

4-23-1999

## Trends. A Profile of Racial Profiles

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### Recommended Citation

Editor (1999) "Trends. A Profile of Racial Profiles," *International Bulletin of Political Psychology*: Vol. 6 : Iss. 16 , Article 4.  
Available at: <https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp/vol6/iss16/4>

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## International Bulletin of Political Psychology

Title: Trends. A Profile of Racial Profiles

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Volume: 6

Issue: 16

Date: 1999-04-23

Keywords: Public Policy, Race, Racial Profiling

Developers and implementors of a profiling approach to prevent crime and to apprehend criminal perpetrators are being attacked for using "race" as a profile element. Although there are many legitimate problems and confusions with the very nature of the "race" construct, opponents of racial profiling discount such problems and seem to logically be against all profiling.

In the simplest sense, profiling merely denotes the identification of regularities that seem to be associated with a particular event. These regularities are then used to find an individual or individuals who may have engaged in that event or may be planning on such engagement.

Racial profilers are being criticized in two main ways. First, few, if any, profiles are 100% accurate. Instead, they miss individuals who should have been identified and falsely identify other individuals. Sometimes the argument appears to be that profilers have no business profiling until the profiles are 100% accurate--an argument that would preclude most of applied science. A more sophisticated argument is that there must be reliable and valid assessments of both sorts of profiling errors and that the results of these assessments must be politically acceptable. This last point means that policymakers should knowingly accept and be accountable for the implications of profiling error in all its legal, ethical, political, and moral aspects. The sophisticated argument is a legitimate criticism of profiling.

The second criticism is that "race" itself should never be employed as a profiling component. If the legitimate criticism above is resolved, then this second criticism should be moot. There should be nothing otherwise sacrosanct about "race" as opposed to any other human attribute. In fact, the same case could be made for any other human attribute. The logic of such a case, in turn, would lead to the abolition of any profiling for any purpose--an absurdity given that humans engage in their own profiling through actuarial and intuitive perspectives on a daily basis.

What seems to have happened is that the ugliness of racial politics in government and public policy on the one hand and of incompetent and corrupt profiling on the other has led to a legal threat to a tool that can be efficacious in crime prevention and adjudication. This seems to be the case in the United States where the Governor of New Jersey is confronted with a specious conflation of racial and racist profiling. Will she have the wherewithal to confront the issues? (See Brown, J. (1998). Helping the police with their inquiries. *Psychologist*, 11, 539-542; Critiquing critiques of profiling in aviation security screening programs: Why the ACLU has it wrong. (January 9, 1998). *IBPP*, 4(1); Homant, R.J., & Kennedy, D.B. (1998). Psychological aspects of crime scene profiling: Validity research. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 25, 319-343; Hopton, J. (1998). Risk assessment using psychological profiling techniques: An evaluation of possibilities. *British Journal of Social Work*, 28, 247-261; Profiling to screen non-immigrant visa applicants: The best and the worst of applied social science? (January 30, 1998). *IBPP*, 4(4); Racial profiling in New Jersey. (April 22, 1999). *The New York Times*, p. A30.) (Keywords: Public Policy, Race, Racial Profiling.)