

Traffic Report - 2019

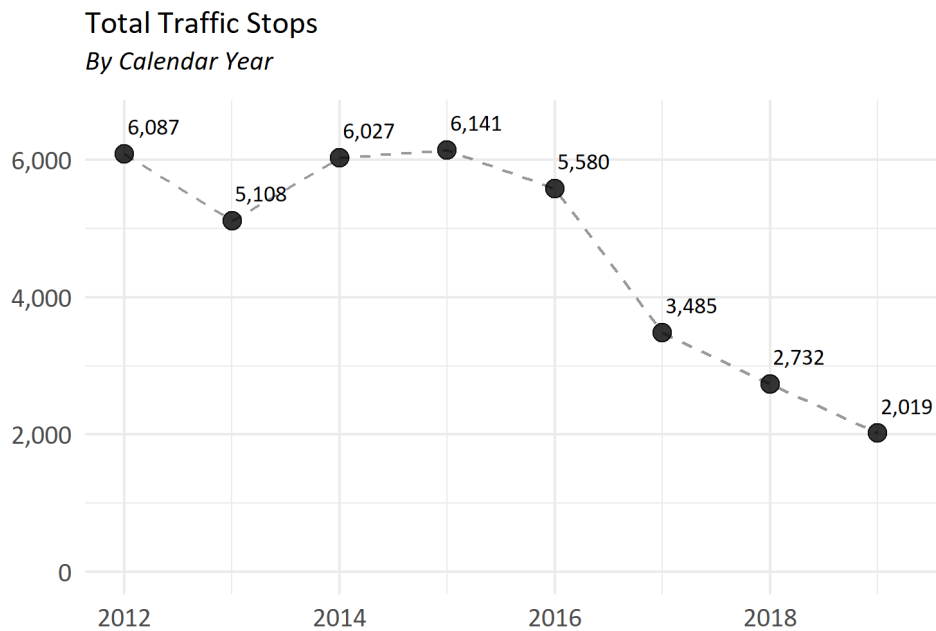
The Burlington Police Department (BPD) strives to ensure traffic safety enforcement is as fair and effective as possible for everyone on the road.

This report is focused on racial equity in Burlington's traffic enforcement. In particular, it examines whether or not there are disparities in enforcement outcomes for Black and White drivers. Of the 2,019 traffic stops made in 2019 by the BPD, 191 were of Black drivers, and 1,663 were White drivers. Another 104 stops involved Asian drivers, and 14 drivers were Hispanic. More information on traffic stops involving Asian and Hispanic drivers can be found in the summary table at the end of this report or by accessing the full dataset of traffic stops on the [BPD data page](#).

This report is the third in a yearly series of reports; previous reports covered [2017](#) and [2018](#). While traffic stops have fallen in recent years, motor vehicle crashes are flat.

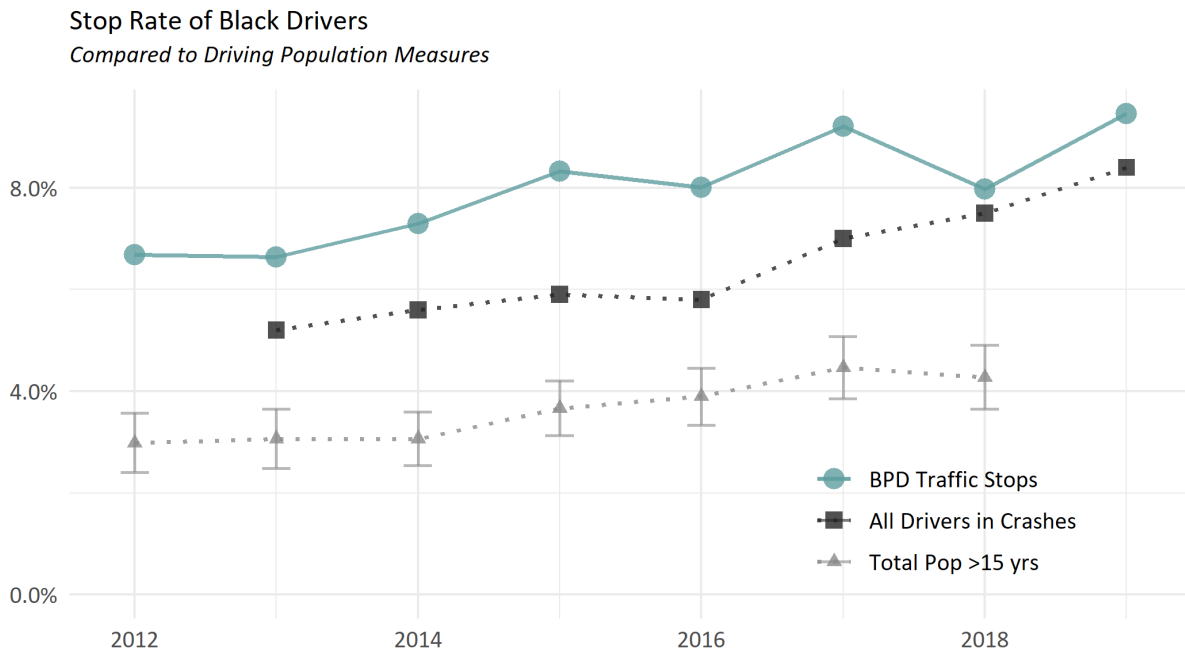
Count Over Time

In 2019, the BPD made 2,019 traffic stops, down 26% from 2018 and down 67% from the eight-year high in 2015.



Stop Rate

Of the 2,019 total traffic stops in 2019, 191 were stops of Black drivers (9.5%). In order to examine whether this percentage is racially equitable, it must be compared to the overall driving population. Because precise driver demographics do not exist, we have to estimate the driving population in other ways. The American Community Survey (2018) estimates that 4.3% of Burlington residents over 15 years old are Black. Not everyone in that broad age group drives at the same rate, however, so the population of drivers with whom the police potentially interact will vary from that estimate. On the other hand, the Vermont Agency of Transportation records the race of drivers involved in motor vehicle crashes. We believe this crash data is a fairer approximation of the racial composition of drivers on the road. Of drivers involved in crashes in 2019 in Burlington, 8.4% were Black, compared to 9.5% of drivers stopped by the BPD.



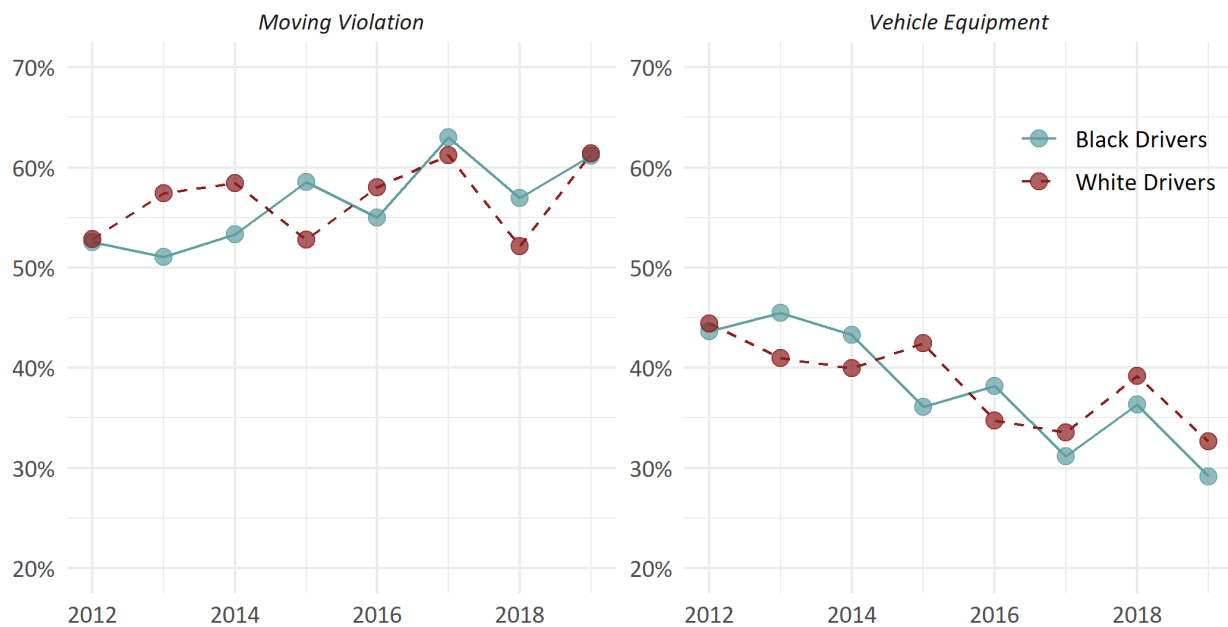
Black Drivers as a Percent of Traffic Stops, MV Crashes, and Population:

Year	BPD Traffic Stops	All Drivers in Crashes	Total Pop >15 yrs
2012	6.7%	-	3.0%
2013	6.6%	5.2%	3.1%
2014	7.3%	5.6%	3.1%
2015	8.3%	5.9%	3.7%
2016	8.0%	5.8%	3.9%
2017	9.2%	7.0%	4.5%
2018	8.0%	7.5%	4.3%
2019	9.5%	8.4%	-

Stop Reason

More than half of all traffic stops stem from a moving violation, for both White (61%) and Black drivers (61%). The second most common reason for a traffic stop – 33% of stops of white drivers, 29% of Black drivers – is the condition of the vehicle. Most of the remainder of stops fall into the category “other” as marked on the ticket form. Five point eight percent of Black drivers are stopped for “other” reasons, compared to 5.1% of White drivers. The least-common type of stop involves investigatory reasons, such as suspicion of involvement in another crime. Although investigatory stops are rare, Black drivers are more likely to be stopped for this reason than white drivers. In 2019, six Black drivers (3.4%) were stopped owing to investigatory reasons, compared to eight White drivers (0.5%).

Most Stops are for Moving Violations or Vehicle Equipment

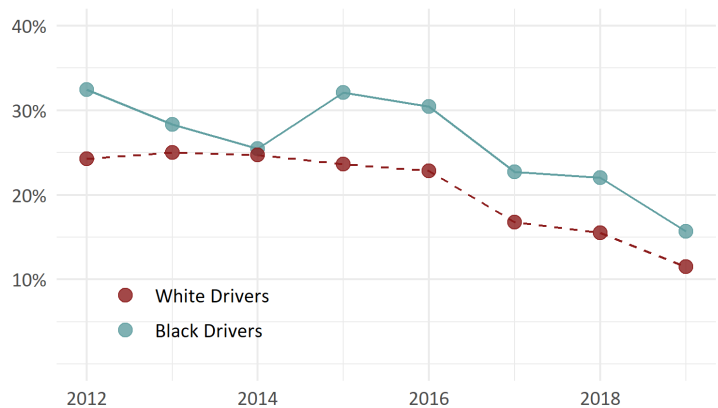


Stop Outcomes

The number of traffic stops declined precipitously over the past few years, and tickets have fallen even faster. This is the result of a concerted effort by the BPD to address traffic infractions by means other than enforcement (e.g., by prioritizing engagement and education in the form of warnings). In 2019, officers wrote 357 tickets, down 31% from 2018 (and down 79% from 2015). In 2019, 12% of all stops resulted in a ticket.

While the large majority of traffic stops result in a warning, regardless of race, the chart here illustrates that Black drivers are more likely than White drivers to be ticketed. In 2019, 12%

Stops Resulting in a Ticket All Stops Included

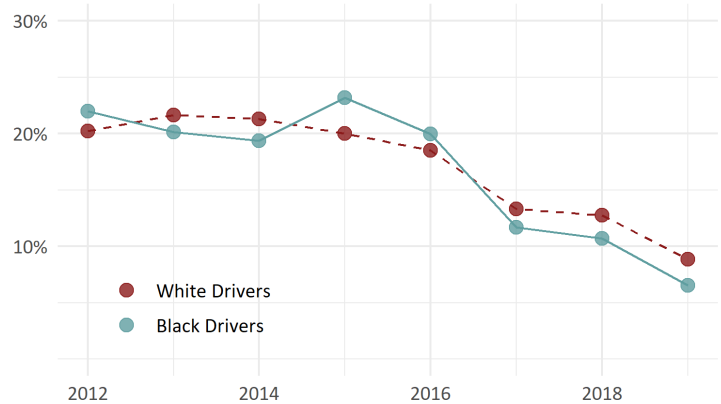


of stops with White drivers resulted in a ticket, compared to 16% percent of traffic stops with Black drivers.

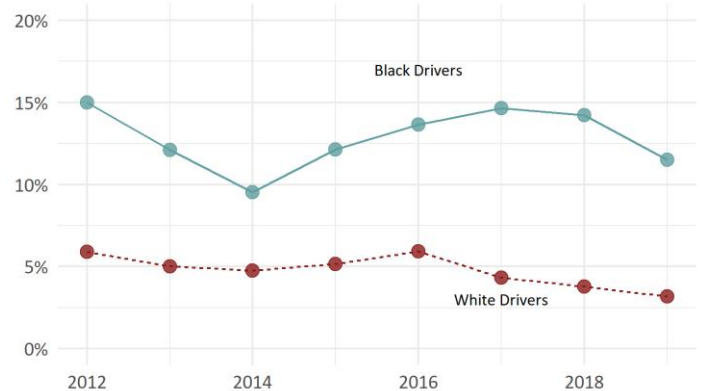
Past analyses have shown that this difference in the ticket rate largely disappears when accounting for the license status of the driver. When a driver lacks a valid license, an officer is prohibited from allowing that driver to drive away with a warning. The officer is supposed to issue a ticket and prevent the driver from continuing to drive. If traffic stops where the driver does not have a valid license are excluded, the ticket rate shrinks to 6.5% for Black drivers versus 8.9% for White drivers. The ticket rate overall has decreased over recent years, and the difference in the White and Black rate, controlling for license status, has not changed substantially. When officers have discretion, and the driver is fully licensed, officers offer warnings rather than tickets for Black and White drivers at the same rate.

Controlling for license violations shifts the ticket rate disparity because of the relative rate of these violations by race. Of the 191 traffic stops of Black drivers in 2019, 22 of the drivers (11.5%) had a suspended license or no license. Of 1,662 traffic stops of White drivers, 52 of the drivers (3.2%) had a suspended license or no license.

Stops Resulting in a Ticket
Excluding License Suspensions



Rate of DLS Violations by Race
Percent of Stops with Unlicensed Drivers

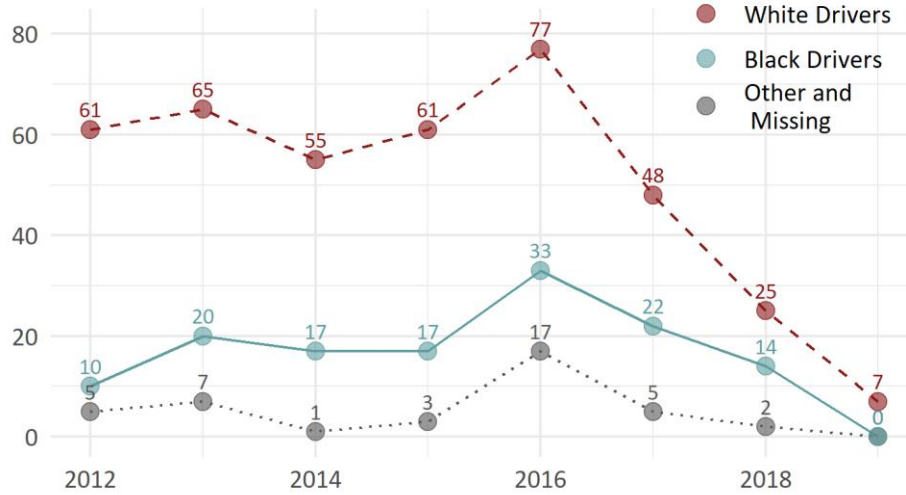


Searches

Past reports have focused on discretionary traffic searches, and the proportion of searches result in the recovery of contraband, as a measure of the treatment of minorities given a traffic stop. In the past many traffic searches were made on the suspicion of marijuana possession and since legalization in July 2018, searches overall have dropped dramatically. There were seven total discretionary searches in 2019, down from a high of 127 in 2016. In each of the seven searches in 2019, the driver was white. Contraband was found in five of the seven searches, a hit rate of 71.4%.

There were two additional non-discretionary searches conducted at traffic stops in 2019. One was externally generated, as it was a part of a larger investigation, and another search was conducted based on a warrant. In both of these searches, the drivers were white.

Traffic Searches Down Across Race

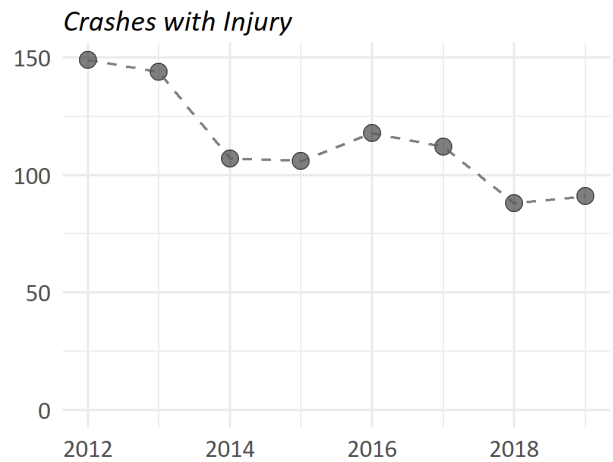
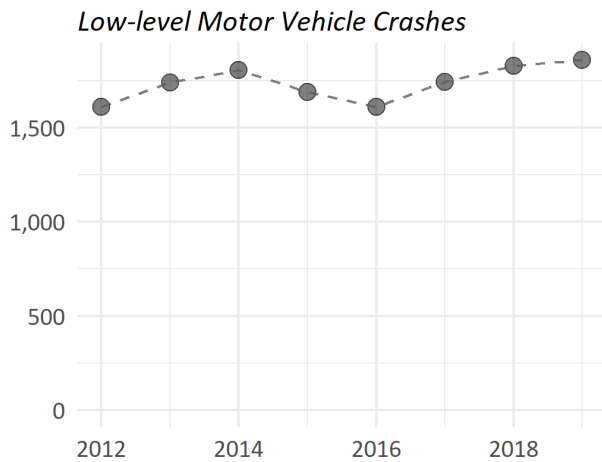


Other and Missing searches include searches of Asian, Hispanic and drivers of other races, as well as searches where the race was not marked on the ticket or in the incident.

Motor Vehicle Crashes

The central goal of traffic enforcement is traffic safety. As traffic stops have decreased over the past five years, motor vehicle crashes in Burlington have remained largely steady. Low level crashes, or crashes that do not involve any injury, are up 1.7%. Crashes with injury are also up slightly (3.4%) after falling substantially since 2012. If these trends persist, the BPD may revisit its prioritization of engagement and education rather than enforcement.

Low level Crashes Steady, Serious Crashes Down from 2012



Summary Table

2019	White	Black	Asian	Hispanic	Missing	Other	Total
Traffic Stops	1,633	191	104	14	74	3	2,019
Stops Resulting In A:							
Ticket	188	30	12	6	-	-	236
Warning	1,376	142	88	7	5	1	1,619
Arrest	9	4	-	1	-	-	14
No Action	60	15	4	-	68	2	149
Searches							
	7	-	-	-	-	-	8
DLS Violations							
	52	22	4	3	-	-	81
Stop Type:							
M = Moving violation	966	107	70	8	6	-	1,157
V = Vehicle Equipment	514	51	25	6	-	1	597
O = Other	84	11	4	-	-	-	99
I = Investigatory	8	6	-	-	-	-	14
D = Susp DUI	1	-	-	-	-	-	1

Traffic stop data is limited to discretionary traffic stops by officers. It excludes traffic tickets written at motor vehicle crashes and “externally generated” traffic stops made in response to a complaint or investigation about a specific car.

Open data on traffic stops is posted online at: <https://www.burlingtonvt.gov/Police/Data/OpenData>