

Ticketing and Turnout: How Policing for Profit Shapes Democratic Participation

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Abstract

The American criminal legal system is an important site of political socialization: sociologists show how the alienating effect of criminalization pushes people away from public institutions, and political scientists have measured the effects of policing and incarceration on political participation. Despite this burgeoning literature, no research has directly investigated how police ticketing practices affect political participation. We use three approaches to answer this question: we leverage individual-level ticketing data from Hillsborough County, Florida between 2010 and 2020, a city-level analysis using Census of Governments data and the national voter file, and national survey data. In Hillsborough County, we estimate that being ticketed decreases an individual's likelihood of voting in federal elections by 1.7 percentage points, but depressive effects are smaller for Black residents. Nationally, we estimate that each 10 percent increase in city fines and fees collections between 2012 and 2017 was associated with a roughly 0.04 percentage point turnout decrease but was not associated with any change in Black turnout. The survey data show that Black people who report that they or a family member were recently stopped by police are more likely to vote than those who reported no such contact.

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