

Comparison of Traffic stops between Texas and California

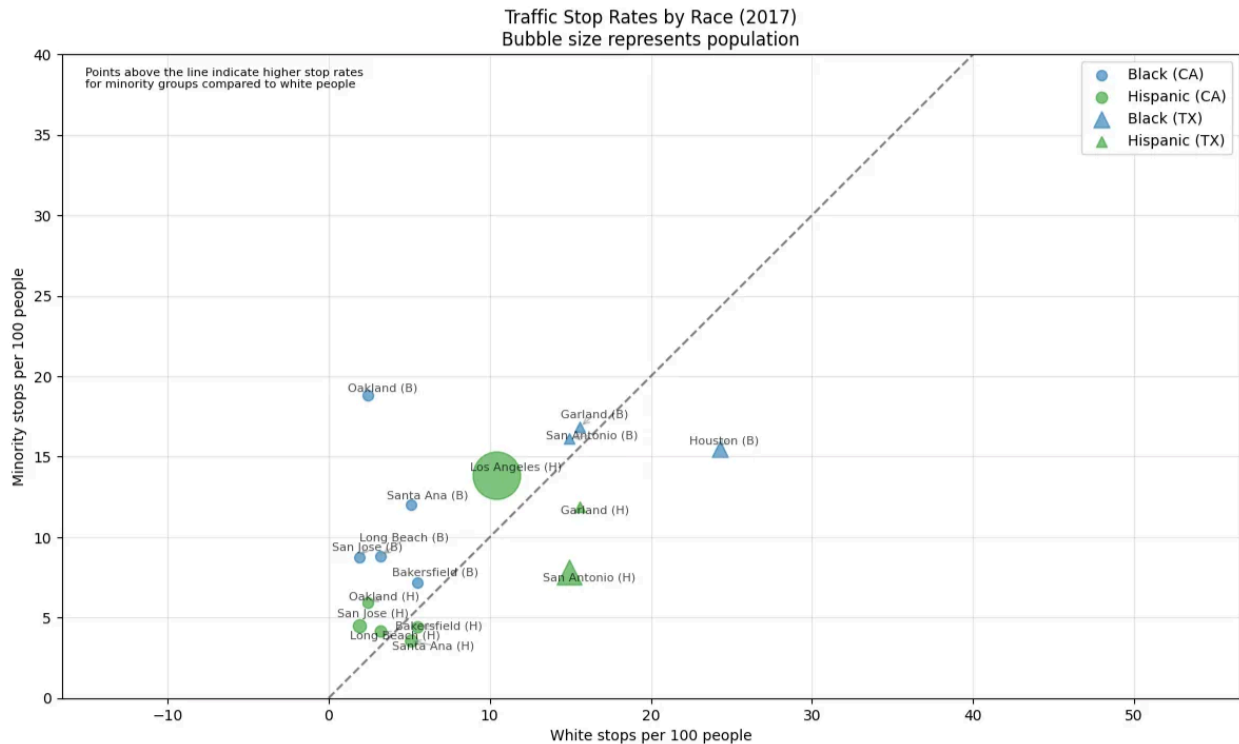
I'm from Texas, but I've spent the last 4 years living in California and I've noticed distinctly different attitudes of the police force in the two locations. In this report I'll explore differences I found when looking at traffic stop data in the two states between 2006 and 2023 collected by stanford's open policing project.

Hypothesis

I predicted higher traffic stop rates in Texas, with disproportionately higher rates for minorities



I was only able to obtain city level race data for 2017 so I will constrain my conclusions about racial discrimination to that year. Note that i've excluded cities in both states that did not include that year or did not include race in the majority of the traffic stops.



Observations from my my analysis:

1. Most of the mass here is above the dotted line, indicating the presence of racial discrimination in traffic stops.
2. Every city I had data for in California reported higher stop rates for Black people than White people. I did not expect this, as my personal experience indicates that far more pressure is put on California police departments to prevent discriminatory practices than in Texas.
3. Texas cities reported much higher rates of stops across the board than California, which is inline with my expectation, as Texans love to talk about "law and order" and don't seem to care nearly as much about reducing discrimination "as long as our streets are safe" 🙄.

Conclusion

The analysis reveals concerning patterns of racial discrimination in traffic stops across both Texas and California. While Texas shows higher overall stop rates, which aligns with its reputation for strict law enforcement, California's data challenges the perception of being more equitable in its policing practices. Every California city in the dataset showed higher stop rates for Black individuals compared to White individuals, suggesting that progressive policies and increased scrutiny of police practices have not yet eliminated racial disparities in traffic enforcement.

The data supports my initial hypothesis about Texas having higher overall stop rates, but the uniform presence of racial disparities in California was unexpected.

While stop rate disparities raise important concerns, these statistics alone cannot definitively prove racial bias in policing. Demographics of drivers can vary significantly from residential population data, particularly near major highways or commercial areas. Additionally, factors such as average miles driven, vehicle condition, and time of day on the road may correlate with socioeconomic patterns that differ across racial groups.