PUBLIC SAFETY AND JUSTICE

Racial Profiling: Not Always Black and White

Greg Ridgeway

June 14, 2004

Racial Profiling Is a Growing Concern

- **I-95 "turnpike" studies in the mid-1990s raised public concern about racial profiling**
  - **Showed concrete evidence of racial profiling policies**
- **Public concern has led to state and local-level action**
  - **At least 14 states have passed legislation to deal with it**
  - **Many localities collect data voluntarily; some are compelled to do so by U.S. Justice Department**
  - **More than 400 police agencies now compile data on racial distribution of stopped motorists**
- **Congress is considering End of Racial Profiling Act**
  - **Mandates data collection to receive Federal funds**

Unfortunately, the Quality of the Analysis Using Collected Data Is Weak

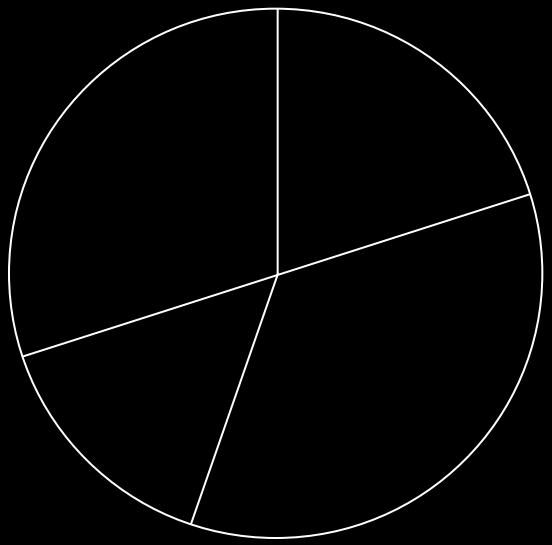
- A growing number of studies claim racial profiling based on analysis of data collected
  - Texas: Concluded that "75% of agencies stop more black and Latino drivers than white drivers"
  - Massachusetts: Flagged 68% of agencies as having racial profiling issues
- And some studies hastily conclude no profiling occurs based on analyzed data
  - Sacramento: Found that the percentage of black drivers stopped matched the percentage of blacks among crime suspect descriptions

Why Is Testing for Racial Profiling So Hard?

Racial Distribution of People Stopped

Racial Distribution of People at Risk of Being Stopped

Difference Between



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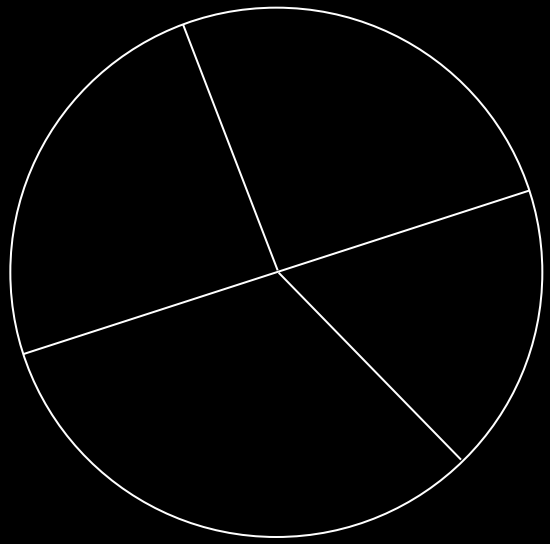

= Racial Profiling

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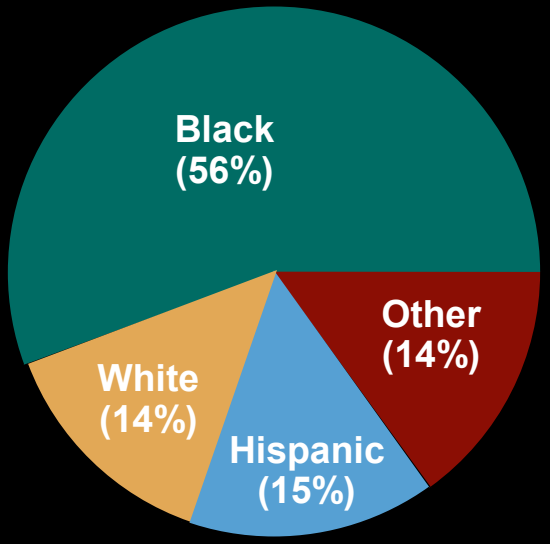

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Difference Between **And** **?** **=** **Racial Profiling**

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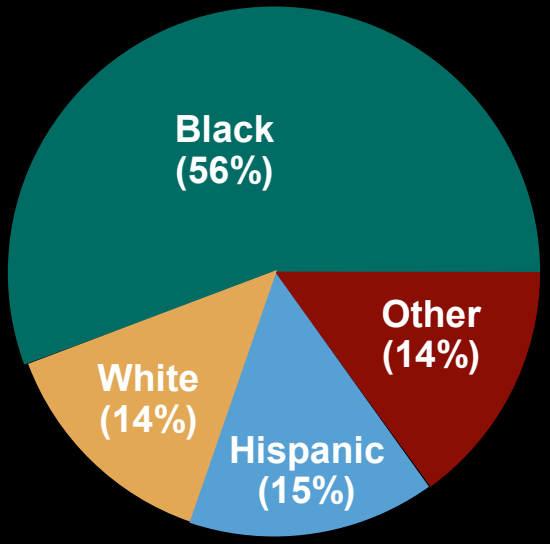

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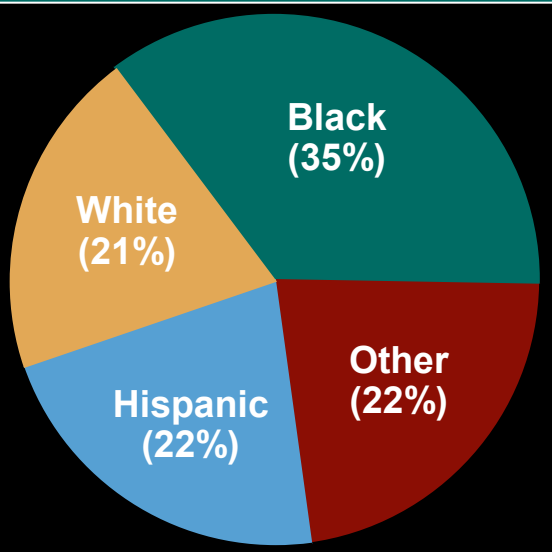
Racial Distribution of Residents According to the Census



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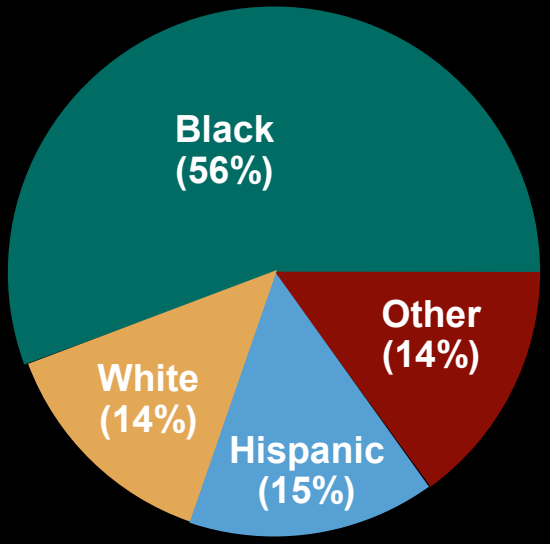

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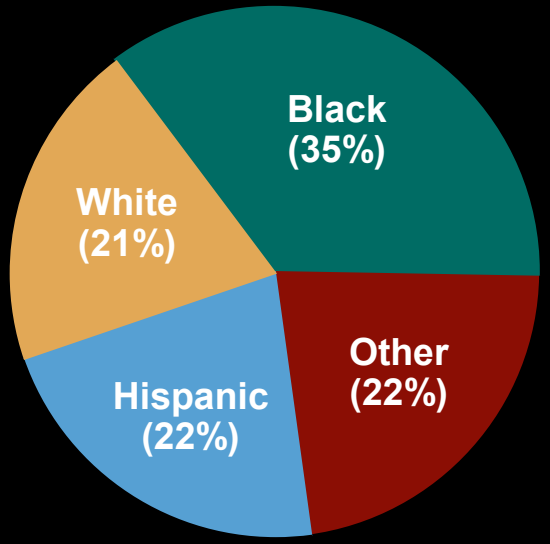

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- The difference between the racial distributions may result from:
  - A race bias
  - Driving behavior: car ownership, time on the road, and care
  - Exposure to police

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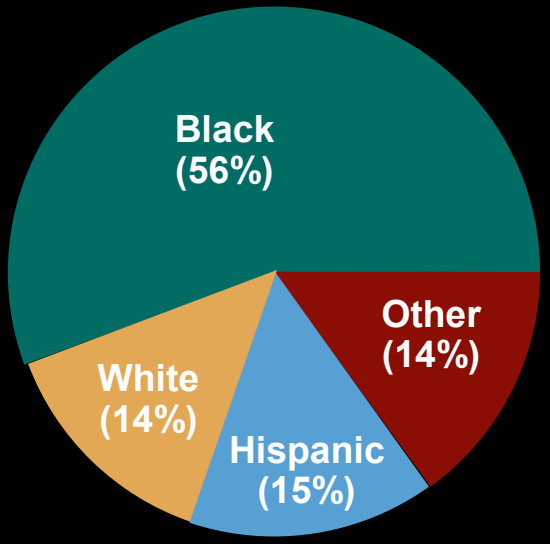

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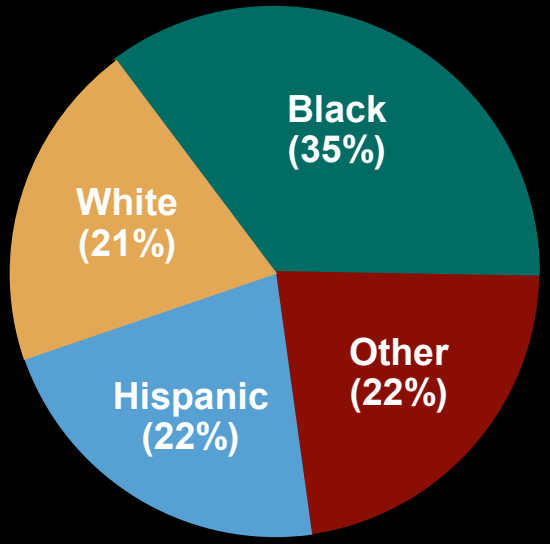

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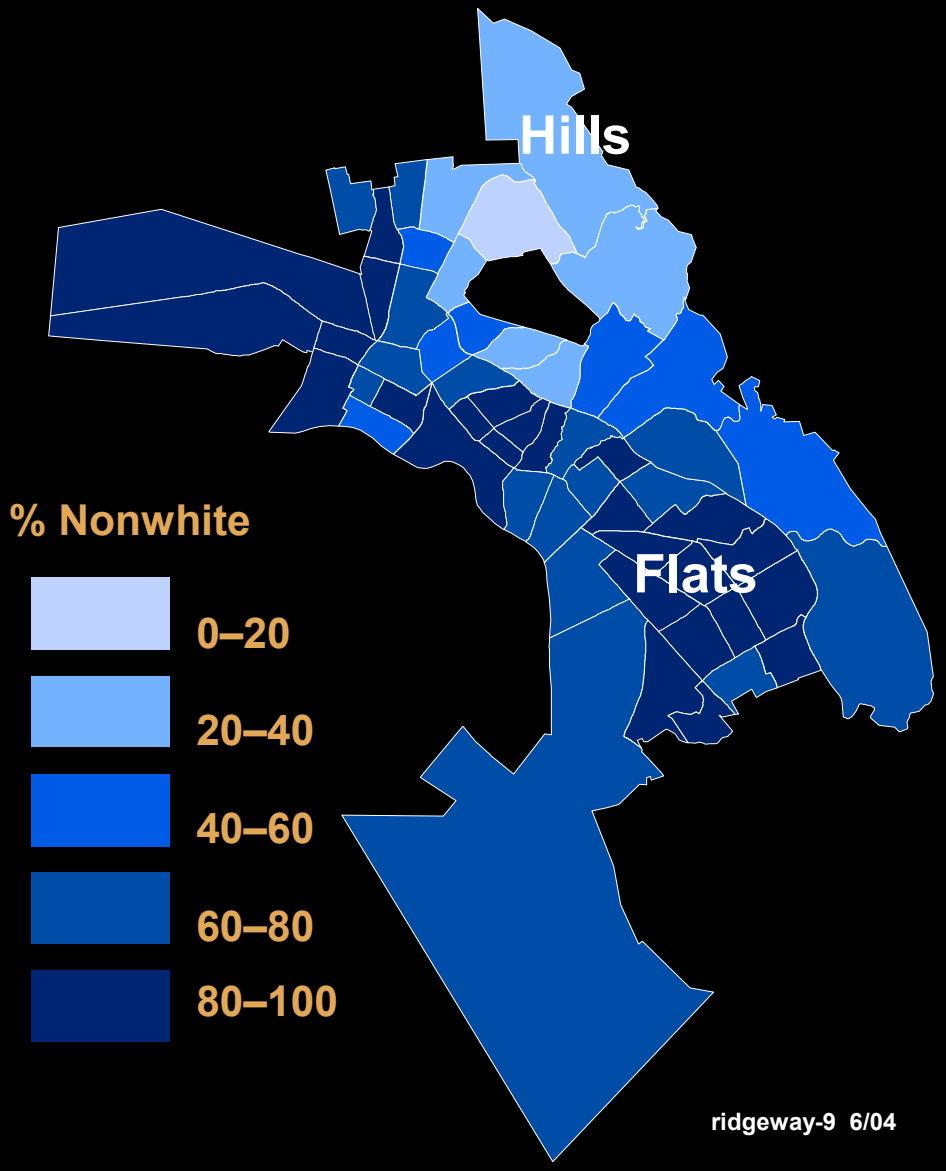
Other approaches to dealing with issue are also problematic

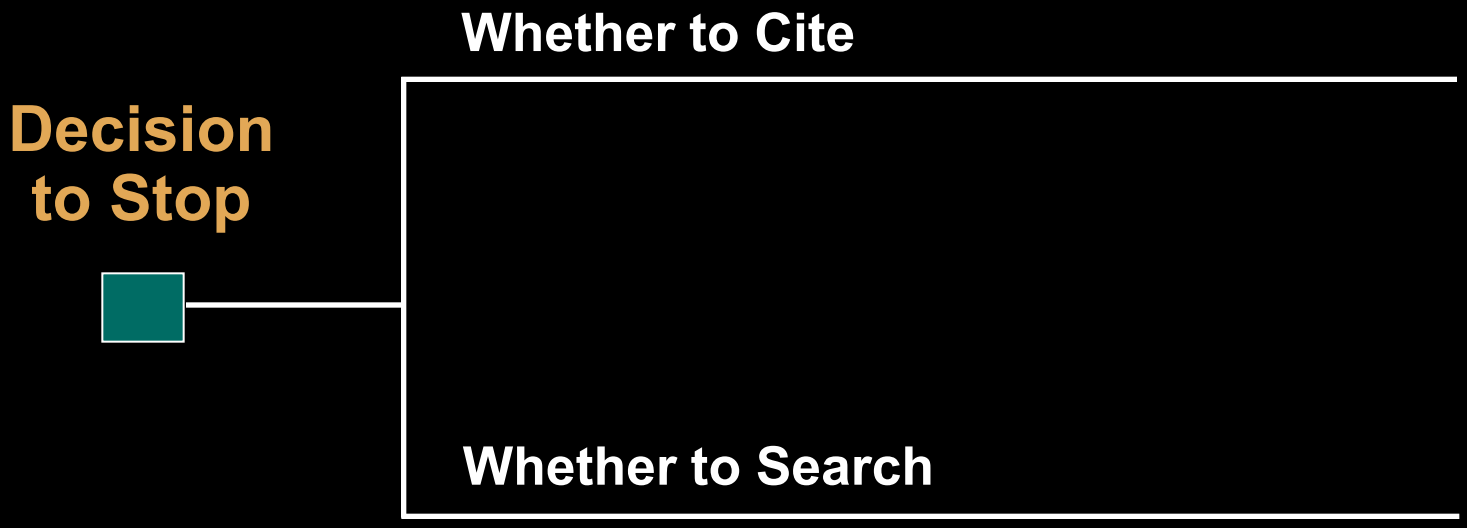
RAND Focused on Applying New Approaches to Assessing Racial Profiling

- Assess whether there is racial profiling in the decision to stop
  - Using "veil of darkness" approach
- Assess whether there is racial profiling in post-stop activity
  - Using propensity score analysis approach
- Use data from Oakland Police Department
  - 7,607 recorded vehicle stops
  - Between 6/15/03 and 12/30/03



Is There Racial Profiling in Oakland?

Post-Stop Activity



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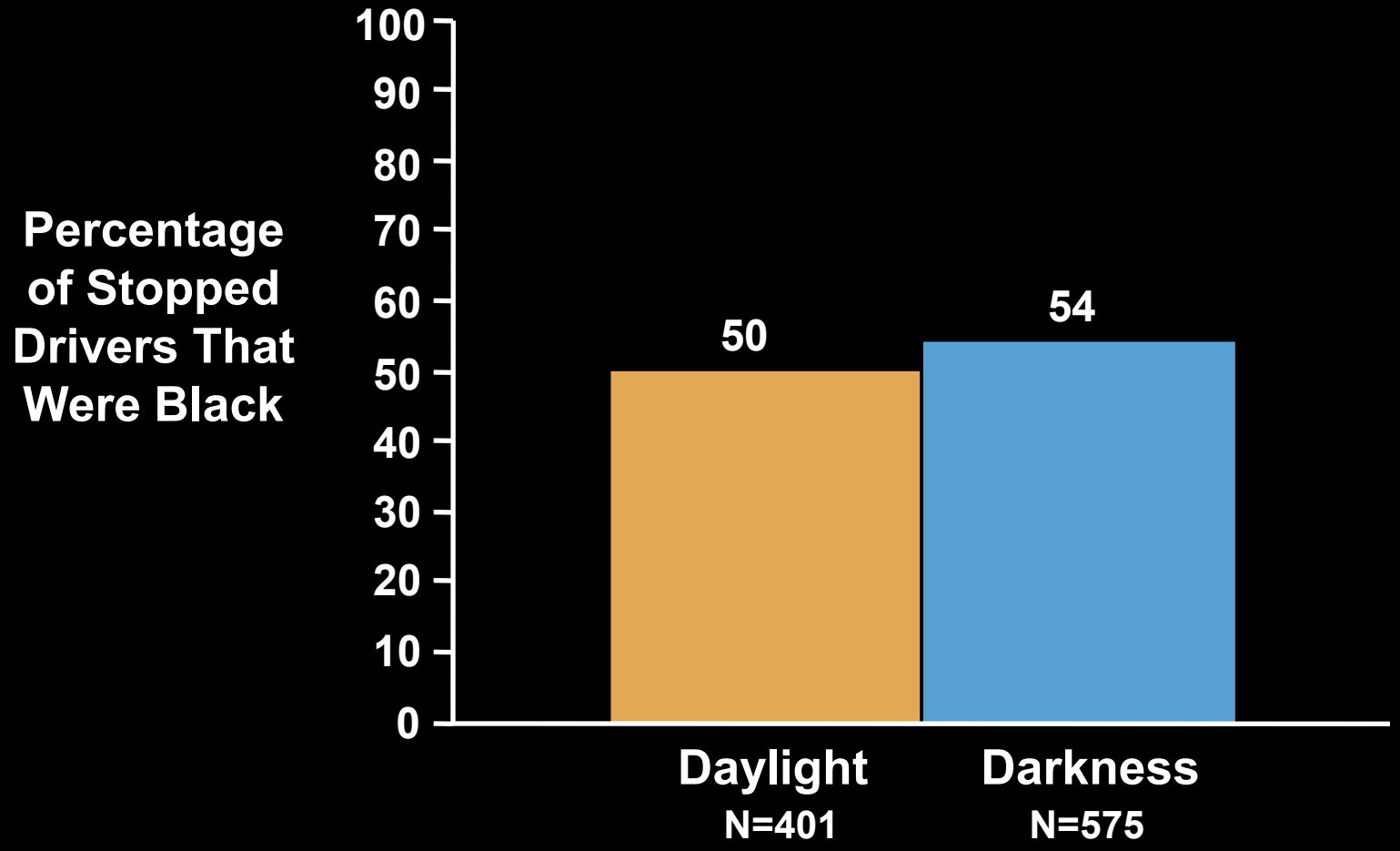
Post-Stop Activity

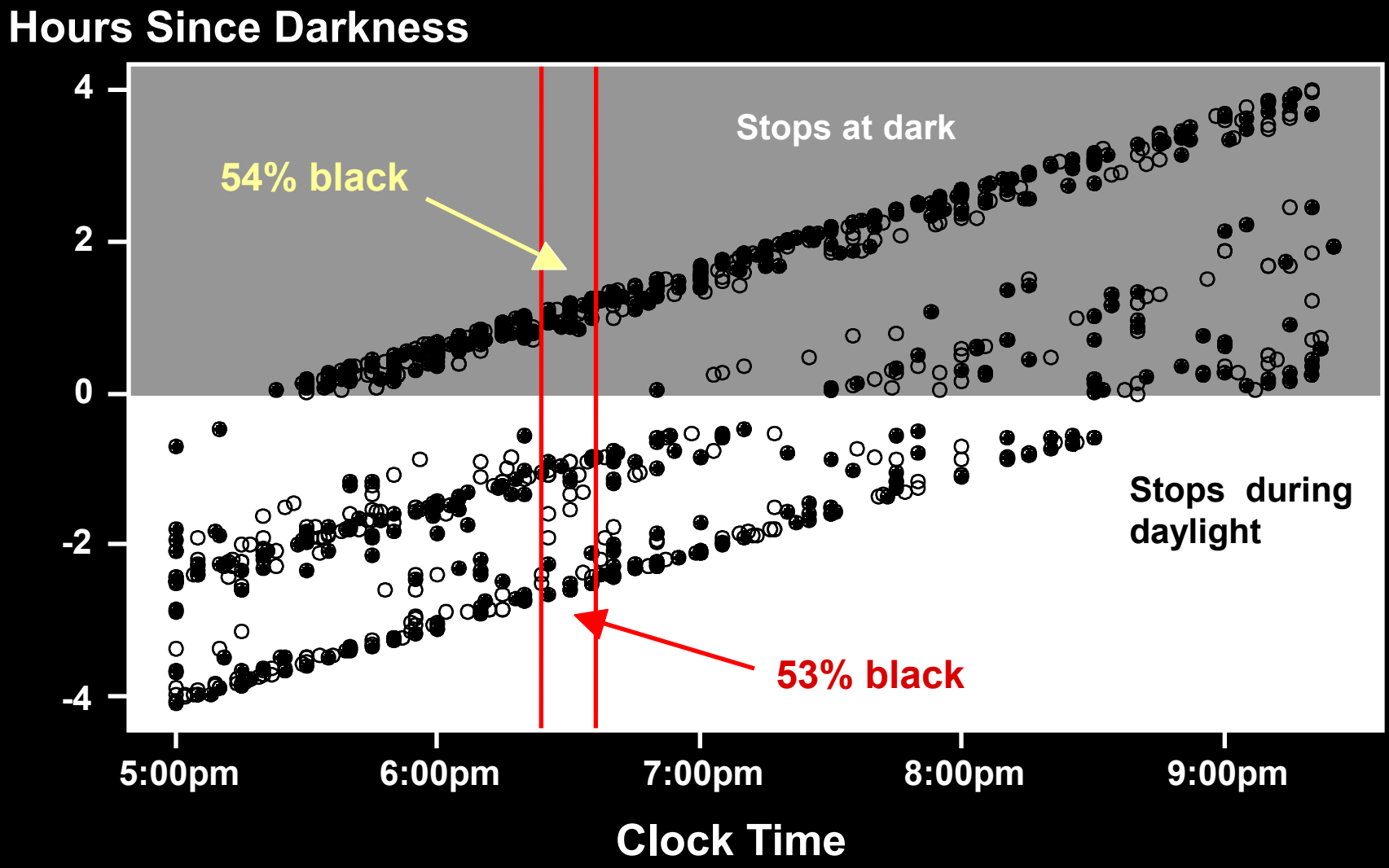
Veil of Darkness Approach Relies on Natural Lighting Experiment to Assess Racial Profiling

- **Does an officer's ability to identify race of driver in advance influence which drivers he stops?**
- **The ability to identify race in advance of the stop decreases as it becomes dark**
- **We directly test whether the ability to identify the race affects the race distribution of the stopped drivers**

Simple Veil of Darkness Test Shows No Evidence of Racial Bias in the Decision to Stop



Adjusting for "Clock Time" Does Not Change the Finding



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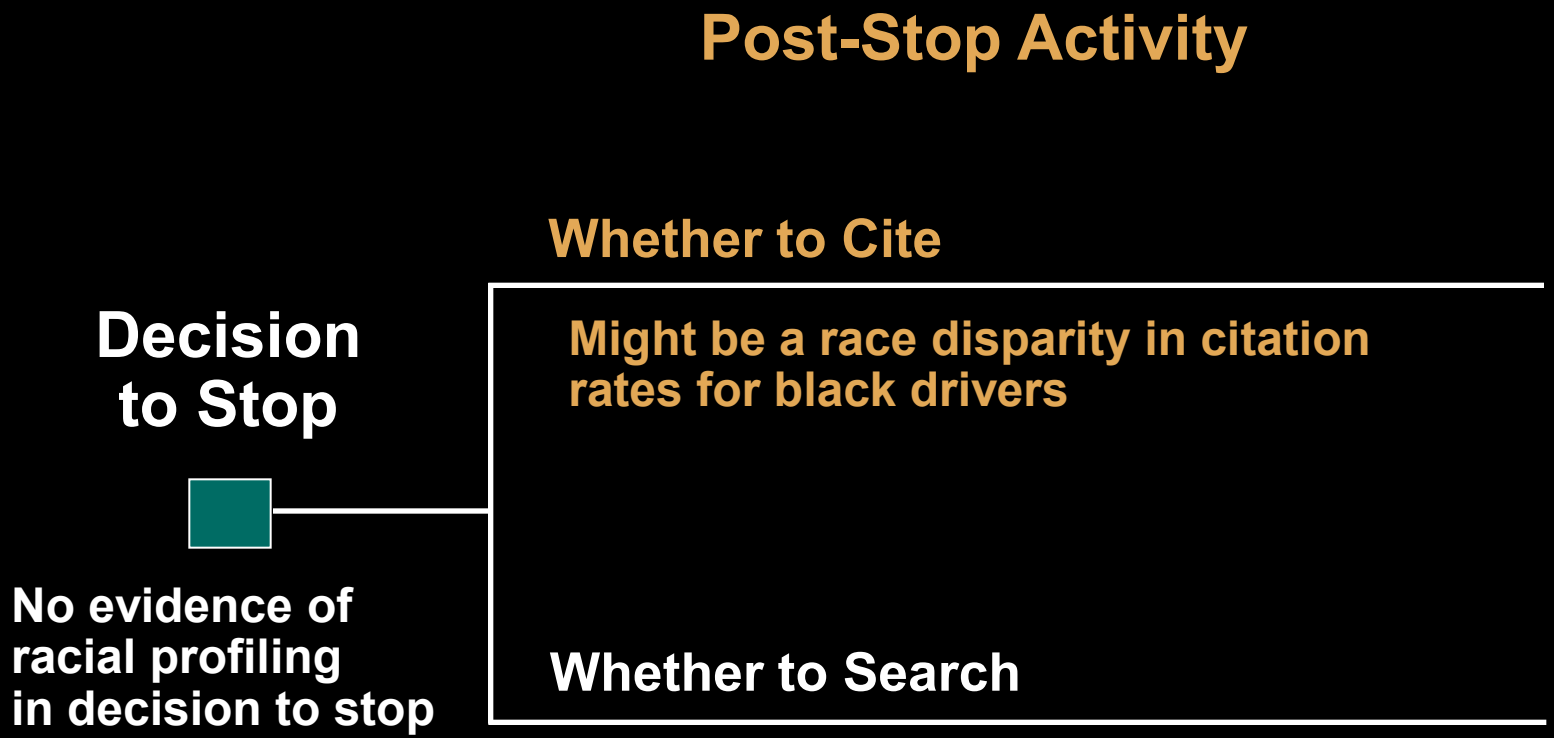


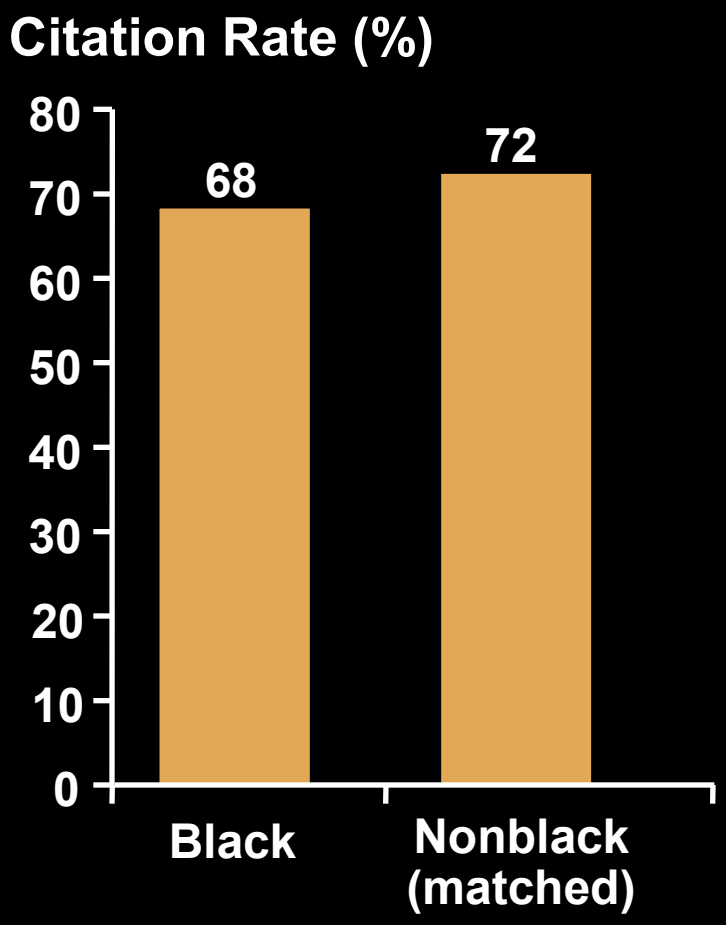
Propensity Score Analysis Created Comparison Group in Terms of Stop Features

Stop Feature	% Black Drivers (N=3,703)	% Nonblack Drivers (unmatched) (N=3,033)
Region East ⋮	32%	14%
Time of Day 12AM-4AM ⋮	16%	7%
Resident	76%	64%
Age 18-29 ⋮	47%	38%
Reason Mechanical/ Registration ⋮	26%	16%
Male	75%	74%

Propensity Score Analysis Created Comparison Group in Terms of Stop Features

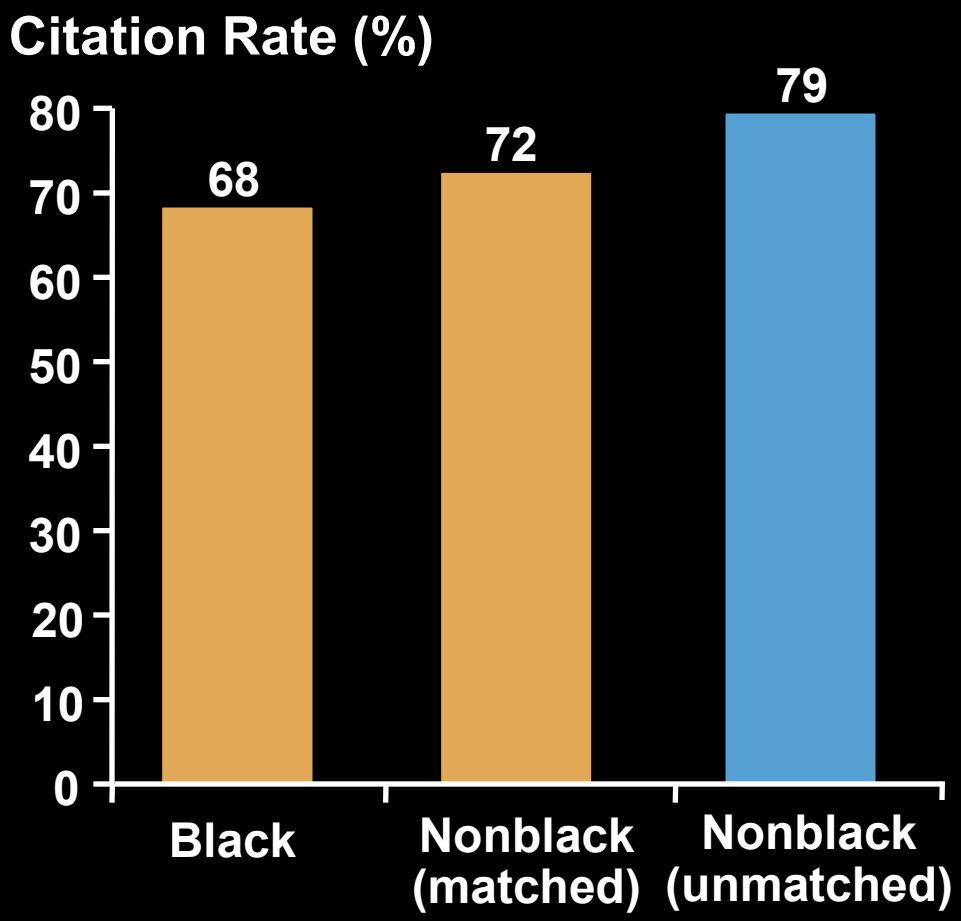
Stop Feature	% Black Drivers (N=3,703)	%Nonblack Drivers (matched) (N=2,809)	% Nonblack Drivers (unmatched) (N=3,033)
Region East ⋮	32%	30%	14%
Time of Day 12AM-4AM ⋮	16%	13%	7%
Resident	76%	72%	64%
Age 18-29 ⋮	47%	45%	38%
Reason Mechanical/ Registration ⋮	26%	23%	16%
Male	75%	76%	74%

Analysis Shows That a Race Disparity in Citation Rates Might Exist



- Citation rate for black drivers is 4% less than for comparable non-black drivers
- Finding potentially implies that either
  - Police are slightly more hesitant to cite black drivers
  - Some of stops involving black drivers were of a level of severity unlikely to result in citation

But the Analysis Also Shows the Danger of Making Naïve Comparisons



- When we compare black vs. nonblack (unmatched), difference is 11%
- Had we not adjusted for factors such as time and location of stop, we would have concluded that black drivers are *much* less likely to be cited than nonblack ones

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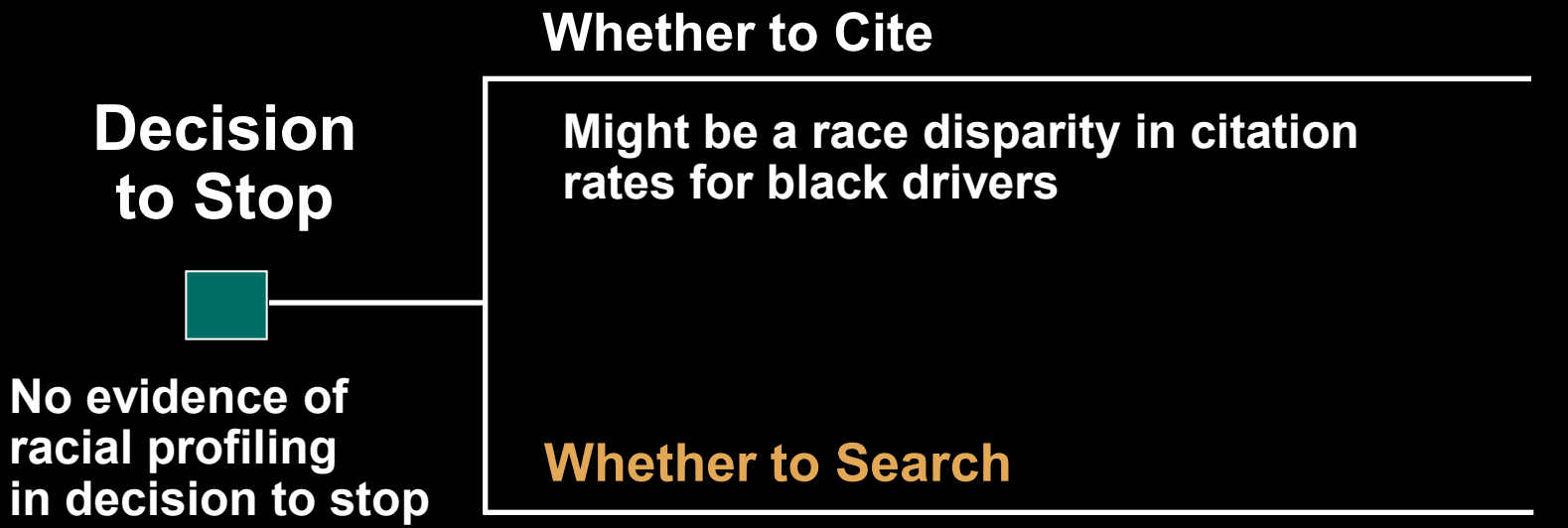
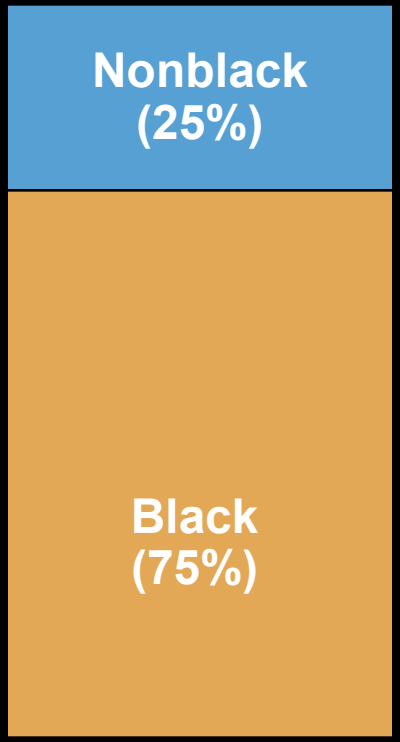
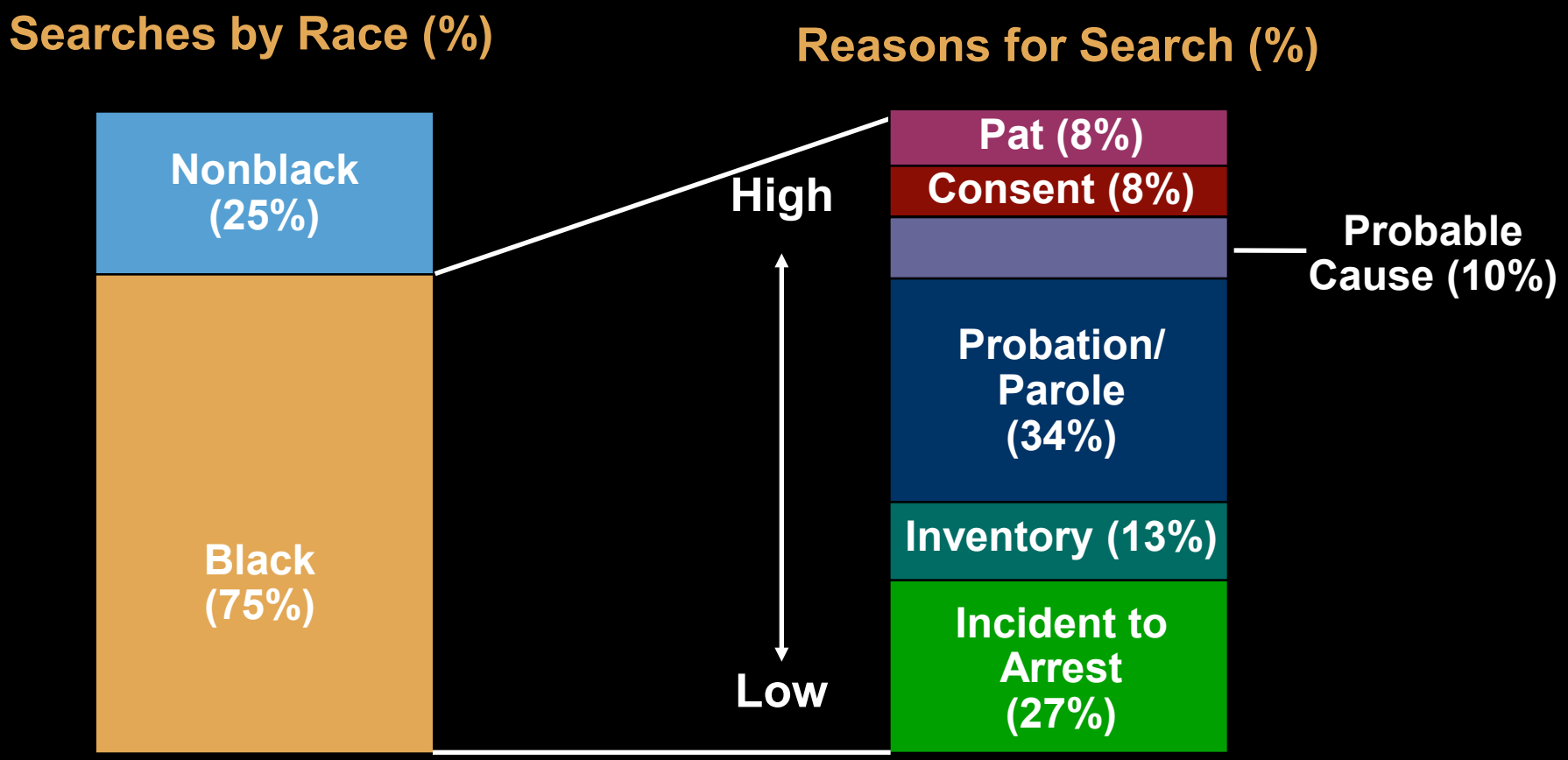


Black Drivers Bear the Burden of Searches

Searches by Race (%)



Black Drivers Bear the Burden of Searches but Most Searches Are Low-Discretion Ones



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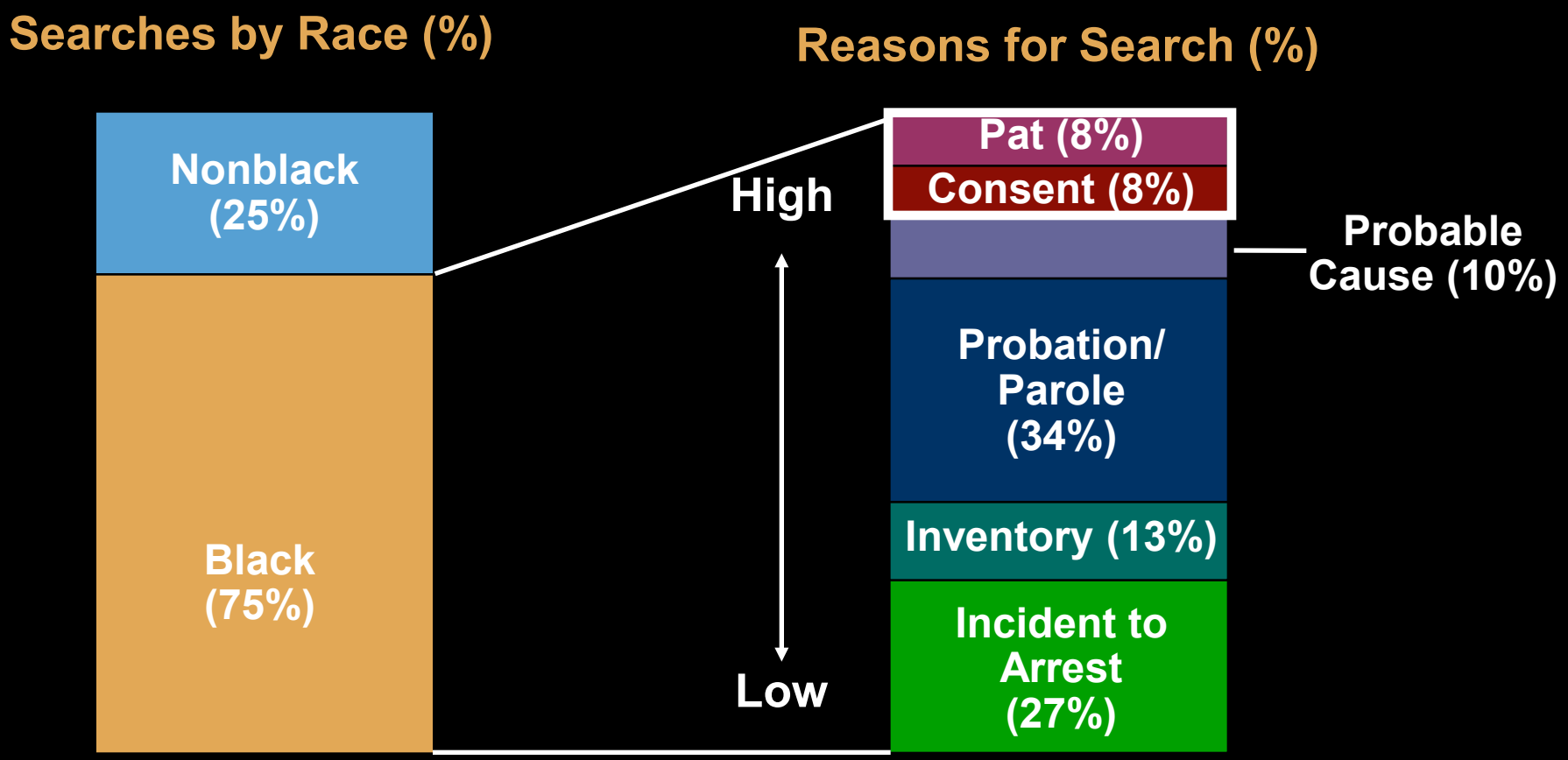
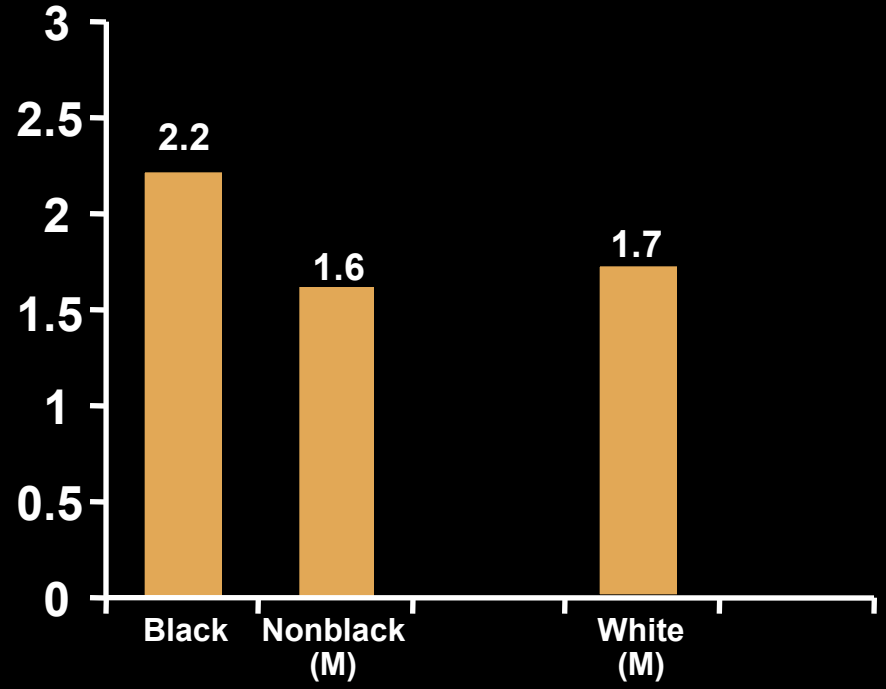


We focus on pat and consent searches

Consent Searches Have Similar Rates, but Pat Searches More Likely for Blacks Than Whites

Consent Searches (%)



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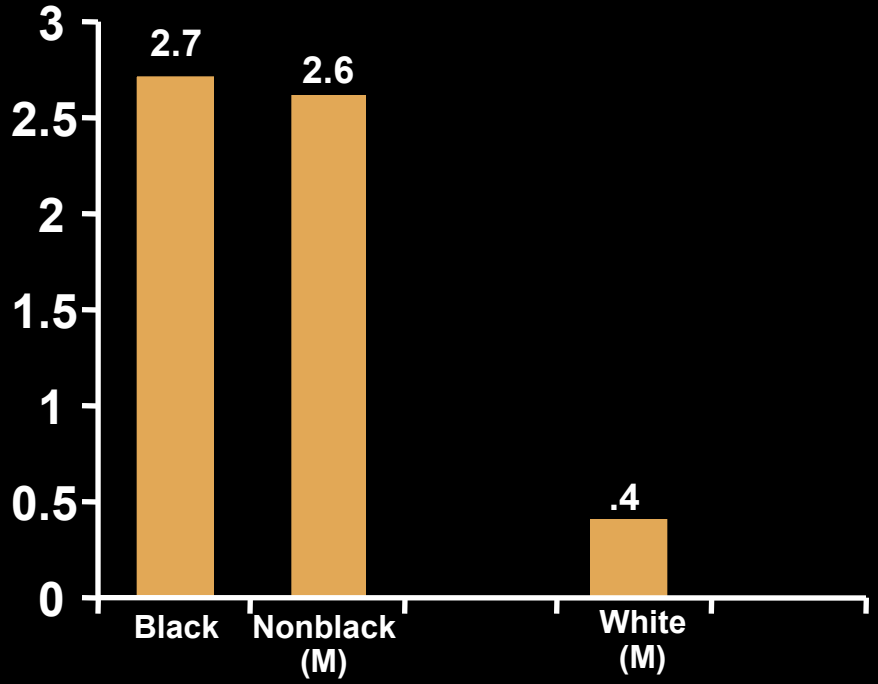

Once Again, Naïve Comparisons Can Distort the Findings

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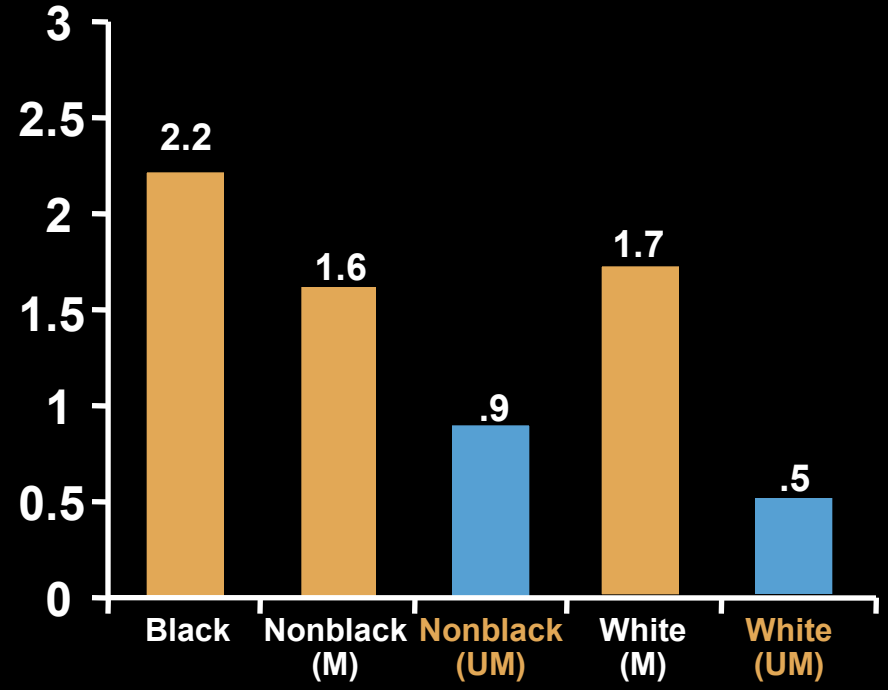

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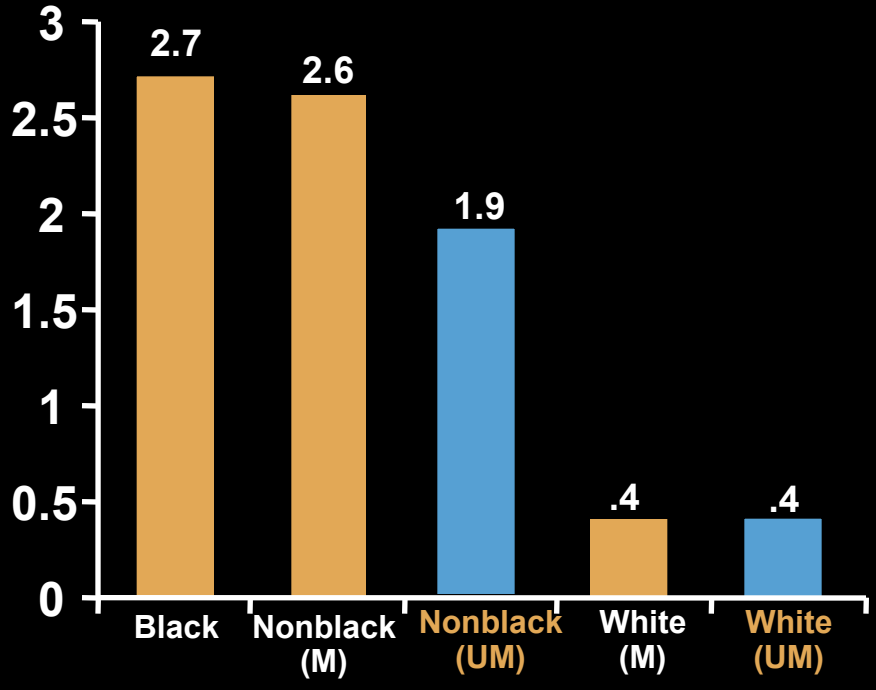
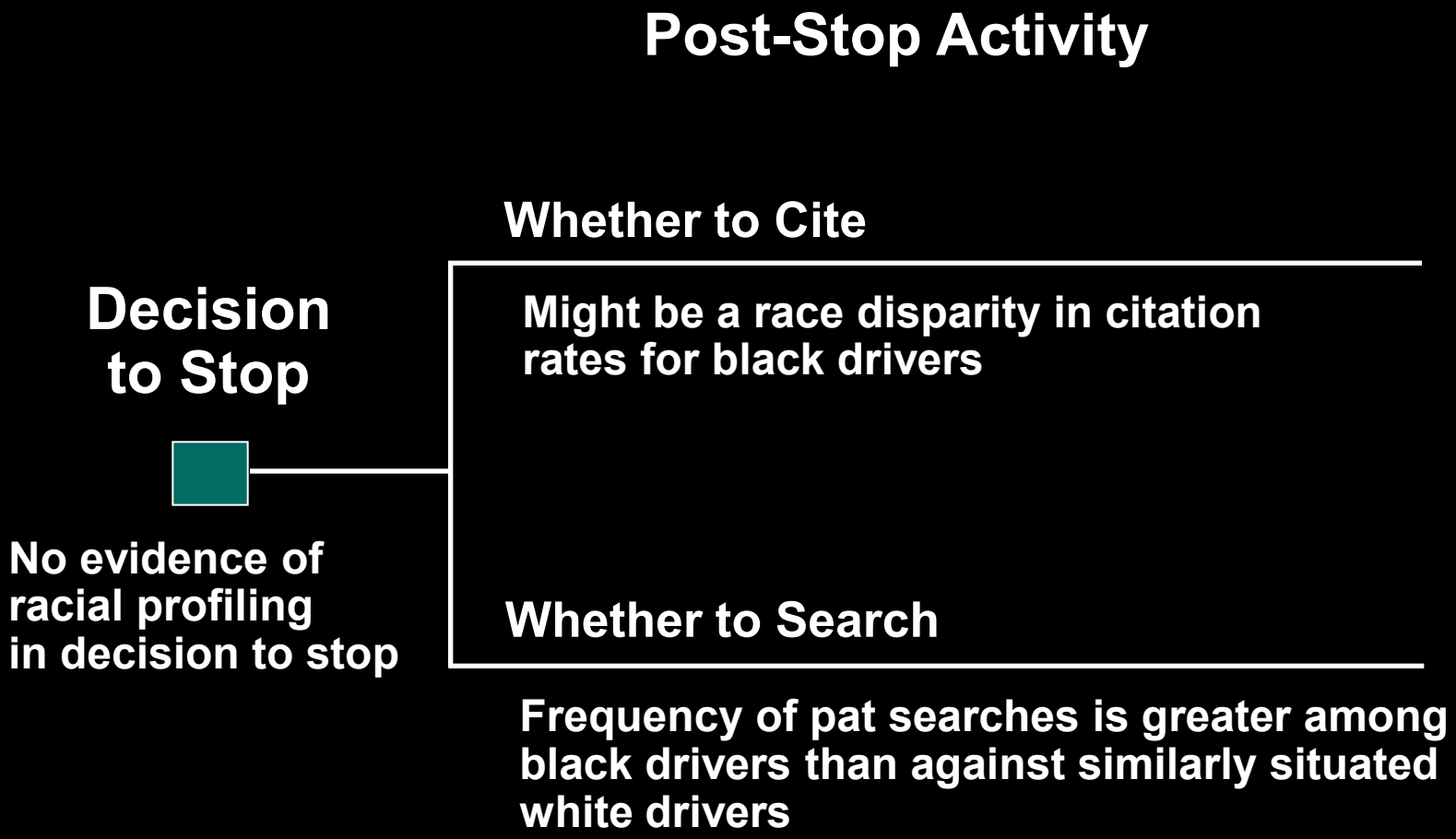


Summary: Is There Racial Profiling in Oakland?



Broader Conclusions

- **It is possible to do more credible analyses of racial profiling**
  - **Objective analyzer using credible approach**
- **Naïve analysis methods can exaggerate (or even understate) the effect of racial bias**
- **Importance of credible analyses increases as data collection becomes mandated**

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We will be testing approach with data from other cities

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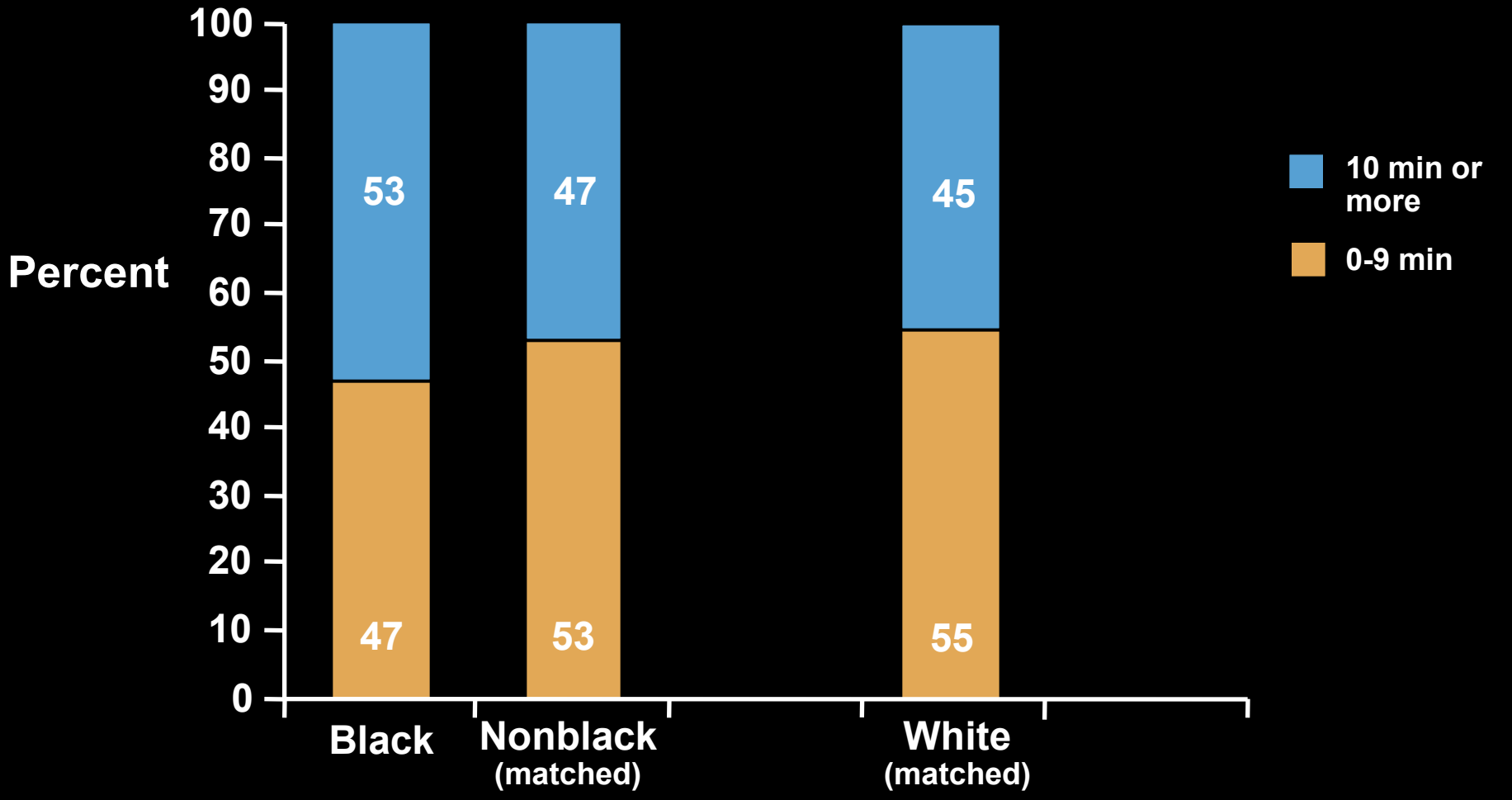
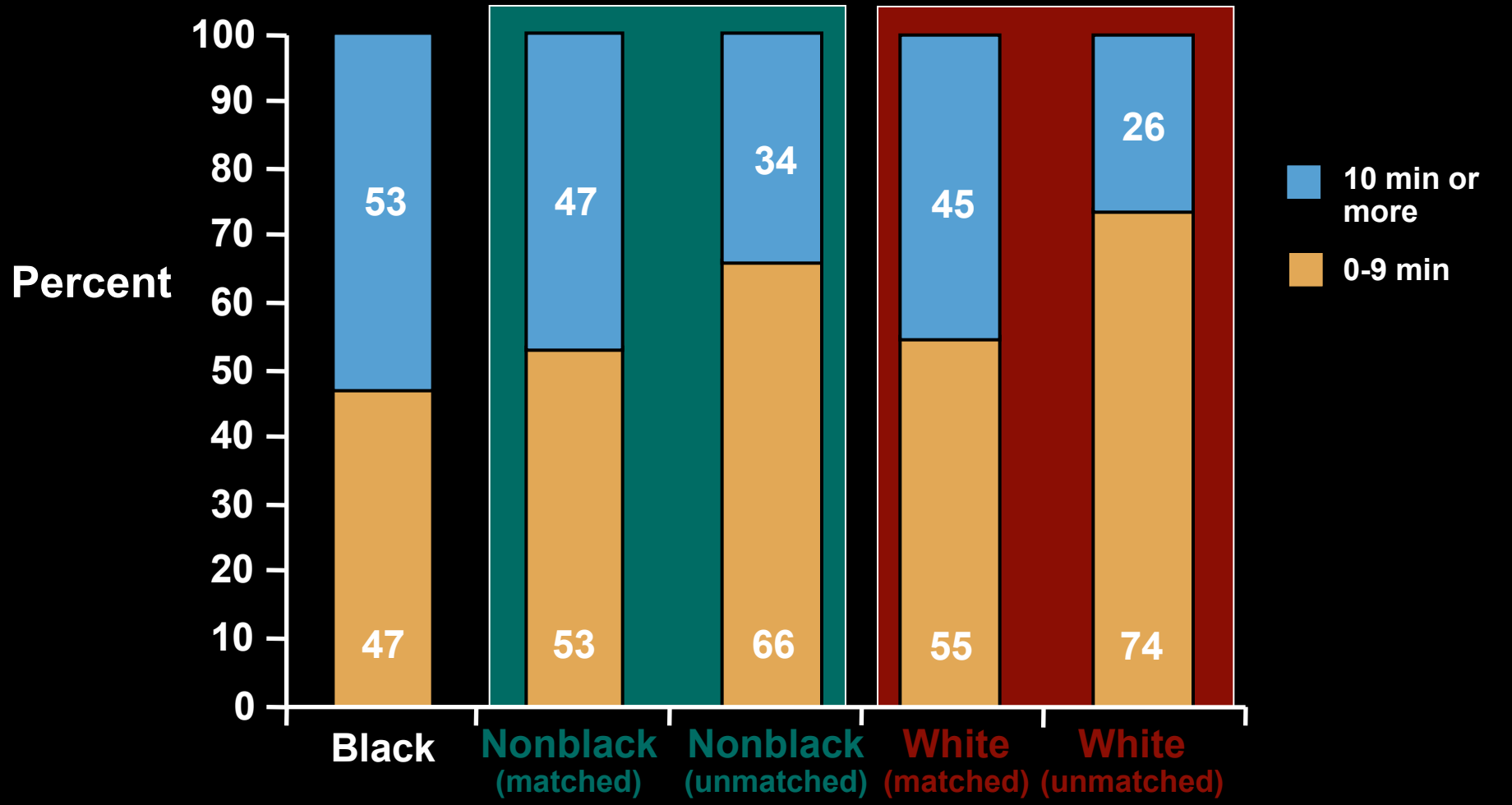
Black Drivers Seemed More Likely to Have Longer Stops Than Nonblack or White Drivers



Naïve Comparisons Considerably Overstate the Problem



Sensitivity Analysis Tests Show the Findings Are Robust

Issue	Analysis Result
Could still be racial bias if many fewer black drivers were at risk of being stopped during the day	• But to change finding, difference in exposure would need to change by 10 percentage points • Unlikely given control for clock time
Could still be racial bias if there were seasonal changes in racial distribution over June–December period	• But repeating analysis using only October and November data does not change the finding
Could still be racial bias because stops are under-reported in the data	• But approach is robust to some kinds of underreporting, even if reporting rates differ for black/nonblack drivers

Approaches to Dealing with "Benchmarking" Problem Are, in Turn, Problematic

Approach	Problem
Using census data	
Using traffic surveys	
Using only outcomes of the stop	

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Using only outcomes of the stop	• Avoids the challenging problem of detecting bias in the decision to stop