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Survey finds racial disparity in traffic stop searches

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Black and Hispanic motorists who were stopped by police in Pantego and Colleyville in 2005 were twice as likely as Anglo motorists to be searched with consent, according to a racial profiling analysis released this week.

Black motorists in Fort Worth were also twice as likely as whites to be searched by police without probable cause, according to the Texas Criminal Justice Coalition, an Austin-based nonprofit that surveyed racial disparity in traffic stops among 221 Texas police jurisdictions. The coalition surveyed 24 police departments in Tarrant County that issued at least 3,000 citations.

Statewide, 72 percent of agencies reported searching blacks more often than whites, and 56 percent reported searching Hispanics more often than Anglos.

Texas' racial profiling law requires law enforcement agencies to create a report annually on the race of people they stop and search and submit it to their local governing bodies.

"We think it's important that law enforcement and community leaders understand what's in the report," said Molly Totman, a senior policy analyst with the Texas Criminal Justice Coalition. "They can use this data to make an informed policy or changes in the way they protect the public."

Fort Worth Deputy Police Chief Pat Kneblick said the disparity reflects the Police Department's crime-fighting initiative of saturating high-crime areas with officers.

"These numbers are based on deployment into the community," Kneblick said. "We regularly hear that residents want police presence."

Some agencies say interpreting the information is difficult because the data is incomplete and does not consider the race and ethnicity of the driving population.

Colleyville police spokesman Bill Hutchins said raw numbers tell a different story. Of the 38 motorists who gave officers permission to search their vehicles in 2005, 25 were white, seven were black and six were Hispanic, Hutchins said.

"The number of Caucasians searched clearly outnumber the whole minority group," Hutchins said. "That alone shows there's no racial profiling."

In Arlington, Bedford, Euless, Keller, Mansfield and North Richland Hills, the percentages of searches were about equal among each group.

Arlington police began collecting data before it was required by the state, Lt. Blake Miller said.

"One of our goals is to try and make sure our department mirrors the community so that we can better serve the community," Miller said. "The coalitions numbers show we're are doing a good job of doing that."

Searches

Number of consent searches per 100 stops of each group:

Agency	Anglos	Blacks	Hispanics	Agency average
Arlington Police Department	1.2	1.1	1.1	1.2
Bedford Police Department	0.3	0.1	0.2	0.2
Benbrook Police Department	1.7	3.1	0.8	1.7
Burleson Police Department	1.0	0.0	0.8	1.0
Colleyville Police Department	0.7	3.5	2.2	0.7
D/FW Airport	0.3	0.1	0.4	0.2
Dalworthington Gardens Police Department	0.3	0.4	0.2	0.3
Eules Police Department	1.3	0.8	1.2	1.2
Forest Hill Police Department	6.2	6.7	2.9	5.7
Fort Worth Police Department	1.0	2.1	1.7	1.4
Grapevine Police Department	1.2	1.3	1.9	1.3
Haltom City Police Department	4.3	4.2	3.0	3.8
Hurst Police Department	1.1	0.9	0.8	1.0
Keller Police Department	1.5	1.2	1.5	1.4
Kennedale Police Department	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.1
Mansfield Police Department	2.9	2.4	2.7	2.8
North Richland Hills Police Department	0.4	0.3	0.4	0.4
Northlake Police Department	4.8	4.5	3.1	4.4
Pantego Police Department	2.8	8.0	7.5	4.0
River Oaks Police Department	5.9	6.3	5.1	5.6
Saginaw Police Department	0.6	0.0	0.0	0.4
Tarrant County Sheriff's Department	4.5	4.1	2.1	4.0
Watauga Department of Public Safety	2.0	2.7	1.2	1.9
Westlake Department of Public Safety	0.1	0.2	0.4	0.2

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