 100,000 population)



Rate of Traffic Stops By Race and Gender (per 100,000 population)



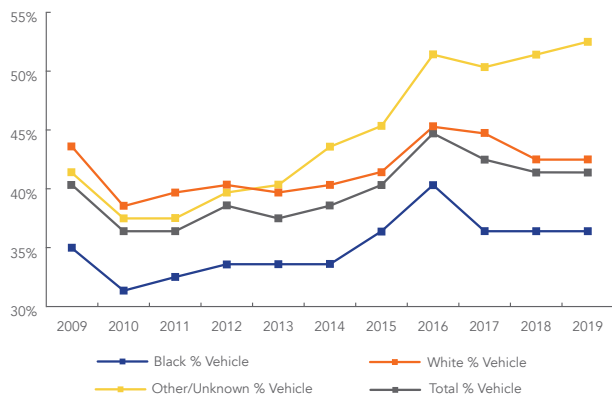
- In 2009, drivers of other races were stopped at a rate of 1.5 times that of whites, which remained constant through 2019.
- Males were stopped at a higher rate than females, but less so over time – 1.8 times more in 2009 and 1.6 times more in 2019.
- The rate of traffic stops decreased for all of the combined race and gender categories from 2009-19. The rate of stops for Black females increased from 1.8 times that of white females in 2009, to 2.1 times in 2019. In addition, the rate of stops for Black females surpassed that of white males from 2013-19.

Purpose of Traffic Stop and Race

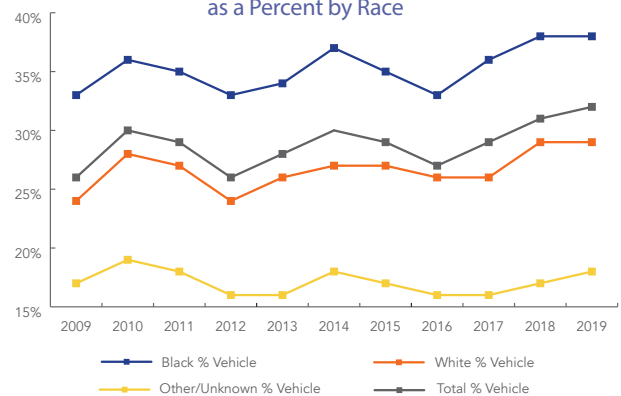
The majority of the traffic stops in North Carolina from 2009-19 were speed limit violations (40%) or vehicle regulatory and equipment violations (29%). These violations account for 69% of all stops from 2009-19.

- The graphs below show a breakdown for the purpose of stop for each race category and for the total of all stops. White drivers and drivers of another or unknown race were stopped for speeding more often than the total, so more likely to be pulled over for speed limit violations than Black drivers.
- The reverse is true for stops for vehicle violations. Black drivers were pulled over at a higher percentage for vehicle regulatory and equipment violations than the other race categories.

Traffic Stops for Speed Limit Violations as a Percent by Race



Traffic Stops for Vehicle Regulatory or Equipment Violations as a Percent by Race



Agency Participation

The overall compliance rate for agencies reporting traffic stops in 2019 was 86%. This varied by agency type, with 76% of sheriff's offices, 89% of police departments and 83% of state agencies that met the reporting requirements for participation. In addition, 15 police or public safety agencies that were not required by statute to submit traffic stop data reported stops in 2019.

¹ N.C.G.S § 143B-903.

² The estimated driving population is determined by the number of persons by race and sex between the ages of 16-84 by year. These estimates were derived from the Vintage 2019 N.C. Population certified state estimates produced by the State Demographer, N.C. Office of State Budget & Management.

³ The "Rate of Stops" have been determined by dividing 100,000 by the estimated race and/or sex population between the ages of 16 and 84 and multiplying this factor by the total number of stops reported for each race where the driver was between the ages of 16 and 84.

⁴ Traffic Stop data includes submissions in the SBI database (<https://trafficstops.ncsbi.gov>) as of April 16, 2020.