

CURBING PRETEXTUAL STOPS:

Early Evidence of Harm Reduction in San Francisco



Center For
POLICING EQUITY



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A NOTE TO READERS

This report contains quotes that include language some readers may find offensive. These quotes are included for critical analysis and to preserve the integrity of the original source.

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Contents

04	Introduction
08	Trends in Stops, Post-Stop Outcomes, and Public Safety
	A Shift Away from Pretextual Stops 09
	Citations 16
	Searches 16
	Use of Force 19
	Traffic Safety 22
	Public Safety 22
24	The Human Cost of Pretextual Stops
	Police Contact Outcomes 24
	Health Impact 25
	Transportation Impact 26
	Impact on Driving Behavior 26
	Impact on Relationship/Family Dynamics 28
	Impact of Fines and Fees 29
30	Additional Opportunities to Expand the Pretext-Stop Policy
32	Conclusion
34	Appendix A: Quantitative Data Sources
35	Appendix B: Quantitative Data Processing Notes
36	Appendix C: Qualitative Methodology
39	References



Introduction

In recent years, a significant focus of police reform efforts across the country has been reducing pretextual stops. Pretextual stops – also known as non-safety stops – occur when an officer pulls a driver over for a legitimate, though minor, infraction, often unrelated to traffic safety, with the goal of discovering some unrelated criminal offense.¹ Common examples are pretextual stops for tinted windows or expired registration. While technically violations of local and/or state statutes, these infractions generally do not pose a threat of harm to the driver or anyone else.

Historically, pretextual stops have disproportionately targeted Black, and often Latinx, drivers more than White drivers.² They more often lead to use of force and involve discretionary searches – searches that officers are not required to make – than stops for moving violations such as speeding or running red lights.³ Recognizing these unnecessary and potentially dangerous escalations, coupled with their consistent racial disparities and lack of connection to public safety, a number of jurisdictions – such as the states of [Virginia](#) and [Oregon](#) and localities including [Philadelphia, PA](#) and [Chapel Hill, NC](#) – have deprioritized or otherwise sought to reduce pretextual stops.

On July 17, 2024, the San Francisco Police Department (SFPD) implemented a new policy restricting officers from making stops based on certain reasons typically considered pretextual. General Order 9.07 (henceforth, “pretext-stop policy”) restricted stops for the following reasons:

- Missing front license plates or rear license plates that are obstructed or improperly installed
- Missing vehicle registration tags, or tags expired by less than one year
- Failure to illuminate the rear license plate
- Defective rear taillights (unless all taillights are out and it is dark)
- Defective rear brake lights (unless all rear brake lights are defective)
- Objects hanging from the rearview mirror
- Failing to activate a turn signal continuously for 100 feet before turning
- Sleeping in a vehicle
- Any stop of a pedestrian for a traffic infraction, unless there is an immediate danger that the pedestrian will crash with a moving vehicle, scooter, bicycle, or other device moving exclusively by human power⁴



An earlier effort, Vision Zero, which was in effect in San Francisco from 2014 through 2024, was a framework for reaching zero traffic-related fatalities. One pillar of that program was called “Focus on the Five,” which encouraged officers to enforce five specific types of traffic violations that pose an immediate threat to public safety: speeding, violating pedestrian right-of-way in a crosswalk, running red lights, running stop signs, and failing to yield while turning. Though this did not *deprioritize* pretextual stops, it did *prioritize* certain moving violations, which may have caused a decrease in pretextual stops due to the shift in emphasis.

The San Francisco Public Defender’s Office (SFPDO) has asked the Center for Policing Equity (CPE) to assess what effects the pretext-stop policy may have had on various aspects of public safety. This report is the culmination of those efforts. Using various publicly available datasets, CPE assessed the extent to which the pretext policy coincided with changes in traffic safety, public safety, and racial disparities. Through original data collection, CPE sought greater detail and understanding on how pretextual stops have affected San Francisco community members.

CPE looked at SFPD stop data from January 1, 2018 through December 31, 2025, to determine the extent to which drivers in San Francisco experience the harmful impacts of pretextual stops, and how the new policy may have affected policing practices and safety. Through this analysis, CPE observed that the policy addressed a clear need to improve policing interactions and outcomes, and to make them more equitable, particularly for Black and Latinx drivers. Before the pretext-stop policy:

- Officers stopped Black drivers roughly 2.5 times as often as White drivers for pretextual reasons and Latinx drivers 1.3 times as often as White drivers.
- Officers conducted discretionary searches at 10.7% of pretextual stops, compared to 3.6% of other traffic stops. Despite the higher search rates, officers actually found contraband less often in searches during pretextual stops.
- Officers used force twice as often at pretextual stops (0.6%) as at all other traffic stops (0.3%).

While various other jurisdictions have deprioritized or otherwise reformed pretextual stop policing, most of these efforts are fairly new. However, preliminary research has shown that reducing pretextual stops can be achieved without compromising public safety.⁵ CPE's analysis showed similar outcomes in San Francisco.

Many positive trends began even before SFPD's pretext-stop policy took effect, and further improvements coincided with its adoption. Overall:

- Pretextual stops decreased.
- Although racial disparities persisted, the proportion of stops for pretextual reasons decreased across all racial groups.
- Discretionary searches decreased for all racial groups, though racial disparities in search rates remained.
- The rate at which officers found contraband when conducting a search did not change.
- The overall number of firearms and other weapons recovered from searches at traffic stops did not change.
- Use of force decreased.
- Stops for moving violations increased.

While various other jurisdictions have deprioritized or otherwise reformed pretextual stop policing, most of these efforts are fairly new. However, preliminary research has shown that reducing pretextual stops can be achieved without compromising public safety. CPE's analysis showed similar outcomes in San Francisco.

The progress following the pretext-stop policy's adoption does not appear to have adversely impacted public safety. While there might be reason to believe that fewer pretextual stops could have a negative impact on public safety, the data do not bear out this conclusion — the policy also coincided with a decrease in crime rates. Because traffic stops yield so few firearm and weapon seizures, reducing pretextual stops is unlikely to have a meaningful impact on weapon-based crime.

To understand the impact of pretextual stops on San Francisco drivers more fully, CPE conducted interviews during Fall 2025 with a purposive sample of 24 adult San Francisco community members who had recently experienced at least one of these stops. The goal of these interviews was to illuminate the varied ways these stops affect people's lives. Most were stopped for a pretextual reason *after* the policy went into effect.⁶ The majority said they generally did not believe they were stopped for the reason given. Nearly half said they were racially profiled, and more than half described negative experiences with the officers who conducted the stops, illustrating how these stops can erode trust in law enforcement. The interviewees also described negative effects to their health, generalized fear and anxiety around driving following the stop, altering when and where they drive, and other adverse outcomes.

While establishing causal links between the pretext-stops policy and these improvements in policing outcomes was beyond the scope of this report, the fact that the pretext-stops policy coincided with so many beneficial changes signals that ending pretextual stops is a promising strategy for reducing unnecessary stops, searches, and use of force while maintaining public safety.⁷ The persistent racial disparities and other harmful outcomes associated with pretextual stops in San Francisco — combined with their lack of observable public safety benefit — suggest that SFPD should consider maintaining the current policy. Further, CPE's preliminary findings suggest that SFPD may be able to expand the policy to include additional pretextual stop types to deepen the improvements they have already made without producing negative outcomes for safety.

While establishing causal links between the pretext-stops policy and these improvements in policing outcomes was beyond the scope of this report, the fact that the pretext-stops policy coincided with so many beneficial changes signals that ending pretextual stops is a promising strategy for reducing unnecessary stops, searches, and use of force while maintaining public safety.

The section that follows describes trends in the quantitative data around changes in policing in San Francisco following the policy's implementation. The subsequent section shares qualitative findings from the lived experiences of San Francisco community members to highlight how pretextual stops can unduly burden drivers and their loved ones. The final section proposes additional stop types that could be included in the policy.

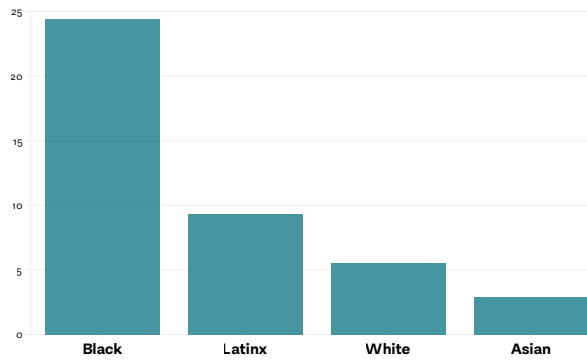


Trends in Stops, Post-Stop Outcomes, and Public Safety

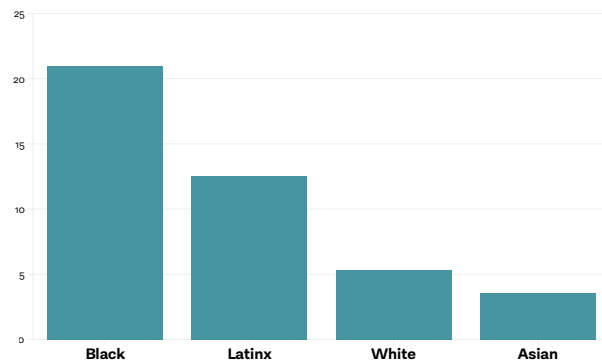
To determine how policing outcomes may have changed following the implementation of the pretext-stop policy, CPE used a variety of publicly-available data sources to assess various trends in policing and related outcomes (see Appendix A for details on data sources). The data show that during the roughly 18 months following the policy's implementation on July 17, 2024, officers shifted their enforcement focus away from pretextual stops and increasingly focused on moving violation stops, particularly Focus on the Five stops. Despite this progress, racial disparities persist across stops and post-stop outcomes. These findings are discussed in greater depth within this section, and additional information about methodology is provided in Appendix B.

Stops, searches, and use of force rates before and after policy change

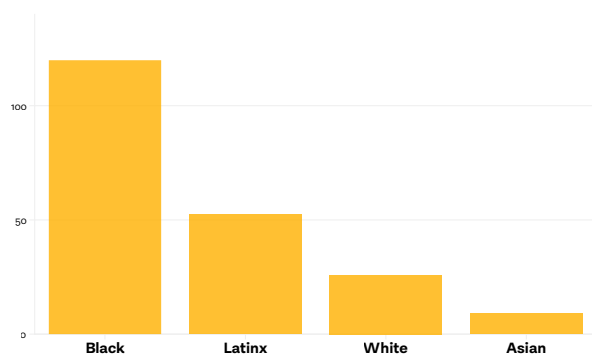
Average Daily Stops Per 100,000 Driving-Age Residents, Pre-Policy Change



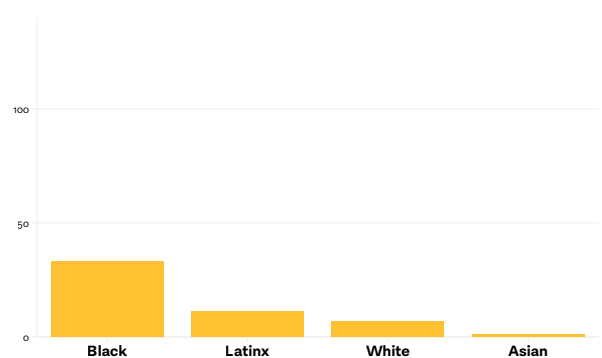
Average Daily Stops Per 100,000 Driving-Age Residents, Post-Policy Change



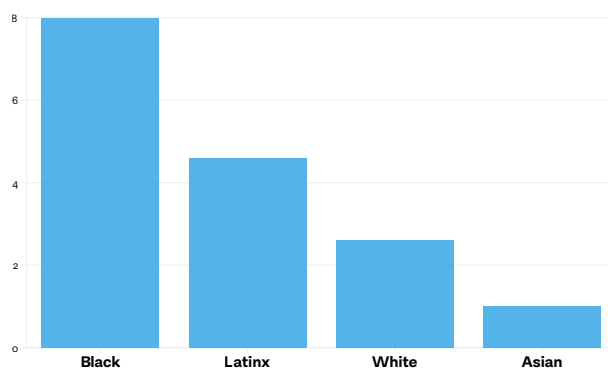
Searches Per 1,000 Stops, Pre-Policy Change



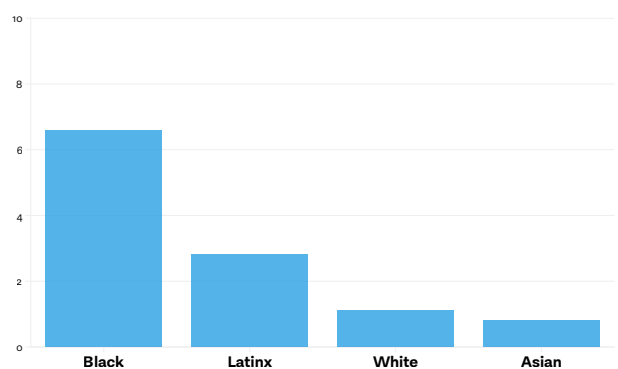
Searches Per 1,000 Stops, Post-Policy Change



Use of Force Per 1,000 Stops, Pre-Policy Change



Use of Force Per 1,000 Stops, Post-Policy Change



San Francisco Police Department Stops Data, Jan. 1, 2018 through Dec. 31, 2025, from DataSF Open Data Portal

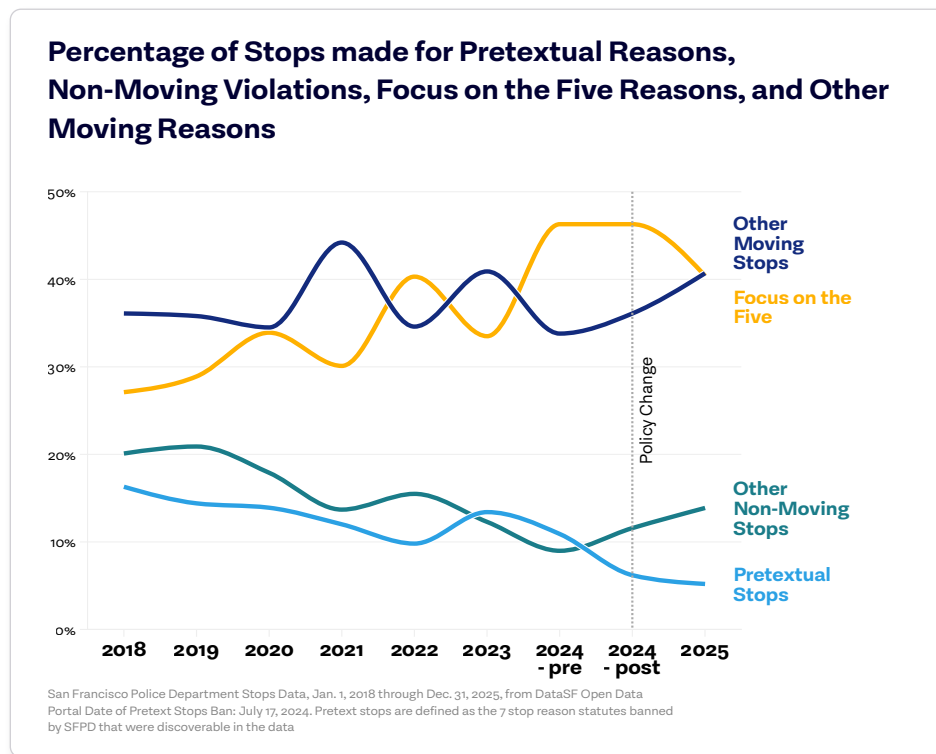
A Shift Away from Pretextual Stops

Prior to adoption of the pretext-stop policy in 2024, non-moving violations, including the subsequently restricted pretextual stops, were already decreasing. The proportion of traffic stops based on the subsequently restricted pretextual reasons decreased from 16% of all traffic stops in 2018 to 13% in 2023. The number of such stops also decreased, from 25 per day in 2019 to 4 per day in 2023.

Non-moving stops other than the restricted pretextual stops decreased from around 20% of all traffic stops in 2018 and 2019 to between 12% and 15% from 2021 through 2023.

Following adoption of the pretext-stop policy, this decrease was much more pronounced: pretextual stops decreased to 6.2% of all stops in the latter half of 2024 and 5.2% in 2025. There were around three pretextual stops per day following the policy. Non-moving stops other than the restricted pretextual stops decreased to 9% in the pre-policy portion of 2024, before increasing to 14% of stops in 2025. Much of the increase was in stops for “Local Ordinance Violations.” Unlike all of the other stop reasons, Local Ordinance Violations are not based on state vehicle codes, so the data do not capture the actual reason for the stop. It is possible that these are similarly low-level, non-safety related stops that officers are substituting in place of the restricted pretextual stop reasons.

As officers make fewer pretextual stops, there has been an increase in moving violation stops, particularly “Focus on the Five” stops. The proportion of stops for “Focus on the Five” infractions increased from between 27% and 34% of all traffic stops from 2018 through 2021 to 46% of all traffic stops in 2024, both before and after the policy, and 40% in 2025. Overall, moving violations, including “Focus on the Five” stops, increased steadily from 63% of all traffic stops in 2018 to 81% in 2025.



● *Racial disparities remain despite decrease in pretextual stops*

Law enforcement agencies across the country have been deprioritizing pretextual stops because they generally do not relate to public safety, and research has shown they are used against Black and Brown drivers at higher rates than White drivers.⁸

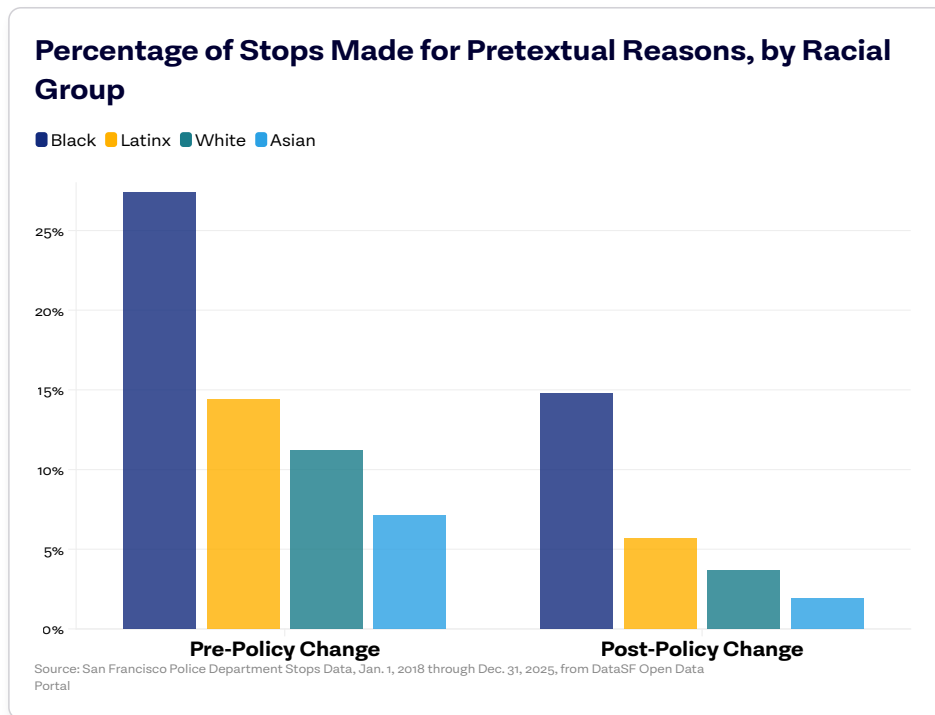
Before the pretext-stop policy went into effect, there were considerable racial disparities in traffic stops overall in San Francisco. Despite making up just around 5% of San Francisco’s driving-age population, Black drivers made up 18% of all traffic stops. White drivers, who made up 43% of the city’s driving-age population, accounted for 34% of traffic stops.

Following the policy, the rates of stops of both Black and White drivers decreased, but the disparity remained, with Black drivers making up 15% of all stops, compared to 31% for White drivers.

Regarding pretextual stops, before the policy, 27% of traffic stops of Black drivers were for the subsequently prohibited pretextual reasons, as compared to only 11% of stops of White drivers, meaning Black drivers were stopped for these reasons about 2.5 times as often as White drivers. Similarly, 14% of traffic stops of Latinx drivers were for these pretextual reasons, 1.3 times as much as White drivers. Asian drivers, on the other hand, were stopped for these reasons less than White drivers, at just 7.1% of traffic stops.

Following the policy, the rates of stops of both Black and White drivers decreased, but the disparity remained, with Black drivers making up 15% of all stops, compared to 31% for White drivers.

Following the adoption of the pretext-stop policy, pretextual stops decreased for all racial groups studied: 15% of traffic stops of Black drivers and 5.7% of stops of Latinx drivers were for these pretextual reasons, compared to 3.7% of stops of White drivers and 1.9% of stops of Asian drivers. The considerable decrease in pretextual stops for all four racial groups indicates significant progress and reduced harm. Fewer drivers of all races are subjected to the experiences described in the qualitative section. But racial disparities persist because Black and Latinx drivers are still pulled over for pretextual reasons at much higher rates than White drivers.



The raw numbers are also telling. Prior to the pretext-stop policy, police made 1.8 times as many traffic stops of White drivers as they did of Black drivers (54,571 stops for White drivers versus 29,826 for Black drivers). However, Black drivers were stopped for pretextual reasons 1.3 times more than White drivers (8,184 pretextual stops of Black drivers, compared to 6,121 of White drivers). Though the pretext-stop policy reduced the overall number of stops, this disparity persists – White drivers were stopped twice as often as Black drivers overall (8,958 stops of White drivers versus 4,382 of Black drivers), but Black drivers were stopped twice as often as White drivers for pretextual reasons (647 stops of Black drivers versus 331 of White drivers).

● *Pretextual Stops Drive Perceptions of Biased Policing*

Despite the gradual decline in pretextual stops since 2018, interview participants perceived such stops as pervasive and believed them to be driven by bias. Nearly two-thirds of participants (63%,15) reported being stopped after the pretext-stop policy went into effect. Among those interviewed, the most common pretextual reason for which they were stopped was expired registration or registration tags not being displayed (46%,11). Seventy-nine percent (19) of participants said, however, they did not believe the reason the officer provided was the real reason for the stop. Moreover, half (12) of participants reported being asked questions that seemed unrelated to the stop reason the officer provided. Of the 19 participants who did not believe the officer's given reason for the stop, 58% (11) believed they were stopped because of race or racial profiling.

In explaining why he thought he was stopped, one participant noted:

No, they said it was for the expired tags, they were pulling over because her tags were expired...No, I just think because it was four Black people. Well, not four. It was three Black people and a Samoan girl in the car, we all looked the same to them. (Black man)

Other common perceived reasons for being stopped included the type of car participants were driving (10), the neighborhood in which participants were stopped (6), and tinted windows (7). Some participants felt they were stopped because the officer suspected them of having contraband and/or was looking for a reason to search their car or person and investigate (8). Of the 19 participants who did not believe the officer's stop reason, the majority (15) reported multiple perceived reasons for the stop, such as their combination of race, gender, and age or the combination of race and the neighborhood in which they were driving. The following quotes from two participants captured their perceived reasons for the stop:

His primary was tinted windows because I rolled the window down. You could see that he was looking in the vehicle, looking for anything that could be more approachable to give him reason to actually do a search and seizure...From my understanding and from his demeanor, he was ready to take me in on some kind of charge. I must be a drug dealer because of my vehicle, the area where I was. There are a lot of drugs in the area where I was. (Black man)

In reality, I think they did it because we were in a Kia...Because like, I understand I didn't have a front plate. But they were being biased by me being in a Kia, and they probably seen that it was like two Black people in the car and we had like dark windows. So they automatically probably assumed the car was stolen or that we weren't supposed to be driving it. (Black woman)

● *Most frequent stop reasons have also shifted*

The shift from pretextual stops to moving violations is also evident in the specific reasons why people were stopped. Before the pretext-stop policy, the most common traffic stop reasons for Black drivers were pretextual: “Display License Plates Wrong,” making up 14% of traffic stops of Black drivers, and “No Registration,” making up 10% of such stops. Following the pretext-stop policy, the most common reasons Black drivers were stopped were moving violations, with “Failure to Stop Vehicle in a Crosswalk” accounting for 15% of traffic stops of Black drivers, and “Failure To Obey Turn Signs” accounting for 11%. But the prior pattern did not disappear entirely. “Display License Plates Wrong” was still the third highest reason, at 7.9% of traffic stops, despite the pretext-stop policy.

In contrast, the most common traffic stop reasons for both Asian and White drivers before the policy were moving violations: “Failure to Stop Vehicle in a Crosswalk,” at 17% of traffic stops of Asian drivers and 14% of stops of White drivers, and “Unsafe Speed,” at 13% of stops of Asian drivers and 14% of stops of White drivers. Following the policy, this pattern remained, with moving violations being the primary reasons for stops of White and Asian drivers.

Most Common Stop Reasons by Racial Group, Pre-Policy Change

	Black Drivers	Latinx Drivers	White Drivers	Asian Drivers
1	Display License Plates Wrong	Local Ordinance Violation	ViolationFailure to Stop at Crosswalk	Failure to Stop at Crosswalk
2	No Registration	Failure to Stop at Crosswalk	Unsafe Speed	Unsafe Speed
3	Fail to Obey Turn Signs	Fail to Obey Turn Signs	Fail to Obey Turn Signs	Fail to Obey Turn Signs
4	Failure to Stop at Crosswalk	Unsafe Speed	Failure to Stop at Red Light	Local Ordinance Violation
5	Unsafe Speed	No Registration	Local Ordinance Violation	Failure to Stop at Red Light
6	Local Ordinance Violation	Failure to Stop at Red Light	No Registration	Using Handheld Device While Driving
7	Failure to Stop at Red Light	Display License Plates Wrong	Using Handheld Device While Driving	Failure to Obey Sign

Note: “Local Ordinance Violation” is a generic catch-all that may include some pretextual stops, but the data do not provide further details on the specific stop reasons.

Most Common Stop Reasons by Racial Group, Post-Policy Change

	Black Drivers	Latinx Drivers	White Drivers	Asian Drivers
1	Failure to Stop at Crosswalk	Failure to Stop at Crosswalk	Failure to Stop at Crosswalk	Failure to Stop at Crosswalk
2	Fail to Obey Turn Signs	Fail to Obey Turn Signs	Unsafe Speed	Fail to Obey Turn Signs
3	Display License Plates Wrong	Unsafe Speed	Fail to Obey Turn Signs	Unsafe Speed
4	Local Ordinance Violation	Local Ordinance Violation	Local Ordinance Violation	Local Ordinance Violation
5	Unsafe Speed	Failure to Stop at Red Light	Failure to Stop at Red Light	Failure to Obey Sign
6	Failure to Stop at Red Light	Fail to Obey Turn Signs	Failure to Obey Sign	Failure to Yield to Pedestrians
7	No Registration	Failure to Yield to Pedestrians	Failure to Yield to Pedestrians	Failure to Stop at Red Light

This contrast demonstrates the different experiences of Black drivers as compared to others, both before and after the policy. Following the policy, the seven most common stop reasons for White drivers were moving violations, while two of the seven most common stop reasons for Black drivers were still pretextual stops. This indicates the extent to which pretextual stops continue to be used disproportionately against Black drivers.

- ***Other non-moving violations decreased before the policy, but increased after***
A potential unintended outcome of restricting specific pretextual stops is that officers may use other non-moving violations for pretextual reasons because they can no longer rely on the restricted reasons. Indeed, as mentioned above, non-moving violations other than the restricted pretextual stops were decreasing prior to the pretext-stop policy – from 20% of traffic stops in 2018 and 2019 to 12% in 2023 and 9% in the first part of 2024 – but increased following the policy – to 12% and 14% of stops for the remainder of 2024 and 2025, respectively. Specifically, “Local Ordinance Violation” decreased from 1,644 stops in 2020 to 336 in 2023, but increased to 1,982 stops in 2025, following the policy’s adoption, and became the fourth most common stop reason for all four racial groups studied. While most vehicle codes in the data are state statutes, “Local Ordinance Violation” is a generic catch-all for San Francisco ordinances, and no further detail on the actual stop reason is provided in the data. San Francisco may consider auditing these Local Ordinance Violation stops to assess whether officers may be using them as substitutes for the restricted pretextual stop reasons.

Citations

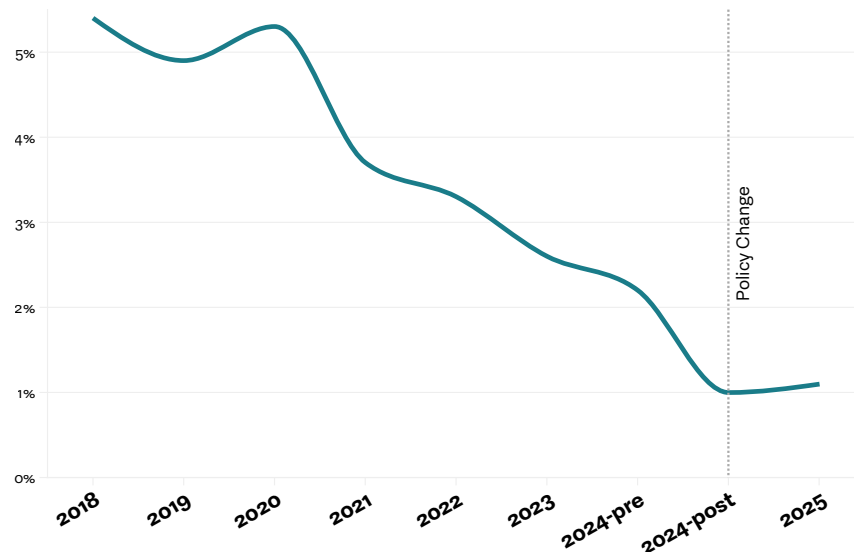
Citations followed a pattern similar to stops. Citations for pretextual stops and non-moving violations were already decreasing prior to the policy and decreased further after the policy. Following the policy, citations for pretextual stops decreased, from 11% of traffic stop citations in 2018 and 6.1% in the pre-policy portion of 2024 to 3% following the policy. Similarly, non-moving violations other than the restricted pretextual stops decreased from 15% of citations in 2018 to 7.8% in the pre-policy portion of 2024, but increased to 11% for the remainder of 2024 and 15% in 2025. This increase following the policy could mean officers started using other non-moving violations that were not covered by the pretext-stop policy when it went into effect. Even after the policy went into effect, officers still issued 664 citations for restricted pretextual stops. However, the pretext-stop policy does allow these specific stop reasons under certain conditions.

Searches

Pretextual stops resulted in discretionary searches more often than other types of stops: before the pretext-stop policy, 11% of pretextual stops involved discretionary searches, compared to 3.6% of other traffic stops. With the policy in place, this decreased to 3.6% of pretextual stops and 1% of all other stops resulting in a discretionary search.

Not all of this change came after the policy. From 2018 through 2020, around 5% of all stops each year involved a discretionary search. This decreased to 3.7% in 2021 and 3.3% in 2022, followed by 2.6% in 2023 and 2.2% during the pre-pretext-stop-policy portion of 2024. Following the policy, discretionary search rates further declined to at or just above 1%.

Percentage of Stops Resulting in A Discretionary Search, by Year



Source: San Francisco Police Department Stops Data, Jan. 1, 2018 through Dec. 31, 2025, from DataSF Open Data Portal

Traditional policing theory suggests that fewer discretionary searches would mean contraband – such as weapons, drugs, suspected stolen property, and even innocuous items, like money and cell phones – was discovered at a lower rate, but this was not the case. Between 2018 and 2025, officers found contraband in 28% to 40% of discretionary searches. Following the pretext-stop policy, the rate was within that range, at 37%.

Some may argue that pretextual stops disrupt crime and get dangerous weapons off the streets. If that were the case, one would expect to see a lower yield rate of firearms during searches following the pretext-stop policy, but the data do not appear to support this idea. Each year before the pretext-stop policy, officers reported finding firearms in between 1.5% and 6.6% of searches. Following the policy, they found firearms in 8.2% of searches in the remainder of 2024 and 6.5% in 2025, more than in any preceding year except 2023.

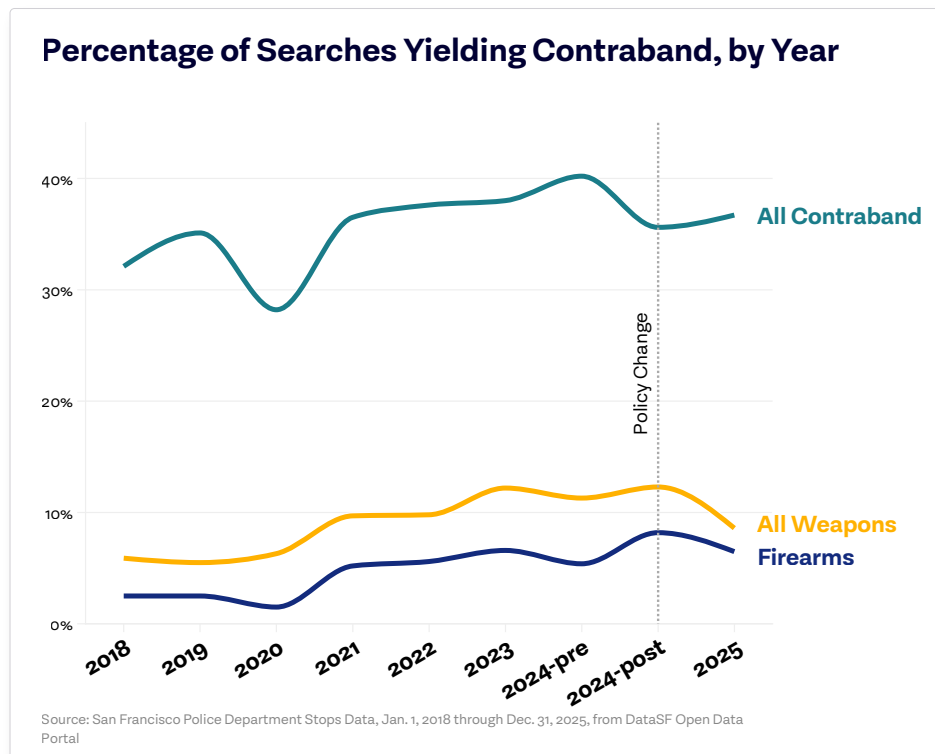
The number of firearms recovered during discretionary searches at traffic stops dropped sharply over time. In 2019, police recovered 78 firearms, but this number fell to 32 in 2021. In each year after 2021, fewer than 20 firearms were found. Specifically, officers recovered 17 firearms in 2024 and 16 in 2025, which is about the same as the numbers in 2022 and 2023.

The data, therefore, do not support the claim that pretextual stops get dangerous weapons off the streets, as there was no decrease following the pretext-stop policy.

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Looking at all weapons, rather than just firearms, the proportion of discretionary searches discovering weapons actually increased, from between 5% and 6% of searches in 2018 through 2020 to 12% in 2023 and 11% in the pre-policy portion of 2024. This trend continued in the latter half of 2024 following the pretext-stop policy, with 12% of searches discovering weapons. It dipped somewhat in 2025, with 8.6% of searches yielding weapons, though this remained above pre-2023 levels.

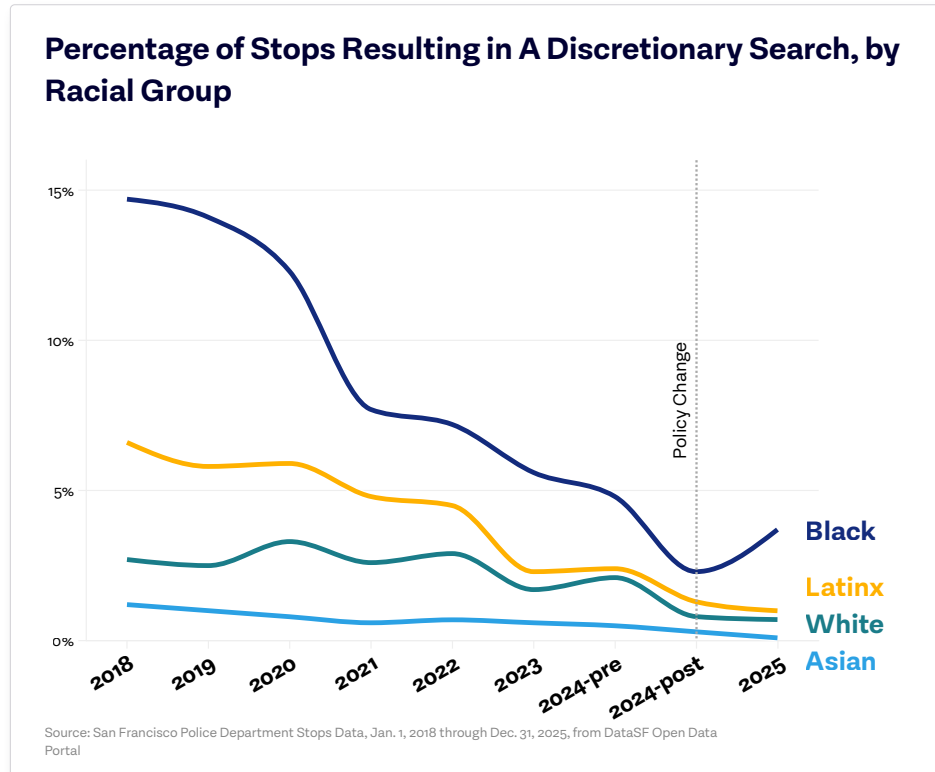
Given that officers have recovered fewer than 40 firearms annually from traffic stops since 2021, it is unlikely that any impact on weapon-based crime from reducing pretextual stops would be particularly large.



- Discretionary searches continued to decrease, but disparities remained**
 Prior to the pretext-stop policy taking effect, 12% of traffic stops of Black drivers and 5.3% of Latinx drivers involved a discretionary search, compared to 2.6% of stops of White drivers and 0.9% of stops of Asian drivers. This means Black and Latinx drivers were searched 4.6 and 2 times as often as White drivers, respectively.

The pretext-stop policy appears to have coincided with a decrease in searches, with the search rate already decreasing in the preceding years. Following the pretext-stop policy, 3.3% of traffic stops of Black drivers and 1.1% of stops of Latinx

drivers involved a discretionary search, compared to 0.7% of stops of White drivers and 0.1% of stops of Asian drivers. This means police searched Black and Latinx drivers 4.7 and 1.6 times as often as White drivers, respectively. While the overall discretionary search rate went down considerably for all racial groups following the pretext-stop policy, racial disparities remained.

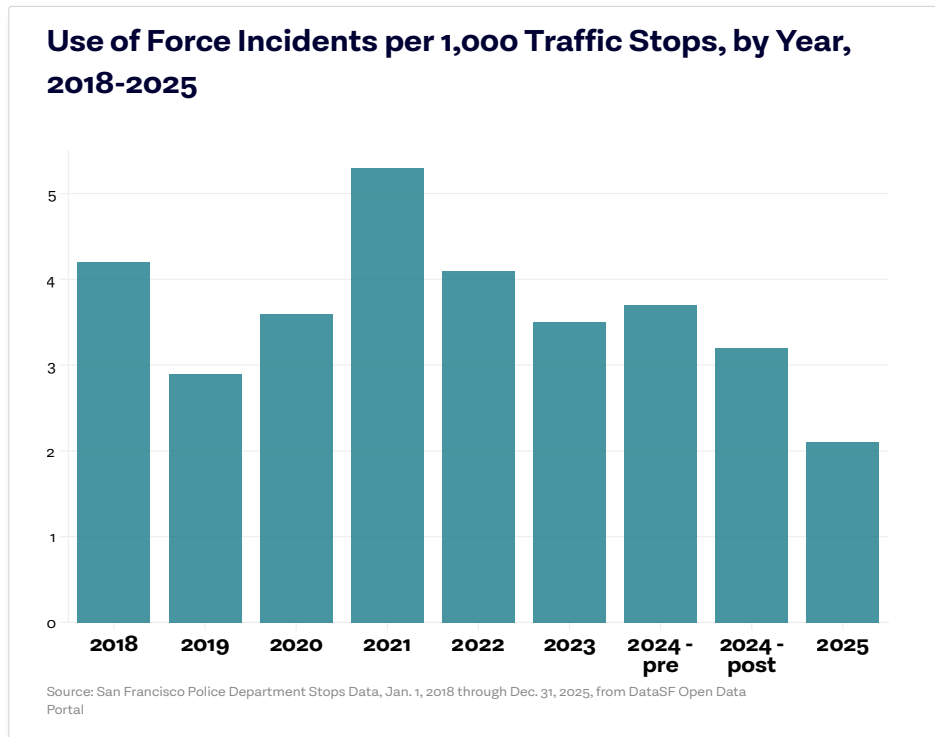


Use of Force

SFPD's use of force rate at traffic stops decreased markedly between 2018 and 2025, from 135 and 184 times in 2018 and 2019 to 76 and 87 times in 2020 and 2021, respectively, and then down to fewer than 40 times per year in 2022 and 2023. The rate increased somewhat, to 57 uses of force in 2024 and 47 in 2025.

It is also important to account for the varying number of stops made overall each year. When looking at the rate of use of force per 1,000 stops, the period after the pretext-stop policy had the lowest rates, along with 2019, in the study period. The rate fluctuated between 2.9 and 5.3 uses of force per 1,000 stops per year before the policy, and post-policy, decreased to 3.2 and 2.1 in the rest of 2024 and in 2025, respectively.

The use of force rate was considerably higher at pretextual stops than at other traffic stops. Before the policy, 0.6% of pretextual stops resulted in use of force, compared to 0.3% of all other traffic stops. It makes sense then that a reduction in pretextual stops would coincide with a reduction in officers using force.



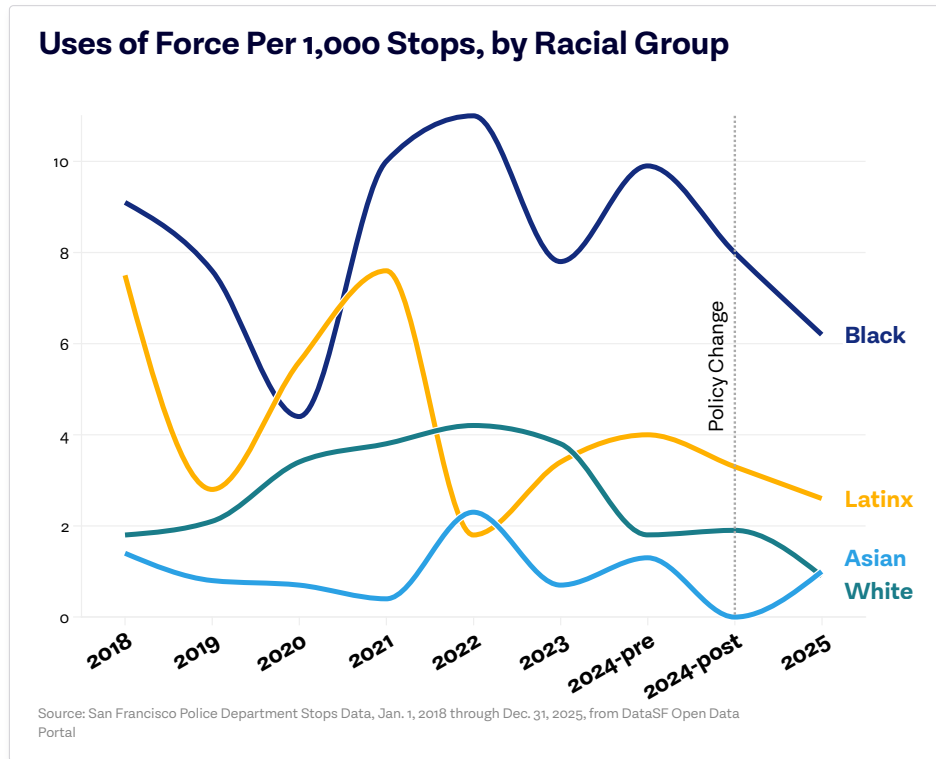
● *While use of force rates declined, disparities persisted*

The rate at which officers used force against Black drivers peaked in 2022, with 11 uses of force for every 1,000 traffic stops of Black drivers. Following adoption of the pretext-stop policy, this rate dropped to 6.2 in 2025, a 44% decrease from 2022. The use of force rate against Latinx drivers also decreased substantially, from 3.4 and 4 uses of force for every 1,000 stops of Latinx drivers in 2023 and the pre-policy portion of 2024 to 1.9 in 2025, a 52% decrease.



The use of force rate against White drivers was decreasing before the new policy took effect, from 4.2 uses of force for every 1,000 stops in 2022 to 1.8 in the first half of 2024. This decreased another 50%, to 0.9 uses of force per 1,000 stops in 2025. The use of force rate for Asian people fluctuated between 0.4 and 1.3 uses of force for every 1,000 stops, except for 2022, when it jumped to 2.3. Following the policy change, there was 1 use of force for every 1,000 stops of Asian drivers, essentially the same as most years before the policy change.

The decrease in the rate of use of force against everyone indicates progress and reduced harm overall. However, the disparities against Black and Latinx drivers remain: they still experience use of force at considerably higher rates than White drivers.



● *Post-stop Actions Cause Additional Harm*

Interviewees reported being burdened not only by the stops themselves, but by additional actions taken by the police, such as arrests, searches, and force being used on them. Of the research participants, only two reported being arrested in connection with the stop; one for a probation violation and the other for an outstanding warrant.

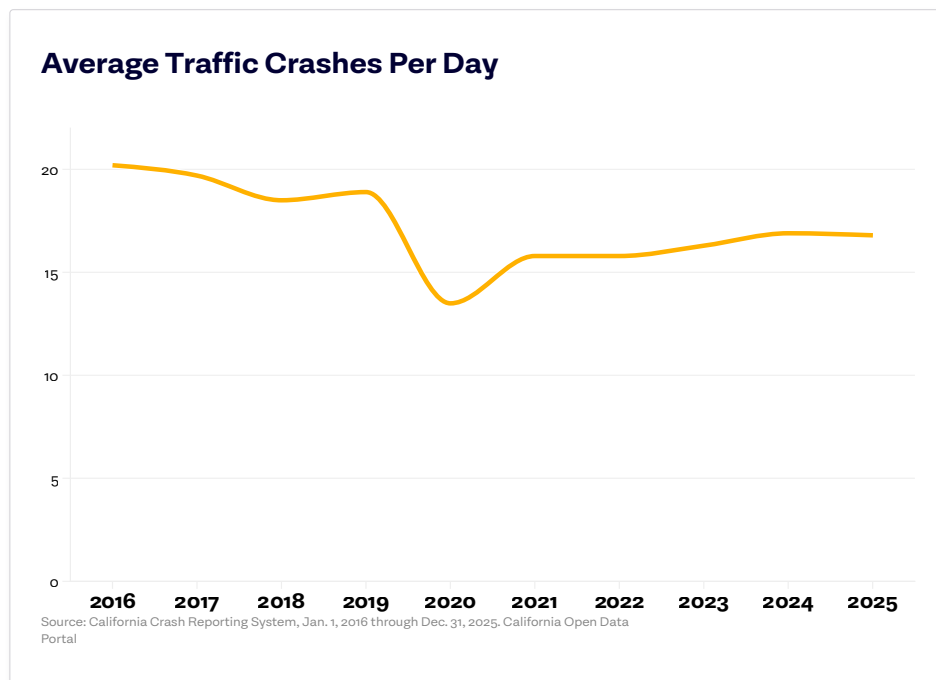
These post-stop actions impact Black drivers disproportionately. For example, studies show that Black drivers are more likely to be searched and to be asked to consent to a search, even though they are less likely to be found in possession of contraband.⁹ Twenty-nine percent of participants (7) reported experiencing a search: five reported that officers searched both their person and car, and two reported that officers searched one or the other. Among those searched, only one person reported being found with contraband, which was drug paraphernalia. Three participants were explicitly asked to consent to a search. Two agreed to be searched while one declined.

With respect to use of force, four participants (17%) reported having force used on them during the stop; three were handcuffed, and one had a gun pointed at them. The participant who had the gun pointed at him explained the encounter as follows:

So we're up near California Street, and this cop ... he's like, "Everybody get out of the car," and they actually drew guns on us. (Black man)

Traffic Safety

A concern might be that fewer pretextual stops could result in a worsening of traffic safety conditions. Though the average number of traffic crashes per day did increase slightly from 2021 through 2025, this trend was occurring before the pretext-stop policy took effect in 2024. The average number of crashes per day increased from 15.8 in 2021 and 2022 to 16.3 in 2023 to around 16.8 in 2024 and 2025, though they remained well below pre-2020 levels. Future research with a longer timeframe could provide a more robust assessment of this question.

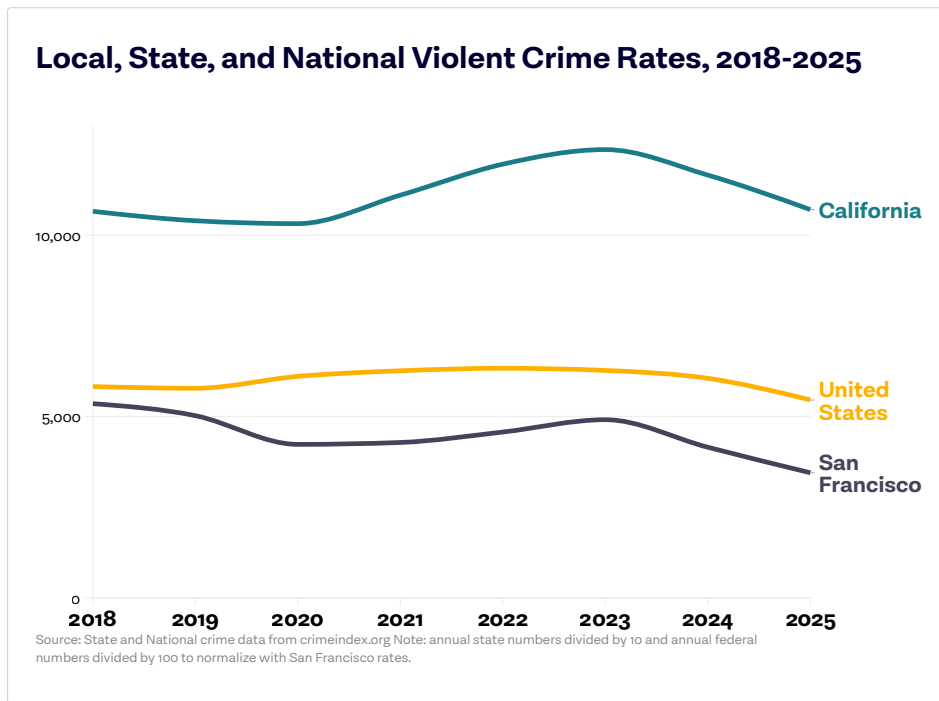


Public Safety

Both violent and non-violent crime rates decreased following implementation of the policy, calling into question assumptions about the necessity of pretext stops.

● *Violent Crime*

Overall, violent crime in San Francisco is on a downward trend, which continued following the adoption of the pretext-stop policy. The violent crime rate decreased from 2018 through 2020 before increasing slightly each year from 2021 through 2023. It decreased again in 2024 and 2025, with those years having the lowest number of violent crimes over this time period, lower even than 2020. Other than the decrease in 2020, 2024 and 2025 had the largest single-year decreases in violent crimes over this time period.



● *Other Crime Types*

The average number of property crimes in San Francisco fluctuated between 116 and 151 per day between 2018 and 2023. For the part of 2024 preceding the pretext-stop policy, this dropped to 103 per day. Following the policy, it dropped further, to 96 per day through the end of 2024 and 73 per day in 2025.

The average number of Part-1 crimes – defined by the FBI as the most serious types of crimes, including murder, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, arson, and theft – fluctuated between 127 and 165 per day from 2018 through 2023. For the portion of 2024 preceding the pretext-stop policy, this decreased to 113 per day. Following the pretext-stop policy, it decreased further, to 106 per day for the remainder of 2024, and 82 per day in 2025.

With trends in crime rates at the state and national levels mirroring those of San Francisco, it is difficult to determine what effect, if any, local initiatives such as the pretext-stop policy may have had on this decrease in crime rates. What is apparent, however, is that the pretext-stop policy was not associated with an increase in crime, which calls into question the idea that pretextual stops prevent or are otherwise related to crime.



The Human Cost of Pretextual Stops

The toll burdensome policing can place on community members can be obscured when looking at overall trends encompassing tens of thousands of stops. To understand how pretextual stops affect San Francisco drivers, CPE conducted interviews with 24 adult community members who had recently experienced pretextual stops. Thematic saturation, the point at which additional interviews yield no new insights or themes, was reached after approximately 12 interviews, demonstrating just how similar experiences of pretext stops are for San Franciscans. Participants described the impact of pretextual stops and post-stop actions (e.g., searches, use of force) on their health, transportation, driving behavior, relationship and family dynamics, and finances. While the group was not chosen at random, its broad age range (18 to 55+) and racial diversity suggest these negative effects were not limited to a narrow segment of San Franciscans targeted by pretextual stops. Details on the interview methodology are provided in Appendix C.

Police Contact Outcomes

Interviewees reported experiences that could be characterized as lacking procedural justice, or a sense that they were not being treated with dignity, fairness, and good faith.¹⁰ There is a large body of literature documenting that Black people tend to have more negative experiences of procedural justice than White people during police contact.¹¹ Fifty-four percent (13) of participants reported negative experiences of procedural justice, while 38% (9) of participants reported positive experiences during the police stop. Two participants described contrasting experiences during the stop:

When they pull you over, they ask for your license plate. You ask them why did you pull me over, they tend to get a little attitude with you. “You’re not answering, I’m answering, I’m asking the questions here” ... I think they be real like on edge, you feel me. Their very like tone is very assertive and very dominant. They tend to establish dominance immediately. They want to make sure that you know that like they’re running stuff and that you should be afraid of them. (Black man)

Well, he spoke well with me. He wasn't mean or anything. It was like he's doing his job and that's why I think like maybe they were kind of {wondering} who because I don't have a brand new car. I have a little bucket a little Toyota Corolla bucket. So maybe they thought {it} was drug related or I don't know. (Black woman)

Beyond pretextual stops, participants also reported experiencing pervasive stops by police overall. Notably, ten participants (42%) reported experiencing other police stops in addition to the pretextual stop that was the focus of the interview. Nine of these participants reported negative experiences of procedural justice. Of those, four reported that they perceived being stopped due to race or racial profiling. One participant described his frequent police stops as being a routine that, to his regret, he has caught himself almost accepting as normal:

*It was almost like going to the dentist or a routine checkup. I feel I have fit the description since I was 12. I've had way worse encounters or encounters that I hadn't done anything wrong...It was like a routine checkup and there's no way it should be, now that I'm thinking about it, it should not be normalized. I've normalized that sh**. That's crazy. That's crazy. That's my normal. What the f***? Sorry. (Black man)*

Health Impact

Over the past decade, public health researchers have begun thinking of police violence and exposure as a social determinant of public health, and studies have shown the negative impact of criminal legal contact, including police stops, on well-being.¹² Research has shown that living in neighborhoods where pedestrian stops are more likely to become invasive and end in a frisk and in neighborhoods with a high concentration of police use of force can have serious physical health consequences, including poor sleep quality, diabetes, and obesity.¹³ Additional studies have shown a link between police encounters and adverse mental health conditions, with people who experience negative police encounters at greater risk of anxiety, depression, and even suicide attempts.¹⁴

Even stops for seemingly minor infractions can have deleterious consequences for those stopped. Participants reported a variety of negative impacts, including health concerns. Nineteen participants (79%) reported a negative change in their physical or mental health as a result of the stop. In describing the stop, one participant who was searched explained the toll this takes on him:

Yeah, I think I was affected mentally. My mental health was affected by them imposing themselves upon me. I don't know any righteous stand up person {who} would feel comfortable with somebody imposing themselves on them improperly, who likes that. So yes, I was very indignant ... I'm suffering from that right now. (Black man)

Another participant, who has encountered numerous police stops, recalls wondering whether this encounter would be “it,” presumably meaning being shot or killed. In thinking back to the stop, the participant stated:

It is like I’ve been in ... these situations before. But for some reason I was particularly afraid. It is scary every time but you’re like, damn is this going to be it. Is this going [to be] the time he says, I reach in my pocket. Is this going to be the time? (Black man)

Transportation Impact

The consequences of a stop can include not only losing a means of transportation, but potentially much more. Over one-third of research participants (9) reported a change in their transportation as a result of the stop. Of these 9 participants, 78% (7) reported losing their car. One participant, when asked whether the stop had an impact on his transportation, responded:

Absolutely, you’re stuck without a car, you can’t get to work, you know, you can’t get to your appointments. (Black man)

One participant who lost her vehicle explained the broader impacts of losing her car given that she was unhoused at the time of the stop. Having her car towed not only resulted in the loss of transportation, but also her shelter, clothes, and other belongings. The participant recalled her exchange with the officer:

I was explaining to him like, “I’m homeless right now. I’m still like trying to get my car situation together.” And he was like, “Oh let me see your registration.” Everything turned bad at that point because I felt he was already going to take my car. So I gave him my license, my registration and of course my registration was expired. So he ended up towing my car. (Asian-American/Black woman)

Impact on Driving Behavior

Every participant (24) reported changes in their driving behavior and/or attitudes toward driving as a result of the stops they experienced. On the positive side, some participants (5) noted the stop made them more cautious drivers. However, all participants described negative changes in their driving behavior or attitudes toward driving. For example, half of all participants reported feeling fear and/or anxiety about driving as a result of the stop. One participant described the fear associated with driving:

I was scared to drive for a minute. I'm like I don't even want to drive this car. I know everything is legit, but I don't want to drive this car until, you know, I get a front plate or get permanent plates because I'm going to keep getting pulled over every time they see a black Kia. Yeah. It impacted my mental {health}. I thought I was just going to jail for some reason. I'm like, how {are} they coming so aggressive? (Black woman)

Another participant described how he believed he was stopped because of the number of Black people in the car, and how that made him apprehensive about driving with other people in the car, including his family. He described the impact on his driving behavior in the following way:

So I'm scared to even go out with my family. If it ain't just me and my son or me and my father, too many people in the car might not be cool. And I think that was the cause of them pulling us over. It was just they saw too many Black people in the car. (Black man)

In addition to fear of driving, participants also reported changing their driving behavior to avoid certain neighborhoods or streets. In fact, nearly two-thirds (63%) of all participants reported altering routes when driving as a result of the stop. One participant explained the varied ways her driving patterns have been altered as a result of her experience with being stopped:

I don't drive after 10:00. I don't go out on certain days. Like certain days, the police just, they don't have nothing to do and they just pull people over. On holidays, I don't drive at all. And that's today, to this day, I do not drive on Holidays. Like Halloween, I came down here. I stayed down here. I stayed over here in the western district with my daughter and I didn't go home and I just lived on 3rd Street. I didn't go home until the next morning. (Black woman)

Besides avoiding certain geographic areas or streets, some participants reported decreasing their driving (4), while 29% (7) of participants reported they stopped driving altogether. As one participant recounted:

Yes, because eventually after I kept getting pulled over, I just parked the car. Yeah, I just ended up parking the car and not driving it for a while because I didn't want to get any more tickets that I couldn't afford, and then the car ended up getting towed. (Black woman)



Impact on Relationship/Family Dynamics

Nearly half (11) of participants reported a change in their family dynamics or relationships as a result of the stop. Of those, ten reported a negative change. One participant describes tension with her daughter as a result of the stop below:

She (daughter) said that I started yelling at her afterwards and I didn't feel like my tone changed, but then I had to step back and say, My perception is not her reality and her reality is not my perception. (Black woman)

The participant also explained the impact the stop had on her daughter, noting:

Yeah, she still won't drive. (Black woman)

Another participant described the strain of losing his car on his relationship, stating:

Yeah, that impacted in a big way on me. Financially, it just, I was so upset. You know, it was more like my lady was upset with me because she know, you know, you're not supposed to drive around, she is lecturing me, with expired tags. (Black man)

Impact of Fines and Fees

Research has illuminated the burdensome financial impact of fines and fees associated with traffic citations, particularly for low-income communities and communities of color. This research demonstrates how these fines and fees essentially criminalize the poor and the disastrous downstream consequences that can stem from citations, including a vicious cycle of debt and deepening criminal legal system involvement.¹⁵

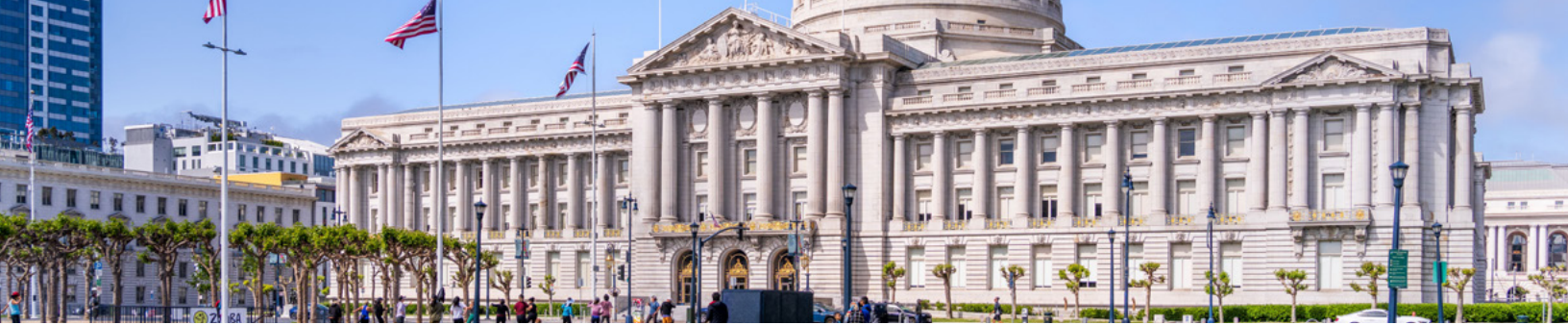
Participants also indicated police stops had implications for their finances. Seventeen participants (71%) reported receiving a citation in connection with the stop. Of those, only 24% (4) reported being able to pay the citation. When asked if she was able to pay the ticket, one participant stated:

I mean, no, not right away. Definitely, I think it actually went up probably too. But I eventually paid it. I just didn't do it. I didn't have it at the time. So it kind of was a hardship financially. (Black woman)

Close to one-third of participants (7) also reported receiving towing and impound fees as a result of the stop and roughly the same number (8) reported incurring public and/or private transportation fees as a result of the stop and losing access to their car. Finally, about 20% (5) of participants reported receiving late fees and penalties as a result of the stop. Participants mentioned fees between \$600 and \$1200 to recover their vehicles. When speaking to his car being towed, one participant said:

Yeah. So the car would have [been] like 30 a day [to] hold on it, accumulate all these, you know, hold charges, storage charges and all that to the point where you can't even get the car back. (Black man)

The citywide stop data showed that pretextual stops disproportionately impact Black and Latinx drivers, involve discretionary searches, and are associated with use of force, while not resulting in any greater contraband recovery or citations that would indicate actual wrongdoing, or other potential benefits to public safety. Speaking with community members demonstrated how pretextual stops also drive perceptions of racial bias and inflict various harms on those stopped. Given these negative outcomes, and the lack of apparent public safety benefits, it is clear that San Francisco is better off after restricting the use of pretextual stops.



Additional Opportunities to Expand the Pretext-Stop Policy

Given the positive outcomes, CPE has identified opportunities for SFPD to do even more to reduce pretext stops. CPE has identified 14 additional stop reasons that SFPD could add to the list of restricted pretextual stops. All of these stop reasons have been included in pretext-stop policies in other jurisdictions.

VC 26708.5 – Transparent material and tinted glass

Window tint enforcement is often highly discretionary.

This charge is similar to objects hanging from a rearview mirror (already covered under the pretext ban), and window tint is typically an equipment issue that can be handled in ways other than initiating a stop.

VC 24252 – Lighting Equipment

The pretext ban already covers taillights and brake lights unless all are not functioning or are out at night. However, the same pretext stop risk exists for other lights under the broader lighting equipment code.

VC 24400(A) and VC 24400(B) – Headlamp Requirements

The pretext ban already covers taillights and brake lights unless all are not functioning or are out at night. However, the same pretext stop risk exists for headlights.

VC 24403 – Fog lamps violation and VC 24800 – Park lights violation

Same reasoning as VC 24252 above.

VC 26709(A) and VC 26709(B) – Mirrors

Similar to VC 26708 (already covered under the pretext ban), VC 26709 is an equipment and/or visibility violation that is easy to allege, but often is not connected to immediate danger while driving.

VC 26710 – Defective Windshield/Rear Window

Often a crack in the windshield relies on the subjectivity of the officer to determine whether the cracked windshield impairs vision, making this susceptible to discretionary enforcement and pretext.

VC 27007 – Sound amplification system violations; VC 27150 – Muffler requirements; and VC 27151 – Exhaust system modification

These stop reasons relate to excessive noise from vehicles and often rely on the officer's subjectivity or are equipment violations that have minimal connection to driver safety.

VC 5200 – Display of License Plates and VC 5201 – Mounting of Plates

The current pretext stop policy prohibits stops for missing or improperly affixed rear license plates, which may still leave the possibility for pretext stops based on a missing front plate, even when the rear licence plate is visible.

There were 6,227 stops for these 14 statutes between 2018 and 2025. The number of stops for these infractions decreased markedly over this time period, from a high of 2,534 stops in 2019 to fewer than 250 per year from 2022 on.

Most of the additional pretextual stops were for lighting equipment (24252(a) and 24252(b), 42% of additional pretextual stops); display of license plates (5200(b), 18%); and headlamp requirements (24400, 16%). Another 14% were for tinted windows (26708.5).

These 14 statutes also appeared to impact Black and Latinx drivers disproportionately. Black and Latinx drivers made up 18% and 20% of all traffic stops, but 28% and 24% of these additional pretextual stops, respectively. While the proportion of these stops involving Black drivers remained fairly steady over this time period, the proportion involving Latinx drivers increased from about 23% per year before 2023 to more than 30% in 2023 through 2025. The proportion of White drivers decreased, from 29% of these stops in 2022 to 18% in 2024 to 15% in 2025. The proportion of these stops involving Asian drivers fluctuated with no clear trend, from 15% in 2018 to a low of 6.6% in 2023 to 13% in 2025.

These stops also involved discretionary searches at about twice the rate of all stops. Across all traffic stops made between 2018 and 2025, 4% involved a discretionary search, while 9.8% of these additional pretextual stops involved a discretionary search. However, the contraband yield rate was only slightly higher, with 39% of discretionary searches at these stops yielding contraband compared to 34% of searches at all stops and 33% of searches at stops restricted under the pretext policy. This would not seem to justify the much higher search rate based on what officers are finding.

Officers also used force almost twice as often at traffic stops for these 14 pretextual reasons than at traffic stops generally – 6.5 times per 1,000 stops for these 14 reasons, compared to 3.4 times per 1,000 stops for all stop reasons.

These 14 additional pretextual stop reasons resulted in arrests at the same rate as all other traffic stops, with 1.9% resulting in arrest. They also resulted in citations at about the same rate as the restricted pretextual stops, and considerably lower rates than all traffic stops combined: 65% of all traffic stops resulted in a citation, while only 42% of stops for these 14 reasons resulted in citations. Inasmuch as a citation or arrest indicates the discovery of actual wrongdoing, it would appear that these 14 statutes are much less effective at doing so than traffic stops generally.

These statutes are being used as enforcement tools less and less, but when they are used, they are used against Black and Latinx drivers at disproportionately high rates. It therefore seems that adding these additional reasons to the list of stops prohibited under SPFD's pretext-stop policy could help further reduce racial disparities in traffic stops and eliminate unnecessary searches and use of force.



Conclusion

CPE’s assessment of SFPD’s pretext-stop policy finds that generally, the policy built upon and deepened improvements that were already underway in the years leading up to the policy going into effect. Qualitative and quantitative evidence demonstrated that eliminating pretextual stops can be a meaningful step toward reducing harmful police interactions and the cascading negative outcomes that often follow from such interactions. Yet, there is more work to be done, especially to tackle the racial disparities that persist in traffic stops.

As outlined in this report, pretextual stops were decreasing before the pretext-stop policy took effect, and decreased further after its adoption. This coincided with a shift in focus to moving violations, including “Focus on the Five” stops, which increased before the pretext-stop policy took effect, and increased further following its adoption. With the decrease in pretextual stops, the rate of discretionary searches also dropped, and the contraband discovery rate remained generally stable. Use of force rates declined as well following the policy. Though the average number of traffic crashes per day did increase slightly from 2021 through 2025, this trend was occurring before the pretext-stop policy took effect in 2024. Tracking national trends, crime rates decreased in the period after adoption of the policy.

Despite this significant progress, Black drivers are still being stopped for pretextual reasons twice as often as White drivers. The number and proportion of stops that were pretextual decreased for Black, Latinx, White, and Asian drivers, but disparities between Black and White drivers remained. Similarly, overall discretionary search and use of force rates went down considerably for Black, Latinx, and White drivers following the pretext-stop policy, but the anti-Black and anti-Latinx racial disparities remained. Since the policy took effect, SFPD officers have also been stopping people more often than before the policy change for Local Ordinance Violations. SFPD may consider auditing such stops to ensure officers are not using them to make pretextual stops.

CPE's preliminary analysis of outcomes following SFPD's adoption of the pretext-stop policy reveals numerous positive trends as described above. CPE also identified 14 additional stop reasons that could be considered pretextual, and encourages SFPD to consider expanding the list of pretextual stops restricted under its pretext-stop policy. Much like the currently restricted pretextual reasons, these 14 additional vehicle code violations are used disproportionately against Black and Latinx drivers, and lead to disproportionately high rates of discretionary searches and use of force. San Francisco should also consider more broadly restricting stops for administrative, non-safety reasons, as the Los Angeles City Council has just requested of the Los Angeles Board of Police Commissioners.¹⁶

Despite this significant progress, Black drivers are still being stopped for pretextual reasons twice as often as White drivers.

As described by interview participants, pretextual stops can place significant burdens on San Francisco community members – for their health and wellbeing, relationships, finances, and even their daily routines. These stops have no clear tie to or effect on public safety outcomes. SFPD's policy restricting the use of pretextual stops coincided with a number of improvements, particularly in reducing burdensome searches and use of force at traffic stops. With these improvements, coupled with the lack of any negative consequences for crime rates, traffic crashes, contraband recovery, or any other measures of public safety, this policy demonstrates considerable promise for the people of San Francisco. Given this initial success, San Francisco should consider restricting other types of pretextual stops and ensuring that officers are not using other stop reasons, such as local ordinance violations, to continue making pretextual stops. Other jurisdictions should follow San Francisco's efforts, as leaders across the country recognize that pretextual stops are harmful for drivers and have no clear public safety purpose.

Appendix A: Quantitative Data Sources

The following is a description of the datasets used to complete the quantitative analyses.

Dataset	Source	Dates Covered	Date Downloaded	Used to Assess
Police Department Stop Data	DataSF Open Data Portal	Jan. 1, 2018 through Dec. 31, 2025	March 24, 2026	All aspects of stops, including stop rates, stop rates by stop reasons, stop rates by racial group, search rates, contra-band found rates, use of force
California Vehicle Crash Data	California Crash Reporting System	Jan. 1, 2016 through Dec. 31, 2025	April 28, 2025 (2016 through 2024); March 10, 2026 (2025 data)	San Francisco vehicle crash rates
Traffic Crashes Resulting in Injury	DataSF Open Data Portal	Jan. 1, 2005 through Dec. 31, 2025	March 10, 2026	Injurious and/or fatal vehicle crash rates
Police Department Incident Reports	DataSF Open Data Portal	Jan. 1, 2018 through Dec. 31, 2025	March 10, 2026	San Francisco crime rates (including violent crime, property crime, thefts from vehicles, etc.)
State and National Crime Data	Real Time Crime Index	Jan. 1, 2018 through Dec. 31, 2025	March 10, 2026	State and national crime rates

Appendix B: Quantitative Data Processing Notes

● *Police Stops Data*

Police Department Stops Data were obtained from 2018 through 2025. Data were processed at the stop level. Stops of multiple people (a driver plus one or more passengers) were counted only once. For each stop, data were coded to indicate whether any of the people in the car were searched, had contraband found on them, or had force used on them. Therefore, while we refer to “drivers” throughout, it’s possible it was actually a passenger who was searched or had force used on them.

The data were also formatted to align with California’s Racial and Identity Profiling Act (RIPA), which requires California police agencies to collect stops data, and to do so in specific formats. One shortcoming of these data is they do not capture all types of use of force, and some actions the department might consider use of force, such as handcuffing, CPE does not. We indicated officers as having used force if any of the following were indicated as true:

- Baton or other impact weapon used
- Canine bit
- Chemical spray used
- Electronic control device
- Firearm pointed at person
- Firearm discharged or used
- Impact projectile discharged
- Person removed from vehicle by physical contact
- Impact projectile weapon
- Physical compliance tactics

Of note is that this may not include the two most common types of force: takedowns and control holds (it is unclear whether or under what conditions these would be included in “Physical compliance tactics”). RIPA data do contain an indicator of when these might be true – “Other physical or vehicle contact” – but this category also may be overly broad and include actions that CPE would not consider police use of force. Because CPE excludes takedowns and/or control holds, these data may represent a conservative estimate of the prevalence of police use of force.

● *Pretextual Stops*

There were nine stop types that were prohibited under SFPD’s pretext-stop policy. However, two of these were not detectable in the data. Stops of a vehicle that has a person sleeping in it (S.F. Police Code§ 97) is a San Francisco statute, whereas the other prohibited stop reasons are California vehicle codes. The data available

do contain indicators of the CA vehicle code cited for each stop, but do not include local statutes, so it was not possible to determine which stops were made for sleeping in a car. Similarly, the pretext-stop policy prohibits stops of pedestrians for moving infractions unless there is immediate danger of a collision. It was impossible to determine which pedestrian stops might have been made for this reason. Analyses are therefore limited to the other seven stop reasons.

Appendix C: Qualitative Methodology

● *Overview*

The purpose of the qualitative research was to understand how pretextual stops have impacted the lives of San Francisco community members who have experienced them. To accomplish this goal, CPE conducted 24 semi-structured interviews with San Francisco residents who had experienced at least one pretextual stop in the last three years. For the purposes of this research, a pretextual stop is defined as one of the nine categories of low-level violations that have been deprioritized in SFPD's pretext-stop policy. All research protocols were submitted to CPE's Institutional Review Board (IRB), and IRB approval was secured prior to the start of the qualitative research.

● *Sampling Approach and Study Demographics*

CPE employed a purposive sampling method to select research participants. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling method where the researcher selects study participants because they possess characteristics and experiences the researcher seeks to understand. To be eligible for this study, prospective participants had to be 18 years of age or older; have experienced one of the pretextual stops listed in SFPD's pretext-stop policy in the last three years; and live, work, or go to school in San Francisco. We over-sampled Black and Latinx people, as research has shown Black and Brown people are disproportionately impacted by pretextual stops. While including both Black and Latinx people in the sample, we conducted more interviews with Black people given the even greater disparate impact they experience from pretextual stops. Where possible, the research team also tried to ensure that selected respondents varied in terms of age, gender, and the pretextual reason for which the person was stopped to ensure a variety of perspectives and experiences.

CPE completed a total of 24 semi-structured interviews. The sample included 16 Black people, 4 Latinx people, 1 Asian-American/Pacific Islander, and 3 bi- or multi-racial people. Twelve people in the sample identified as men, 11 as women, and 1 person identified as non-binary. The age range of participants was: 18-24 (3), 25-34 (7), 35-44 (6), 45-54 (4), and 55+ (4). Two research participants identified as LGBTQ+, 3 participants reported being unhoused or housing insecure, and 9 people reported living with a chronic illness or disability.

● *Recruitment Process*

CPE implemented a two-stage recruitment process to select individuals for participation in the study. The first phase consisted of recruitment through the San Francisco Public Defender's Office and community-based organizations serving Black, Latinx, and other marginalized populations in San Francisco. For this phase of recruitment, CPE provided SFPDO staff and staff of community-based organizations with recruitment flyers to share with their clients and community members, respectively. We also provided SFPDO and community organizations with a predetermined script (in English and Spanish) to explain the study to their clients and community members, respectively. Given the power dynamics between public defenders and their clients, SFPDO's script included a statement notifying clients that neither their relationship with the public defender's office nor the SFPDO services they receive would be affected by their choice to participate or not, and no data that could identify them would be shared with SFPDO.

The recruitment flyer contained study details, contact information for questions about the study, and a QR code linked to an initial questionnaire that asked prospective research participants for contact and demographic information, including primary language (used to ensure diversity among recruited research participants). CPE used Google forms, a user-friendly method, to create the initial questionnaire, which was made available in English and Spanish. All recruitment materials were translated into Spanish by a certified translation company.

CPE staff members directly contacted everyone who completed the Google form to assess their eligibility for participation in study (e.g., at least 18, experienced pretextual stop) and to ask for their communication preferences (e.g., text, phone, email) for interview reminders if they were eligible to participate. Using a preset script, CPE staffers then notified individuals as to whether they were eligible to participate in the study. Those who were not eligible were thanked for their time and interest, and those who were eligible were given additional information about the study, provided an opportunity to ask questions, and scheduled for an interview if they agreed to participate.

The second phase of recruitment consisted of on-the-ground recruitment. CPE selected places suspected to have a high concentration of drivers. CPE staff selected courthouses holding traffic court and the main DMV on Fell Street. While CPE spent time at the DMV, the physical layout of the space was not conducive to recruitment, and CPE was not successful at recruiting participants there. This was also the case at the San Francisco Superior Courthouse located at 400 McAlister Street. The majority of the on-the-ground recruitment took place at the 850 Bryant Street Courthouse. CPE also recruited one participant at the Criminal Justice Court of San Francisco at 575 Polk Street. All participants recruited on the ground were screened for eligibility and interviewed on the spot if they were eligible and agreed to participate in the study.

● *Administering the Interviews*

Research participants recruited during the first phase were scheduled to be interviewed at the Public Defender’s Office located at 555 7th Street. All phase one research participants were interviewed in a private office at the Public Defender’s Office with no SFPDO staff present. Research participants recruited on-the-ground were interviewed at the place where they were recruited.

During the interview, the interviewer went over the informed consent process, which included information about the study and the rights of research participants. Participants were asked to confirm they wanted to participate in the interview, and once an affirmative answer was given, the interview began. CPE conducted 24 interviews that each lasted approximately 45 minutes to one hour. Each interview was audio recorded, and audio files were stored securely to ensure the safety and privacy of participants’ data. Each participant was compensated with a \$75 visa gift card for their time, and each was offered the opportunity to receive an emailed copy of the report once it is ready. While CPE hired a certified translator to do live in-person Spanish translation during the interviews, these services were not needed, and all interviews were conducted in English.

● *Transcription, Coding and Analysis*

Interviews were transcribed, de-identified, and uploaded into qualitative software for coding and analysis. Two researchers worked on the qualitative coding of the transcripts to ensure inter-rater reliability. The researchers used a combination of inductive and deductive coding. In addition, the qualitative analysis used a grounded theory approach to understand research participants’ experiences of pretextual stops and post-stop actions and their impacts.¹⁷ One researcher conducted a thematic analysis to unearth key patterns in the ways that these stops affect the lives of those who experience them, and impact their income, housing, transportation, and other critical resources. Data saturation was reached after approximately the first dozen interviews, suggesting that our sample of 24 participants was sufficient to capture key themes in the experiences of San Francisco community members. Another researcher then conducted a quality assurance (QA) review of the analysis.

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1. Bayness, Gabrielle, et al., “Safe Roads for All: Evidence-Based Strategies for Keeping Our Roadways Safe.” American Civil Liberties Union and the Policing Project, 2026.
2. See, for example, Susan T. Parker, Matthew B. Ross, and Stephen Ross, “Driving Change: Evaluating Connecticut’s Collaborative Approach to Reducing Racial Disparities in Policing,” NBER Working Paper 32692 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.3386/w32692>; Rushin, S., & Edwards, G. S. (2021). *An empirical assessment of pretextual stops and racial profiling*. Stanford Law Review, 73, pp. 637–726. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3506876>
3. Officers have no discretion whether to make three types of searches: (1) If an officer is going to take someone into custody, they must search the person before putting them in their squad car to ensure the person doesn’t have any weapons or other items they could use to hurt themselves, officers, or anyone else; this is known as a “search incident to arrest.” (2) If police are going to take a vehicle into custody – for example, if they’re arresting a person for DUI and have to impound their car – the officers will search the vehicle to ensure there is no contraband inside; this is called a “vehicle inventory search.” (3) If police have a warrant to search a person or property, the search is predetermined, and the officer executing the warrant has no discretion whether or not to conduct the search. Similarly, in the case of an arrest warrant, the arrest is predetermined, meaning a search incident to arrest is mandatory. CPE was interested in what police officers do when they have discretion and therefore omitted mandatory searches from this analysis. For evidence linking pretextual stops to higher volumes of searches and use of force, see Center for Policing Equity (2026a). Assessment of Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department, Carson Station. Justice Navigator, <https://justicenavigator.org/carson-ca-2024-summary/>; Center for Policing Equity (2026b). Assessment of Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department, Century Station. Justice Navigator, <https://justicenavigator.org/century-ca-2024-summary/>; Center for Policing Equity (2026c). Assessment of Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department, Compton Station. Justice Navigator, <https://justicenavigator.org/compton-ca-2024-summary/>; Center for Policing Equity (2026d). Assessment of Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department, East LA Station. Justice Navigator, <https://justicenavigator.org/east-la-ca-2024-summary/>; Center for Policing Equity (2026e). Assessment of Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department, Industry Station. Justice Navigator, <https://justicenavigator.org/industry-ca-2024-summary/>; Center for Policing Equity (2026f). Assessment of Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department, Lakewood Station. Justice Navigator, <https://justicenavigator.org/lakewood-ca-2025-summary/>; Center for Policing Equity (2026g). Assessment of Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department, South LA Station. Justice Navigator, <https://justicenavigator.org/southla-ca-2024-summary/>; Center for Policing Equity (2026h). Assessment of Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department, Temple Station. Justice Navigator, <https://justicenavigator.org/temple-ca-2024-summary/>.
4. SFPD General Order 9.07: https://www.sanfranciscopolice.org/sites/default/files/2024-07/SFPDDN_24_098_20240711.pdf.
5. Fliss MD, Baumgartner F, Delamater P, Marshall S, Poole C, Robinson W. Re-prioritizing traffic stops to reduce motor vehicle crash outcomes and racial disparities. *Inj Epidemiology*. 2020 Jan 20;7(1):3. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40621-019-0227-6>. PMID: 32127046; PMCID: PMC6970293.

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Pulvino, Rory, Jess Sorensen, JJ Naddeo, and Jared Fishman, “Traffic stop policy in Ramsey County, MN.” Justice Innovation Lab, 7 June 2023. Website: <https://knowledgehub.justiceinnovationlab.org/reports/traffic-stop-policy-ramsey-county>.
6. The pretext-stop policy does allow officers to make stops for the restricted pretextual reasons under certain circumstances: if the vehicle in question is a commercial vehicle; if the person or vehicle matches “the description of a suspect or suspect vehicle involved in a felony offense where the risk of death or life-threatening injuries is imminent;” or if the officer is investigating a traffic crash. They may also cite a driver for the restricted reasons if the stop was initiated for a non-restricted reason.
7. Also see the following report, which included additional analyses on the effect of the pretext-stop policy: Dhillion, Parambir, “Data Reveals Effectiveness of Pretext Traffic Stop Bans in San Francisco,” *Berkeley Public Policy Journal*, 6 February 2026.
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