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Racial Profiling: Still a Worry

The Aug. 26 editorial "Lowering Profiling's Profile" said that the "good, and perhaps surprising, news" from a Bureau of Justice Statistics study "was the absence of any significant differences in the rates at which white, black and Hispanic drivers were stopped by police."

I also was surprised at this conclusion, which contradicts the findings of a study I led for Rand Corp. That study, which examined racial profiling in Oakland, Calif., found that 56 percent of stops involved black drivers, much greater than their representation in the community, 35 percent.

Why? Many more police officers patrol high-crime and predominantly minority areas of Oakland than patrol low-crime, predominantly white areas. As a result, minority residents are far more likely to be caught rolling through stop signs and speeding.

The study noted that the higher rate of traffic stops involving black drivers in Oakland was the same during the day and at night (when identifying the race of a driver of a moving car is more difficult). That led us to conclude that the difference in the rate of traffic stops by race resulted from greater police presence in the minority neighborhood rather than officer bias.

A simple statistic belies the complexity of the problem. Racial profiling is a serious issue that cries out for rigorous and objective research and analysis.

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