



PRESS RELEASE

Police stops in Germany: People who look foreign are stopped more frequently

Discriminatory police practices such as racial profiling have been the subject of debate in Germany for a number of years – though without any reliable underlying statistics. The scientific staff of the Expert Council on Integration and Migration (SVR) has now for the first time examined the link between perceived phenotypic difference and police stops in Germany based on data drawn from a national representative survey. The findings show that respondents who are perceived as foreign are stopped by the police around twice as frequently as those who are not.

Berlin, 15 November 2023. “Our data show that there is an imbalance when it comes to police stops in public spaces. People with a migration background are stopped more frequently than people without a migration background. A more detailed analysis of data taken from the SVR Integration Barometer shows that the deciding factor is not a person’s migration background but their phenotypic difference, that is mainly visible physical features such as a dark complexion or headscarf,” says Maximilian Müller, one of the policy brief’s authors. Survey respondents who stated that they are perceived as foreign reported that they were stopped by the police around twice as frequently (8.3%) than respondents who report that, in their view, they conform to the prevailing white norm – only 4.4 per cent of whom reported having been stopped by the police.

“The findings also point to intersectional effects that are at play in this context. The probability of someone being stopped by the police not only varies by phenotypic difference but also by other characteristics such as gender and age,” adds Maximilian Müller. Regardless of their appearance, men are stopped more often than women. Men aged between 15 and 34 who are perceived as foreign report being stopped most frequently. They are stopped significantly more frequently than their peers without the relevant characteristics (18.4% vs. 11.9%). “What is striking is the different composition of the two groups in terms of gender and age. In other words, those who are phenotypically different are, to a certain extent, stopped more frequently by the police simply because there are more young men in that group. But even taking this and other sociodemographic differences in the groups’ composition into account, there is still a significant difference in terms of the probability of being stopped by the police. These findings thus indicate that racial profiling exists in Germany,” says Maximilian Müller.

It is not possible to examine racial profiling in Germany on the basis of administrative data, because the key characteristics are not recorded in the relevant statistics. Representative surveys such as the SVR Integration Barometer are thus an important basis on which to examine this phenomenon says Alex Wittlif, co-author of the SVR policy brief on racial profiling in Germany: “For the first time we’ve been able to empirically analyse, on a representative data basis, differences in the frequency of police stops of phenotypically different people. It’s important to bear in mind, though, that the higher incidence of police stops is not necessarily only down to racial profiling. There are many factors that may play a role here – and we were not able to incorporate all of them into our study design. For instance, we cannot ‘factor out’ one particular effect that is due to differences in residence distribution. Crime hotspots, around which more police stops tend to be carried out, are often in socially disadvantaged urban districts that have a large share of first- and subsequent-generation migrants.”



The fact is, however, that police stops based on physical appearance and not on a person's conduct constitute inadmissible unequal treatment and thus violate the prohibition of discrimination enshrined in Germany's constitution, the Basic Law. "That is why it is so important to get the facts straight. The consequences of racial profiling can be huge – both for those affected and in terms of the legitimacy and acceptance of police action. That is why the planned introduction of a 'receipt' that is to be issued to a person after they have been stopped by the police, which is part of a reform of the Federal Police Act, is to be welcomed," says Dr Jan Schneider, Head of the SVR Research Unit.

This system is already in operation in the UK and in New York and could soon be launched in Germany. Random police stops would then have to be systematically recorded, creating more awareness on all sides. "To ensure that the data can be used in future research, the issuing of such 'receipts' should be mandatory. At the very least, those stopped should be informed about the possibility of being issued with such a receipt. Also, the category 'ethnicity' needs to be included in the record – for instance on the basis of self-identification by the person who has been stopped," says Dr Schneider. "Racial profiling is not just something that happens in the Federal Police, though, and the federal states should also look into introducing these receipts."

A total of 15,005 people with and without a migration background were surveyed in the period between late November 2021 and early July 2022 for the [SVR's 2022 Integration Barometer](#). Of those surveyed, 15.7 per cent stated that they are perceived as phenotypically different.

A summary of this policy brief is available to download at:

<https://www.svr-migration.de/en/publication/stateless-people-in-germany>

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About the Expert Council

The Expert Council on Integration and Migration is an independent and interdisciplinary body providing research-based policy advice. Its reports aim to assist those bodies responsible for integration and migration policy, as well as the general public, in their opinion-forming processes. The interdisciplinary Expert Council comprises a total of nine Researchers: Prof. Dr Hans Vorländer (Chairperson), Prof. Dr Birgit Leyendecker (Deputy Chairperson), Prof. Dr Havva Engin, Prof. Dr Birgit Glorius, Prof. Dr Marc Helbling, Prof. Dr Winfried Kluth, Prof. Dr Steffen Mau, Prof. Panu Poutvaara, Ph.D., Prof. Dr Sieglinde Rosenberger.

The organisation's scientific staff support the Expert Council in its work and conduct their own applied research in the fields of integration and migration using a variety of discipline-specific and methodological approaches. Research findings are published in the form of studies, expert reports and policy briefs.

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