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## Addicted to Fines.

***Small towns in much of the country are dangerously dependent on punitive fines and fees.***

Flashing police lights are a common sight all along Interstate 75 in rural south Georgia. On one recent afternoon in Turner County, sheriff's deputies pulled over a vehicle heading northbound and another just a few miles up on the opposite side of the interstate. In the small community of Norman Park, an officer was clocking cars near the edge of town. In Warwick to the north, a police cruiser waited in the middle of a five-lane throughway.

These places have one thing in common: They issue a lot of tickets, and they finance their governments by doing it. Like many other rural jurisdictions, towns in south Georgia have suffered decades of a slow economic decline that's left them without much of a tax base. But they see a large amount of through-traffic from semi-trucks and Florida-bound tourists. And they've grown reliant on ticketing them to meet their expenses. "Georgia is a classic example of a place where you have these inextricable ties between the police, the town and the court," says Lisa Foster, co-director of the Fines and Fees Justice Center. "Any city that's short on revenue is going to be tempted to use the judicial system."

This is by no means just a Georgia phenomenon. Throughout the country, smaller cities and towns generate major dollars from different types of fines, sometimes accounting for more than half of their revenues. Some places are known for being speed traps. Others prop up their budgets using traffic cameras, parking citations or code enforcement violations.

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