U7514
Weeks 2 through 4: NYPD Subway Fare Evasion Enforcement
Policy Context and Data Overview

Research questions
- Assignment 3:
    - Which demographic groups experience the most enforcement?
    - Where is the NYPD making the most subway fare evasion arrests?
- Assignment 4:
    - How do differences across communities in poverty and crime help explain enforcement disparities?
    - Is there evidence of discriminatory enforcement by the NYPD?

Data for Good questions
- How should we think about coding race and ethnicity?
- What are some of the limitations of the data we're using?
- How does research design and data structure help us understand the nature of discriminatory NYPD enforcement? What does internal validity mean in this example?

Policy context
The MTA—which is largely under State control—has claimed that fare evasion ("jumping the turnstile") cost them more than 300 million in lost revenue in 2019. This was one of the reasons cited by then Governor Andrew Cuomo to justify the addition of 500 extra police officers to patrol the city's subway system.[1] However, more than one out of four low-income New Yorkers have said they are often unable to afford subway and bus fares. Out of desperation to get to work, school, or the doctor, those living paycheck to paycheck sometimes feel they have no choice but to risk evading the fare. The MTA, on the other hand, has historically viewed fare evasion as a choice that should be policed away, rather than a consequence of economic hardship and inadequate fare collection systems.

In response to suspected fare evasion (the criminal charge is "theft of services"), the New York Police Department can choose to either let the individual go with an informal warning, issue a summonses (a ticket with a $100 fine), or arrest the individual.[2] Around 90,000 people were stopped for fare evasion in 2016, including roughly 25,000 arrests and 65,000 summonses.[3] In 2016, an overwhelming 90 percent of arrested individuals were Black or Hispanic, and in Brooklyn young Black men aged 16-36 made up half of all fare evasion arrests, but represent only 13 percent of adults living below the federal poverty level.[4] This sort of "broken windows" policing of non-violent crimes of poverty has disproportionately impacted marginalized

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[1] This proposal was put on hold due to the pandemic, but has since been revived, with Mayor de Blasio announcing in May 2021 the addition of 250 extra police officers to be stationed in subways.
[2] MTA Police are also empowered to issue summonses, but to make arrests.
[3] Author's calculations based on publicly available NYPD fare evasion enforcement data.
[4] Stolper, Harold and Jones, Jeff. 2017. 'The Crime of Being Short $2.75: Policing Communities of Color at the Turnstile.' Community Service Society. October 2017.

communities of color, and can have both immediate and long-term consequences for arrested individuals (fare evasion is classified as a class A misdemeanor in NY, so convictions appear on individual criminal records). By 2018 the majority of subway fare evasion enforcement was in the form of summonses and not arrests; however, the $100 fine remains a major burden for lower income riders, let alone the psychological burden from these police encounters.

Data
The "enforcement data" includes anonymized client records from the only two public defender organizations operating in Brooklyn: Brooklyn Defender Services (BDS) and The Legal Aid Society (LAS). Records were obtained for all clients arrested for fare evasion in 2016. These files were provided by the respective organizations without any written documentation.

Additional data on neighborhoods demographics was obtained from the American Community Survey via IPUMS. Subway station ridership data was obtained from the MTA website, and data on criminal complaints reported by the NYPD during 2016 was obtained from NYC OpenData (include all valid felony, misdemeanor, and violation crimes).

Methods
Week 3/Assignment 3: we'll use the public defender data, along with MTA ridership data, to conduct a cross-sectional exploratory analysis to understand the demographics of arrested individuals, and how arrest "intensity" varies across subway stations. Much of the initial work will be pre-processing (cleaning) the data and validating our steps.

Weeks 4-6/Assignment 4: We'll explore how subway fare evasion enforcement intensity varies along with neighborhood race/ethnicity and income. In particular, we'll focus on economic need (measured by poverty rates in a subway station area) and police presence (proxied by criminal complaints in an area) as two major determinants of enforcement activity. We'll also think about how to structure the data and analysis to explore the nature of any enforcement disparities we observe across subway stations and their surrounding communities.

Why should we care?
- Should the city be allocating resources to increase police presence on subways and buses, or does this just serve to expand an infrastructure of penalizing poverty and systemically targeting NYers of color? How should state and city funding be prioritized to improve transit accessibility for all NYers?
- Understanding who is most affected and where can be an important step in understanding the nature of racial disparities in enforcement and possible policy solutions.
  - To the extent that racial disparities are explained by neighborhood poverty rates, for example, then policies that address transit affordability should be considered.
  - To the extent that racial disparities are explained by police presence, it may suggest a role for policies that target a lack of police transparency and accountability.
- This issue is especially relevant as the MTA renews their fare evasion crackdown efforts, and subway crime remains a salient issue for many riders.
- How does the data—and how we use it—help or hinder our understanding of the role of personal identity?