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Data detailing millions of N.J. State Police traffic stops available online for first time
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New Jersey has released data detailing millions of State Police traffic stops going back years, the first comprehensive look at who troopers pull over since the federal government stopped monitoring the agency for racial profiling more than a decade ago.

Residents can analyze and download information about more than 6 million stops, from the beginning of 2009 through the end of last year. The website does not name individual troopers or drivers, but it does explain why somebody was stopped, the driver's race, if physical force was used and if any criminal charges were issued, among other details released Thursday.

"The New Jersey State Police Traffic Stop Dashboard is another powerful tool to promote transparency and accountability in policing," state Attorney General Gurbir Grewal said in a statement. "It presents more than a decade of data in a format that will facilitate analysis and encourage public dialogue about this critical area."

Publishing the data was one of Grewal's last acts before he steps down July 16 to take a job with the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission.

Some states offer similar information. The Texas Department of Public Safety publishes annual traffic stop reports and researchers at the Connecticut Racial Profiling Prohibition Project collect and analyze local data, but policing experts at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice said they weren't aware of a site as detailed as New Jersey's.

Garden State data shows several trends, including a sharp dip in all stops around 2013, when officials said budget cuts and retirements thinned the ranks, and another drop last year amid the pandemic.

Yet the big question — do troopers disproportionately stop certain groups? — is difficult to answer because there's little information about the racial makeup of today's commuters.

For example, the data shows that troopers pulled over 86,920 Black drivers last year, a little more than a fifth of the approximately 398,800 stops overall. But the last survey estimating the total number of Black people on the road is more than 20 years old, according to a state report.

Grewal's office and the State Police are looking to create a new study, according to spokesman Steven Barnes.

Last year's data does show that, once stopped, Black or Hispanic drivers were more likely to face interactions like frisks, vehicle searches or arrests. About 7% of stops with

Black drivers resulted in some type of extended interaction, which is more than 2.5 times the rate faced by white drivers, according to the data.

Black drivers and their passengers were also more likely to have outstanding warrants, the 2020 data shows.

The website builds on a long history of reforms.

The State Police had been accused of racial profiling before the issue came to a head in April 1998, when troopers on the New Jersey Turnpike shot into a van carrying four unarmed minority men, injuring three. The U.S. Department of Justice soon stepped in to force changes in training and supervision.

Federal oversight ended in 2009, partially on the condition that a new division within the state attorney general's office keep tabs on traffic stops.

The Office of Law Enforcement Professional Standards has published several reports over the years, but access to traffic stop information has recently been lacking.

The division's last public review of traffic data only covered the first half of 2016, a lag criticized by the state comptroller. That data also showed that Black drivers were involved in a disproportionate share of searches.

New Jersey has since tapped Kristin Golden to lead the newly created Office of Justice Data, which will collect, analyze and publish a range of criminal justice records.

Officials plan to update the traffic database twice a year. They're also asking residents to give feedback on an online form.

"With this new public dashboard, we invite citizens, advocates, and reporters to examine State Police traffic stop data themselves and perhaps contribute to a public conversation about best practices," said Christina Glogoff, director of the professional standards office.

The head of the State Police, Col. Patrick Callahan, said the data was already used to improve training.

We "welcome the opportunity to engage in meaningful dialogue about how we conduct traffic stops," Callahan said.

The website is similar to another database published earlier this year, detailing every time cops statewide hit, tackled or shot suspects in recent months. An initial analysis showed less than 1% of officers accounted for 18% of all reported force.