

# Residential segregation and racially biased policing

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## **Abstract**

Tests for racial bias in policing based on hit-rates—the rates at which vehicle searches result in the seizure of physical evidence—are premised on the notion that if two racial groups differ in their propensity to commit crime, unbiased police will subject the high-crime group to more frequent traffic stops and vehicle searches, but those searches will result in the same hit rate for all racial groups. This notion requires that the cost of policing each group is the same. I argue (a) that police use both search and non-search inputs in producing deterrence, (b) that non-search activities undertaken to reduce crime for one group may spill over, affecting other groups as well, (c) that these externalities drive a wedge between the costs associated with policing different groups, and (d) that residential segregation may erode these externalities. I derive the conditions under which such externalities can be discerned under varying levels of segregation, and use traffic stop data from two states to test for the effects of segregation on hit rates. The results from one state are consistent with such externalities, calling the legitimacy of hit-rate tests into question. The results from the other state are ambiguous.