

## Socio-economic status cause a divide in red light cameras in Chicago

Red light camera tickets are one of the biggest sources of revenue in the City of Chicago. In almost every neighborhood, you can spot a camera sitting on the corner of an intersection except on the city's south side. There are 15 red light cameras on the south side whereas the north side has 57 cameras.

The Chicago Department of Transportation (CDOT) claims that the installation of red light cameras is pinnacle for the safety of city drivers, "CDOT is committed to improving safety on our streets, and the Red Light Camera Enforcement program has proven to be a critical part of that effort. It is effective in discouraging motorists from running red lights and causing crashes". The city's argument is invalid in two ways: One being that drivers actually cause more accidents by slamming on their brakes on yellow lights to avoid a ticket according to a study at Weatherhead School of Management at Case Western Reserve. The other being the obvious discrepancy of cameras in South Side neighborhoods that are primarily black or Hispanic.

Halsted, Ashland, South Pulaski, and State are all major streets that run through the south side, yet there are only ten lights with those streets combined. If CDOT truly believes the red light camera program ensures the safety of drivers, then there would be more of an effort to include lower-income neighborhoods in the picture.

On Irving Park Road you will see a red light camera on almost every block. Irving Park is a major road that runs through the city's north side, similar to Ashland. It is home to ten red light cameras alone, about every three blocks. North Pulaski Road has seven cameras that run through the northwest side. The two streets combined have more cameras than all of the south side.

Table of cameras in Chicago neighborhoods

**South Side Cameras**

<b>Neighborhood</b>	<b>Number of Cameras</b>	<b>Racial Demographics</b>	<b>Median Household Income</b>
Chatham	3	96.61%-Black	\$32,222
Englewood	2	94.98%-Black 2.61%-Hispanic	\$19,854
Auburn Gresham	1	96.86%-Black 1.50%-Hispanic	\$29,398
Beverly	1	55.75%-White 34.86%Black	\$90,766
Calumet Heights	1	2.24%-White 93.47%-Black 3.23%-Hispanic	\$49,923
Washington Heights	1	95.77%-Black	\$44,071
West Pullman	2	93.39%-Black 4.83%-Hispanic	\$33,898
Greater Grand Crossing	3	96.07%-Black	\$26,515
Avalon Park	1	97.4%-Black	\$41,531

**South West Side**

<b>Neighborhood</b>	<b>Number of Cameras</b>	<b>Racial Demographics</b>	<b>Median Household Income</b>
Garfield Ridge (Midway)	3	47.33%-White 46.62%-Hispanic	\$60,851
Archer Heights	1	76.20%-Hispanic 19.39%-White	\$43,394
West Elsdon	1	80.14%-Hispanic 16.86%-White	\$44,791
Gage Park	2	92.25%-Hispanic	\$38,852

## North Side

<b>Neighborhood</b>	<b>Number of Cameras</b>	<b>Racial Demographics</b>	<b>Median Household Income</b>
Portage Park	8	50.34% White 41.81%-Hispanic	\$57,031
Logan Square	8	43.61%-White 46.94%-Hispanic	\$59,216
Edison Park	1	87.32%-White	\$86,300
West Ridge	5	44.28%-White 17.55%-Hispanic	\$46,091
Wicker Park	7	14,543-White Collar	\$100,140
Irving Park	13	40.07%-White 46.64%-Hispanic	\$51,997
Jefferson Park	3	65.14%-White 22.81%-Hispanic	\$60,472
Edgewater	5	54.51%-White 16.25%-Hispanic	\$46,174
Lincoln Park	3	80.16%-White	\$94,087
Forest Glen	1	71.82%-White	\$101,559

Many of the neighborhoods on the south and southwest side are well below the poverty line compared to the north side. According to the Chicago Data Portal, Englewood's population is 46.6% below the poverty line while Wicker Park, a neighborhood in West Town, population is only 14.7% below the poverty line. Englewood has a total of two cameras and Wicker Park has seven. There are vast socioeconomic differences between the two areas. Wicker Park is known for attracting young, uppermiddle class, hipsters because of its gentrification in the 90s. Englewood on the other hand is littered with gun violence and poverty. The Chicago Department of Transportation would be able to make quick revenue off of more affluent people rather than

people who are just trying to make ends meet. That is why more red light cameras are stationed on the north side and not on major intersections on the south side.

Conduent State and Local Solutions, formerly named Xerox State and Local Solutions, manages and upkeepes the city's cameras. Ultimately, it is the city's decision on where to install the cameras. Conduent and the Chicago Department of Transportation were both contacted for comment on the socio-economic divide on cameras but declined to respond. The city has no plans to change this divide, "We don't have any plans to add red light cameras" said Michael Claffey, Director of Public Affairs for the Chicago Department of Transportation.

Regardless if CDOT ignores the fact that there are more cameras in the more affluent neighborhoods in Chicago, statistics show that the city favors making a profit instead of enforcing safety. Change can be made to the cameras if the city elects officials that genuinely care about all neighborhoods of the city, not the ones that make the give them revenue dollars. For decades, politicians have been worried about the bettering of downtown and the north side and ignore the dire needs to the south and west side. The installation of more red light cameras will overall better the safety of south side residents. Chicago will not consider improvements unless the voices of the residents are heard. The red light camera debacle has room for change if residents of lower income neighborhoods voice their opinions on safety.