



## **2020 Massachusetts Uniform Citation Data Report** *Frequently Asked Questions*

### **Q: What is the 2020 Massachusetts Uniform Citation Data Report?**

**A:** On November 25, 2019, Chapter 122 of the Acts of 2019, *An Act Requiring the Hands-Free Use of Mobile Telephones While Driving*, became law in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Section 10(d) of the Act requires the Executive Office of Public Safety and Security (EOPSS) to commission a report to analyze data from uniform citations issued by Massachusetts law enforcement agencies.

Through a competitive public procurement process, EOPSS selected a qualified team of researchers from Salem and Worcester State Universities to conduct the study.

### **Q: What data was available and who provided it to the researchers?**

**A:** Law enforcement agencies submit their uniform citation data to the Registry of Motor Vehicles (RMV). The submitted data includes information about the age, gender, and race of the driver as well as the date and time of offense, location, whether a search was initiated, and whether the stop resulted in a warning, citation, or arrest.

In accordance with the Act, the RMV provided the research team with Uniform Citation data beginning on February 23, 2020 and ending on December 31, 2020. Of the 425,702 total traffic stop citations during the 10-month period, municipal police conducted approximately 60% of the traffic stops, while state police conducted 40%.

### **Q: What was the goal of the study?**

**A:** The report includes a baseline analysis of municipal and state police data for two purposes: first, to gain evidence-based insight into factors surrounding traffic stops and, second, to identify any potential patterns of racial disparities. These insights provide a foundation for subsequent annual studies focused on deepening the State's understanding of police interactions with the public and ensuring that the Commonwealth's traffic laws are enforced in an impartial, equitable, and just way.

### **Q: Did researchers analyze traffic stop patterns of individual police officers?**

**A:** The study focuses more broadly on state and municipal law enforcement agencies. In compliance with section 10(b) of the Act, researchers were not provided with identifying information either about the individual who was cited or the law enforcement officer who issued the citation.

### **Q: What is the Veil of Darkness (VoD) and what is its role in the study?**

**A:** The VoD method, first developed in 2006 by renowned researchers Jeffrey Grogger and Greg Ridgeway, is considered by many to be the gold standard of analysis for identifying patterns of racial differences. The VoD test compares stops made in darkness to those made in daylight, based on the logic that police officers are less likely to be able to determine a driver's race at night than during the day.

Researchers applied VoD analysis to study the racial distribution of traffic stops. The statewide analysis found no support for patterns of racial disparity in traffic stops. According to the report, non-white motorists are 36% less likely to be stopped in daylight (when they could potentially be seen and racially profiled for a stop) than in darkness.

**Q: Did researchers use other forms of analysis?**

**A:** Yes, in keeping with best practices from similar studies, researchers used several types of analyses and benchmarks to determine if potential disparities exist.

For the statewide analysis of stops, researchers used three different analytical tools.

For each department-level analysis, they utilized five different analytical tools or measures of disparity. The first three analytical tools examine potential racial disparities in the decision to stop. The last two analytical tools examine potential racial disparities in post-stop outcomes, including the decision to issue a warning or a citation and the decision to conduct a discretionary search.”

Pages 18-19 of the report explain each methodology in greater detail.

**Q: Does the VoD analysis account for artificial light in urban areas that are well lit by streetlights and other activities?**

**A:** Although the dataset includes each traffic stop's zip code, it would be impossible with the current information which does not include a specific location. Researchers are considering what possibilities may exist to study this in the future.

**Q: Why not analyze *all* traffic stops, not just those that resulted in a citation?**

**A:** The RMV does not collect information about traffic stops that do not result in the issuance of a uniform citation (commonly referred to as a “ticket,” “citation,” or “warning”), and therefore it could not be provided to the research team for analysis.

Page 40 of the report acknowledges that although comprehensive traffic stop data was beyond the scope of the law and dataset, EOPSS will consider what opportunities may exist to collect such data for future studies.

**Q: The data includes the race of the driver. Who determines that?**

**A:** In every citation report, the issuing officer reports the race of the driver. As with all the information they include, officers use their training, judgement, and information they may gather during the traffic stop to inform their report.

**Q: Why does the report group Black and Asian in a unified “Non-White” grouping, instead of creating more distinct categories of race?**

**A:** To determine meaningful, statistically significant conclusions, any analysis requires a specific sample size. The sample size in many municipalities with small Black and/or Asian populations would not allow for statistically significant conclusions. The “Non-White” category as constructed in the report maximizes the value of the analysis in our study of possible racial disparities and potential patterns.

**Q: Why did the researchers exclude some law enforcement agencies from their analysis?**

**A:** Given the sample size requirements needed to draw meaningful, statistically significant conclusions, the research team analyzed agencies that issued 100 or more uniform citations. *It is important to note* that the research team performed analysis on more than 80% of the 350 law enforcement agencies across the Commonwealth.

**Q: Why wasn't mobile data terminal information included in the study?**

**A:** A mobile data terminal (MDT) is a portable computer device that is mounted in a vehicle to allow digital communications between the vehicle and a central office. In public safety, these devices connect vehicles with a dispatcher and allow officers to access information about vehicles and motorists.

The Act did not stipulate that MDT information be included because:

1. The RMV does not collect this information.
2. Not all police have this technology and those that do typically do not access information prior to a traffic stop.
3. Officers and department's themselves use this technology differently according to varying policies and procedures.

**Q: Can I have access to information specific to a department?**

**A:** Pursuant to section 10(f) of the Act, EOPSS will publish an annual report, derived from the data used for the annual analysis and report prepared by the Research Team, containing aggregate numbers, listed by municipality and law enforcement agency, for the information categories listed in section 10(a) of the Act. The information contained in the report will be made available to the public online in machine readable format.