

Austin V. Smith

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Education

2025 (expected)	PhD in Economics, University of Arizona
2021	MA in Economics, University of Arizona
2020	BA in Economics and Mathematics, Lewis & Clark College

Fields of Interest

Labor Economics, Economics of Crime, Public Economics

Awards and Honors

2024	Graduate Student Fellowship, National Institute of Justice
2024	Graduate Student Award, Southern Economic Association
2023	Best 3rd Year Paper, University of Arizona
2022	Steve Manos Prize for Best 2nd Year Paper, University of Arizona
2020	<i>summa cum laude</i> with Honors in Economics, Lewis & Clark College
2020	<i>Phi Beta Kappa</i> (Senior Year), Lewis & Clark College

Conference and Seminar Presentations

2024	Texas Economics of Crime Workshop, Workshop on the Economics of Crime for Junior Scholars, Southern Economic Association Annual Meeting (<i>scheduled</i>)
2023	APPAM Fall Conference (discussant)

Workshops

2023	Price Theory Summer Camp, <i>Becker Friedman Institute at University of Chicago</i>
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Teaching Experience

Sole Instructor of Record

2024	Economic Strategy for Business Decisions (online, asynchronous; 7-week Spring Course)
2022-2023	Economics of Sports (5-week Summer Course)

Teaching Assistant

2024	Economics of Crime
2023	Economics of Strategy
2022	Econometrics
2022	Economics of Sports
2021	Basic Economic Issues
2021	Public Sector Economics
2021	Microeconomic Analysis for Business Decisions
2020	Macroeconomic and Global Institutions and Policy
2020	Global and Financial Economics and Strategy

Working Papers

“Lead by Example: The Effect Supervisors on Police Behavior” (Job Market Paper)

Police agencies rely on chain of command to hold officers accountable in their job duties. Using the exogenously-timed rotation of officers within the Dallas Police Department, I document substantial heterogeneity in the enforcement preferences of first-line supervisors. Variation in supervision accounts for 3.4% of the total variation in monthly officer arrests. I find that supervisor preferences can affect arrests for both serious and low-level crimes, however preferences along each dimension are not systematically correlated. I show that, on the margin, low-level arrests induced by supervisors are more likely to be officer-initiated, are concentrated in drug-related crimes, and lead to a substantial increase in officer use of force. Supervisors who value low-level enforcement are more likely to patrol in the field and make their own low-level arrests, effectively leading by example. In contrast, supervisor-induced arrests for serious crimes arise exclusively from activity at 911 calls, where arrests for domestic violence increase significantly. I conclude by demonstrating that performance on the exams used to determine promotions are predictive of supervisor preferences. My findings illustrate that supervision is an important source of discretionary law enforcement practices.

“‘Who You Gonna Call?’ 911 Call Takers and Police Discretion”

Police make high-stakes decisions under multiple sources of uncertainty, often resulting in adverse outcomes that are disproportionately experienced by minority citizens. What source of information do police use to make their enforcement decisions and does it generate accurate decisions? I examine a common information source for police officers throughout the United States: risk assessments conducted by 911 call takers. Exploiting random variation in the automated call distribution system used by a large metropolitan 911 center, I show that police are 37.7% more likely to make arrests at calls that the call taker deems risky. I demonstrate that officer perceptions are a primary channel through which the effects operate. This results in lower quality police decisions: misdemeanor arrests made at calls that are on the margin of being classified as risky are 14.9 percentage points less likely to result in a conviction. In cases where the race of the involved civilians is the same as the responding officer or the responding officer has more job experience, call taker information has a negligible effect on arrests. The results suggest that the strength of an officer’s priors determines the extent to which officers rely on information transmitted by call takers.

Works in Progress

“Teamwork in Policing”

Programming Languages

R (Advanced), ~~La~~TeX(Proficient), Stata (Proficient)