



DEPARTMENT of SOCIOLOGY and CRIMINOLOGY

September 22, 2021

Good afternoon distinguished Councilmembers and fellow Philadelphians. I am a Professor of Sociology and Criminology at Villanova University who conducts quantitative research on a variety of issues related to crime and justice. I have experience analyzing Philadelphia's vehicle and pedestrian stop data and I have published a number of peer-reviewed articles relating to that data. I am here today because I feel that my professional knowledge may be helpful for evaluating Bill 210636 and Bill 210635.

Statisticians with the Stanford Open Policing Project, arguably the leading experts on traffic stop dynamics, utilize recent Philadelphia data to illustrate the variety of techniques one can use to empirically assess bias-based policing (<https://openpolicing.stanford.edu/tutorials/>). They go through the calculation of several indicators and note that in each case, the Philadelphia data suggest significant bias against Black drivers. For example, using census benchmarking, they concluded that "Black drivers are stopped at a rate 3.4 times higher than white drivers." Applying a statistical technique known as the threshold test, they concluded that "Officers are indeed applying lower thresholds when deciding to search black and Hispanic drivers than when deciding to search white drivers."

Still, for me, the Stanford group's most powerful statement was "Looks like no matter how you slice it, the veil of darkness test shows racial profiling of black drivers is present in Philly traffic stops." I found this conclusion striking because the veil of darkness test very rarely produces false positives (cases where the test confuses bias with some other factor). The test exploits natural variation in sunlight throughout the year (as well as daylight savings time) and is based on the simple notion that officers who are engaged in bias-based policing will be less capable of discerning a driver's race when it is dark. If stops made after dark have a smaller proportion of Black drivers than stops made in sunlight, this suggests racial bias against Black motorists.

I was so struck by the Stanford group's statement that I decided to take a look at the data myself to see if it was indeed true that "no matter how you slice it," the veil of darkness test indicates bias against Black drivers. Along with colleagues Malik Neal and Alex Gustafson, I wondered if the test ever indicated bias against White drivers, especially when they are traveling through neighborhoods that are overwhelmingly Black. What we found was that, even in areas where White males might stand out as suspicious, the ability to more clearly discern race in sunlight remained an advantage for them and a disadvantage for Black motorists. Our statistical models indicated that Black males were 22% more likely to be stopped when their race and gender was more visible due to sunlight.



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In my professional opinion, the data strongly support the need for Bill 210636 as a measured remedy for unequal policing in Philadelphia. In my view, Bill 210636 appropriately (1) prioritizes the reduction of pretextual stops as a major source of racial disparity, (2) facilitates successful implementation with its parsimonious structure (of primary vs. secondary violations), and (3) enables productive police work (rather than restricting it as some have argued).

I also believe that the companion piece, Bill 210635, makes a number of significant contributions. First and foremost, it allows for independent monitoring of the possibility that Bill 210636 could introduce side or substitution effects (e.g., a new category of pretextual stop). Second, and relatedly, Bill 210635 promotes transparency and thus legitimacy at a crucial point in policing history. Third, rather than overburdening the police with new record keeping duties, Bill 210635 rightfully focuses on information already captured on the 78-48A.

In sum, I believe that both Bills (210635 and 210636) represent a rare blend of innovative and pragmatic thought. I look forward to the day that I will see Philadelphia featured not as an example where numerous statistical tests all point to racial bias in policing practices, but rather as a national leader in evidence-based justice reform.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Lance Hannon, Ph.D.  
Professor of Sociology and Criminology