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An Exploration of the Nature and Disposition of Crimes Committed by Sheriffs and Sheriff's Deputies

Adam M. Watkins

Bowling Green State University, adammw@bgsu.edu

Chloe A. Wentzlof

Bowling Green State University, cawentz@bgsu.edu

Philip M. Stinson

Bowling Green State University, stinspm@bgsu.edu

John Liederbach

Bowling Green State University, jlieder@bgsu.edu

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Adam M. Watkins, Chloe A. Wentzlof, Philip M. Stinson & John Liederbach

Bowling Green State University

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ABSTRACT

We assess whether the nature and disposition of arrest cases involving sheriffs and sheriff's deputies differ from arrest cases involving municipal, county, state, or other law enforcement personnel. The initial sample consists of 13,214 criminal cases representing nonfederal sworn law enforcement officers arrested from 2005-2016. These 13,124 criminal arrest cases involved 10,901 officers. Among the criminal arrest cases, roughly 70% involved a municipal officer and 19% involved a sheriff or sheriff's deputy. The remaining criminal cases (< 12%) involved officers employed by a county, state, or other law enforcement agency. We first present descriptive findings that assess whether the nature (drug, alcohol, sex, violence, profit) and disposition (lost job or convicted) of the criminal arrest cases varies by type of officer. We then present multivariate (logistic regression) findings that control for select variables in the data.

METHOD

The data for this project were collected as part of a larger research project on police crime. The data were compiled from multiple news sources and court documents from the years 2005-2016. The news sources used for this project were primarily discovered through Google News™ search engine and Google Alerts™ email update service.

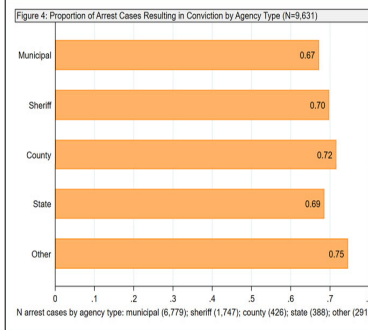
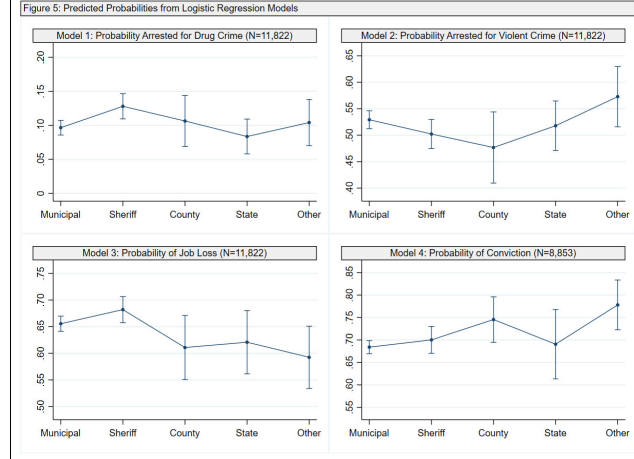
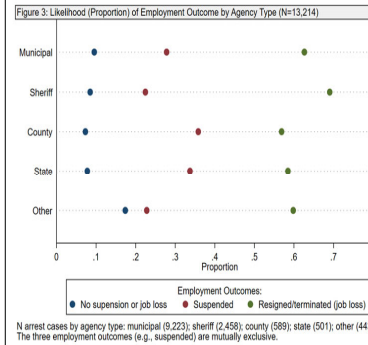
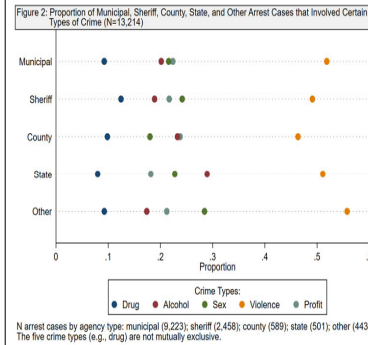


Table 1. Means/Proportions for Control Variables by Agency Type

Variable	Municipal	Sheriff	County	State	Other
Male	.94	.93	.93	.97	.93
Age	37.76	39.16	37.28	38.7	39.4
Supervisor	.18	.20	.19	.18	.16
On duty	.38	.40	.42	.35	.34
Full-time officers	2663.5	675.4	1329.2	2440.5	215.8
Nonmetro county	.13	.23	.08	.18	.10
Region:					
Northeast	.26	.07	.09	.33	.21
Midwest	.21	.17	.11	.19	.13
South	.39	.57	.70	.30	.52
West	.14	.20	.11	.18	.13
N	8,301	2,150	502	467	402

DESCRIPTIVE RESULTS

- Figure 1 displays the number of criminal arrest cases by year and agency type. Cases involving municipal police officers were the most common followed by cases involving sheriffs and sheriff's deputies.
- Figure 2 indicates that regardless of agency type, criminal arrest cases were most likely to involve a violence-related offense and least likely to involve a drug-related offense. This figure indicates modest differences in the types of offenses involving municipal officers and sheriffs and sheriff's deputies.
- Figure 3 indicates whether a criminal case involved an officer being suspended or losing their job (resigned or terminated). This figure reveals that criminal cases involving sheriffs and sheriff's deputies were most likely to result in job loss.
- Figure 4 indicates the proportion of criminal cases resulting in a conviction by agency type. 70% of criminal arrest cases involving sheriffs and sheriff's deputies resulted in a conviction, similar to the 67% of criminal arrest cases involving municipal officers.
- Table 1 indicates the control variables accounted for in our regression models. We also include year dummy variables in all models and the crime type variables when predicting job loss and conviction.

REGRESSION RESULTS

- Figure 5 displays the predicted probabilities, along with the 95% confidence interval of these estimates, from four logistic regression models in which drug-related offense, violence-related offense, job loss (resigned or terminated), and conviction served as the dependent variables.
- Missing data was handled via listwise deletion, reducing the total number of criminal arrest cases to 11,822 for three outcomes and to 8,853 for the conviction outcome.
- Drug and violence-related offenses were modeled because supplemental (descriptive) analyses indicated significant differences by agency type. This significant difference remained for drug-related offenses in that cases involving sheriffs and sheriff's deputies were more likely to involve a drug offense net of controls (Model 1). No significant agency type differences persisted for violence-related offenses (Model 2).
- Models 3 and 4 predict job loss and conviction. Model 3 indicates that arrests cases involving sheriffs and sheriff's deputies were more likely to result in job loss, although this relationship is not statistically significant.

DISCUSSION

- Our findings indicate more similarity than difference in the nature and disposition of criminal arrest cases involving sheriffs and sheriff deputies.
- However, criminal arrests cases involving such officers were more likely to be drug-related and, while not significant, more likely to result in job loss.
- We intend to examine these crime and job loss dynamics more closely with additional variables in the data.

