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‘Making a police officer: Investigating how the police changed with the introduction of the Civil Service in the US’

Public jobs became an increasingly common occupation in the late nineteenth century as American city governments and their functions grew in size. Gradually, cities and states adopted a civil service system and moved away from the old system of jobs as a reward for political support along ethnic lines. This paper builds a new dataset that matches police rosters from annual police reports for the largest US cities to Census and other historical records for individual officers. It then explores the familial and previous occupational background of each officer and examines whether there was a pattern of change in who became an officer as civil service systems were introduced in various different years. We will also focus on the propensity of immigrants from various groups to become officers during the years 1880 to 1930. This is part of a broader project which will track officers and their families over time to investigate the social and intergenerational mobility effects of obtaining a police jobs. This is especially interesting for the immigrant groups as public jobs may have been a prime vehicle for attaining social mobility and if we can see that this avenue was more available to some ethnic groups relative to others this also tells us something about the potential importance of the channel. We will also test the extent to which there was turnover in police forces before the civil service system was introduced, as new mayors were elected and parties changed, and assess the extent to which individuals were hurt by this turnover. What did officers do once the regime changed and they lost their jobs? And did they later regain the job? The police roster data set also reveals information on promotions and we can explore that aspect of the data as well in our wider analysis.