



America's 3 Most Fee-Ridden Cities

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Fees, fines, and petty law enforcement: Little ticky-tack violations can pile up quickly and are enough to drive even the most civic-minded citizens crazy. But they can also create an undercurrent of hostility between citizens and the government officials who are supposed to serve them. Former *Reason* writer Radley Balko uncovered a pattern of [overzealous fee-collection](#) in the suburbs of St. Louis county for *The Washington Post* and speculated that the overbearing law enforcement helped create a pressure-cooker environment that finally exploded in the wake of the Michael Brown shooting.

"When you have towns like those in St. Louis county that get in some cases, 40 percent of their municipal revenue in fines and fees, they have chosen a very expensive way of taxing their population, one that creates maximum hassle and maximum hostility," says Walter Olson, senior fellow at the Cato Institute and publisher of the blog [Overlawyered](#).

Watch the video above for Reason TV compilation of America's 3 Most Fee-Ridden Cities, listed below:

1. Detroit, Michigan

In the wake of the largest municipal bankruptcy in history, Detroit launched a variety of revenue-generating schemes, such as raising the prices of parking meters in a downtown with a rapidly dwindling population and workforce. Unfortunately for the city, about half their meters are broken, making it one of the only cities to actually [lose money on parking enforcement](#). But what really grants Detroit this honor is "Operation Compliance," an initiative pushed by former mayor David Bing aimed at bringing all of Detroit's small businesses up to code through costly permitting. The initiative launched with the stated goal of [shutting down 20 businesses a week](#).

2. Ferguson, Missouri

Ferguson has stayed in the news for the massive protests over the police shooting of Michael Brown and for the militarized response of law enforcement to those protests. But tension between the citizens and the government run deep in Ferguson and the other nearby St. Louis suburbs. Citizens report of being constantly harassed by law enforcement over minor violations and then being forced to navigate through an overrun court system. The *Washington Post* reported that one courthouse in St. Louis County had issued five arrest warrants per citizen.

3. Bell, California

Residents of this tiny California town just south of Los Angeles rose up against the local government after learning that their city officials were robbing them with high property taxes and ridiculous parking fines and city fees in order to pay themselves exorbitant salaries. The ringleader was City Manager Robert Rizzo, who paid himself [\\$1.5 million in annual salary and benefits](#) in a town with a per capita household income of \$24,800. Rizzo is now rotting in federal prison alongside his accomplice, former Assistant City Manager Angela Spaccia, but the town is still on the hook for the \$137 million in debt left behind. Locals call it the ["Rizzo Tax."](#)

"Ideally, the local population would rise up and say, 'It's time to take back our town. Government is not just a revenue source. It should be an engine of justice.' Until that happens, we've got a much wider problem," says Olson.