

# Criminals on the Field: A Study of College Football\*

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## Abstract

Economists have found mixed evidence on what happens when the number of police increases. On the one hand, more law enforcers means a higher probability of detecting a crime, which is known as the monitoring effect. On the other hand, criminals incorporate the increase into their decision-making process and thus may commit fewer crimes, constituting the deterrence effect. This study analyzes the effects of an increase in the number of on-field college football officials, taking players as potential criminals and officials as law enforcers. Analyzing a novel play by play dataset from two seasons of college football, we report evidence of a monitoring effect being present in the overall dataset. This effect is mainly driven by offensive penalties which are called in the area of jurisdiction of the added official. Decomposition of the effect provides evidence of the presence of the deterrence effect in cases of penalties with severe punishment or those committed by teams with moderate to high ability, suggesting that teams are able to strategically adapt their behavior following the addition of an official.

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