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Your Speeding Ticket is Paying for City Budgets. Scholars of Public Finance Reveal ‘Policing for Profit’ and How to Fix It.

When city governments spend more money than they take in, officials often search for ways to generate revenue. One increasingly common source of money is traffic tickets. And research shows police officers issue more traffic tickets when cities are financially in a deficit.

But police represent only one aspect of this revenue-generating system. Judges and their courts also use traffic citations to generate money for the cities that employ them.

As scholars of public finance, we study how cities raise money to pay for their operations. Our new research indicates that judges in cities facing red ink often use their positions to maximize revenue from traffic tickets. They can do this by adding financial penalties to unpaid tickets. Judges often use the extra penalties to encourage people to pay.

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FORTUNE

by BYSIAN MUGHAN, AKHEIL SINGLA AND THE CONVERSATION

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