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Examining Racial Profiling Within the Champaign Police Department: Does Racial Profiling Exist?

Most law enforcement officials in the United States are attempting to eliminate practices of racial profiling within their departments. Racial profiling is the use of race or ethnic characteristics as a profile in order to make traffic stops, and/or search an individual. The primary concern about racial profiling is that law enforcement officials are using race as the sole purpose for citizen contacts. Minorities have primarily been the targets of racial profiling. Examining data of motorists' stops and profiles have provided evidence of racial bias (Scott, 2001). There is a disproportionate number of minority traffic stops compared to their overall numbers in the population. The Champaign police department has collected data for examining racial bias in traffic stops. In this paper, we will discuss the legality of racial profiling and Supreme Court cases addressing the issue. In addition, we will present the results and interpretations from data collected by the Champaign police department. Statistical models used by law enforcement officials and economist to measure racial bias will be evaluated for effectiveness. Finally, considerations for interpreting data to police departments and the community will be discussed.

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