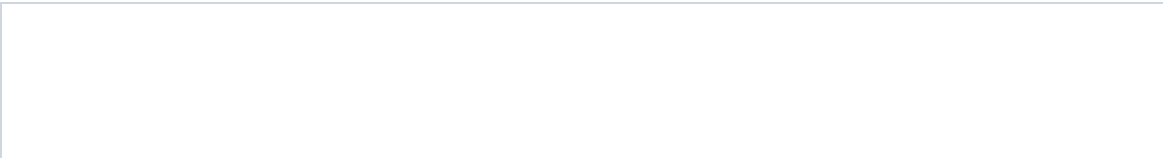


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EDITORIAL

Learning from race data

Mar 25, 2009 04:30 AM

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The argument for collecting race-based police statistics gained more allies last week when two arm's length federal organizations called for such data as a way to address racial profiling.

In a joint statement, the Canadian Human Rights Commission and the Canadian Race Relations Foundation urged police, border guards, and security agencies across the country to systematically track their interaction with the public – a process that would include collecting information on people's race.

Elsewhere, this is done routinely, including in many U.S. states and in Britain. But – with rare exceptions – police forces in Canada are unwilling to collect and analyze statistics that could shed light on racial profiling by some officers.

Police adamantly maintain that they do not discriminate according to race, but there is much anecdotal evidence, especially in the black community, to suggest profiling does indeed happen. It is impossible to know how much.

That's why a systematic collection of statistics is so important: It can alert police departments if they have a problem with racial profiling.

The federal human rights commission and the foundation, which is a Crown corporation dedicated to fighting racism, issued their joint statement after the authors of a study they commissioned recommended "more rigorous data collection to demonstrate whether or not profiling occurs."

Several methodologies exist to do exactly this sort of analysis. Indeed, as the joint statement notes: "The collection of such data is becoming the norm." Given that trend, Canada's police and security forces should take up the challenge and confront race-based statistics – sooner rather than later.

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