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*European Journal of Criminology* 2008 5: 161

DOI: 10.1177/1477370807087641

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# Racism and Police Stops

## Adapting US and British Debates to Continental Europe

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### ABSTRACT

Findings from an international research programme on police stops in Bulgaria, Hungary and Spain are reviewed in the context of British and US debates on racism in police stops, and in particular the concepts of ethnic/racial profiling, disproportionality and institutional racism. The research uses surveys and qualitative interviews to examine the experiences of Roma in all three countries and of immigrants in Spain. The article finds evidence of ethnic/racial profiling in police decisions to stop. However, this does not translate into aggregate ethnic disparities in stops (disproportionality) in Bulgaria and Hungary where it

can be measured. This is because ethnic disparities are driven also by structural factors that are independent of ethnic profiling. Different kinds of institutional racism are also suggested by the poorer treatment of ethnic minority populations during stops and by evidence of under-policing of Roma-only communities in Bulgaria.

#### KEY WORDS

Disproportionality / Ethnic Profiling / Institutional Racism / Police Stops / Racial Profiling.

## Introduction

Police stop tactics, when carried out in a racist manner, run the risk of causing profound public resentment. Recent scholarship also shows that racism in police stops can be illegal under international law (Goldston 2005) and is of questionable efficacy as a crime-fighting strategy (Harris 2002; Miller et al. 2007). Yet, until now, scientific research on racism in police stops has largely been limited to the US and Britain, with examples in continental Europe more limited.

This article reviews new evidence from an international research programme on police stops in Bulgaria, Hungary and Spain in partnership with the Open Society Justice Initiative.<sup>1</sup> In particular, it examines whether existing British and US concepts are appropriate and adequate to describe the examples of racist policing in stopping practices highlighted by evidence from the study countries.

### 'Racial profiling' in the US

There is a long history in the US of the police singling out minorities – particularly African Americans – for unwanted attention (Buerger and Farrell 2002). The term 'racial profiling' has been coined in recent years to describe the contemporary incarnation of this phenomenon. It describes police use of racial or ethnic characteristics to decide whom to investigate for, as yet,

<sup>1</sup> In January 2005, the Open Society Justice Initiative, which works around the globe to foster rights-based law reform, launched an effort to address ethnic profiling by police in Europe. This has involved several parallel initiatives, including research detailed in this article and presented more fully in Miller et al. (2007), observational research in Russia documenting profiling practices by police throughout the Moscow metro system, and the preparation of a report documenting the extent of ethnic profiling in policing and counter-terrorism operations in the European Union.

unknown criminal offences (Harris 2005). A practical definition of ethnic or racial profiling needs to accept that police officers who profile typically use ethnic and racial stereotypes along with other factors (such as gender, age, location or time of day) (Harris 2005; Ramirez et al. 2003). However, occasions when specific intelligence alone guides police suspicion toward individuals from minority backgrounds should probably not be included (Ramirez et al. 2003).

The use of explicit profiles invoking race/ethnicity – amounting to racial profiling – has formed a part of the history of modern law enforcement, particularly in relation to drug interdiction (Buerger and Farrell 2002; Harris 2002). In the late 1990s there was an explosion of news stories about the purported instances of racial profiling across the nation's police agencies, dubbed the 'driving while black' phenomenon (Harris 2002, 2005; Ramirez et al. 2000). Numerous anecdotes and complaints about the problem were accompanied by litigation against some police agencies (Harris 1999).

The emerging recognition of racial profiling has been underpinned by a series of scientific studies often linked with litigation efforts. Two key studies by John Lamberth (1998) identifying clear patterns of racial profiling set the scene for many developments that followed. In 1993 he carried out a visual census of traffic violators on the New Jersey turnpike road using trained observers, and compared this profile with the ethnic pattern of people stopped according to police records. African Americans made up 13.5 percent of the turnpike's population and 15 percent of the speeders, yet they made up 35 percent of those stopped. In 1996 and again in 1997 Lamberth conducted a similar survey on an interstate highway in Maryland, which showed that whereas 17.5 percent of the traffic violators were African American, they made up 28.8 percent of those stopped and 71.3 percent of those searched by the Maryland State Police.

The basic research design established by Lamberth became the paradigm for much of the debate about racial profiling in the US, fixing the question of ethnic profiling to a statistical comparison between the ethnic breakdown of police activities (stops or searches for example) and that of the population to which the police are exposed and might legitimately target (for example because of speeding). This research model has been reproduced with variations in other US studies (for example, Lange et al. 2005; The Alpert Group 2004; Engel and Calnon 2004; Rickabaugh 2003; Smith et al. 2003; Lamberth 2003).

The research and campaigning around the issue of racial profiling have produced a profound shift in attitudes in the US. Today, more than 20 states have passed legislation prohibiting racial profiling or requiring jurisdictions within the state to collect law enforcement data on stops and searches that allow analysis of their racial breakdown and, countrywide, hundreds of

individual jurisdictions now routinely collect police ethnic data (Racial Profiling Data Collection Resource Center 2006). The climate has reversed somewhat in the aftermath of the 11 September 2001 attacks, however, as the pursuit of anti-terrorism objectives has produced increased support for some kinds of racial profiling (Amnesty International USA 2004).

### **Britain: 'disproportionality' and 'institutional racism'**

The concepts that have emerged to describe racism in police stops in Britain follow a different track from that in the US. Whereas the US concept of racial profiling fixes racism to the single question of direct racial stereotyping, British concepts of racism have come to encompass also police deployment and tactics that have disproportionate impacts on ethnic and racial minorities.

As in the US, debates about racism emerge from a perception, backed by empirical evidence, that minorities receive disproportionate unwanted police attention. Examples and anecdotes of police targeting stops at minorities date back many years in Britain and have been associated with profound community resentment towards the police (Bowling and Phillips 2002), including outbreaks of riots (Scarman 1981).

The debate has been substantially underpinned by a statistical picture that, for many years, has tended to show that stops and searches are more common among black people, a phenomenon dubbed 'disproportionality' (e.g. Miller et al. 2000a). This includes social scientific surveys dating back more than two decades (Smith 1983; Willis 1983; Young 1994; Bucke 1997; Clancy et al. 2001) and, since 1997, routine and systematic collection of data on stop and searches by the police and published by central government (e.g. Home Office 2006). Police recorded searches, when compared with ethnic data from the national census, have consistently shown that ethnic minorities, and black people in particular, are searched disproportionately compared with their numbers in the population. Statistics for 2004/5 highlight nationally a roughly 6:1 difference between blacks and whites, and a 2:1 difference between whites and Asians, under core stop and search powers (Home Office 2006).

Researchers have considered the possibility that disproportionality in stop and search may be underpinned by street-level stereotyping by police officers – reminiscent of the US concept of racial profiling – while highlighting, on the other hand, how demographic, lifestyle and police deployment activities might help explain it (e.g. Quinton et al. 2000; Brown 1997; FitzGerald and Sibbitt 1997; Reiner 1993; Young 1994; Jefferson 1993; Walker et al. 1990; Tuck and Southgate 1981). For many years researchers reached no clear conclusions. However, a series of recent studies resembling

those of Lamberth in the US provide a stronger argument against the existence of systematic street-level discrimination (Hallsworth et al. 2006; Waddington et al. 2004; MVA and Miller 2000; Boniface 2000). They show that populations 'available' for stop and search, because of their presence on the street at times and places where stop and search take place, tend to include a much larger proportion of minorities than the resident population. Comparing these street populations with stop and search statistics, the studies have failed to find ethnic disparities. If they are taken to be representative of other places and times, they provide an important challenge to the idea that street-level stereotyping akin to racial profiling, is routine practice.

Important criticisms of these recent studies, however, highlight their disregard for the use and deployment of stop and search – for example the areas chosen for police patrol and stop and search activity (Bridges 2001; Statewatch 2000) – thus leaving broader dynamics of potential police racism unaddressed. These authors shift attention away from a narrow, more direct form of racist discrimination – crystallized most effectively in the US concept of racial profiling – to an indirect notion of discrimination in which broader decision-making and practice produce potentially racist outcomes. This notion is consistent with the concept of 'institutional racism'. This term emerged from a 1999 government-sponsored inquiry into the bungled police investigation of the racist murder of the black teenager Stephen Lawrence, which as part of its remit addressed broader questions about the policing of minority communities (Macpherson 1999). The inquiry report concluded that London's Metropolitan police force and police forces 'countrywide' were 'institutionally racist', which it took to mean:

The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people. (Section 6.34)

The definition encompasses both direct racism and the indirect racism that arises from a lack of reflection on the character and outcomes of routine police practice. Notably, the inquiry report specifically criticizes 'colour blind' policing because it can have a negative impact on minorities (Section 6.21). In contrast to racial profiling, the idea of institutional racism pegs police racism to the actual experiences of those on the receiving end of policing, rather than the good intentions, or otherwise, of police officers. Importantly, the inquiry report emphasized stop and search as a major example of institutional racism resented among minority communities.

Given the research evidence in Britain, it seems as though it is the largely 'colour blind' use of stop and search that constitutes its institutionally

racist character and facilitates its disproportionate outcomes. Curiously, however, the policy responses to the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry have not addressed this dynamic. Instead, resting largely on the assumption that racism in police stops is solely a problem of direct stereotyping, legal codes have been revised, individual police forces have strengthened policies, and new standards for accountability and monitoring have been mandated. However, disparities in stop and search rates across ethnic groups are similar today to those at the time of the inquiry's publication (Home Office 2000, 2006).

### **Ethnic/racial profiling in continental Europe**

There is far less history of research and public discussion of racism in police stops in Europe. Insofar as they have emerged, concepts have borrowed from US rather than British traditions, with the term 'racial profiling' or 'ethnic profiling' used – often by human rights organizations – alongside the more general and conventional concepts of discrimination, misconduct and abuse, to describe racist policing. For example, the term 'racial profiling' has been used by the European Roma Rights Center (e.g. 2004, 2005) the Greek Helsinki Monitor (2001) and the Hungarian Helsinki Committee (Farkas 2004), and the term 'ethnic profiling' has been used by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (2006b). Some scholars have also used the term 'religious profiling' to narrate developments in European security policies since 11 September 2001 (Fekete 2004; Pap 2006).

The Open Society Justice Initiative – a key partner in the current research – has funded the only credible social scientific study of ethnic profiling in Europe. It focuses on the Moscow subway and uses a variation of the standard benchmark methodology for such studies, such as those by Lamberth (1998) and the British studies of available populations (Hallsworth et al. 2006; Waddington et al. 2004; MVA and Miller 2000; Bonniface 2000). John Lamberth, in conjunction with local researchers, examined 15 randomly selected metro stations in Moscow. They created a benchmark of minority (non-Slavic) individuals passing through each of the stations and compared it with the ethnic breakdown of actual police stops carried out at the same 15 stations at similar times of day. Ethnic minorities were on average 22 times more likely to be stopped than Slavs – apparently the most extreme measure of ethnic profiling ever recorded (Open Society Justice Initiative and Jurix 2006).

The Open Society Justice Initiative has pioneered the concept of ethnic profiling in Europe through other work, including a published volume dedicated to charting the origins and use of the concept of ethnic profiling, along with an analysis of the European legal environment and documented

examples of ethnic profiling in European countries (Open Society Justice Initiative 2005).

## Research questions

This article is based on the findings of a recent programme of research in Bulgaria, Hungary and Spain carried out in partnership with the Open Society Initiative. The research involved local national research partners in each of the countries<sup>2</sup> and focused on the experiences of Roma minorities in all countries and immigrant populations in Spain.

This article reviews research findings against the backdrop of existing US and British debates, focusing on the following questions:

- is there evidence of ethnic/racial profiling in police stops?
- is there evidence of disproportionality in police stops? Does this indicate patterns of institutional police racism?
- is there evidence for other types of institutional racism in police stops?
- overall, how helpful are British and US concepts to describe racialized patterns of police stops within the study countries?

Police stops were taken to include any police-initiated encounter in a public place. At its most basic, this involves being called to account by the police, but may also involve requests to see personal identification or a search of the person stopped or their vehicle.

## Data

The research projects in each country were primarily tailored to local needs rather than an international comparative standard. As such, not all countries used all the same strategies and there were methodological differences between sites in the implementation of similar strategies. This set limits on our ability to draw detailed comparisons, but still allowed for some important comparative conclusions. The methods used, and their local implementation, are discussed below. These strategies are in addition

<sup>2</sup> The national partner in Bulgaria was the Center for the Study of Democracy (CSD), an interdisciplinary public policy institute dedicated to the values of democracy and market economy. CSD is a non-partisan, independent organization fostering the reform process in Bulgaria through impact on policy and civil society. In Hungary, the national partners included TÁRKI, a research institute dedicated to the field of social science and market research, and Andras L. Pap working under the aegis of the Bolyai Research Scholarship of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. In Spain, the principal partner was Dani Wagman, a researcher and analyst with the GEA21 group.



to a review of existing research, advocacy and legal literature in each of the study countries.

### **Qualitative interviews with police officers**

In all three study countries, interviews were carried out with police officers selected from a range of settings, probing operational practice and decision-making in relation to police stops. This was the strongest core empirical element across countries. In Bulgaria, 55 police interviews were spread across police patrol officers, heads of department, criminal investigation officers and 'district' or neighbourhood police officers, drawn from eight different police districts spanning different types of geographical area. In Hungary, 80 officers were interviewed, with a deliberate effort made to vary characteristics including age, length of service, educational level and geographical area (across three different sites). Interviewees had diverse positions, including both sergeants and patrol officers. In Spain, 61 interviews were conducted in a variety of police agencies: 18 National Police officers, 19 Civil Guards, 10 Catalan Police and 14 municipal police across five locations. Officers were selected across diverse operational roles and included patrol officers, traffic police, customs officers, judicial police, detectives, sergeants and police chiefs.

### **Focus groups with members of the public**

Focus groups with members of the public were also carried out in all study countries, probing perceptions and experiences of police. In Bulgaria, three focus groups focused exclusively on the Roma population – one in each of three geographical settings. In Hungary, six focus groups were carried out, two in each of three geographical areas, with a Roma and non-Roma group in each location. In Spain, 10 groups were conducted capturing significant variation according to ethnicity, age, gender and status (undocumented vs. resident permit) across three geographical locations. There were two non-Roma Spanish groups, three Roma groups, one sub-Saharan African group, one Latin American group, two Moroccan groups, and one mixed group of immigrants.

### **Qualitative interviews with people who have experienced stops**

In Hungary and Spain (though not in Bulgaria) a series of interviews were carried out with people who had had direct experiences of being stopped. In Hungary, these included 10 Roma and 10 non-Roma, spread across three research sites. In Spain, there were 13 interviews across the

country, two of which were with Roma, and nine of which drew from a range of immigrant groups.

### National surveys

In Bulgaria and Hungary (though not Spain), national door-to-door public surveys were carried out that asked subjects about experiences of police stops, attitudes and socioeconomic and lifestyle characteristics. The Bulgaria survey was most elaborate, involving both a nationally representative sample (n51,202) and a booster sample of Roma only (n5534). The response rate was 79 percent for the main survey and 94 percent for the booster sample. In Hungary, the national survey involved a single representative sample (n51047), with a response rate of 52 percent. The questionnaires used were different between countries both in terms of the structure and phrasing of questions, and in terms of the recall period (Bulgaria asked about police stops in the previous six months, Hungary in the previous year).

### Country background

All three of the study countries have made the transition from totalitarian government to democracy in recent decades (Spain had democratic elections from 1977 onwards, and Hungary and Bulgaria from 1990). However, the outcomes of these transitions have varied, with Spain now the most affluent and Bulgaria the least. Spain is also the largest country in the study (42.6 million); populations in Hungary (10.1 million) and Bulgaria (7.8 million) are substantially smaller (UNDP 2006).

The Roma population is greatest, proportionally, in Bulgaria, where it amounts to between 5 and 10 percent of the population (UNDP 2002) followed by Hungary (6 percent) (Kemény et al. 2006) and Spain (about 1.5 percent) (Fundación Secretarido Gitano 2005). The Roma are among the most disadvantaged minority groups across a wide variety of sectors within all three countries, but are probably most marginalized in Bulgaria and least in Spain. In the Bulgarian survey carried out for this research, 60 percent of Roma seeking work were unemployed. In Hungary, unemployment rates are around 50–55 percent, with 22 percent dependent on social assistance (UNDP 2005). In Spain, where conditions for Roma are better, few Roma hold salaried jobs and most are engaged in independent, part-time or casual labour that is largely low paid (Ringold et al. 2003). In all three countries, popular stereotypes in the media and among the general public link Roma

identity with criminality (Székelyi et al. 2001; European Roma Rights Center 1997; Unión Romaní 1997, 2002) and in all three countries available statistics indicate that Roma are disproportionately represented within the criminal justice system (Bulgarian Helsinki Committee 2002; Proyecto Barañí 2001; Miranda and Barberet 1998; Huszár 1997).

Of the three countries, Spain has had the greatest influx of immigrants in recent years, with a foreign national population estimated at 9 percent (Secretaría de Estado de Inmigración y Emigración, Ministerio de Trabajo y Asuntos Sociales and Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2006), compared with about 1 percent each for Bulgaria and Hungary (National Statistical Institute 2004: 308–9; Hungarian Central Statistical Office 2006). Spain has many registered immigrants from Latin America, EU countries and Africa (mostly Moroccans) (Secretaría de Estado de Inmigración y Emigración, Ministerio de Trabajo y Asuntos Sociales and Instituto Nacional de Estadística 2006). These figures do not include the estimated 800,000 to one million undocumented migrants and those immigrants who have received Spanish citizenship.<sup>3</sup> Immigrants fare less well in socioeconomic terms than Spanish citizens, for example in their working situation (Observatorio Permanente de Inmigración 2005; Observatorio de Desigualdades de Género en la Salud 2006). Like the Roma, they are overrepresented in the criminal justice system, making up 31 percent of those arrested, more than three times their representation in the national population (Ministerio del Interior 2003).

## Policing and police stops

There are important differences between the three countries in the structure and culture of policing. Bulgaria and Hungary have highly centralized police forces, whereas Spain combines both centralized police structures and about 1700 local police agencies. In all three countries there is evidence of human rights abuses, in particular involving minorities. In Bulgaria, repeated international criticism, as well as European Court of Human Rights' judgments (with a judgment relating to Roma abuse as recently as 2004), has led the police to start introducing some reforms in its treatment of minorities. In Hungary, 2004 saw the first victory of the Hungarian human rights movement engaged in the defence of Roma rights before the European Court of Human Rights in a case indicating police violence against a Roma victim.<sup>4</sup> In Spain, Amnesty International (e.g. 2002), the

<sup>3</sup> Instituto Nacional de Estadística ([www.ine.es](http://www.ine.es)). Estimates of undocumented foreigners are calculated by subtracting immigrants with residency papers from the INE's Municipal Patron figures.

<sup>4</sup> ECHR case *Balogh v. Hungary* 371 20.7.2004.

European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (e.g. 2006a), SOS Racismo (e.g. 2003) and others have produced reports on racist incidents by police towards both Roma and immigrants.

Police stop activity, often associated with identity checks, is a part of policing in all three countries. Laws governing stops (including vehicle stops) within the countries allow for wide discretion amongst police officers to carry out personal identity checks (i.e. requiring personal documents to be produced). In Bulgaria, police officers can carry out identity checks for purposes that include the detection or investigation of a crime, examination of identity documents, residence permit or driving licence, and because of a police checkpoint.<sup>5</sup> In Hungary, police have full authority to stop and ask for identification from ‘anyone whose identity needs to be established’ and can stop vehicles at any time to check the legality of vehicle operation and possession.<sup>6</sup> And in Spain, all police can stop and identify persons provided usually that they have ‘motive’, a concept that is not well defined. Stops targeting drunk drivers and vehicle inspections do not require a motive.<sup>7</sup>

Table 1 shows that levels of police stops of drivers are higher in Bulgaria and Hungary than in England & Wales and the US, with traffic stops roughly twice as common as in the US, and notably higher than in England & Wales. This suggests a wider use of discretion and more routine use of stops, at least

**Table 1** Rates of police stops in Bulgaria, Hungary, England & Wales and the US in previous 12 months

	<i>Bulgaria</i> (2005) [ <i>last</i> <i>six months only</i> ]	<i>Hungary</i> (2005)	<i>England &amp; Wales</i> (2002/3)	<i>US</i> (2002)
Frequency of driver stops (% population)	[15]	18	10	8
Frequency of pedestrian stops (% population)	[5]	3	3	5

*Note:* Survey questions are not strictly comparable between countries, so differences in numbers may be explained in part by differences in methodology.

*Source:* Bureau of Justice Statistics (2005) and Nicholas and Walker (2004).

<sup>5</sup> This is according to the Law on the Ministry of Interior, Article 68, last amended according to State Gazette 27 on 29 March 2005.

<sup>6</sup> This is according to the 1994 Police Act (Act XXXIV of 1994 on the Police).

<sup>7</sup> This is according to the Ley Orgánica 1/1992 on the Protection of Citizen Security.

of vehicles, which may be explained by the common use of identity checks in the two study countries, a practice that is less relevant to Anglo-American policing.

## Evidence of disproportionality?

We look first of all at aggregate stop rates to evaluate ethnic disparities using Bulgarian and Hungarian surveys. Neither shows aggregate ethnic differences, but they do show disparities when disaggregated by their vehicle or pedestrian character. Because the Spanish research did not include a survey, assessment of disproportionality was not possible.

### Bulgaria

The Bulgarian survey uses a substantial extra booster sample of Roma that allows for more reliable comparisons between Roma and non-Roma than in other study countries. The data, presented in Table 2, show that absolute rates of stops among three ethnic groups (Bulgarian, Roma and 'other') are strikingly similar: in each of these groups approximately one in five had experienced stops in the previous six months. In the aggregate, therefore, there is no evidence of disproportionality.

The picture becomes more complex when we separately examine different types of stop. This indicates disproportionality that both disadvantages and favours Roma minorities. Vehicle stops – the most frequent type

**Table 2** Frequency of stops in previous six months among the Bulgarian population, by key ethnic group

	<i>Ethnic Bulgarian (%)</i>	<i>Roma (%)</i>	<i>Other (e.g. Turkish) (%)</i>	<i>Significance of ethnic difference</i>
All stops	18	18	19	
Vehicle stops	14	5	19	**
Pedestrian stops	5	13	4	**
<b>N</b>	<b>981</b>	<b>547</b>	<b>125</b>	

*Note:* Pedestrian stops here are inferred from a combination of questionnaire questions that imply that respondents are not in vehicles when stopped.

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ .

of stop in the general population (15 percent report vehicle stops, compared with just 5 percent reporting pedestrian stops) – are about three times more frequent among Bulgarians than among Roma, and about four times more frequent among ‘other’ ethnic groups than among Roma. As we examine in more detail later, this has much to do with higher rates of vehicle ownership among Bulgarians (51 percent) than among Roma (20 percent). Conversely, pedestrian stops are approximately three times more common among Roma than among non-Roma groups – a pattern that disadvantages Roma.

## Hungary

The Hungarian survey lacked the ethnic booster sample that the Bulgaria survey has, relying on the responses of only 55 Roma respondents. This limited our ability to explore ethnic difference in stopping experience with the same precision and reliability, but important conclusions can still be drawn.

The picture (Table 3) has a lot in common with that in Bulgaria, and in overall terms there is no evidence overall of disproportionality in police stops. However, separate examination of types of stop shows some evidence of disproportionality. Vehicle stops, which are by far the most prevalent of stops, showed no statistically significant differences between Roma and non-Roma, though they were still higher among non-Roma in the sample. Car ownership rates were also higher for non-Roma (58 percent) than for Roma (35 percent). Pedestrian stops, in contrast, are approximately three times more common among Roma as among non-Roma: a statistically significant difference.

**Table 3** Frequency of stops in previous year among the Hungarian population by Roma and non-Roma

	Non-Roma (%)	Roma (%)	Significance of ethnic difference
All stops	23	29	
Vehicle stops	18	13	
Pedestrian stops	3	10	**
Other stops	3	6	
<b>N (minimum)</b>	<b>986</b>	<b>55</b>	

*Note:* Subgroups of stops (e.g. vehicle or pedestrian stops) relate only to the last recounted stop within the previous year, and therefore will be a slight undercount.

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ .

## Ethnic/racial profiling?

As we have noted, although racial or ethnic profiling can help explain ethnic differences in stop rates, international research has also highlighted how other socioeconomic, demographic and lifestyle factors, along with variations in police deployment, can profoundly affect the attention given to different ethnic groups when these factors are correlated with ethnicity. We cannot therefore assume that the disproportionality among the subgroups of stops identified in the countries in the current study is reducible to ethnic profiling. Certainly, interview data and statistical evidence point to factors besides direct ethnic profiling as contributing to variations in stop rates across ethnic groups. For example, in explaining the differential attention given to different groups, interviews across countries highlighted how police focus attention on suspicious behaviour, physical appearance (such as style of dress or type of vehicle), location (particularly for those who appeared out of place in an area) and time of day, and statistical data in Bulgaria highlighted how lifestyle characteristics such as going out and owning a vehicle help explain disparities in police attention.

Yet our research also provided direct evidence of ethnic profiling. Notably, police interviews across countries indicated that ethnicity was a factor driving stopping decisions for at least some police officers (a view held even more strongly by minorities themselves). Police officers who described ethnic profiling in Bulgaria and Hungary referred to Roma, whereas in Spain officers indicating ethnic profiling talked primarily about immigrants rather than about Roma. Immigrants in Spain are probably subject to the most systematic form of ethnic profiling identified by the research. Multivariate statistical analysis – possible only with the Bulgarian data – reinforced the conclusion that ethnic profiling was a feature of policing in this country.

Data from each country are discussed in more detail below.

### Bulgaria

Drawing collectively on the accounts given by Bulgarian police officers, a general set of criteria for police suspicion can be developed. In summary, this includes when a member of the public:

- fits the profile of crime suspects;
- is an outsider to the neighbourhood, town or village (often signified by being a Roma);
- has a suspicious look (described as an instinct or feeling, but could be connected with behaviour or appearance, including looking concerned, looking around, walking in a certain way, wearing certain clothes or being a Roma);

- is out late at night;
- is carrying a large bag or a package;
- is riding in a full horse carriage – a criterion particularly relevant to Roma, who collect scrap metal or wood (in some cases stops of these carriages were routine);
- is an obvious intravenous drug user;
- could be an information source;
- is not a well-known local or is elderly;
- has Roma identity.

Interestingly, another motivation for stop is economic – asking for a bribe. In around 10 percent of cases of vehicle stops, according to the household survey, patrol officers had in the past demanded some sort of a bribe. The level of bribes demanded in pedestrian stops is well under 1 percent of cases.

As highlighted, a number of police officers (though by no means all) emphasized Roma ethnicity as a basis for a stopping decision, primarily because of a perception that the Roma, in some communities, are heavily involved in crime. As one officer said:

‘You can’t really tell who [among the Roma] steals and who doesn’t. They almost all do.’ (Police officer)

For these officers, Roma identity alone, or perhaps in combination with a limited range of other suspicious characteristics (such as being an outsider to an area), was a strong basis for suspicion in stopping practice. One even suggested that he stopped ‘all’ Roma, though on further questioning he highlighted a number of exceptions, such as not stopping Roma who he knew personally, who were municipal workers or who were an entire family of Roma.

Many Roma themselves have a strong impression that Roma are targeted by the police. In November 2004, interviews in the region of Stara Zagora conducted by ‘Links’ from Sofia (a Bulgarian non-governmental organization) showed that a number of Roma respondents held the view that the police tended to target Roma deliberately.<sup>8</sup> For example, one claimed:

‘If somebody does some mischief the police immediately arrest a whole group of Roma for interrogation.’ (Roma interviewee in Links research)

To explore in more detail how social, demographic and lifestyle factors might also play a role in stop disparities, we can use the Bulgarian survey data to examine the kinds of socioeconomic and lifestyle differences that could help account for differences, alongside ethnic profiling. Table 4 highlights that there are in fact significant differences between the ethnic Bulgarian and Roma groups in Bulgaria, with Roma being younger, much

<sup>8</sup> The experience of the minorities with the police was studied by ‘Links’, which provided interview transcripts for this research.



more likely to be unemployed and not to have completed high school, and much less likely to own a car. There are also profound geographical differences between the two populations. The majority of both ethnic Bulgarians and Roma live in neighbourhoods that are composed almost exclusively of their own ethnic group. Only a quarter of ethnic Bulgarians and a third of Roma live in neighbourhoods that are ethnically mixed.

Logistic regression models were used to explore whether factors such as those presented in Table 4 help account for disparities, and whether in fact ethnicity persists as a predictor of disparities in police stops after they have been controlled for. Table 5 presents the findings of our analysis, focusing separately on vehicle stops and pedestrian stops. Because of the high levels of ethnic segregation, we combined variables relating to ethnicity and the ethnic character of neighbourhoods into a single categorical interaction term.

The model for vehicle stops shows that Roma ethnicity does not increase the chances of a stop. Instead, rates are higher for younger people, males, those who have completed high school (which may also be related to aspects of lifestyle), those owning vehicles, those going out every week, and according to the character of the neighbourhood. With respect to neighbourhood, Roma people from exclusively Roma neighbourhoods are actually less likely – other things being equal – to experience vehicle stops than are Roma or ethnic Bulgarians living elsewhere. We can infer therefore that the reason non-Roma are stopped more often in vehicles than Roma is in significant part because they are twice as likely to own vehicles and because police are less likely to stop vehicles inside Roma-only neighbourhoods.

**Table 4** Demographic and lifestyle characteristics of Bulgarians and Roma

	<i>Ethnic Bulgarians (%)</i>	<i>Roma (%)</i>	<i>Significance of ethnic difference</i>
Under 35	32	42	**
Completed high school	79	11	**
Unemployed	7	43	**
Vehicle ownership	51	20	**
Goes out > once a week	37	38	**
Bulgarian neighbourhood	74	3	**
Mixed neighbourhood	26	35	
Roma neighbourhood	0	62	
Urban neighbourhood	75	75	
<b>N (minimum)</b>	<b>986</b>	<b>579</b>	

Note: \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ .

**Table 5** Logistic regression models of vehicle and pedestrian stops in Bulgaria

	Vehicle stop ( <i>n</i> = 1619)		Pedestrian stop ( <i>n</i> = 1633)	
	<i>B</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Age	-0.02	**	-0.03	**
Female	-1.61	**	-1.12	**
High school completed	0.64	*	-0.10	
Unemployed	0.51		0.00	
Vehicle ownership	2.91	**	0.39	
Goes out every week	0.44	*	-0.01	
Urban area	0.29	*	0.65	*
Bulgarian in Bulgarian-only neighbourhood		**		**
Bulgarian in mixed neighbourhood	-0.09		-0.24	
Roma in mixed neighbourhood	0.54		1.59	**
Roma in Roma-only neighbourhood	-1.13	*	0.50	
Other ethnic group	0.15		-0.33	
Constant	-1.73	**	-0.90	
Nagelkerke <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.39		0.18	

*Note:* Pedestrian stops here are inferred from a combination of questionnaire questions that imply that respondents are not in vehicles when stopped.

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ .

This latter point is suggestive of a pattern of ‘under-policing’ of these kinds of neighbourhoods.

The model for pedestrian stops, by contrast, shows that Roma ethnicity increases the chances of a stop after controlling for other variables – specifically, Roma living in ethnically mixed neighbourhoods. They are more likely to be stopped than ethnic Bulgarians (regardless of neighbourhood) or Roma in Roma-only neighbourhoods. Besides this, being younger, male and from an urban neighbourhood increase the likelihood of being stopped. We must acknowledge that the model was not able to control for differing levels of criminality among ethnic groups, which may go some way also to explaining ethnic disparities in stops (though factors such as unemployment and under-education, which are included in the models, may provide a crude proxy for delinquency). Certainly, British research shows that delinquency variables help explain patterns of stops over and above socioeconomic variables (Flood-Page et al. 2000). Nonetheless, the finding here for pedestrian stops adds substantial weight to our interview evidence that routine ethnic profiling of Roma may exist among Bulgaria’s police.

One further point to note is that the reasons why stop rates in Roma-only areas and Bulgarian-only areas are similar, according to our model, are somewhat ambiguous. This finding could reflect even-handedness by the police between the two types of areas. Yet, given that our model of vehicle stops suggests under-policing of Roma-only areas, coupled with the fact that, in ethnically mixed areas, Roma are substantially more likely to be stopped than are ethnic Bulgarians, it could be that fewer patrols in Roma-only areas are nonetheless aggressive with regard to pedestrian stops. In this scenario, the effects of ethnic profiling and under-policing would go some way to cancelling one another out. However, this is speculation that would need further research to test.

## Hungary

When describing reasons for searches, Hungarian police officers highlighted the following factors as the basis for 'suspicion', although individual opinions varied:

- shifty appearance and behaviour, with clothing and neatness important factors;
- location and time (perhaps the scene of a crime; someone whose presence is unusual at that place at that time of the day; 'strange' behaviour);
- the age and condition of the car (mentioned by vehicle patrol officers);
- the Roma origin of potential suspects.

In general, about half of police interviewed in Hungary thought some colleagues tended to stop people belonging to certain groups more than others, most often mentioning the Roma. To some extent, this was considered to be an inevitable outcome of objective ethnic differences in levels of criminal involvement. However, it also seemed that prejudice in at least some cases directly drove practice, with Roma identity being a clear reason for a stop:

'One has to pay more attention to the Gypsies. There is a greater chance that I will catch someone off the wanted list ... I therefore assume that we should check them more closely, more frequently.' (Police officer)

This view was also held among Roma themselves, as illustrated by the focus group data, for example:

'Compared to a non-Roma, a Roma has a far greater chance of being stopped and searched by an officer, in any situation, for any reason.' (Roma interviewee)

Reminiscent of the Bulgaria findings, some interviewees had experienced police stops for bribes.

The survey data in Hungary involved few Roma, few pedestrian stops, and a narrower range of variables than were available in Bulgaria, so it is

difficult to identify other factors through multivariate analysis that might contribute to disproportionality.

## Spain

The vast majority of the police interviewees stressed the need for a justifiable motive for stopping, identifying and searching someone. When asked to discuss specific reasons for carrying out stops, a number of factors were highlighted that were similar to those mentioned in Bulgaria and Hungary, though with some distinctive elements:

- direct observation of crimes and infractions (particularly in relation to vehicle stops);
- behaviour, such as nervousness or trying to avoid police attention, or carrying something;
- physical appearance (for example, being badly dressed);
- time of day (for example, walking late at night);
- people who fit suspect descriptions;
- known offenders;
- being from outside an area;
- a 'sixth sense', in which people appear suspicious for under-defined reasons;
- ethnicity;
- immigrant status – where this is associated with the possibility of being undocumented;
- random preventative criteria.

It was rarely suggested that Roma identity was a direct reason for suspicion. Instead, officers often suggested that Roma were stopped more as a product of legitimate policing of crimes, which Roma were simply more involved in. However, a more explicit connection between ethnicity and stopping was articulated for immigrants. In particular, the enforcement of illegal immigration seemed to provide some police officers with what they considered to be a legitimate and legally sanctioned basis for targeting immigrant minorities. Although many police officers emphasized that immigrant appearance alone was not enough to stop somebody, it still featured significantly in police officers' accounts of motivations for stopping. One senior police officer even went as far as to say:

'We stop foreigners to see if they are illegal. How can we enforce the 4/2000 if we don't stop people that look like foreigners?' (Senior police officer)

Once again, the views of minorities themselves (both immigrant and Roma), as evidenced through focus groups and as articulated by representatives from some NGOs spoken to in the course of this research, tend to the

impression that ethnic profiling does occur, though some felt it was more widespread than others. For example:

'You are a suspect, by the hair, by the face, because you have a photocopy of your ID papers but not the [national residence number] ... and that makes us nervous.'  
(Immigrant interviewee)

'I believe that we were stopped just for being Gypsies. They came directly at us. A Gypsy who looks like the stereotype is stopped more.'  
(Roma interviewee)

## Differences in the character of stops

By focusing on the rates of stops and their underlying causes, it is easy to overlook some other important differences in ethnic experiences. In particular, these other differences include variations in the character of police stops experienced by different ethnic groups. In Bulgaria and Hungary, survey data indicate that Roma are more likely to have unpleasant experiences of stops, and in Bulgaria they are more likely to be searched (we did not ask this of the Hungarian survey respondents). In Spain, qualitative data suggest that when stops happen they are accompanied by negative evaluations among Roma and immigrants, though there are too few interviews with non-minority Spanish to compare differences in experience. Given that international research shows that negative experiences (far more than positive experiences) affect confidence in the police (e.g. Skogan 2006) and undermine the extent to which people view the police as legitimate (Sunshine and Tyler 2003), these study findings have important implications for how minorities may relate to the police in the study countries.

### Bulgaria

Table 6 presents survey findings on the character of stopping experiences in Bulgaria according to ethnicity. It suggests a consistent pattern of more disrespectful treatment of Roma. For example, Roma more often experience insults (20 percent), threats (14 percent) and use of force (5 percent) during stops than do ethnic Bulgarians (3 percent, 5 percent and 1 percent, respectively). It is notable also that Roma are more likely to be searched.

One Roma focus group respondent in Bulgaria gave a very vivid description of how his Roma identity was associated with bad treatment by police:

'I was once stopped by the police for drugs: "Give us your ID and lift up your sleeves." I was like "Wait a minute, why don't you go and catch someone with drugs [drug dealer]? Why do you check me?" I was almost about to cry. "Lift up your sleeves and don't talk too much, you dirty Gypsy [otherwise] I'll put you in the trunk [of the police car]."' (Roma interviewee)

**Table 6** Characteristics of stops among Bulgarians and Roma (based only on those stopped in previous six months)

<i>Stopped in previous six months and describing across at least some stops . . .</i>	<i>Ethnic Bulgarians (%)</i>	<i>Roma (%)</i>	<i>Significance of ethnic difference</i>
Questioning	52	81	**
Search	8	21	**
Insults	3	20	**
Threatened	5	14	**
Force used	1	5	
"Rights disregarded"	11	23	**
Taken to station	4	12	*
Arrested	1	7	
No explanation given	35	43	
Disrespectful treatment	26	41	*
Unprofessional treatment	26	31	
<b>N (minimum)</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>84</b>	

Note: \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ .

## Hungary

Although there is less detailed survey information on stops in Hungary, a similar image emerges from the available data. Table 7 provides information on the proportions of all Roma and non-Roma who had had what they felt were disrespectful or unprofessional experiences of stops. It highlights how, overall, Roma were more likely to report experiencing a disrespectful stop. The differences were most marked in relation to pedestrian stops compared with vehicle stops, which in part reflects that pedestrian stops are more common among Roma.

These differences were echoed in the qualitative focus groups carried out within the Hungarian research. The Roma and non-Roma groups indicated quite different levels of unsatisfactory experience with the police.

## Spain

Although there were no quantitative data in Spain, interviews with people stopped suggest that experiences of stops tend to be evaluated negatively by Roma and immigrants. For example:

'I often get body searched, and it is very humiliating. They sometimes take my trousers down in the street.' (Moroccan interviewee)

**Table 7** Experiences of perceived disrespectful and unprofessional stops among Hungarian survey respondents: non-Roma and Roma (based on all survey respondents)

	Non-Roma (%)	Roma (%)	Significance of ethnic difference
Disrespectful stop (any)	3	9	*
Unprofessional stop (any)	2	6	
Disrespectful car stop	2	2	
Unprofessional car stop	1	0	
Disrespectful pedestrian stop	1	4	**
Unprofessional pedestrian stop	0	4	*
Disrespectful "other" stop	0	2	
Unprofessional "other" stop	0	2	
<b>N (minimum)</b>	<b>986</b>	<b>55</b>	

Note: \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ .

However, the research involved just two interviews with non-minority Spanish – too few to establish whether their experiences of stops were fundamentally different from ethnic minority experiences.

## Conclusions

Finally, we summarize our key findings and assess how relevant concepts of racism in police stopping from British and US debates fit with our evidence.

### Ethnic/racial profiling

Overall, the concept of ethnic or racial profiling is highly relevant to the experiences of the three countries. Though we did not carry out a study that was able to benchmark and quantify ethnic profiling – such as the model pioneered by Lamberth in the US (1998), MVA and Miller in Britain (2000) or Open Society Justice Initiative and Jurix (2006) in Russia – the evidence we collected through surveys and interviews was strongly suggestive that the phenomenon exists. It is reflected in the words of some police officers in the three countries, as well as of many members of Roma in all countries and of immigrants in Spain. Police officers who described ethnic profiling in Bulgaria and Hungary referred to Roma, whereas in Spain officers indicating ethnic profiling talked primarily about immigrants rather than Roma. Immigrants in Spain are probably subject to the most systematic

form of ethnic profiling identified by the research. Stopping people in part because they ‘look like foreigners’ appeared, in some cases, to be accepted operational policy within Spanish policing.

Bulgarian statistical data indicate that ethnic profiling is probably a feature of pedestrian stops rather than of the far more numerous vehicle stops. Statistical data in Hungary, though less detailed and reliable, suggest a similar pattern. Although it goes beyond the scope of the research, we might speculate that one reason vehicle stops seem less subject to ethnic profiling in these two countries relates to the challenge of distinguishing between Roma and non-Roma travelling in vehicles. This may be more difficult than distinguishing between white people and visible minorities (e.g. black people), that are found in the US and Britain, where concerns about stops of minorities in vehicles have been an important feature of debate about racism and ethnic profiling. Even in the latter contexts, some research highlights problems in accurately identifying the ethnicity of vehicle occupants (e.g. Waddington et al. 2004).

The concept of ethnic profiling is clearly valuable but it does not capture the range of racialized policing practices that we observed in the research. For this reason we require other concepts, elaborated below.

### **Disproportionality**

The British concern with disproportionality as a key indicator of institutionally racist policing was found to be more problematic in this research, at least in Bulgaria and Hungary where it could be measured. First of all, despite evidence of apparently racist forms of policing (including but not limited to ethnic profiling), aggregate numbers of stops show no clear ethnic differences. And, although disaggregation of stop statistics by stop type shows more evidence of ethnic disparity, some of this disparity seems to advantage Roma populations. Specifically, vehicle stops in Bulgaria seem to show higher rates among non-Roma (substantially attributable to higher rates of vehicle ownership) – even if pedestrian stops in Bulgaria and Hungary show consistent disparity against Roma.

One implication of this is that greater emphasis should be placed on examining disproportionality among subcategories of stops rather than aggregated stop statistics. This would make even more sense if, as we have speculated, problems identifying Roma travelling in vehicles make it difficult for police to profile vehicle occupants ethnically. If this is indeed the case, disproportionality among vehicle stops would have little to do with direct racism, arising instead from structural factors, though these might include forms of indirect racism. However, more research is needed to establish the extent to which this speculation is accurate.



Taking a step back from measures of aggregate stop rates and looking at other indicators of potential disadvantage – notably the character of stops experienced and measures of under-policing in Roma-only neighbourhoods – suggests that disproportionality may be misplaced as a leading indicator of institutional racism among police in the continental context of this research. Capturing profound differences in experience may usefully rely on other approaches as well.

### **Forms of institutional racism old and new**

Ethnic profiling constitutes a key element of institutional racism, and we have highlighted evidence for the existence of this across countries. Yet institutional racism is also concerned with disparate ethnic outcomes at the hands of the police arising from causes other than direct ethnic or racial stereotyping.

The research reveals two key dimensions of disadvantage not well articulated by existing British and US discussions about police stops but that nonetheless rank as forms of institutional racism. First, Roma in Bulgaria and Hungary more often have experiences of disrespectful treatment during stops than do majority populations (including being searched more often in Bulgaria, the only country where data were available to assess this). In Spain, we were unable to draw direct comparisons between ethnic groups, but there were many accounts of unpleasant stops among Roma and immigrant groups. Although this kind of observation is not unique within the international literature – and there is empirical evidence that minorities experience poorer treatment in police stops elsewhere, including more searches (e.g. Bureau of Justice Statistics 2005; Clancy et al. 2001) – it has been subject to less discussion and theorization than overall rates of stops or other contacts. Yet in Bulgaria and Hungary, where stop rates are even across ethnic groups (and take place in general on a more routine basis across the population), differences in the quality of stops should perhaps be more central to discussions. Thus, the key question would shift from ‘how often do stops happen?’ to ‘how often do unpleasant stops happen?’ according to ethnic group. Differences in treatment during stops probably require a different theorization from that found in much of the US and British discussion of racism in stops. That is, differences in rates of suspicion according to ethnicity (i.e. ethnic profiling) or deployments of police to areas where they are more exposed to ethnic minorities (possible institutional racism) cannot easily account for the less respectful treatment of minorities meted out once stops take place. Instead, theory probably needs to make reference to more conventional kinds of racist attitudes, which prompt a more disrespectful attitude to minorities simply because they are the ethnic ‘other’.

A second type of racialized policing we have found some evidence for, but which has seen very little attention within the existing literature on police stops, is the concept of ‘under-policing’. In Bulgaria, the only country where we had data that supported multivariate analysis, there is clear evidence of ‘under-stopping’ of vehicles in Roma-only neighbourhoods; that is, a rate of stopping lower than that for either Roma or ethnic Bulgarians living in other areas. Although pedestrian stops do not show the same disparity, their patterns are at least consistent with the possibility of fewer police patrols operating in Roma-only areas. Importantly, the findings could be a marker for a broader pattern of under-policing, in which these neighbourhoods receive fewer police resources, perhaps including support for Roma as victims of crimes. Although this is an issue that needs further research, it is nonetheless consistent with a picture of Roma-only communities as segregated ghettos that receive worse public services in a variety of spheres, including education, health and housing (European Roma Rights Center n.d.). In this sense, under-policing could amount to a conventional kind of racist discrimination in which minority communities are deemed less worthy of police services or are less able to command services owing to their marginalization.

Overall, the findings of this programme of work have broken new empirical and theoretical ground and the conclusions depart in some important ways from existing concepts and conventions arising from US and British debates about police stops. This is perhaps inevitable and is certainly healthy – reflecting as it does the development of fresh knowledge in countries that have so far been subject to limited social scientific research on police practice.

## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the Open Society Justice Initiative, New York, for directing, funding and supporting this work. In particular, we would like to thank Rachel Nield and Rebekah Delsol for their hard work leading the ethnic profiling programme that gave rise to this research project.

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## Erratum

### Racism and Police Stops

Joel Miller, Philip Gounev, Andras L. Pap et al.

European Journal of Criminology, April 2008; vol 5: pp 161 -191.

In the April 2008 issue of European Journal of Criminology, there were a number of errors introduced into page 169 and the biography for Joel Miller.

The paragraph on p169 should read as follows:

### National surveys

In Bulgaria and Hungary (though not Spain), national door-to-door public surveys were carried out that asked subjects about experiences of police stops, attitudes and socioeconomic and lifestyle characteristics. The Bulgaria survey was most elaborate, involving both a nationally representative sample ( $n = 1,202$ ) and a booster sample of Roma only ( $n = 534$ ). The response rate was 79 percent for the main survey and 94 percent for the booster sample. In Hungary, the national survey involved a single representative sample ( $n = 1,047$ ), with a response rate of 52 percent. The questionnaires used were different between countries both in terms of the structure and phrasing of questions, and in terms of the recall period (Bulgaria asked about police stops in the previous six months, Hungary in the previous year).

The biography for Joel Miller should read as follows:

### Joel Miller

Joel Miller is Research Director for the Center on Youth Justice within the Vera Institute of Justice. From 2001 to 2005, he also worked as a senior research associate at Vera, overseeing studies on juvenile delinquency recidivism, alternatives to placement, and police/community relations. Prior to returning to Vera in 2007, he spent two years as a visiting professor of criminology at the University of Malaga, Spain, where he conducted research on racial profiling, crime prevention, and victimization. Previously, he was the head researcher for police-community relations at the Home Office Research and Statistics Department in London. He holds a BA in human sciences from Oxford University, an MSc. in social research methods and a PhD. in sociology from Surrey University.  
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The Publisher regrets these errors and would like to offer a sincere apology to the authors of this article.