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Racial Disparity on Holding Penalties in the NFL

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Racial Disparity on Holding Penalties in the NFL

I. Introduction

- Racial Disparities are known to run rampant throughout the United States. In matters ranging from incarceration, to housing, to employment, and even to sports. Sports leagues such as the MBL and NBA have been researched, finding racial disparities in calls from officials and in other areas such as fines imposed. This research focuses on the NFL to determine whether there is a racial disparity in calls made by NFL referees.
- Though there are many aspects of sport that could be studied, holding penalties provide an example that can be tracked throughout different seasons.
- The increasing awareness of racial disparity can be linked to the actions of athletes such as Colin Kaepernick and others who have made public statements in order to shed light on inequality.

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II. Methods

The collected data comes from the 2017 and 2018 NFL regular seasons, accessed through the NFL's "league pass" service.

- Offensive tackles were chosen to be the position of focus for this study; because they are normally in one-on-one matchups with their opponent , making it easier to code for variables and analyze information accurately.
- This study was done with a stepwise approach, with variables added one by one until a final model was created. All the log odds are exponentiated to become odds ratios for better interpretation.

Bivariate Analysis

Table 1: Race of Players in Study by Side of Ball (in percentages)

Race of Player	Side of Ball		
	Offense	Defense	Combined
Black	59.1	87.0	73.0
White	40.9	11.6	26.3
Other	0.0	1.4	0.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
(n)	(430)	(430)	(860)

Table 2: Holding Penalty by Race of Offensive Tackle (in percentages)

Holding Penalty	Race of Offensive Tackle	
	Black	White
Holding Penalty	51.2	48.3
No Holding Penalty	48.8	51.7
Total	100.0	100.0
(n)	(254)	(176)

$\chi 2 = .346$; df = 1; $p > .05$

III. Results

Racial disparity in calls was found in the following ways:

- The study's sample was made up of 73% black players, 26% white players, and approximately 1% players of another race.
- Out of 254 holding penalties, 51% were against Black players and 48% were against White players.
- No significant evidence was found to suggest that Black players were more likely than White players to be called for holding penalties.

IV. Conclusions

The bivariate logistical regression did not show any difference in holding penalty calls based on race.

Evidence did show that right tackles are less likely to be called for holding than left tackles.

Potential changes could occur with new data being studied, as data was only collected from two seasons.

In this study, only offensive tackles were examined. New information including all offensive lineman would be interesting to consider as it would increase sample size.

Other studies indicated racial differences in fines, suspensions, coach hirings, and fouls/penalties called in other professional sports leagues.