# 5 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT ANALYZING POLICE TRAFFIC STOP DATA

Traffic stop data can be an informative resource for the general public to understand and assess how local law enforcement agencies operate and provide public safety. As more agencies release traffic stop data it can be anticipated that more analyses of these data will be undertaken. Traditionally, analysis of these data has been something that researchers and agencies engage in to better understand patterns and trends - as they would be well advised to do so. Today, however, more and more people outside of law enforcement and academia are conducting their own analysis and sharing it for a variety of reasons.

While interest in the work of the police is a positive step, there are potential pitfalls as well-intended individuals and groups may not have a full understanding of the scientific literature and methodological challenges that have been well documented within the research community, as well as law enforcement policy and practice. Below are five points that law enforcement, community groups, and the media should all understand to make analysis of traffic stop data more useful and reliable.

## 1 NO SINGLE BENCHMARK
There is no widely accepted, science-based, single-method analysis for traffic stop data. No single benchmark (e.g., demographic/census comparisons) can confirm or disprove disparities.

## 2 AVOID THE "LESS IS MORE" MISTAKE
Collecting, providing, or releasing limited data on stops invites flawed analysis, may omit essential variables that must be considered, and fails to promote transparency.

## 3 VARIETY OF DATA SOURCES NEEDED
To accurately assess traffic enforcement and data, a variety of data including community satisfaction, citizen calls for service, complaints, crime incidents, accident data, etc., can be relevant and important for a more complete analysis.

## 4 CONSIDER MULTIPLE DECISION POINTS
Multiple data points may be needed to assess what happens in stops, including time, location, reason, searches and outcomes, arrests, citations, etc.

## 5 POLICY, PRACTICE, PERSON, OR PROBLEM?
Assessing this data should include consideration of potential casual and confounding influences, such as deployment patterns, staffing shortfalls, decision-making/bias, training, crime/crash hotspots, or a combination of these and other factors.

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Numerous studies have examined traffic stop data from a wide variety of agencies. Many experts have acknowledged gaps in data and methodologies to identify disparities and their likely causes. Kyle Mclean and Dr. Jeff Rojek recently authored Traffic Stops, Race, and Measurement", a chapter in The Handbook of Measurement Issues in Criminology and Criminal Justice, providing an excellent overview of the challenges in analyzing traffic stop data. Another excellent resource is Dr. Lorie Fridell's By the Numbers: A Guide for Analyzing Race Data from Vehicle Stops and its companion publication, Understanding Race Data from Vehicle Stops: A Stakeholders Guide, funded by the U.S Department of COPS Office. The Guide confirms, "data collection cannot provide unequivocal answers to questions about the existence or lack of racial bias by police in a jurisdiction."

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