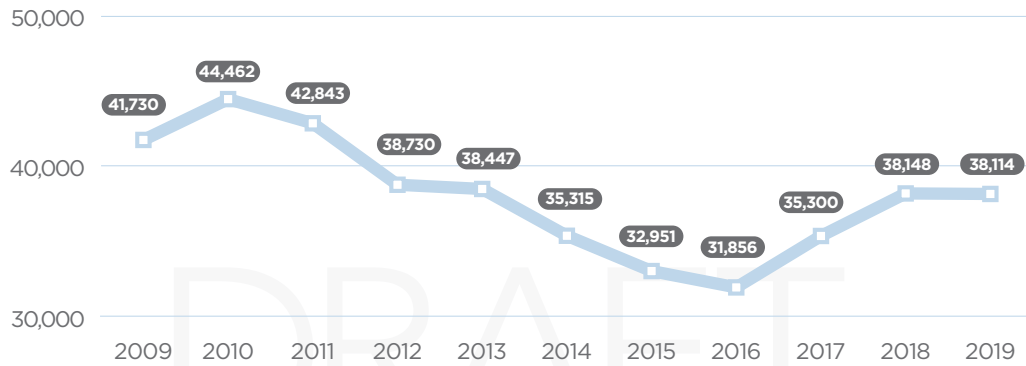


North Carolina Traffic Stop Reporting Program Series: Part 3

The North Carolina Traffic Stop Reporting Program Series has analyzed racial disparities among drivers being stopped ([Part 1](#)) as well as the purpose of these stops and the action taken by law enforcement ([Part 2](#)). This final part of the series concentrates on searches conducted during traffic stops.¹

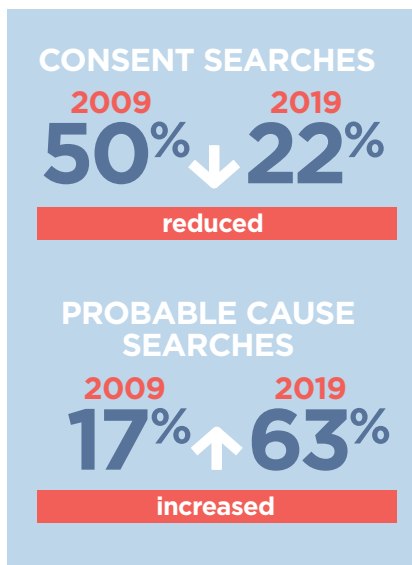
2009-19 Searches Conducted During Traffic Stops

Between 2009 and 2019, a search occurred during approximately 3% of all reported traffic stops each year.²

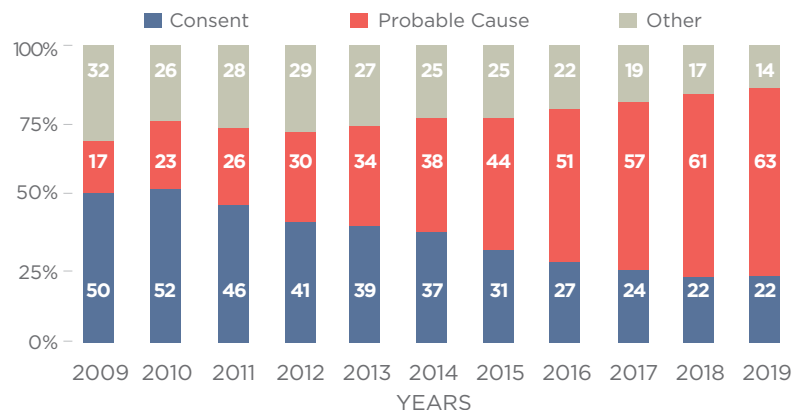


Types of Searches

The most frequent type of search conducted during a traffic stop from 2009-19 shifted from a consent search to a probable cause search.³ Other search types include search incident to arrest, by search warrant and protective frisks. This shift in search type was consistent across all race/ethnicity categories.



2009-19 Types of Searches



¹ NC Traffic Stop Database as of 04/16/20.

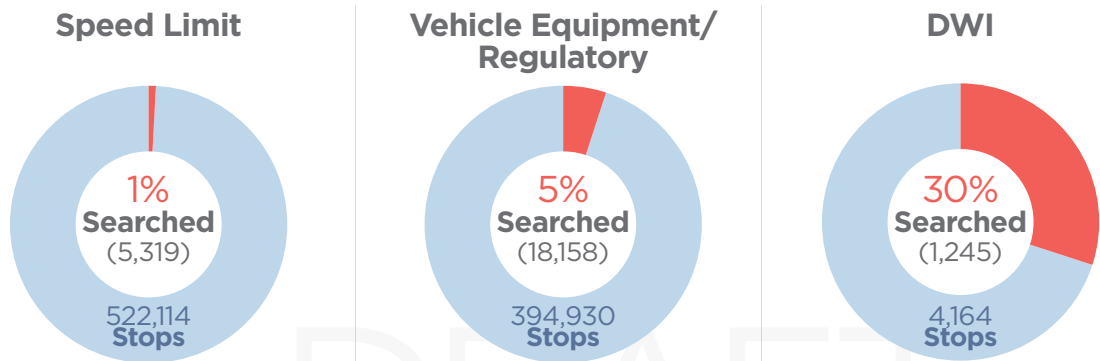
² For the purposes of this analysis, a search has occurred when one or more of the following is searched: driver, passenger, property or vehicle.

³ A consent search is a search made by a law enforcement officer based on the voluntary consent of the individual whose person or property is being searched. A probable cause search is done without the consent of the individual and requires that the facts known to the officer at the time of the search reasonably indicate that a crime has been committed.

Searches by Stop Purpose

Speed limit violations and vehicle regulatory/equipment violations are consistently the most common types of traffic stops, making up an average of 40% and 29% of stops each year between 2009 and 2019, respectively. However, these types of stops are searched at much different rates. During the same time period, drivers stopped for speeding were searched less than 1% of the time compared to 4% of those stopped for vehicle equipment/regulatory violations. In contrast, DWI stops regularly made up less than 1% of stops each year but were searched at a much higher rate. The chart below represents these data for 2019.

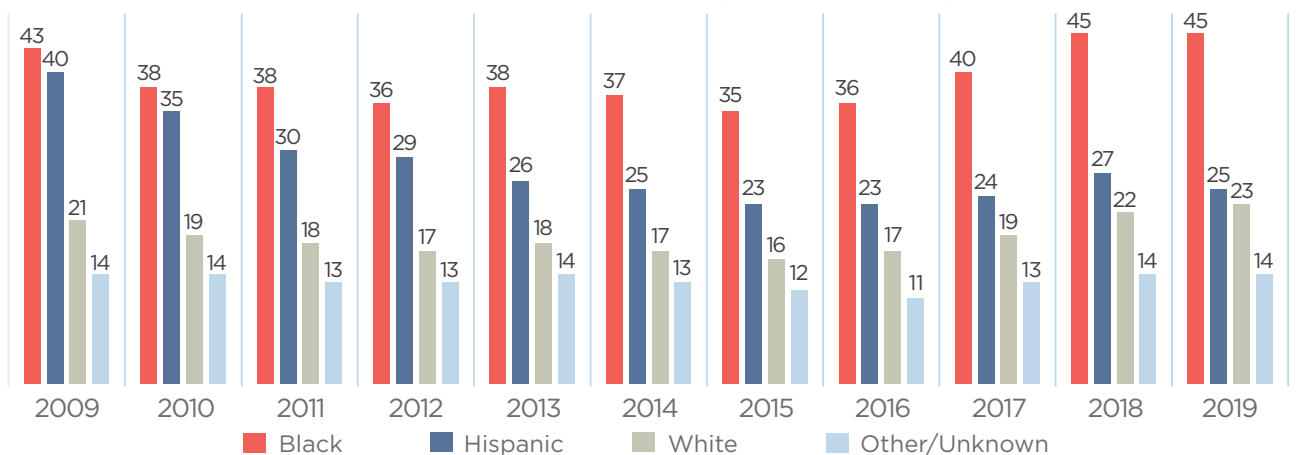
2019 Types of Stops Searched at Different Rates



Search and Contraband Rates by Race/Ethnicity

In 2019, Black drivers in North Carolina were searched during a traffic stop more often than drivers of other races—for every 1,000 Black drivers stopped for a traffic violation, 45 were searched. This compares to 23 of 1,000 white drivers, 25 of 1,000 Hispanic drivers and 14 of 1,000 drivers of other/unknown races.

2009-19 Search Rate per 1,000 Traffic Stops by Race/Ethnicity⁴

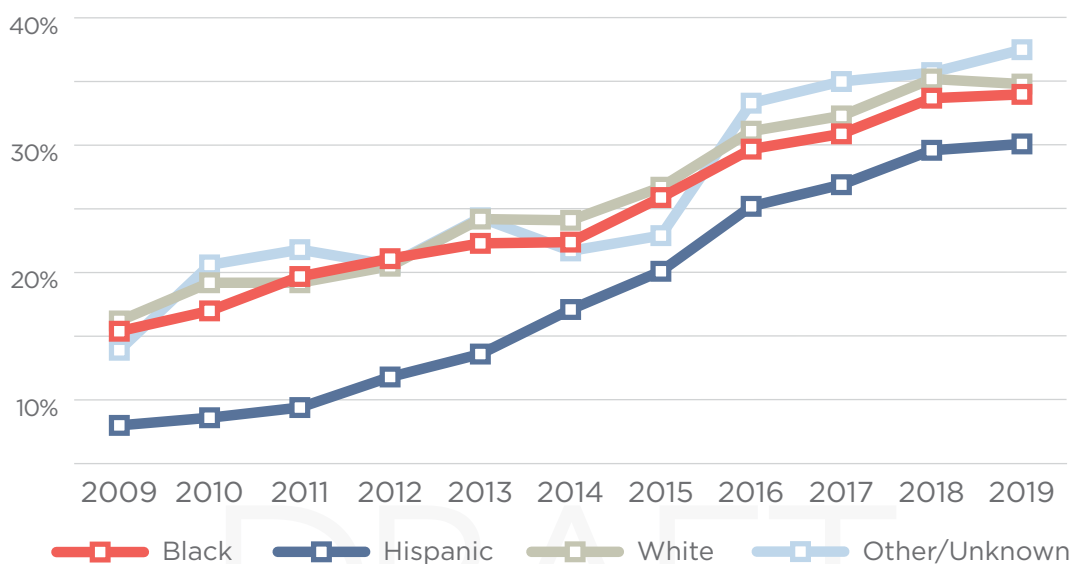


⁴ For the purposes of this analysis, the variables for race and ethnicity were combined into a single variable using ethnicity as the principle determinant.

Contraband Found by Race/Ethnicity

The overall percent of searches where contraband is found has steadily increased each year from 2009-19. In 2009, 15% of all traffic stop searches resulted in finding one or more types of contraband.⁵ This increased to 34% of all searches by 2019. While the rate at which searches are conducted varied by race/ethnicity, the rate at which contraband is found has not. In searches where contraband was found, 75% included some type of drug.⁶

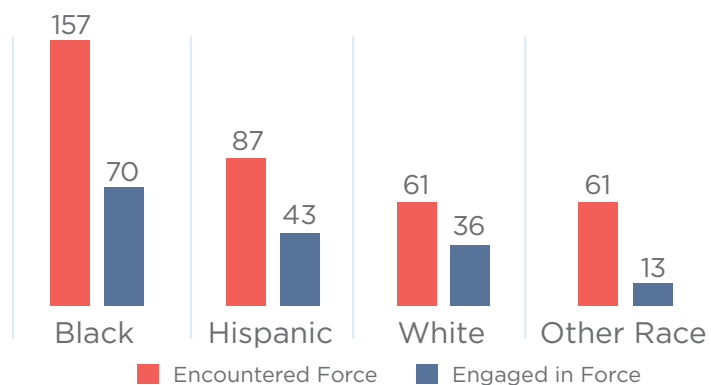
2009-19 Contraband Found by Race



Encountered and Engaged in Force

Law enforcement officers report encountering any physical resistance from a driver and/or passenger in .1% of traffic stops (in 2019, 1,224 of 1,252,063) and engaging in force against the driver and/or passenger about half as often (596 stops in 2019). The rate at which these incidents occur varies by the race of the driver.

2019 Rate of Incidents of Force Per 100,000 Traffic Stops By Race



⁵ Contraband includes drugs, alcohol, money, weapons or other items that are being used in a manner which violates the law.

⁶ Drug type is not captured by the traffic stop data form. It may be captured at a later point in the law enforcement process, if applicable.