Austin V. Smith

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Current Employment

2025-   Associate Data Scientist (Post-doc), School of Public Policy & Urban Affairs, Northeastern University

Education

2025   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

Working Papers

"The Boss in Blue: Supervisors and Police Behavior"

This paper studies the role of first-line police supervisors — sergeants — in the enforcement decisions of their officers. I leverage a unique institutional setting where officers switch sergeants frequently in order to estimate sergeant arrest effects, and I document substantial variation in these effects across sergeants. Moving an officer from a 10th percentile sergeant to one in the 90th percentile would increase monthly arrests by 42% relative to the mean. I provide evidence that sergeants induce arrests for serious and low-level crimes through distinct policing strategies. Sergeants increase serious arrests by incentivizing their officers to respond to more 911 calls, while they increase low-level arrests through discretionary drug enforcement. Sergeant-induced low-level arrests disproportionately affect Black civilians and increase officer use of force. Connecting these estimates to pre-promotion characteristics, I find that sergeants who scored the lowest on their promotional exams are over-represented among those who increase low-level arrests. My findings suggest that sergeant-focused policies may be particularly effective at reducing aggressive policing tactics without harming the enforcement of serious crimes.

"'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.

"Teamwork in Policing"

I estimate the effects of teamwork in 911 call responses. In order to circumvent the endogenous assignment of more officers to calls with greater unobserved severity, I leverage exogenous variation in the number of double-manned patrol vehicles across shifts. I find that police are more likely to use their enforcement powers when dispatched in teams: an additional officer being dispatched to a call increases the likelihood of an arrest being made by 24% relative to the mean. I interpret these findings as evidence that officer teams reduce the costs of enforcement. Indeed, in the rare case where officers experience suspect resistance, the presence of more officers is associated with a lower likelihood of an officer being sent to the hospital. The results indicate that policing strategies which maximize patrol area to increase deterrence come at the cost of lower incapacitation capabilities.

Teaching Experience

Sole Instructor of Record

2024	Economic Strategy for Business Decisions (online, asynchronous)
2022-2023	Economics of Sports

Teaching Assistant

2024	Economics of Crime
2024	Intermediate Microeconomics
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	Macroeonomic and Global Institutions and Policy
2020	Global and Financial Economics and Strategy

Grants, Awards, and Honors

2024	Graduate Research Fellowship, National Institute of Justice ($39, 499)
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	*summa cum laude* with Honors in Economics, Lewis & Clark College
2020	*Phi Beta Kappa* (Senior Year), Lewis & Clark College

Conference and Seminar Presentations

2025   ViCE, Providence College, Transatlantic Workshop on the Economics of Crime (*scheduled*)

2024   Texas Economics of Crime Workshop, Workshop on the Economics of Crime for Junior Scholars, Southern Economic Association Annual Meeting

2023   APPAM Fall Conference (discussant)

Workshops

2023   Price Theory Summer Camp, *Becker Friedman Institute at University of Chicago*

Programming Languages

R, LaTeX, Julia, Stata