

LOCAL

Racial disparities in Twin Cities arrests are widespread

St. Anthony is hardly alone in disproportionately arresting black people.

By Dan Browning (<http://www.startribune.com/dan-browning/10644516/>) Star Tribune |

JULY 19, 2016 — 9:49PM

It appears at first glance that St. Anthony police are targeting black people for arrest.

Data released by the Minneapolis suburb last week show that 41 percent of the people whom St. Anthony police arrested last year were black — nearly seven times what one might expect, given that they make up about 6 percent of residents in the department’s patrol area.

Yet nearly every Twin Cities metro-area police department exhibits a racial disparity in its arrest rates, according to a Star Tribune analysis of recently released FBI Uniform Crime Reports data for serious crimes. Minneapolis, St. Paul and inner-ring suburbs had the highest disparities, which diminished in exurban areas.



Map created by [MaryJo Webster](#)



JEFF WHEELER — STAR TRIBUNE

A BCA investigator gathered evidence around the Oldsmobile being driven by Philando Castile when he was stopped by St. Anthony

Does that mean certain police agencies engage in racial profiling?

Criminal justice researchers say arrest and citation data by themselves can’t answer that question. Arrests are not the same thing as convictions, which would indicate whether the bust was legitimate. And arrests don’t begin to address the numbers of people who were stopped by police and sent on their way, for which no data exist, said Richard S. Frase, co-director of the University of Minnesota’s Robina Institute of Criminal Law and Criminal Justice.

“There are not studies out there today that readily document overt racial bias,” Frase said at a June 7 seminar at the U on racial disparities in law enforcement. “But there is study after study after study out there demonstrating implicit racial bias when it comes to decisionmaking” at every stage of Minnesota’s criminal justice system, he said.

Implicit bias occurs when police target high-crime areas, Frase said in an interview. Those are largely poor areas in the Twin Cities, which have higher minority populations. When police find guns or drugs, it ratifies their judgment, leaving them with a predisposition to stop similar people in those areas.

The U seminar on racial disparities took place a month before a St. Anthony police officer fatally shot Philando Castile during a traffic stop on Larpenteur Avenue in Falcon Heights. The incident here and similar police shootings around the country have rekindled the painful subject of racial profiling.

Former U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno famously questioned the pernicious effects of racial profiling in 1999, saying that it “is one of the more difficult issues that we have to confront” in law enforcement. Minnesota legislators then questioned whether it was a problem here.

Earlier studies found bias

The Star Tribune explored the question in 2000 in a special series called “Presumed Guilty,” which analyzed five years of arrest data in Minneapolis. The analysis concluded that police appeared to have different rules of enforcement for whites and blacks — especially for minor crimes such as loud car stereos, lurking, trespassing and not carrying proof of auto insurance. Minorities were arrested more often but were less likely to be convicted of those crimes than whites.

In 2002, the Legislature funded a \$4.3 million study of nearly 200,000 traffic stops, which found a “strong likelihood” of racial bias in police policies and practices that probably extends statewide.

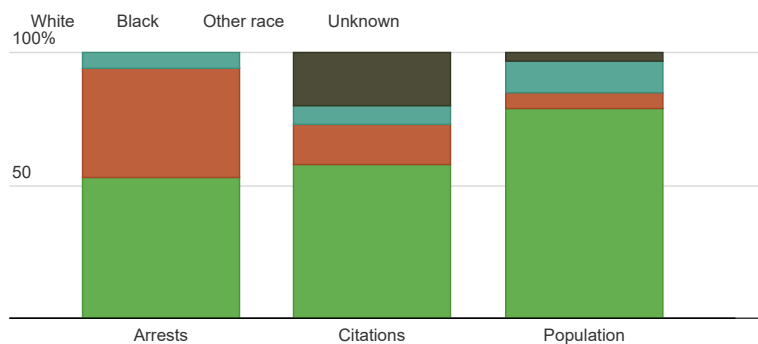
“One of the things we found in our study was that blacks were searched much more frequently and they found contraband in a lower amount,” said Myron Orfield, a U professor of civil rights and civil liberties law and director of the Institute on Metropolitan Opportunity.

Orfield noted that one question arising over the killing of Castile, who is black, is whether he was stopped because of his race. A Star Tribune analysis of public records shows that Castile, a 32-year-old school cafeteria worker with no serious criminal convictions, had been stopped and cited at least 49 times since 2002.

An unidentified officer told dispatchers that he was stopping Castile on July 6 because he thought his “wide-set nose” matched the description of a robbery suspect. According to Castile’s girlfriend, who was riding with him at the time, the pretext for the stop was a broken taillight. She said that Castile told Officer Jeronimo Yanez he had a license to carry a weapon and that the officer shot him as he reached for his driver’s license. Yanez’s lawyer said his client reacted to the presence of a gun. Whether race played a factor in Castile’s stop is in dispute.

St. Anthony Police arrests and citations by race

St. Anthony Police released data on 2015 arrests and citations by race. It shows a disparity in arrests of blacks when compared to the city's population makeup. But it's hard to know if there are disparities in citations because 20% of those cases didn't identify the race.



Other race includes Asian, American Indian and Pacific Islander.

Source: City of St. Anthony [Get the data](#)

Orfield said that when the statewide study on racial profiling was conducted 13 years ago, the area surrounding St. Anthony “was one of the worst we found” for racial profiling, meaning that nonwhites were more likely to be stopped or arrested without sufficient cause. He said he couldn’t say specifically how the St. Anthony Police Department, which patrols Falcon Heights, performed in the 2003 study because the agency wouldn’t release its data at the time.

Orfield cautioned against relying on arrest data by itself to prove racial profiling. “I don’t think this is a good way to do this,” he said. “There’s a lot of quick and dirty analysis that’s being done.”

Seeking more data

Sen. Scott Dibble, DFL-Minneapolis, wants to revive a bill introduced in the Legislature last session that would have required increased data collection relating to use of force, profiling and other police practices.

Ebony Ruhland, a research director with the Robina Institute who formerly worked with the nonprofit Council on Crime and Justice, said that as a researcher, she would welcome more data. “But we know the issue,” she said. “We can’t deny that profiling does happen. ... We need to change police practices.”

Ruhland, Orfield and Frase said in interviews that “hot spot” policing practices that target people traveling through high-crime areas may work to the degree that they result in arrests and the seizure of guns and drugs. But they said the tactic undeniably results in disparate enforcement, causing minorities to mistrust police.

“Even if you do get something out of that, it doesn’t necessarily make the practice right,” Ruhland said. “You’re not doing that to white people. They could also have guns in their car or drugs in their car.”

Data editor MaryJo Webster and interactive data journalist Jeff Hargarten contributed to this report.

Dan Browning has worked as a reporter and editor since 1982. He joined the Star Tribune in 1998 and now covers greater Minnesota. His expertise includes investigative reporting, public records, data analysis and legal affairs.

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