

Exploring the Controversy over Stop and Frisk in Philadelphia



What is Stop and Frisk?

A police officer who is suspicious of an individual detains the person and runs his/her hands over the suspect's outer garments to determine if the person is carrying a concealed weapon, drugs, or other illegal materials.

Facts:

- » In 2008, Mayor Nutter declared a “crime emergency” and implemented an aggressive stop and frisk policy in Philadelphia.
- » A police officer may legally stop and frisk a pedestrian as long as there is a "reasonable suspicion" of illegal activity. (More thorough searches require “probable cause,” which is a higher threshold.)
- » In Philadelphia, stop and frisk searches nearly doubled from 2007 to 2008 and overall crime dropped.

What do you think about this policy? What questions does it raise for you?

How could we use data to understand the impact of this policy better?

Philadelphia Stop-and-Frisk and Population Data

Table 1. Number of Pedestrian Stop-and-Frisk Occurrences by Race in Philadelphia

Race	2005	2009
Black	69,901	183,081
White	22,469	46,723
Hispanic	8,799	20,773
Asian	1,095	2,576
Other	54	170
Total	102,319	253,333

Source: Philadelphia Police Department

Table 2. Demographics of Philadelphia in 2010

Race	Percent of Population
Black	43
White	42
Hispanic	9
Asian	4
Other	2
Total	100

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Look at the two tables above. What do you notice about the data?

What questions do you have about the data?

Exploration

Stop and Frisk Simulation

Define what a *simulation* is in your own words.

Using the census data on Philadelphia, create a sample of colored tokens that represents the demographics of Philadelphia. (For example, because 43% of the population is black, 43% of the tokens should be the color that you choose to represent black citizens).

Race	Percent of Population	Number of Tokens Needed	Color of Tokens
Black	43		
White	42		
Hispanic	9		
Asian	4		
Other	2		
Total	100		

Source: 2010 Census Data

Simulation Procedure

Now you will simulate the stop and frisk situation in Philadelphia. Each time that you pick a token represents a police officer stopping a pedestrian.

1. Put the correct number of tokens into the bag to create a representative sample.
2. Randomly pick a token without looking in the bag. This represents one stop and frisk incident. Make a mark on the tally chart for the race that the token's color represents.
3. Put the token back into the bag. This represents the fact that the same person can be stopped more than once.
4. At the end of 10 picks, transfer the results to the Cumulative Table on the next page. The cumulative table is for the "running total" of all the picks you've made so far, up to the final 100. For example, after 30 picks, you should record the results for picks 1-30.
5. After you have recorded 100 picks, compute the fraction and percentage for each race after every 10 picks.

Stop and Frisk Tally Chart

Race	Number of Stop and Frisk Incidents Simulated									
	Picks 1-10	Picks 11-20	Picks 21-30	Picks 31-40	Picks 41-50	Picks 51-60	Picks 61-70	Picks 71-80	Picks 81-90	Picks 91-100
Black										
White										
Hispanic										
Asian										
Other										

Name _____ Date _____

Stop and Frisk Cumulative Table

# of Picks	Black			White			Hispanic			Asian			Other		
	#	Fraction	%	#	Fraction	%	#	Fraction	%	#	Fraction	%	#	Fraction	%
1-10															
1-20															
1-30															
1-40															
1-50															
1-60															
1-70															
1-80															
1-90															
1-100															

What trends do you notice in the data as you add more picks?

Use your simulation data from the last row on page 5 and the 2009 data on page 2 to complete the table below.

Race	Percent of Population	Percent of Sample Who Were Stopped and Frisked <i>in the Simulation</i>	Percent of the Population Who Were Stopped and Frisked <i>in 2009</i>
Black	43		
White	42		
Hispanic	9		
Asian	4		
Other	2		
Total	100		

What do you notice about the relationship between the percent of each race in the population and the percent of each race picked in the simulation?

What do you notice about the relationship between the percent of each race in the population and the percent of the population who were stopped and frisked in 2009?

Discussion

What did you notice about the percents of people who were stopped and frisked in your simulation and in real life?

How did the percents change as you picked more tokens in your simulation?

How can mathematics be used to demonstrate whether the stop and frisk policy is fair or unfair?

Racial profiling is the discriminatory practice by law enforcement officials of targeting individuals for suspicion of crime based on the individual's race, ethnicity, religion or national origin. Do you think that stop and frisk in Philadelphia involves racial profiling?

The chart below shows the number of Philadelphia pedestrians who were stopped by the police and the number of them who were arrested.

	2005	2009
Pedestrian Stops	102,319	253,333
Pedestrian Arrests	10,176	21,267

What do you notice? What questions does this raise?

Facts from the 2010 ACLU Lawsuit

- In November of 2010, the ACLU filed a federal lawsuit arguing that Philadelphia police illegally stop pedestrians based on race and question them with little or no justification.
- The ACLU report explained that most of the arrests were for "criminal conduct that was entirely independent from the supposed reason for the stop," usually for small, personal quantities of marijuana.
- Around 93% of arrests for possession of marijuana were of black or Hispanic individuals. Weapons were recovered in 1.5% of all pedestrian stops.
- Mahari Bailey, one of the plaintiffs (a person making an accusation in court) was a 27-year-old lawyer who had been stopped on four occasions in 18 months, but the only accusation brought against him was driving a car with tinted windows.

How does this information inform your thinking about stop and frisk?