



SPRING 2024

PERCSPECTIVES ON RESEARCH



Maya Mikdash is a PERC Graduate Student Fellow and a PhD graduate in Economics at Texas A&M University. Mikdash received both her undergraduate and Master's degrees in Economics at American

University of Beirut. Her field of research is applied microeconomics, with a focus on labor, law, health and race research. Mikdash is the recipient of PERC's M.J. Grove Scholarship; the Publication Accelerator Grant through the Institute of Humane Studies; as well as the Gail Frey Monson Memorial Scholarship and the Charles S. Maurice Fellowship at Texas A&M University. Beginning in the fall of 2024, she will begin her faculty position at Louisiana State University.

What first drew you to study the field of economics?

When I was in high school, I was actually planning on being an engineer. I really wanted to do something that used math, but I didn't enjoy studying physics, which was required for engineering. After speaking with some older mentors, one suggested that I study economics. After looking into it, I really liked the flexibility that a degree in economics could provide - I could work in business, I could work in consulting, I could go to graduate school - this is what attracted me to the field.

After completing your Bachelor's and Master's degrees at University of Beirut, you came to Texas A&M for your PhD. During your time here, what made an impact on you while at Texas A&M?

I consider myself lucky. There's a lot of support that the faculty at Texas A&M provide to graduate students, whether in terms of funding to go to conferences or to purchase data for research

papers, or even mentoring, which is more important than any of these other things. I felt like the faculty actually cared about how their students are doing and whether their students are going to be successful or not. They really go out of their way to make sure that the students are following what's required from them.

One of your research topics is attorney quality and race effects and you have two papers in a series on this topic. What were your expectations prior to analyzing the data and did you have any surprising results?

The first one is the one I used for my job market paper, which was *The Role of Race in the Legal Representation of Low-Income Defendants*. The second one, *Shades of Justice: The Disparate Impact of Court-Appointed Attorney Quality*, shows how attorney quality impacts outcomes of black versus white individuals.

Going into both of these projects, my motivation was seeing how stark racial disparities are in the U.S. criminal justice system, with respect to incarceration rates and conviction rates. Relative to white individuals, more black individuals are convicted and also incarcerated for the same types of crime. Through these papers, I was trying to discover the source of this disparity.

One of the possible explanations for these disparities is discrimination within the justice system. Perhaps prosecutors are discriminatory against black individuals, for example, or the judges are discriminatory against black individuals. But it also could be caused by underlying differences across black and white people - they could be committing different types of crimes that could lead to different outcomes within the system.

The goal of my job market paper was to try to disentangle these two different mechanisms from each other. Now, one of the things that I wanted to do was to see if having an indigent defense attorney



of a different race impacts case outcomes. Indigent attorneys handle cases for low-income defendants, or those individuals who can't afford to hire their own attorney, which is the majority of defendants in the U.S. These are private attorneys who have their own private practice, and at the same time, they sign up through the court to represent low-income defendants. Here, I look at the effect of having an attorney of a different race and those case outcomes.

Prior research in this area usually finds that having someone of a different race impacts the outcomes negatively. For example, having a different race prosecutor has been shown to have more convictions on other race defendants. I expected going into this project that there's going to be a different race effect and that outcomes are going to be worse if someone is being represented by an attorney of a different race. To my surprise, I found that it's actually the opposite. I found that there is a different race effect, but a positive one. So, if you had an attorney that was a different race than you, you were more likely to have better outcomes. This was primarily driven by black defendants who were represented by white attorneys.

My explanation for this is that white attorneys put in more effort when they represent black defendants because they're worried about some sort of public backlash if it was found that they were not representing black defendants fairly. I came up with this hypothesis after I noticed these effects in the years following 2018, which is when Black Lives Matter became more popular.

What are you currently working on?

I am finishing a paper with my coauthor, Chandon Adger, that uses the same method as the attorney-quality paper to look at what happens when officers respond to calls in neighborhoods of a different race. This paper replicates another paper by Mark Hoekstra [former PERC professor] and Carlwill

Sloan [former PERC Graduate Student Fellow] using semi-randomized 911 calls to show how race impacts use of force, but for different cities other than Minneapolis. For these other cities, we found that there's no effect of dispatching white officers to black neighborhoods relative to black officers. This was still true when controlling for different levels of crime.

What advice would you give to current or a future crop of Economics PhDs?

Make sure to always communicate with others, especially your seniors and mentors. During our time as students, we come across things that we are not sure about, certain decisions that we don't know the implications of whether to do it or not. It's always useful to talk to someone who has gone through it because they know what the right thing to do is. To succeed in this field, you need to be talking to other people that can help you.

For me, Mark Hoekstra and Steve Puller [PERC's Professor in Free Enterprise] greatly impacted so many decisions that I made, especially this last year. Having someone with that bird's eye view, where if you have a specific question, they can answer it, but they can also help move you down a path to the end point, such as having a good paper or research topic. It's building on their experience. These are things that you don't actually learn in your coursework. In your first and second year [of your PhD program], you learn useful skills, but these are not the skills that are going to make you successful as a researcher if you want to continue in academia.

I learned many things, like how to work on different papers or projects at the same time, or to always have a backup plan because there's always the chance that a project is going to fail. I also learned how to network. The people you meet may be your journal referees. You have to look to the future.



DOES (ALL) POLICE VIOLENCE CAUSE DE-POLICING?

The death of George Floyd in May 2020 spurred nationwide protests and the media storm that ensued placed police accountability and reform front-and-center in the American news cycle. However, with over one thousand individuals killed by police each year in the United States, this event was not unique. Another widely publicized event was the death of Michael Brown in 2014, who was fatally shot by police in Ferguson, Missouri. These events serve as catalysts for a growing body of research documenting the negative effects of exposure to police violence. Here, PERC's M.J. Grove Scholar Maya Mikdash, along with coauthor Reem Zaiour, examine the causes behind increases in criminal activity following incidents of police violence.

A recent study showed an increase in gun violence in several cities following the George Floyd event, while another trend of increased crime was seen in Ferguson, Missouri after the Michael Brown incident. What are the contributing factors to increases in crime after incidents of police violence?

A possible mechanism is known as the "Ferguson Effect," which is characterized by the decrease in proactive policing after a decline in community trust in law enforcement. Increased public scrutiny, public protests decrying police actions, and a fear of reprisal for actions completed on the job result in police officers exerting lower levels of effort in deterring crime or taking action to respond to potential dangers. This mechanism is known as de-policing.

Current empirical evidence shows that police exercised de-policing following highly publicized deaths caused by police. However, not much is known about whether localized deaths by police, or events where publicity is limited in scope, also cause de-policing.

In this paper, using police-involved shootings in Minneapolis, the authors examine the effect of different types of police violence on police effort, measured by arrests and police-initiated calls for service. The data is sourced from emergency 911 calls for service, as well as publicly available arrests and shooting records where police were involved.

Over the years 2009 through 2021, 1.2 million total police-initiated calls for service were observed. Civilian-initiated calls for service were differentiated from police-initiated calls. During that period, 57 unique shootings where police were involved were also observed. Fifty-four percent of these shootings were nonfatal, 19 percent were fatal, while 26 percent had missing fatality information.

The yearly average for arrests hovered around 30,000 arrests, with 9.7% occurring directly in response to a police-initiated call for service. Corresponding arrest crimes were then categorized into one of three categories using FBI offense definitions: index level crimes, quality of life crimes, or a third category that excludes the other offenses listed in the other two categories. Index arrests include serious offenses, such as murder, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, grand larceny and motor vehicle theft. Quality of life, or lower level crime arrests, include offenses of liquor violations, disorderly conduct, loitering and drug possession. Lower-level crimes involve a high level of police discretion and are often police-initiated. The third category of crime arrests include offenses of arson, prostitution, forgery, fraud, embezzlement, etc.

Using a time regression discontinuity design from 60 days before and after police-involved shootings, findings show a 72.7 percent decrease in lower-level quality of life arrests, and a 61 percent decrease in non-index crime arrests in Minneapolis following George Floyd's death. Findings also show that this decrease in arrests was driven by a 69 percent decrease in police-initiated calls for service.

For police-involved shootings that were not highly publicized, a much smaller decrease of 2.7 percent in arrests and a 1.5 percent decrease in police calls following police-involved shootings was found.

These results suggest that the "Ferguson Effect," or the decrease in active policing after police-involved deaths, does exist but effects were much larger for events that were highly publicized. Although other factors may be at work, the level of public scrutiny after police-involved deaths has significant effects on de-policing.



PERCSPECTIVES ON RESEARCH

Founded in 1977 through the generosity of former students, corporations and foundations, the Private Enterprise Research Center pursues a dual mission of supporting academic research at Texas A&M University and developing market-oriented solutions to public policy problems.

PERCspectives on Research newsletters are not copyrighted and may be reproduced freely with appropriate attribution of source.

The opinions expressed in PERCspectives on Research are those of the authors and not necessarily those of Texas A&M University.

CONTACT

Private Enterprise Research Center
Texas A&M University
4231 TAMU
College Station, TX 77843-4231
(979) 845-7559
perc@tamu.edu

For archived newsletters, visit
perc.tamu.edu