**Introduction**

The United States is the only country in the world where citizens have the ability to elect their prosecutors. However, there are a few states that do not have this procedure and instead have their prosecutors appointed by some governing body. All prosecutors are otherwise similar in that they can exercise discretion in the cases they investigate and prosecute. A review of the literature has shown a gap in research regarding public opinion and prosecutorial discretion. However, research on Judges, who are a parallel actor in the judicial system, shows that elected judges are more likely than appointed judges to exercise discretion in favor of the attitudes held by their constituents, especially on election years (Bandyopadhyay 2014, p.152).

This study explores the gap in literature by taking a closer look at how utilization of prosecutorial discretion changes after a publicly salient event (which we will call the catalyst) changes the priorities of the prosecutor in the eyes of the public.

**Background**

I chose to compare prosecutors from the states of Connecticut and Massachusetts. I specifically chose appointed States Attorney Gail P. Hardy of the Hartford Judicial District, Connecticut and elected District Attorney Rachael Rollins of Suffolk County, Massachusetts due to the difference in how they are selected for their office. Both jurisdictions are similar in population, economics, and demographics. To collect my data, I focused on the investigation and prosecution of police shootings before and after a specified “catalyst” event. I chose to use the death of Michael Brown, an unarmed, 18-year-old African American, who was shot and killed by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri. His death galvanized the public against police shootings in movements like Black Lives Matter.

Connecticut has much more comprehensive laws regarding police shootings than Massachusetts. In Connecticut, all deaths relating to police use-of-force must be investigated by a State’s Attorney outside of the jurisdiction of the incident. This prosecutor is chosen by the CT Attorney General. After investigating the incident, the State’s Attorney must then submit a report of their findings. If the investigation finds that the use of force by police was unjustified, then the case is prosecuted in court.

In Massachusetts, deaths deemed “unnatural” are supposed to be investigated by the local District Attorney. Other than this requirement, Massachusetts has not specific statutes guiding the investigation or prosecution of unjustified use of force by law enforcement.

**Research Question:**

Do the actions of elected and appointed prosecutors change after a catalyst event causes a shift in the opinions of their constituents?

**Research Design**

For each police shooting case I use a collection of news media databases and compilations from government and third-party sources. Each case includes data for variables including: the location of the injury, whether the subject was unarmed, non-threatening, and/or minority individuals, and what the sentence was, if any. After the death of Michael Brown, three police shooting cases in Connecticut and two in Suffolk County were followed.

**Hypotheses:**

H1: If there is a large amount of police shooting cases involving unarmed, non-threatening, and/or minority individuals, then the catalyst event is a valid influence on prosecutors.

H2: After the catalyst event, elected prosecutors will be more likely to conduct investigations into police shootings than appointed prosecutors.

H3: After the catalyst event, elected prosecutors will be more likely to conduct investigations into police shootings than appointed prosecutors.

H4: After the catalyst event, elected prosecutors will be more likely to conduct investigations into police shootings than appointed prosecutors.

H5: After the catalyst event, elected prosecutors will be more likely to conduct investigations into police shootings than appointed prosecutors.

H6: After the catalyst event, elected prosecutors will be more likely to conduct investigations into police shootings than appointed prosecutors.

**Results**

- Preliminary data collection found that Massachusetts had more police shooting cases than Connecticut both before and after the catalyst.
- Both places saw individuals identified as belonging to a minority as the victim more police shootings recorded.
- Of all cases recorded, only three cases led to an investigation finding the police’s use of force as unjustified.
- All three occurred before the catalyst event, one in the Hartford Judicial District and two in Suffolk County.
- Of the three “unjustified” cases only one case went to trial and another never saw a grand jury (internal discipline).
- That police officer in the trial was acquitted.
- Both jurisdictions saw a decrease in the time it took to resolve a case after the catalyst event.
- The most noticeable change was in Connecticut.

**Discussion**

The findings of this thesis only support the first of my six hypotheses. The extremely high proportion of minority shooting victims shows that there is evidence to back up moments related to the catalyst, such as Black Lives Matter. Only three cases total were found to be unjustified shootings. These cases were also all before the catalyst, meaning that there was a downward trend in unjustified shootings. This runs counter to my anticipated results, meaning that hypotheses two is unsupported.

There was also one only successful indirect and no convictions or sentences of which to speak of. Such a lack of prosecution was surprising and finds that hypotheses three, four, and five are unsupported by my findings.

After looking at time taken to resolve a case, I did see an increase in time spans for both prosecutors. However, it was the Hartford Judicial District that had the largest decrease in average time taken to resolve a case. This was contrary to my expectations, which means that hypothesis six is unsupported.

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