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### Black People Made Up 70 Percent Of Boston Police Stops, Department Data Show



*A Boston Police officer stands beside a protest on June 4, 2020 in Boston, MA.*

*Maddie Meyer / Getty Images*

By **Isaiah Thompson**

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Seventy percent of people stopped by Boston Police officers through the department's "Field Interrogation and Observation" program throughout most of last year were black – even though black residents comprise less than one quarter of the city's population.

That's according to **data collected by the Boston Police Department** itself and reviewed by WGBH News that represents the first public glimpse in years into thousands of routine stops made by the BPD as part of its field interrogation program – which includes, but is not limited to, police actions known elsewhere as "stop-and-frisk."

And the same data suggests that while black residents were stopped at highly disproportionate rates, they were actually less likely to be issued a formal summons, or citation, by Boston Police.

According to a WGBH News analysis of more than 7,000 stops conducted by Boston Police between January and September 2019, only 3 percent resulted in a summons being issued to black individuals, compared to 4 percent for white people, even as black people were stopped at a rate nearly triple their proportion of Boston's population.

The records give an imperfect picture of police actions when it comes to Boston's major racial identities. Notably, they do not include, under the column "Race," people who identify as Latino or Hispanic. (Instead, the data notes people who self-identified as "Hispanic" under a secondary column titled "Ethnicity.")

But for residents described as black or white, the data show stark disparities when it comes to stops and interrogations by Boston Police.

Neither Mayor Marty Walsh nor the Boston Police Department responded to requests for comment on these statistics.

These findings come amid calls from civil libertarians, community activists and Boston City Council members for more transparency, public accountability and racial equity in the Boston Police Department – especially in the wake of the death of George Floyd, an African-American man killed by a white Minneapolis police officer.

"I think the data confirms what black residents in Boston already know, that certain communities are disproportionately policed," said Boston City Councilor Andrea Campbell, who represents parts of Dorchester, Mattapan and Roslindale, and chairs the Council's Committee on Public Safety and Criminal Justice.

“And so the fear and mistrust that many black Bostonians feel is valid,” she said.

This latest data, published recently on the City of Boston's website, was released shortly after Campbell filed a formal demand – the City Council equivalent of a subpoena – for the information.

“What was really troubling is how hard it was to get this data,” Campbell told WGBH News.

Prior to this disclosure, the BPD hadn't made similar data public since 2016, when the department released details of its field interrogation program as part of a negotiated agreement with the ALCU of Massachusetts, which had been preparing to sue for public records.

That data showed a similarly stark disparity in the number of black individuals stopped, interrogated or observed by Boston Police.

Rahsaan Hall, director of the ACLU of Massachusetts' Racial Justice program, said he was not surprised to see that the most recent data compiled by WGBH News appeared to show that pattern had not changed much in the five years since.

“Even though I wasn't surprised, I am disappointed,” Hall said, but noted that these latest findings come at an opportune time to re-think policing in Boston and around the country.

“This is informative of the larger conversations people are having,” around police policies and funding, Hall said.

People, and especially black people, Hall said, “are saying, ‘You know, for the amount of money that is invested in policing our communities, we're not satisfied with the results that we're getting.’”

In recent days, Walsh has pointed to reforms already implemented under his administration, including the adoption of police body cameras, and has put forward his own agenda for police reforms.

During a press conference on Friday, Walsh declared racism a “public health crisis” and pledged to re-allocate roughly \$3 million from the Boston Police Department's budget to the city's Public Health Commission.

Walsh said his administration is “determined to accelerate our work toward systemic change” and racial justice.

Whether the mayor’s actions will satisfy the public or Boston City Council members, tasked with approving the city’s roughly \$400 million police budget due at the end of June, remains to be seen.

Several council members have voiced skepticism about the administration’s willingness or ability to tackle police reforms without legislative – and, perhaps, budgetary – changes.

New ordinances before the Council include one sponsored by Councilors Michelle Wu, Ricardo Arroyo and Kim Janey that would ban surveillance by face-recognition technology; and another by Wu and Arroyo that would require surveillance programs to be approved by the Council before going into effect.

Arroyo, a former public defender who became the first person of color to represent the city’s 5th District, which includes Hyde Park and parts of Mattapan and Roslindale, has been a vocal proponent of police reforms, and said WGBH News’ findings confirm his conviction that change is overdue.

The data speak “to the fact that we do a lot of over-policing of the African-American community,” Arroyo said. “At the end of the day, if you live in a community where simply living in that community makes you subject to more stops, simply because you live there, that’s going to cause a deterioration in public trust.”

Arroyo acknowledged that the high number of police stops of black residents likely consists of many stops or other interactions that are positive in nature.

But, he said, that doesn’t justify disproportionate policing.

“It’s putting people into a position where they’re more likely to interact with a criminal justice system that’s already planted against them,” Arroyo said. “And the numbers prove that.”

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Isaiah Thompson is a reporter WGBH News.

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