

# ABSTRACT

ESSAYS ON THE ECONOMIC ANALYSIS OF DISCRIMINATION, LAW  
ENFORCEMENT, AND SMOKING

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This dissertation examines issues related to the efficiency and effectiveness of government policies to provide public goods. In the first essay, I develop an empirical test for whether police officers discriminate on driver gender when enforcing traffic laws. The test is designed to only detect discrimination that is unrelated to providing safe conditions on the roads. The empirical method developed in the essay may be applicable in a number of other contexts where evaluators (such as police officers, judges, or mortgage lenders) may potentially discriminate when making decisions regarding subjects who belong to different demographic groups.

The second essay makes a theoretical argument showing that because police officers can detect many different crimes by making a traffic stop, the widespread practice of giving stopped traffic law violators a warning instead of a fine can be efficient. Warnings would at first seem to be inefficient because they lower the expected penalty from breaking the law, and thereby reduce deterrence for a given amount of public resources devoted to detecting and stopping violations. My argument therefore points out an efficiency rationale for providing individual government agents discretion in deciding which detected law breakers to penalize.

In the third and final essay, my co-author Daniel Eisenberg and I use the Vietnam draft lottery to test the commonly held presumption that smoking as a young person strongly

predicts smoking in later adulthood. This presumption, well documented by many observational studies, underlies many anti-smoking policies in the United States. Yet some of the persistence of smoking over time might be attributable to individual factors, such as tolerance for health risks, which are difficult to account for in observational data. Using variation in smoking induced by the draft lottery, we do not find a strong relationship between smoking in early and late adulthood, suggesting that anti-smoking policies directed at young people may not be effective in achieving the policy goal of reducing adult smoking rates.