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DOES RACE DRIVE POLICING?

Renewed concerns that police target Black persons roil Los Angeles



For Police Issues by Julius (Jay) Wachtel. In 2015 California legislators enacted Penal Code section 12525, the “[Racial and Identity Profiling Advisory Act](#)” (RIPA). Since 2018 all State and most local law enforcement agencies have been required to disclose public complaints of racial and identity profiling and furnish annual reports about pedestrian and vehicle stops (small agencies had until this year to comply.) Required information includes the reason for a stop, the race and ethnicity of pedestrians, drivers and other persons who influenced a stop decision, any use of force, and whether someone was detained or arrested, and *why* (for the official guide, click [here](#).)

A Board was formed to oversee the process. Alas, its weighty, just-released [2023 Annual Report](#) doesn’t offer much hope:

Over the past four years, the data collected under the Racial and Identity Profiling Act (“RIPA”) has provided empirical evidence showing disparities in policing throughout California. This year’s data demonstrates the same trends in disparities for all aspects of law enforcement stops, from the reason for stop to actions taken during stop to results of stop.

From their initial release, RIPA’s annual reports have blasted the seemingly unequal treatment of racial and ethnic minorities. Little has apparently improved:

Overall, the disparity between the proportion of stops and the proportion of residential population was greatest for Multiracial and Black individuals. Multiracial individuals were stopped 87.4 percent less frequently than expected, while Black individuals were stopped 144.2 percent more frequently than expected.

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According to the report, Black persons comprised six percent of the State’s 2021 population but accounted for twenty-one percent of stops. Hispanics also shouldered a burden, although of substantially lesser magnitude (36 pct. of pop. v. 42 pct. of stops). On the other hand, White persons carried an advantage (35 pct. of pop. v. 31 percent of stops). Force, including lethal force, was also far more likely to be used against Black persons and substantially more likely to be used against Hispanic persons than against Whites.

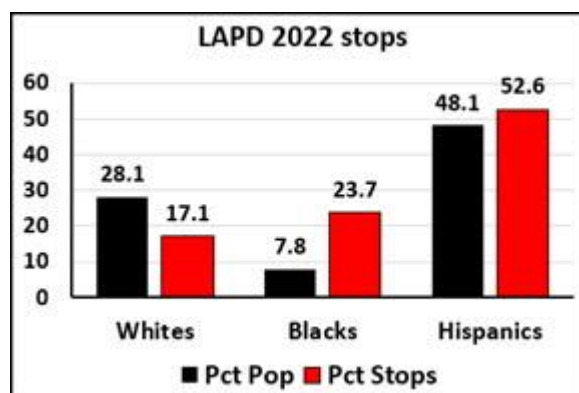


On first read, RIPA’s 222-page piece seems a thorough work. But as our readers know, we’re concerned about the influence of economic conditions on crime. As to these, RIPA’s silent. While its report insists that it did “closely analyze and isolate calls for service, stops, and other contacts to identify disparities while controlling for factors like neighborhood crime and poverty levels” (p. 216), RIPA kept mum about crime rates or economic conditions. So their impact (if any) on agency and officer decisions was ignored.

From the start, critics have used RIPA data to accuse California cops of discriminating against members of minority groups. Our 2019 two-parter (“[Did the Times Scapegoat L.A.’s Finest?](#)”) was prompted by a series of articles in the *Los Angeles Times* that used RIPA data to question why only 17.9 percent of LAPD’s vehicle stops were of Whites. We selected a sample of one-hundred stops and took it from there. Our present journey was inspired by [a recent piece in the Associated Press](#) about RIPA’s reveal of similar racial and ethnic disparities in 2021 stops:

In more than 42% of the 3.1 million stops by those agencies in 2021, the individual was perceived to be Hispanic or Latino, according to the report. More than 30% were perceived to be white and 15% were believed to be Black.

Statewide, however, 2021 Census estimates say Black or African American people made up only 6.5% of California’s population, while white people were about 35%. Hispanic or Latino people made up roughly 40% of the state’s population that year.

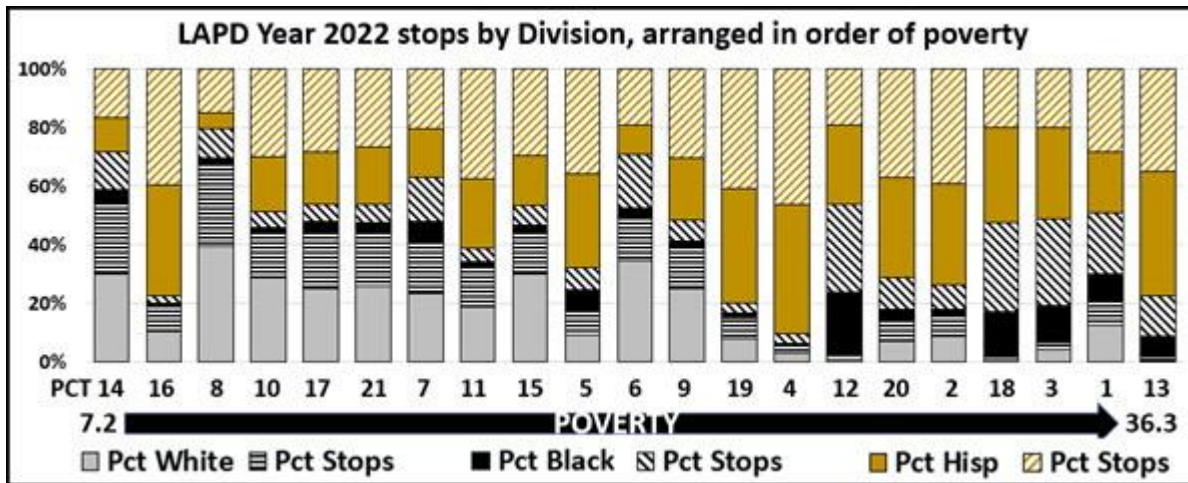


Well, 2022 RIPA stop data is in. We again focused on LAPD. (Click [here](#) for data on when and where stops took place, and [here](#) for details about suspects, officer actions, and outcomes.) Once again, the

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numbers create concern. According to [Census ACS 2021](#) estimates, L.A.’s population is 28.1 percent White, 7.8 percent Black and 48.1 percent Hispanic. Yet only 17.1 percent of the 330,075 stops in 2022 were of White persons. Black persons were stopped at a rate about three times their share of the population, while Hispanics suffered a lesser disadvantage.

What’s more, Black persons were stopped at higher rates throughout Los Angeles. This graphic, which we generated using RIPA data, arranges police Divisions by poverty, from prosperous Division 14, “Pacific”, where only 7.2 percent of residents are poor, to the impoverished Division 13, “Newton”, where 36.3 percent are poor:



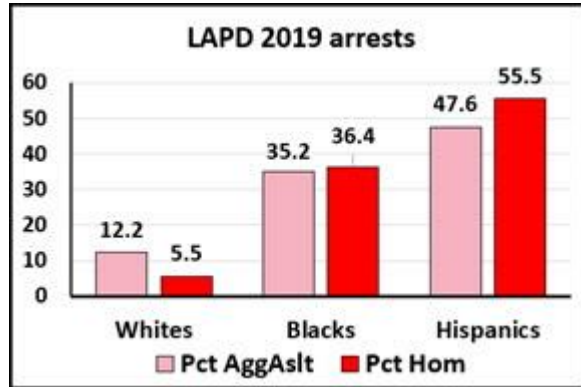
LAPD DIV.		14	16	8	10	17	21	7	11	15	5	6	9	19	4	12	20	2	18	3	1	13
HISP	% STOPS	28	74	24	52	47	46	35	65	55	66	34	55	75	85	38	56	69	38	37	46	69
	% POP	20	71	9	32	30	34	29	41	31	60	18	39	71	82	53	52	61	62	58	33	84
BLK	% STOPS	22	5	16	9	10	11	25	8	12	14	33	12	6	6	59	17	15	59	55	33	27
	% POP	8	2	4	4	6	5	12	3	5	14	6	5	3	1	42	6	4	29	23	15	14
WHI	% STOPS	41	16	45	25	32	32	30	23	26	15	26	25	12	5	3	10	12	2	5	14	2
	% POP	51	20	65	50	42	45	40	33	55	17	63	46	15	6	2	11	16	2	8	20	1

(Division pop. figures are posted on each [Division’s homepage](#). Racial and ethnic distributions are from the [LAPD I.G.’s 2019 report](#). Division poverty was estimated by overlaying the [city ZIP Code map](#) on the [LAPD Division map](#) and averaging [Census poverty scores](#) across ZIP’s. Division Part I crime rates, mentioned below, are from the [L.A. City hub](#).)

RIPA mentions that Black persons were often stopped outside their area of likely residence. For example, White persons comprise 51 percent of the residents of prosperous Pacific Division but figured in only 41 percent of stops. Meanwhile Black persons, who only form eight percent of that Division’s population, accounted for twenty-two percent of stops. Indeed, White persons seemed to enjoy a modest

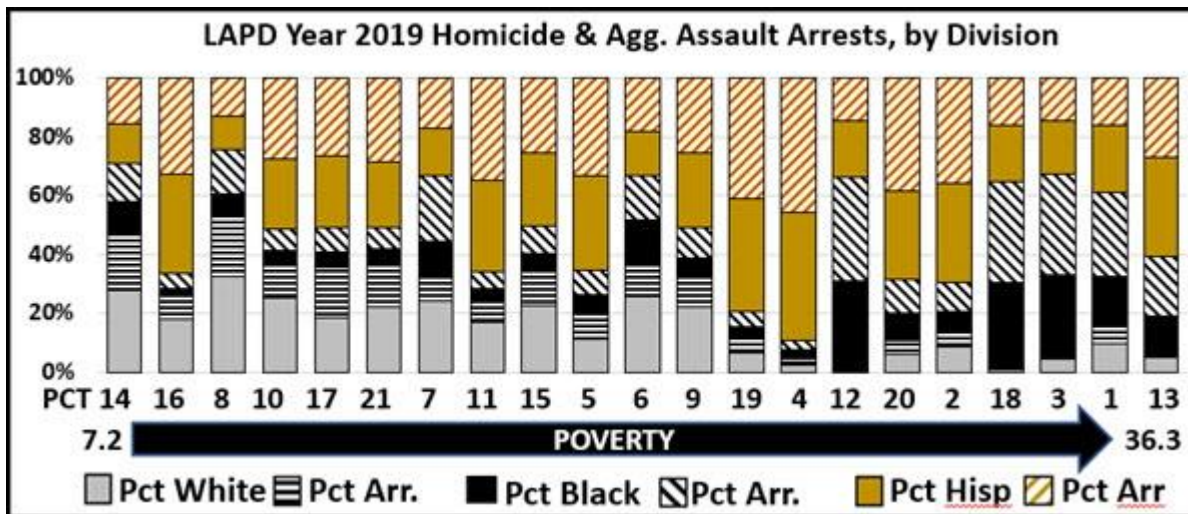
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advantage throughout. As poverty scores increase, their proportion of the population, and of stops, plunges. (One exception, Div. 1, “Central”, which covers L.A.’s downtown, has a small resident population but experiences a large influx during the daytime.)



RIPA doesn’t collect data about crimes or arrests. For that we turned to the city’s [public safety portal](#). On the left is a graphic that depicts the racial and ethnic distribution of LAPD arrests for aggravated assault and homicide in 2019 (the most recent year available), when 1,447 persons were arrested for homicide and 16,839 for aggravated assault. The disparities are obvious.

Our next graphic arranges things as we did for stops:



LAPD DIV.	14	16	8	10	17	21	7	11	15	5	6	9	19	4	12	20	2	18	3	1	13	
HISP	% ARR	32	71	27	59	51	57	36	72	55	67	41	55	80	89	29	70	72	32	29	32	56
	% POP	28	74	24	52	47	46	35	65	55	66	34	55	75	85	38	56	69	38	37	46	69
BLK	% ARR	27	12	31	16	15	14	47	12	19	17	34	22	10	7	70	21	19	68	69	57	42
	% POP	22	5	16	9	10	11	25	8	12	14	33	12	6	6	59	17	15	59	55	33	27
WHI	% ARR	41	18	42	25	33	29	17	16	26	17	25	23	11	4	1	9	10	0	2	12	2
	% POP	57	40	68	54	36	44	51	35	49	23	58	47	13	5	1	11	18	2	10	19	10

Black persons seem substantially over-represented as alleged perpetrators of violent crimes, and particularly in the poorer districts. But there’s lots of numbers. So we turned to the “r” (correlation) statistic. (It ranges from zero to one. Zero means no relationship between variables; one reflects a perfect lock-step association. Positive r’s mean that

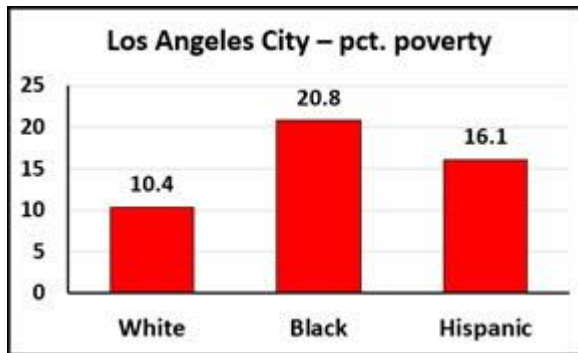
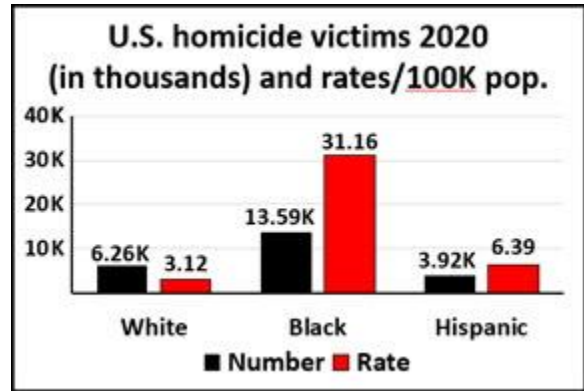
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variables move up and down together; a negative [-] *r* indicates that they travel in opposite directions.)

	Poverty	PctWhite	PctBlack	PctHisp	Stop rt	Pt. I cr. rt	H/Agg rt
Poverty		-0.76	0.51	0.22	0.63	-0.22	0.57
Pct White	-0.76		-0.42	-0.43	-0.43	0.96	-0.43
Pct Black	0.51	-0.42		-0.56	0.34	0.25	0.41
Pct Hisp	0.22	-0.43	-0.56		-0.01	-0.12	-0.07
Stop rt	0.63	-0.43	0.34	-0.01		0.95	0.97
Pt. I cr. rt.	-0.22	-0.05	0.25	-0.12	0.95		0.96
H/Agg rt.	0.57	-0.43	0.41	-0.07	0.97	0.96	

Consider the relationship between Pct. White and Poverty. That strong negative *r* (-.76) means that as the proportion of White residents in a Division increases, percent poor consistently declines. In contrast, Pct. Black’s *r* with Poverty, a relatively strong [+].51, indicates that Black residents and poverty increase and decrease pretty much in unison. There’s a similar relationship, but of lesser strength, between Pct. Hispanic and Poverty. And note that strong “positive” relationship between Poverty and Stop rates. Its *r*, a robust [+].63, would yield highly visible, real-world consequences at poverty’s higher levels, say, from Div. 12 (“77th. Street”) on.

As one might expect, Part I crimes and Homicide/Agg. Assault rates are in near-perfect sync. Ditto, the relationship of each with stop rates. Maybe LAPD’s focus really *was* on high-crime areas. But put stops aside. What’s most troubling is that as the proportion of Black residents increases, a Division’s inhabitants become considerably more likely to fall victim to violent crime. Indeed, the (+).41 between Pct. Black and H/Agg. is a virtual opposite to the -.43 between Pct. White and H/Agg. That’s common throughout the U.S. Grab a look at the right graphic, which displays [CDC’s 2020 national homicide victimization rates](#).

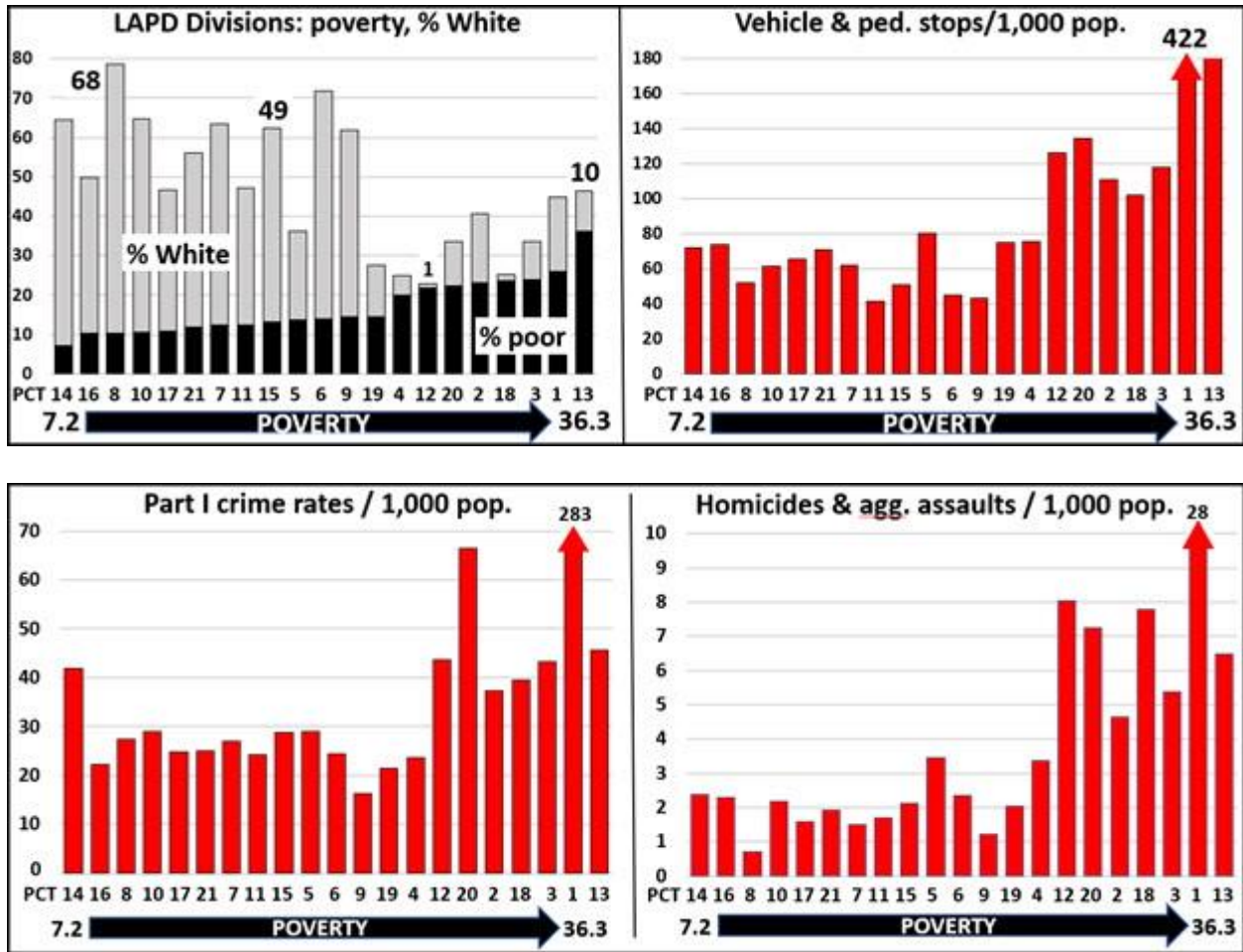


Police Issues has always rejected the notion that race and ethnicity “cause” crime and violence. Instead, we’ve consistently laid the blame on poor economic conditions. And even in supposedly prosperous Los Angeles, [material wealth is sharply distributed according to skin color](#). Just consider the

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challenges of living in an economically-challenged neighborhood: poor education, lousy child care, a lack of marketable skills, substandard housing, and an absence of health care and other critical supports. (For a “primer” check out “[Fix Those Neighborhoods](#)”. It’s part of our “[Neighborhoods](#)” special section, which offers a wealth of posts on point.)

Let’s bring it together. Set aside ideologically-infused narratives. Or even our well-intentioned try at objectivity. Share these two graphics with your friends. They really *do* say it all:



p.s. As we were putting the finishing touches on this piece, [Memphis](#) happened. An indisputable abuse by some clearly out-of-control cops, and a man died. We’ve got an approach that might prove of value. Stay tuned!