

Title: Prosecutor Elections and Police Killings

Abstract

Prosecutors play an important role in holding police accountable by determining whether or not an officer has broken the law. At the same time, prosecutors and police officers work together closely, raising concern over conflicts of interest. Police officers might behave differently if they are unfamiliar with a new prosecutor. We study the effect of prosecutor turnover on the number of deaths caused by police officers. Using data from close district attorney elections in the United States, we find that the election of a new district attorney leads to a 0.2 fewer deaths caused by police officers in the year of the election and in the year following the election, a 30\% reduction. We observe no corresponding changes in crime, arrests, assaults on police officers, or deaths of police officers. The effects are significant regardless of the political party of the newly elected district attorney. We find suggestive evidence in favor of increased police accountability and uncertainty about the district attorney's type as mechanisms.