

Racial Bias by Prosecutors: Evidence from Random Assignment

Authors : CarlyWill Sloan

Abstract : Racial disparities in criminal justice outcomes are well-documented. However, there is little evidence on the extent to which racial bias by prosecutors is responsible for these disparities. This paper tests for racial bias in conviction by prosecutors. To identify effects, this paper leverages as good as random variation in prosecutor race using detailed administrative data on the case assignment process and case outcomes in New York County, New York. This paper shows that the assignment of an opposite-race prosecutor leads to a 5 percentage point (~ 8 percent) increase in the likelihood of conviction for property crimes. There is no evidence of effects for other types of crimes. Additional results indicate decreased dismissals by opposite-race prosecutors likely drive my property crime estimates.

Keywords : criminal justice, discrimination, prosecutors, racial disparities

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