PRIVATE SECURITY AND PUBLIC POLICE

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ABSTRACT

Private security officers outnumber police by a wide margin, and the gap may be growing. As cities have claimed to defund the police, many have quietly expanded their use of private security, reallocating spending from the public to the private sector. It is difficult to know what to make of these trends, largely because we know so little about what private security looks like on the ground. On one prevalent view of the facts, a shift from public to private security would mean little more than a change of uniform, as the two labor markets are deeply intertwined. Indeed, academics, the media, popular culture, and the police themselves all tell us that private security is some amalgam of a police retirement community and a dumping ground for disgraced former cops. But if, instead, private officers differ systematically from the public police—and crossover between the sectors is limited—then substitution from policing to private security could drastically change who is providing security services.

We bring novel data to bear on these questions, presenting the largest empirical study of private security to date. We introduce an administrative dataset covering nearly 300,000 licensed private security officers in the State of Florida. By linking this dataset to similarly comprehensive information about public law enforcement, we have, for the first time, a nearly complete picture of the entire security labor market in one state. We report two principal findings. First, the public and private security markets are predominantly characterized by occupational segregation, not integration. The individuals who compose the private security sector differ markedly from the public police; they are, for example, significantly less likely to be white men. We also find that few private officers, roughly 2%, have previously worked in public policing, and even fewer will go on to policing in the future. Second, while former police make up a small share of all private security, roughly a quarter of cops who do cross over have been fired from a policing job. In fact, fired police officers are nearly as likely to land in private security as to find another policing job, and a full quarter end up in one or the other. We explore the implications of these findings, including intersections with police abolition and the future of policing, at the paper's close.

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INTRODUCTION

Private security officers in the United States outnumber the police by a wide margin. Many of these officers are armed. And while their function may strike the casual observer as worlds apart from law enforcement, private security officers perform many core police functions: they surveil, detain, interrogate, arrest, and use coercive force—including deadly force (Joh, 2004; Sklansky, 1999; see also Rushin, 2012). Moreover, just like the police, when private security officers exercise these powers, they sometimes abuse them, to tragic ends (e.g., Avanier, 2018; Bernstein, 2022; Chapman, 2022; Cull, 2022; Murphy et al., 2019; Paybarah, 2020; Rice, 2022; see also Boghosian, 2005). This is why many who have studied the comparison carefully have concluded that, "as it is practiced, public and private policing can come close to being functionally indistinguishable" (Stoughton, 2017b, p. 127; see also Joh, 2004; Scott & McPherson, 1971; Sklansky, 1999; Strom et al., 2010).

As cities have claimed to defund the police, moreover, they have quietly expanded their use of private security, reallocating security spending from the public to the private sector. Take Minneapolis, for example, whose city council shocked the nation by voting to defund its police department in the summer of 2020 (Herndon, 2020). Less well-known is that the council simultaneously authorized funds to pay private security guards to protect its members. Likewise, shortly after pulling the police out of public schools, the city replaced them with private "public safety support specialists" hired to break up fights and maintain order (Bernd, 2020; Fouriezos, 2020).

As early as fall 2020, one commentator observed that private security guards were "flooding" into major cities like New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Seattle, and Portland—including many of the same cities that had just voted to cut police funding (Bernd, 2020). Chicago spent over a million dollars during a single weekend that summer to hire private security to protect retail establishments. Portland laid out ten million on guards to protect city hall (Bernd, 2020; Saslow, 2023). According to an industry insider interviewed the same year, "The demand for armed and unarmed security guards across every market is as high as it has ever been" (Barbanel, 2020; see also Heydari, 2022).

Escalating fears of violent crime have also intensified demands for private security in the past few years. In addition to substantial government outlays to the private sector, constituents in many urban neighborhoods have banded together to pay for private security services themselves (Berger, 2021; Ellis, 2021; Liederman, 2022). Significantly, these private patrols have spread beyond their traditional office in gated communities and downtown business districts into residential enclaves like Chicago's Lincoln Park and Lakeview, provoking skepticism and concern from some politicians and residents (Barrett, 2022; Goudie et al., 2022; Myers, 2022; Nordquist, 2022; Schamisso,

2022).[1] "I think the responsibility of protecting the neighborhood," one Lincoln Park resident shared, "is the responsibility of the police, not private security" (Gray, 2022).

It is difficult to know what to make of these trends, largely because we know so little about what private security looks like on the ground. Indeed, roughly twenty-five years ago, David Sklansky (1999) declared private security "terra incognita" for "most lawyers and scholars": "wild, unmapped, and largely unexplored" (p. 1166). And while a handful of legal scholars have, in the intervening years, made important conceptual, legal, and theoretical contributions (Boghosian, 2005; Joh, 2004, 2005; Rushin, 2012; Sklansky, 1999, 2006; Stoughton, 2017b), when it comes to *empirical* understanding, Sklansky's characterization rings true today. Unlike public police agencies—which collect systematic data subject to public records laws—private security agencies and their officers exist mostly in the shadows, hidden from empirical scrutiny (Joh, 2004).

On one prevalent view of the facts—one based largely on impressionistic anecdotes—a shift from public to private security would mean little more than a change of uniform, as the two labor markets are heavily interconnected and the barriers between them, permeable. Academics (Boghosian, 2005; Marx, 1987; O'Toole, 1978; Shearing, 1992; Shearing & Stenning, 1981; see also Strom et al., 2010), the media (Fouriezos, 2020; Klare, 1975; Walter, 2015b; see also Murphy et al., 2019; Reinke, 2021), popular culture,[2] and the police themselves (Badgerland, 2002; Flovilla, 2014) all tell us that private security is some amalgam of a police retirement community and a dumping ground for disgraced former cops. As a result, two of the leading private security scholars instruct, "personnel in both sectors … are likely to share similar experiences, attitudes, and social backgrounds" (Shearing & Stenning, 1981, p. 224). Other voices, however, resist this narrative. They describe private security as a landing pad for "wannabe" cops, not former cops (BigMig, 2002; FzzTrooper, 2014). In truth, no one really knows.

The answer matters. If private security officers are just police officers in different garb, a shift from policing toward private security may amount to

[1] Private patrols in residential communities are not entirely new, but they have been uncommon in most areas of the country (Sklansky, 1999).

[2] Major (then, Lieutenant) Howard "Bunny" Colvin and Sergeant Thomas "Herc" Hauk, for example, move into private security and private investigation, respectively, after being forced to resign from the Baltimore Police Department in the HBO series *The Wire* (Simon et al., 2002-2008). And the notion that private security is a graveyard for fired and retired cops is the butt of many jokes in *The Shield*, an FX series set in the Los Angeles Police Department. Upon being terminated, for example, one officer asks a colleague, rhetorically, "What am I going to do, work security?" "Hey, we all end up there in 20 years anyway," comforts the second officer (Ryan et al., 2004).

little in practical terms. But if private security officers differ systematically from the public police—and crossover between the sectors is limited—then recent trends may take on a different valence. Substitution from policing to private security could drastically change who is providing security services. This might prompt us to ask, for example, whether the sorts of people who go into private security may be better-positioned, or worse, to furnish security services in the way contemporary communities desire.

We bring data to bear on these questions. We introduce a novel administrative dataset covering all licensed private security officers in the State of Florida, nearly 300,000 people. By linking this dataset to similarly comprehensive information about public law enforcement, we have, for the first time, a nearly complete picture of the entire security labor market in one state. In particular, we are able to compare and contrast police and private security personnel along several dimensions and to estimate the extent of crossover between the two fields.

We report two principal clusters of findings. The first reveals that the public and private security markets are predominantly characterized by occupational segregation, not integration. The individuals who compose the private security sector differ markedly from the public police. They are, to start, significantly less likely to be white men. Roughly 52% of private officers in Florida are Black, for example, far more than the 12% of police officers who so identify. Similarly, 31% of private officers are women, compared to only 16% of police.[3] And while 10% of private officers have either a felony or misdemeanor arrest on their record before they're hired, just 1% of police officers do. We find some evidence, too, that private security takes in workers who wanted to become police officers but couldn't: 16% of those who fail the state's Basic Abilities Test (BAT), a prerequisite to public police employment, land work in private security soon after—a surprisingly high number given the hundreds of other occupations they could choose.

Closely related, we also find that few private officers, roughly 2%, have previously worked in public policing. There are more former cops in private management roles, which may give them outsized influence over the sector relative to their raw numerical representation. Still, our results undermine the pervasive notion that former cops are common in private security. That is the exception, not the rule. Nor is the opposite notion—that private security is a stepping stone to public policing—supported by the data.[4] Only about 1% of

[3] There are historical echoes here—the Pinkerton National Detective Agency, for example, hired women from its inception, as they were useful as spies (Seiple, 2015).

[4] The idea that private security officers are not former cops, but rather future cops, is not as pervasive as its public-to-private counterpart, but it does appear in academic literature and within police communities (e.g., Shearing & Stenning, 1981).

private security officers in our data go on to become Florida cops within five years.

Our second cluster of findings shows that, while former police make up a small share of all private security, those officers who do cross over tend to have troubling work histories. Roughly a quarter of the former police officers working in private security have been fired from policing. In fact, fired cops are nearly as likely to wander into private security as into another policing job: 11% and 13% of fired officers land jobs in private security and policing, respectively. While movement from the public to the private sector is relatively rare, the fact that so many officers who make the journey had disciplinary problems on the public side is cause for concern—and possibly for tighter regulation. Prior research shows that when fired officers land subsequent *public* policing jobs, they're disciplined or fired again at significantly elevated rates (Grunwald & Rappaport, 2020).

The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows. Part I provides background on the nature of private security work and the regulatory environment nationally and in Florida, the site of our study.

Part II describes our data in detail. Our principal dataset, obtained through public records requests to the Florida Department of Agricultural and Consumer Services (FDACS), the regulatory agency that licenses private security officers, captures every individual who possessed a valid private security license in Florida at any time between January 2016 and July 2021. The vast majority of these individuals obtain licenses to gain employment at licensed security firms and are known as *contract* or *third-party* security officers.

While the FDACS dataset is comprehensive in many respects, there are several kinds of "private police" that are not included. First, working police officers who "moonlight" as security guards with their agency's permission do not need a private security license from FDACS (for background on moonlighting, see Stoughton, 2017a). (Officers who are directly employed by a private security firm as secondary employment, however, do.) Back-of-the-envelope estimates using moonlighting data obtained through public records requests from several Florida localities suggests that moonlighting likely comprises no more than 10% of private security employment hours statewide. Second, individuals directly employed by a business, rather than by a private security agency, can work as *unarmed* security guards without an FDACS license. These workers, often referred to as *proprietary* security officers, are

less common than contract officers but represent a meaningful share.[5] Finally, sworn police officers employed by non-governmental entities, such as private universities, are not licensed by FDACS.

Part III presents our results and Part IV discusses their implications, both practical and theoretical. Lower compensation and job security in the private sector raise real concerns about the possibility that women and people of color interested in security work are being funneled into less desirable jobs. This is bad for them and bad for the civilians who are deprived of their presence among the public police. Our findings should prompt reexamination of barriers to entering the police profession. And given how difficult it is to fire police officers, the realization that so many former cops working in private security have been fired creates a compelling case for reevaluating private security licensing and hiring practices. Finally, at the Article's close, we step back to consider what, if anything, private security may be able to teach us about the future of policing—and its alternatives—by drawing connections between private security and police abolition.

I. BACKGROUND

"Private security" is not a well-defined term in legal discourse. While an expansive conception of private security might encompass volunteer neighborhood watches, locksmiths, and garage attendants, our own use of the term is more circumscribed, tracking the basic regulatory structure of the industry, which also shapes our data. The officers we study are security guards and private investigators—"for-profit personnel," to borrow from Elizabeth Joh (2004), "whose primary objectives include the control of crime, the protection of property and life, and the maintenance of order" (pp. 55-56). Given the structure of our data, and the fact that our study focuses on movement of personnel between private security and policing, we exclude moonlighting police officers as well as sworn police officers with full arrest authority who happen to work for private employers like colleges or universities. We intend by this no conceptual intervention in the literature, but rather a pragmatic clarification of our object of study.[6]

A. Role of Private Security

We next describe, as best we can, what private officers do, focusing in particular on guards rather than investigators, as they represent the vast

[5] A leading report describes proprietary security as being performed by "any organization, or department of that organization, that provides full time security officers solely for itself," while contract security is "protective services provided by one company, specializing in such services, to another company on a paid, contractual basis" (Strom et al., 2010, p. 2-4).

[6] For thoughtful exploration of the definitional questions, see Joh (2005) and Stoughton (2017b).

majority of private officers in our data. With very little reliable data about their activities, we draw on a variety of sources for the following synopsis, including government reports, academic literature, and our own original analyses of job postings and an online discussion forum (Cunningham & Taylor, 1985; National Center for O*Net Development, 2023; Shearing & Stenning, 1981; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023b; Wakefield, 2003).[7] According to these sources, private security officers perform an enormous variety of functions, some of which bear a strong resemblance to policing.

To start, however, much of what security guards do is repetitive and mundane. Security guards monitor alarms and video surveillance systems, enforce access to restricted areas, patrol property (on foot or by car), and respond to occasional emergencies, both directly and by contacting the police or fire department. They also file reports about their observations. In addition, many security guards engage in "non-security tasks including rubbish disposal, snow-shoveling, flag-raising, general maintenance and administering first aid," which "fall to the security guard not because they are regarded as security tasks, but because the security guard can conveniently undertake them" (Shearing et al., 1980, p. 170). Many job postings emphasize the importance of excellent customer service. Of course, similar things might be said of the police, who spend most of their time on "community caretaking" and other tasks besides fighting serious crime (Friedman, 2021).

But not all of a security guard's tasks are so humdrum. According to the Occupational Information Network, roughly 80% of security guards are expected to "warn persons of rule infractions or violations, and apprehend or evict violators from premises, using force when necessary" (National Center for O*Net Development, 2023). Especially for security guards posted in public settings like stores and hospitals, discharging these duties can involve confrontation with members of the public. Private security officers in retail environments, for example, frequently detain and interrogate shoplifting subjects.

There is precious little information available on the frequency with which security guards employ physical force. Surely for many guards, the answer is rarely, if ever. "Always an observe and report kind of day," reported one guard in an online discussion forum; "Nothing physical at all" (Security Guard, 2022). Indeed, academic studies generally agree that guard work "seldom involves physical coercion" (Shearing & Stenning, 1981, p. 218; see

[7] In addition to the sources just cited, we collected from Google's job search platform a random sample of 25 job listings for private security officers that contained details on job responsibilities. We also used Indeed.com to gather, for three very large private security agencies, responses to a prompt that asked current employees to describe a typical day at their job.

also Cunningham & Taylor, 1985; Joh, 2004; Wakefield, 2003). This may be partly because many security guards are posted in manufacturing or industrial settings, reducing the frequency of interactions with the general public (Cunningham & Taylor, 1985).

There is another, more subtle reason that security guards may not use force very often (though we reiterate that data on this question is sorely lacking). As Elizabeth Joh (2004) puts the point, "Private police do not resort to the more coercive methods associated with the public police [not] because they *cannot*, but because they *need not*" (p. 88). "What might appear … to be *inaction* on the part of the private police," Joh (2004) explains, "is revealed, upon closer examination, as more subtle, 'apparently non-coercive and consensual' methods" of maintaining social control (pp. 81-82). Private security minimizes "[o]pportunities for disorder … by constant instruction, by physical barriers which severely limit the choice of action available and by the surveillance of omnipresent employees who detect and rectify the slightest deviation" (Shearing & Stenning, 1985, p. 344). Joh (2004) concludes: "[P]rivate police engage in an active and interventionist enterprise in which they assume policing responsibility within their physical jurisdiction that is, in the main, no less 'policing' than what most public police do" (p. 88).

And while security guards may not need to resort to force and coercion very often, the threat that they might do so is omnipresent. As David Sklansky (1999) observes, "[p]rivate security companies eager to appear unthreatening often stress that their personnel are limited to the search and arrest powers of ordinary citizens," but "[i]t is a mistake … to make too much of this limitation" (p. 1184). "Many private guards," Sklansky (1999) continues, "are 'deputized' or otherwise given full or partial police powers by state or local enactment, and most states have codified a 'merchant's privilege' that allows store investigators, and in some instances other categories of private security personnel, to conduct brief investigatory detentions that would be tortious or criminal if carried out by ordinary citizens" (p. 1184). Moreover, "the arrest powers of ordinary citizens in most states," it turns out, "are not strikingly different … from those of police officers" (Sklansky, 1999, p. 1184), and private security are "occupationally disposed to use powers that a citizen may rarely, if ever, invoke" (Joh, 2004, p. 64). Sure enough, if one looks for them, it is not difficult to find examples of private security guards detaining, interrogating, arresting, and using force against civilians in the course of their duties. "Private police," observes Stephen Rushin (2012), "engage in many of the same socially coercive behaviors as public law enforcement" (p. 170).

B. National Regulatory Landscape

Regulation of the private security sector varies significantly from state to state (for overviews, see Klein & Hemmens, 2018; Maahs & Hemmens, 1998;

Rushin, 2012; Strom et al., 2010). Some states have no regulatory oversight at all, some regulate armed guards only, and yet others oversee armed and unarmed guards alike. Only some states require contract security firms to be licensed, and only some require any training or continuing education. Indeed, the list of regulatory issues on which the states differ goes on and on.

That said, it is possible to extract some commonalities. First, there is exceedingly little regulation that seeks to govern the *behavior* of private security officers—what they do and how they do it. Due to the state action doctrine, the activities of private security officers are, with rare exceptions, unconstrained by constitutional law. And state licensing schemes do not typically regulate on-the-job activity. In the absence of constitutional and regulatory constraints, "[t]he main legal limitations on the private police today are tort and criminal law doctrines of assault, trespass, and false imprisonment" (Sklansky, 1999, p. 1183; see also Joh, 2004).

Second, beyond generally applicable tort and criminal law doctrines, state law focuses almost entirely on regulating the hiring process for private security officers (Rushin, 2012). State licensing requirements focus heavily on characteristics deemed to disqualify individuals from service in the security profession. Criminal history gets the lion's share of attention. Felony convictions disqualify applicants in many states. Misdemeanors can as well, particularly if they are said to demonstrate moral turpitude. This can include drug, weapon, theft, or fraud convictions. Evidence of mental incapacity, substance abuse, or dishonesty can also disqualify an applicant whether or not reflected in criminal records. Educational requirements, in contrast, are virtually nonexistent; only a few states require a high school diploma.

Third, pre-employment training requirements are minimal. Roughly half of states impose no training requirement on unarmed guards at all; only slightly fewer require no training even for armed guards. According to Stephen Rushin (2012), "[t]he average state statute mandates a little over eight hours of training before employment" (p. 191). Relatedly, very few states require applicants to pass any kind of licensing examination.

Finally, most states distinguish sharply between contract officers (who, again, work for a private security firm) and proprietary officers (who work directly for a business such as a retail establishment), requiring only the former to obtain licensure (Rushin, 2012). Although the precise breakdown of contract and proprietary officers is unknown, several national estimates put the share of proprietary officers at 40% (Cunningham & Taylor, 1985; Strom et al., 2010; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023b). This means that a substantial minority of the private security industry is entirely exempted from, and invisible to, the regulatory apparatus.

C. Florida Regulatory Landscape

State law grants the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) regulatory authority over security guard and private investigation services (Fla. Stat. § 493.6101). With some exceptions discussed below, individuals who wish to work in these fields must obtain from FDACS a license of the appropriate class. Private security agencies, too, must be properly licensed to operate in the state. As relevant for our purposes, individuals may apply for any of the following license types:

- A class D license, which authorizes work as a private security guard (Fla. Stat. § 493.6301)
- A class C license, which authorizes work as a private investigator (Fla. Stat. § 493.6201)
- A class G license, necessary for class D or C licensees to carry certain firearms when they work (Fla. Stat. § 493.6115)
- A class M license, for a managerial position at a private security agency (Fla. Stat. §§ 493.6201, .6301)

Consistent with the mainstream approach nationwide, Florida law imposes various eligibility requirements on applicants for private security licenses, which focus on criminal history, substance abuse, and serious mental illness (Fla. Stat. § 493.6106). Felony convictions bar licensure unless civil rights have been restored and ten years have elapsed; FDACS may also deny license applications based on certain misdemeanor convictions (Fla. Stat. § 493.6118). Applicants must attend 40 hours of training, which can be entirely online, and pass a two-hour exam administered by a licensed private security school (Fla. Admin. Code Ann. r. 5N-1.140).[8] Tuition for this course and examination ranges from $100 to $250 (Invictus Security, 2023; Florida Security & Firearms Training Inc., 2020a).

Class G licensure, to carry a firearm on the job, involves additional eligibility and training requirements. Class G licensees must be U.S. citizens or legal permanent residents and must complete 28 hours of firearms training—20 hours of classroom instruction (that may be completed online) and 8 hours of range instruction (Fla. Stat. § 493.6105, .6106). An annual, 4-hour recertification course is required as well (Fla. Stat. § 493.6113). Fees for

[8] The training curriculum is determined by FDACS and includes classes on the "Legal Aspects of Private Security," "Observation and Information Reporting," "Medical Emergencies," and "Terrorism." FDACS determines the time training schools must allot to each topic, as well as the number of questions pertaining to each topic that must appear on the final exam (Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, 2018a).

a class G license course total around $450 (Florida Security & Firearms Training Inc., 2020b).

Florida's training, testing, and (for class G licensees) continuing education requirements appear to place it toward the more stringent end of the national regulatory spectrum (Rushin, 2012). That said, screening and preparation for private security jobs in Florida is minimal compared to that required for sworn law enforcement officers. Eligible law enforcement candidates must clear the BAT, complete 770 hours of training at a police academy, and then pass a comprehensive certifying examination (Fla. Stat. §§ 943.13, .1397, .17; Fla. Admin. Code Ann. r. 11B-35.0011; Buck, 2016). Police officers, in other words, complete more than 10 times as much training as armed security guards, and pass multiple examinations, before they patrol their first beat.[9] Unsurprisingly, certified Florida law enforcement officers, as well as some federal and military officers, are exempt from Florida's training requirements when they apply for private security licenses (Fla. Stat. §§ 493.61035, .6105; Fla. Admin. Code. Ann. r. 5N-1.119, .140).

There is another respect in which Florida appears to regulate private security more stringently than most other states. As we explained, our understanding—informed by the prior literature—is that in most of the country, regulation of on-the-job behavior is left to the tort and criminal law systems, while regulatory agencies stick to licensing and training. FDACS, however, possesses the authority to discipline licensed agencies and individuals for a host of reasons related to on-the-job behavior (as well as off-the-job behavior) (Fla. Stat. § 493.6118; Fla. Admin. Code Ann. r. 5N-1.113, .114). For reasons we share below, we suspect that the majority of FDACS discipline actually relates to off-duty conduct—in particular, to licensees who are convicted of disqualifying crimes—but it is difficult to be sure. Disciplinary consequences for prohibited conduct can range from a reprimand all the way to license suspension or revocation.

Finally, there are two major exceptions to Florida's licensing requirements, which we previewed earlier. First, current law enforcement officers do not need private security licenses when moonlighting in private security—that is, "when performing off-duty security activities approved by [their] superiors" (Fla. Stat. § 493.6102). Law enforcement agencies commonly loan out their officers to private entities on a short-term basis, such as to provide security at a football game or concert. When employment is structured in this manner, it is not subject to FDACS' jurisdiction and officers are not required to hold the licenses they would otherwise need if they were to perform

[9] Other licensed occupations in Florida require even more training than law enforcement (Buck, 2016; Yan, 2016).

the same work through a contract security agency.[10] Our analysis of moonlighting data from several large agencies in Florida suggests that moonlighting comprises no more than 10% of private security employment-hours in Florida.[11]

Second, consistent with the typical approach among the states, most proprietary security officers in Florida do not need FDACS licensure (Fla. Stat. § 493.6102). As mentioned above, national estimates put the share of proprietary officers in the market at around 40%. For several reasons, however, we suspect that FDACS licenses well more than 60% of Florida's private security officers. First, while *unarmed* proprietary officers are exempt from FDACS licensing, *armed* proprietary officers are not. Armed proprietary officers are required to obtain a G license (Fla. Stat. § 493.6102). Second, when we took a random sample of 100 private security job listings in Florida, 87 advertised jobs at contract security firms that required class D licenses. This suggests that the 60% national figure may underestimate the relative prevalence of (regulated) contract security jobs in Florida, specifically. Finally, we have learned that many proprietary employers require security officers to be licensed even though Florida law does not. Indeed, of the 13 job listings that were not from contract security firms, over half required applicants to possess a class D license.

II. DATA

Our analyses rely primarily on two administrative datasets, both obtained through public records requests from the State of Florida. For information on private security, we use data from the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services ("the FDACS dataset"), which regulates the private security industry. For information on police, we use the Automated Training Management System ("ATMS" or "the FDLE dataset") from the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE). Subsidiary analyses incorporate data from several other sources, which we also describe briefly below. Details on data cleaning and processing are reported in Appendix B.

[10] If a current police officer were to work *directly* for a contract agency, she would need to obtain the appropriate FDACS licenses (though would be exempt from the training requirements in obtaining them).

[11] We obtained data on officer moonlighting from the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office, the Orlando Police Department (in Orange County), and the Orange County Sheriff's Office. We used these data—which include the number of officer-hours spent moonlighting—to compute county-level estimates of the total hours law enforcement officers spend moonlighting in Jacksonville and Orange Counties. We used FDACS employment data to estimate, again at the county level, the private officer-hours spent working in private security. We find that, under a number of different assumptions, moonlighting hours account for fewer than 10% of the total officer-hours spent working in private security and moonlighting together.

A. FDACS Private Security Data

The FDACS dataset contains license information for every contractual private security officer and every proprietary security officer licensed to carry a weapon in Florida between 2016 and 2021. As noted, the agency issues class D and C licenses that certify individuals to work in contract firms as security guards and private investigators, respectively. It also issues class G licenses to allow private officers to carry a firearm while on duty if authorized to do so by their employer. We augment this primary dataset with license information for every individual with a class M manager license between 2019 and 2023.

From the license information, we create a person-level dataset of all 299,297 FDACS license holders,[12] including 178,779 who are associated with at least one recorded employment stint.[13] This dataset includes name, birthdate, gender, race, citizenship, and a binary measure of military experience. Birthdates are missing for 21% of officers due, among other things, to public records exemptions for some public employees, including former and current law enforcement officers who request confidentiality (Fla. Stat. § 119.071). For that reason, we suspect that FDACS officers with missing birthdates are disproportionately former cops. The number of licenses and individuals in the datasets are described in Table 1.

[12] Because the FDACS dataset does not contain unique identifiers for individuals or employment stints, we employ our own entity-resolution process to derive these lists of individuals and employment stints, which is described in more detail in Appendix B.

[13] There are several reasons licensed individuals might never be recorded as having a job at an FDACS-licensed agency. First, proprietary security officers who carry firearms are required to maintain a G license and either a D or C license. Second, we also believe that many proprietary security employers require their officers to possess FDACS licenses despite no legal obligation to do so. These officers appear in the license dataset but not the employment data because proprietary security employers do not report employment information to FDACS. Third, it is possible that, in some cases, FDACS-regulated agencies fail to report employment of a private security officer to FDACS, resulting in the omission of that individual's employment from our dataset. Finally, some individuals may have obtained licenses but simply never worked in the private security industry.

Table 1. Number of Licenses, Individuals, and Employment Stints, by License Type[14]

License Type	Licenses	Individuals	Stints	Individuals with a Stint
D Guard	302,155	182,287	374,054	173,718
C Investigator	14,368	13,392	10,458	6,205
G Gun	65,775	33,689	43,525	27,347
M Manager	2,909	2,719	2,250	1,524
Total	382,298	299,297	384,448	178,779

The FDACS dataset also contains employment information on all recorded job stints for contractual private security positions (but, unlike the license data, not proprietary armed ones) associated with a license in the database. A small number of stints pre-date 2016 because they are associated with licenses that began before that year. We create an employment-level dataset that contains information on officer name, employer, and start and end date for 374,054 security job stints and 10,458 investigator stints.[15]

Unsurprisingly for an administrative dataset of this magnitude, the employment data are imperfect.[16] Firms are required by law to report hirings and separations to FDACS, and they can and do face discipline for failing to do so (Fla. Stat. § 493.6112; Fla. Admin. Code Ann. r. 5N-1.142).[17] Nevertheless, agencies sometimes fail to report a hiring, separation, or both. We find evidence that agencies fail to report separations in a substantial fraction of reported hirings because about 25% of stints that lack a termination date are associated with licenses that have already expired. Consequently, we generally do not compute results that depend on accurate reporting of stint-termination dates. For any result that does rely on stint-termination dates, we employ a reasonable imputation method and explain our choice when presenting the result.

[14] License and employment information for D, C, and G licenses covers licenses active between 2016 and 2021. Information for M licenses covers licenses active between 2019 and 2023. Numbers within a column may not sum to the total because some people and stints are associated with more than one license.

[15] 9,060 stints are associated with a gun license but no other license. Because we suspect that the vast majority are for security jobs rather than investigation, we assume that all stints that are associated only with a G license are armed guard positions.

[16] We are forced to drop a number of employment stints due to inconsistent or implausible data. We drop 1,380 stints that have multiple termination dates or a combination of missing and present termination dates. We also drop 12,000 stints for which both the hire and termination date are missing and an additional 14,000 stints for which the hire date is missing.

[17] For examples of private security firms being sanctioned for failure to timely report a hiring or separation see Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (2017, 2018b, 2018c).

Because a D or C licensee can sometimes serve as a manager without an M license, we occasionally use an FDACS agency-level file that identifies the manager at each agency as of April 2023 to find additional managers beyond those with M licenses.

Finally, the FDACS dataset also provides officer and date information on all 222 reported incidents in which an officer discharged a firearm on duty from 2016 to 2021. Although we do not know how often firms fail to report such incidents, one investigative journalist concluded that "Florida does the most thorough job of tracking, responding to and investigating security guard shootings," giving us some comfort that the data are reasonably comprehensive (Walter, 2015a).

B. FDLE Law Enforcement Data

We use four principal policing datasets from our extract of the FDLE's data, which is current as of April 2022. First, a person-level dataset contains information on, among many others, all candidates for public law enforcement in Florida, including individuals who have taken the BAT (even if they have never applied for or obtained employment). The data contain a unique person identification number, name, gender, race, and birth year. Altogether, there are 508,143 individuals in the FDLE person dataset.

Second, an employment-level dataset contains information on all 174,146 employment stints for all 121,004 sworn law enforcement officers at all police departments, sheriffs' offices, and other public law enforcement agencies in Florida going back to the mid-1980s. For each stint, we observe the individual employed, the employing agency, start and end dates, whether the job is part- or full-time, and the reason for separation. We define a separation as a "firing" if it occurred as a result of an agency policy violation or a "moral character" violation, the latter of which includes committing a felony or certain enumerated misdemeanors (regardless of criminal prosecution), using excessive force, or making false statements in a court proceeding (Fla. Admin. Code. Ann. r. 11B-27.0011). Ultimately, we observe 37,938 firings, representing 8.7% of all separations that are not transfers within the same agency.

Third, a complaint-level dataset contains moral character complaints made against officers. In total, we observe 6,889 complaints against 6,121 individuals.

Finally, our BAT-level dataset contains information on each instance, since its inception in 2001, in which an individual took the BAT, a 120-question, multiple-choice examination candidates must pass to enter a

certification training program to become a law enforcement officer. We observe 256,249 attempts, 85% of which resulted in a passing score.

C. Other Data Sources

We use several additional datasets for supplementary analyses. We use data collected by the *Tampa Bay Times* on lethal and non-lethal officer-involved shootings by public police officers (Tampa Bay Times, 2017); moonlighting data obtained via public records requests from the Orlando Police Department, Orange County Sheriff's Office, and Jacksonville Sheriff's Office; and Census information on the population of Florida at large (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). Finally, we employ name and party registration information from the Florida Voter Rolls published by the Florida Department of Elections ([Florida Voter Rolls], 2020) and aggregate criminal history data obtained through a public records request to the Florida Statistical Analysis Center, an arm of FDLE.

We also scraped individual-level disciplinary information from biannual summary reports published by FDACS from 2016 to 2021. We matched 82% of disciplinary actions since 2016 to individuals in the FDACS dataset. Unfortunately, as we explain below, statistical noise prevented us from using these data in any of our reported analyses.[18]

D. Data Linkage

To identify crossover between private security and police, we link our person-level datasets from FDACS and FDLE—a challenging task because we have only name and (typically) birth year information, which do not uniquely identify individuals. We begin by matching individuals in the private security data with individuals in the police data based on first and last name.[19] We then

[18] We matched 3,236 disciplinary actions to individuals. Of these, 55 resulted in reprimand, 1,011 in fines, 261 in license suspensions, and 1,815 in license revocations. We have no information on the underlying misconduct alleged in most disciplinary actions. In the subset of cases in which an officer files an appeal, however, we can observe the alleged misconduct through final orders from appeal. In a random sample of roughly 75 of these cases, we found that 54% of complaints arose due to an arrest or conviction of the security officer, 18% stemmed from job-related misconduct, and the rest related to the licensure process itself, such as failing to complete required firearms training. Half of the job-related misconduct involved officers leaving their post during work or failing to perform certain duties, while petty theft and careless use of a firearm each accounted for 7%. Although appeals may not be representative of all disciplinary actions, these figures suggest that most disciplined misconduct does not concern on-the-job acts.

[19] Requiring a perfect match on name is a relatively strict constraint, which increases our false negative rate—that is, the rate at which we fail to match records in one dataset with records for the same person in the other. However, fuzzy linkage techniques, which match

eliminate matches if years of birth are available in both datasets and differ or if middle names or initials are incompatible.[20]

After performing this pruning process, we link 41,598 individuals in the security dataset to at least one person in the policing dataset and 46,763 individuals in the policing dataset to at least one person in the security dataset. This pruning process results in 36,519 one-to-one matches, in which a single private security record matches with a single police record. Because we lack uniquely identifying information, an additional 5,079 private security records either match with multiple police records or with a single police record that itself matches to multiple private security records. And 10,244 police records either match to multiple private security records or a single private security record that matches to multiple police records.

Despite the fact that some records have multiple matches, we can still generate informative statistics about the overlap of individuals in private security and law enforcement by computing upper- and lower-bound estimates. When estimating the share of private security officers who have previously worked in law enforcement, for example, we compute both an upper-bound estimate that assumes private officers have previously worked in policing if they match to at least one individual in our FDLE dataset who has a prior policing job and a lower-bound estimate that assumes they have not previously worked in policing if they match to at least one individual in our FDLE dataset who does not have a prior policing job. For each of our analyses, we report the more conservative estimate, usually the upper bound. In a few instances—which we flag in footnotes—the more conservative estimate is the lower bound. Nearly always, the upper and lower bounds are substantively similar. For more details on our linking process, see Appendix B.

Because we lack uniquely identifying information, even our one-to-one matches may sometimes erroneously link records of different people together. To address this potential source of bias, we rerun many of our analyses using

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similar but non-identical names, produce an unacceptable number of false positives—or erroneous matches—because we have hundreds of thousands of people in the FDACS and FDLE datasets and relatively little identifying information. Still, we suspect that, under any reasonable estimate of the number of false negatives caused by perfect matching, our results remain substantively similar. Our matching process links 2% of private officers in FDACS with at least one record in FDLE. Suppose there are another 1% of private officers in FDACS that have a match in FDLE that we fail to capture because of perfect matching—an incredibly ungenerous assumption that assumes perfect matching causes us to miss a third of all matches. Even under these implausible conditions, our estimate of the share of security officers who are current or former cops increases by, at most, a single percentage point. We therefore do not believe the low rates of crossover we report between public and private security are an artifact of our record linkage strategy.

[20] For example, John A Doe may not match to John Brian Doe, but may match to John Doe or John Anthony Doe.

the subset of officers with rare names, for whom erroneous linkage is far less likely.[21] All but one of our conclusions are substantively similar; we note specific results as they arise, often below the line.

As noted, 21% of officers in the private security dataset are missing birthdate information, and these officers are disproportionately former cops. This data quality issue renders most of our crossover-related estimates conservative (relative to our conclusions about them) and, for several reasons—including the results of our rare-names analyses—we suspect has little effect on the rest.

III. RESULTS

We investigate the view that private security and police labor markets are tightly integrated, with individuals frequently moving across the private-public boundary. Our findings suggest that these markets are characterized far more by segregation than by interconnectivity. We then examine the extent to which private security serves as a landing pad for fired police and find significant evidence consistent with this phenomenon.

A. Occupational Segregation

Commentators often assume high levels of fluidity between the private and public security labor markets. Recall the assertion that "personnel in both sectors … are likely to share similar experiences, attitudes, and social backgrounds" (Shearing & Stenning, 1981, p. 224). Our data instead highlight remarkable levels of what economists and sociologists call occupational segregation: the "uneven distribution of racial, ethnic, and gender groups across occupations" (Weeden, 2019, p. 33). We begin by showing that the characteristics of officers differ substantially across the two fields. Private security officers are far more diverse than police along the lines of race, gender, and citizenship, and they also differ in their politics and criminal histories. Notably, the first-order diversity we find at the officer level translates into far more second-order diversity at the agency level than in policing. We then examine the rate at which officers move across the private-public boundary and find little evidence of crossover.

[21] We use the 2020 Florida Voter Rolls to measure the rareness of full names (excluding middle initials). We classify a name in FDACS or FDLE as rare if it appears no more than once in the Florida Voter Rolls. According to this rule, about 58% and 47% of FDACS and FDLE names, respectively, are rare. A random sample of three rare names included Mirza Khan, Antowan Lindsay, and Helen Kushnir. The three FDACS and FDLE names that appear most in the roll data are Maria Rodriguez, Jose Rodriguez, and Michael Smith, which appear 1,908, 1,843, and 1,635 times each.

1. Compositional Differences

On several key dimensions, private security and public police officers look strikingly different. Table 2 shows the demographic characteristics of all private security and police officers in our data who worked for at least one day between 2016 and 2021. As a baseline, we also provide the same information for the general public in Florida. Both security officers and police are roughly representative of the average age of Florida residents, but that is where the commonalities end. Turning first to race, Black officers make up just 12% of police—fewer than the 17% Black share of the residential population—but constitute 52% of all security officers.[22] Similarly, women represent only 16% of police but 31% of private security.[23] Notably, these demographic differences are smaller for armed guards—who are 43% Black and 16% female. Black women, specifically, constitute 19% of all security officers and 27% of unarmed guards (not reported in Table 2).

These demographic patterns in Florida are broadly consistent with—but more pronounced than—reported patterns at the national level. Nationally, 12% of police officers and 31% of private security officers are Black (compared to 12% and 52% in Florida) (Goodison, 2022; Strom et al., 2010).[24] Similarly, 12% of police officers and 22% of private security officers are women nationwide (compared to 16% and 31% in Florida) (Hyland & Davies, 2019; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). In short, Black and female

[22] The process by which we identify unique individuals in the private security data, described in Appendix B.A.2, may slightly overstate the race gap between public and private security if, for example, Black officers share their names with fewer people than white officers do (Fryer & Levitt, 2004).

[23] The process by which we identify unique individuals in the private security data, described in Appendix B.A.2, may slightly overstate the gender gap between public and private security if women are more likely than men to have licenses under multiple names due to more frequent name changes. We suspect name changes are a problem only if they occur after a licensee obtains one license but before they obtain another. Fortunately, however, 75% of men in FDACS obtain all their licenses within a single calendar year. Assuming the same pattern applies to women, name changes are unlikely to substantially affect our results.

[24] We note that the measures of race in FDACS and FDLE are not fully compatible: FDLE has four categories, including "Hispanic," while FDACS has three categories, excluding "Hispanic." This means that some people identified as Hispanic in FDLE would be assigned a different racial category if they were in FDACS. We suspect this problem has little impact on our estimate of the share of officers who are Black because very few Hispanic residents in Florida also identify as Black. According to the 2021 American Community Survey 1-year Census estimates, just 0.5% of all Florida residents are both Black and Hispanic while 14.6% are Black and non-Hispanic (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). With respect to our estimates of white officers, however, the measurement incompatibility implies that Table 2 *under*states the difference in the share of officers who are white in private and public policing. Indeed, the figures suggest that a smaller share of officers are white in private security than public policing. If some of the private officers who are identified as white in FDACS would be identified as Hispanic in FDLE, then, our estimates for white officers in FDACS would be too high.

representation in private security is stronger than in public policing, and even more so in Florida than nationwide.

Not only are the officers of private firms diverse, but their managers are, too. About 44% and 28% of the managers at private firms in Florida are Black and Hispanic, respectively. While we lack parallel information for Florida police chiefs, the national numbers are far lower, just 6% and 4%. And 11% of private managers are women, almost three times the national average for police chiefs (Goodison, 2022).

Private security and police officers also differ dramatically in terms of politics. By matching our data to Florida Voter Rolls, we were able to identify the party registration of 50% of private security officers and 58% of police in our sample.[25] Within this subsample, security officers are more Democratic than both police officers and Florida residents overall: roughly 49% of all private officers are registered Democrats (22% Republicans), considerably more than the 37% of Florida residents (35% Republican) and 20% of law enforcement officers (55% Republican) who so register. Notably, while still more Democratic than both law enforcement officers and Florida residents, armed guards are somewhat less Democratic than unarmed ones.

[25] We first obtained party registration information from the Florida Voter Rolls. We linked these data to the records of private security officers for whom we have name and birthdate information based on those two variables. For law enforcement officers, we did the same but used birth year instead of birthdate. In both cases, we discarded any matches in which one officer matched to more than one person in the voter rolls. Other/No Party refers to people who are registered with a party other than Democrat or Republican or who are in the voter rolls but are not registered with any political party.

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of Florida Residents, Private Security Officers, and Law Enforcement Officers[26]

	All of Florida	Private Security					Law Enforcement
		Any Position	Armed Guard	Unarmed Guard	Investigator	Security Manager	
	N= 20,901,636	N = 166,062	N = 30,838	N = 128,788	N = 6,288	N = 3,179	N = 60,147
Age	42	43	44	42	57	48	43
Race							
Asian	2.8%	1.0%	1.1%	1.0%	0.7%	1.0%	1.3%
Black	17%	52%	40%	57%	11%	44%	12%
White	77%	47%	59%	42%	88%	55%	65%
Hispanic	26%	22%	27%	21%	18%	28%	20%
Female	51%	31%	15%	35%	19%	11%	16%
Party Registration							
Democrat	37%	49%	38%	52%	27%	33%	20%
Republican	35%	22%	31%	20%	51%	40%	55%
Other/No Party	28%	29%	31%	28%	22%	27%	25%

To explore whether private security and police officers have different histories of criminal justice contact, we obtained from the Florida Statistical Analysis Center aggregate data on criminal history for random samples of 5,000 officers from each sector. Once again, the differences are striking. Almost 10% of private security officers (479/5,000) were arrested—for either a felony, a misdemeanor, or both—at some point in the six years preceding their employment. On the public side, the figure is less than 1% (43/5,000).[27] Likewise, far more private security officers have pre-employment convictions—

[26] FDACS does not record whether individuals are Hispanic. We impute Hispanic status of individuals in private security based on names using the rethnicity software package (Xie, 2022). Thus, for both FDACS and for the Florida population, Hispanic status is not mutually exclusive to membership in other racial groups, as it is for individuals in FDLE.

Because an individual can be a manager of a private firm without an M license, in this table we identify individuals as managers if they have at least one stint associated with an M license or if they are identified as an office manager as of March 2023 in a separate agency-level file.

Any discrepancies between this table and Table 1 are due to sampling. Table 1 describes the entirety of the FDACS data file, while Table 2 covers only those individuals in the FDACS data file with employment in 2016 or later.

[27] Of the 479 private security officers with arrest records, 253 were arrested for misdemeanors, 97 for felonies, and 129 for both misdemeanors and felonies. Among police, the figures are 34, 4, and 5, respectively.

almost 1% (41/5000) versus 0.1% (6/5000) for police—though convictions are rare for both groups.[28]

Finally, we have data on two additional characteristics of private officers for which we lack parallel data about police. Very few private officers are military veterans—fewer than 1%—compared to 9% of Florida residents. Citizenship information is reliably reported only for armed security officers, but roughly 10% of this group are non-citizens, and we expect that the number is higher for unarmed guards. Florida law bars non-citizens from public police work, in contrast (Fla. Stat. § 943.13).

Greater diversity among individual private security officers also translates into greater second-order diversity at the agency level, meaning that the composition of worker pools varies substantially across agencies (Gerken, 2005). Panel A of Figure 1 depicts a histogram of the Black share of officers in Florida law enforcement agencies with 50 or more job stints from 2016 to 2021. As anticipated by a deep literature on diversity in policing, Black officers make up only a small minority at the vast majority of agencies. In most, fewer than 10% of officers are Black, and in virtually none are more than 50% Black. As Panel B shows, the same does not hold true for private firms, where the spread is wide and there are a substantial number of agencies in which 50% to 75% of officers are Black. Notably, this second-order diversity is present not only in the largest agencies—the likes of Allied Universal and Securitas—but also in smaller agencies.[29]

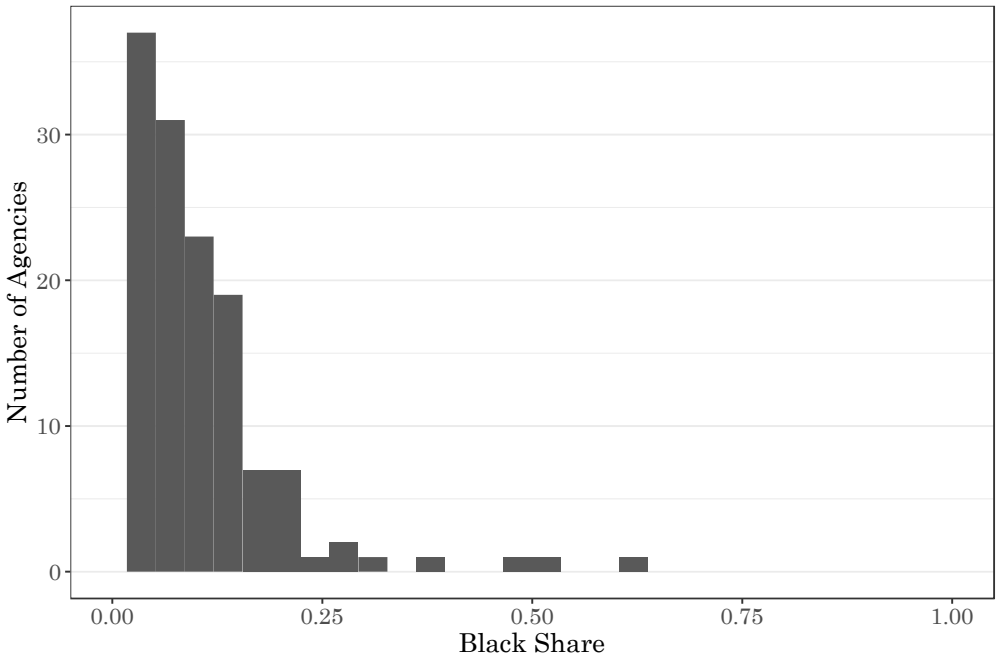
The same basic story holds for gender, although it's somewhat less extreme. As Figure 2 shows, the share of officers who are women ranges mostly from 15 to 20% within law enforcement agencies, while on the private side most agencies fall between 10 to 40%.

[28] Out of 41 private security officers with criminal convictions, 2 were convicted of felonies, 37 of misdemeanors, and 2 of both felonies and misdemeanors. For police, the breakdown was 0, 4, and 2, respectively. Convictions may be rare, relative to arrests, due in part to a Florida law that allows judges to impose probation without first adjudicating guilt. *See* FLA. STAT. § 948.01. Moreover, although convictions are rare, we emphasize that arrests are nonetheless significant events that have the capacity to disrupt arrestees' lives in myriad ways, including employment (Harmon, 2016; Jain, 2015; Rappaport, 2018).

[29] For example, among agencies with 26 to 50 stints from 2016 to 2021, the 25th, 50th, and 75th percentiles for Black share are around 15%, 35%, and 50%, respectively. The results are similar for agencies with 51 to 100 and 101 to 500 stints as well.

Figure 1. Histogram of Black Share of Agencies with 50 Job Stints or More on January 1, 2016

Panel A: Law Enforcement Agencies



Panel B: Private Security Agencies

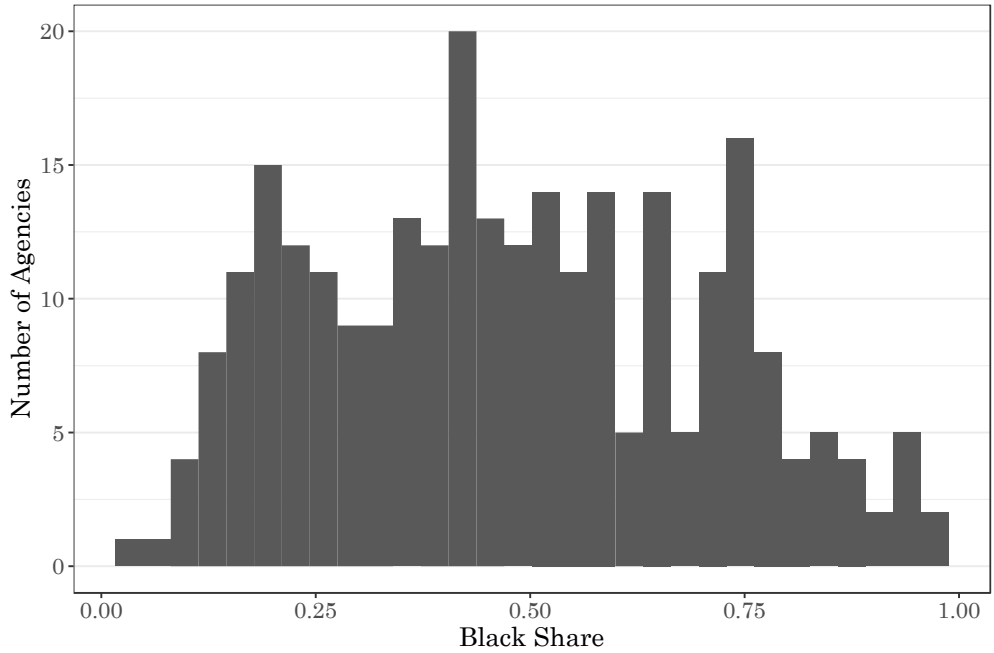
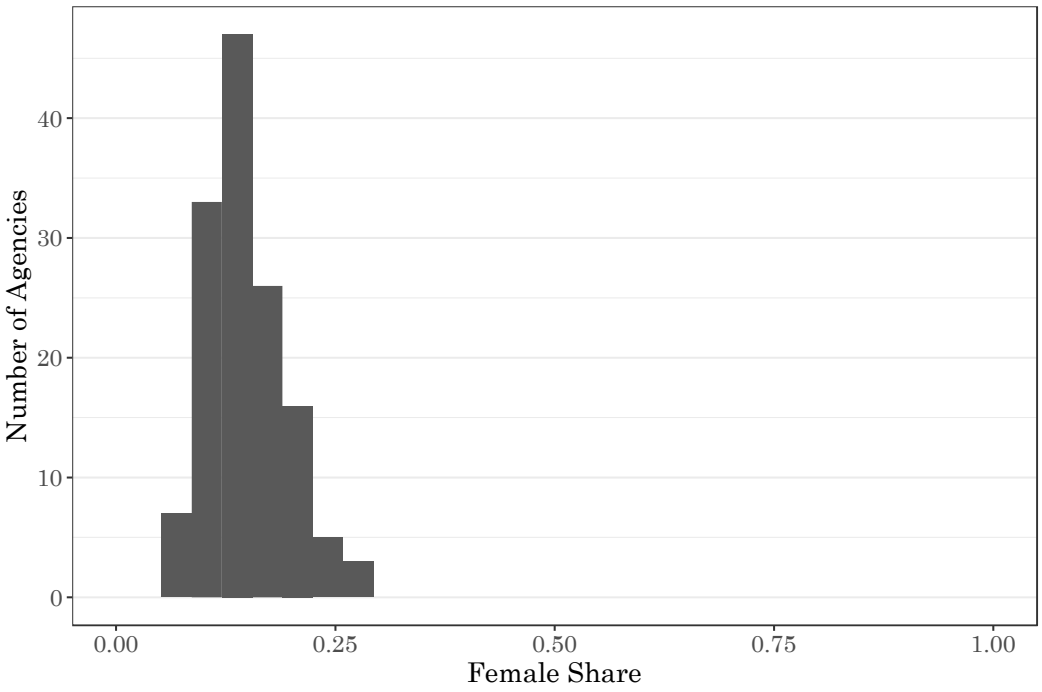
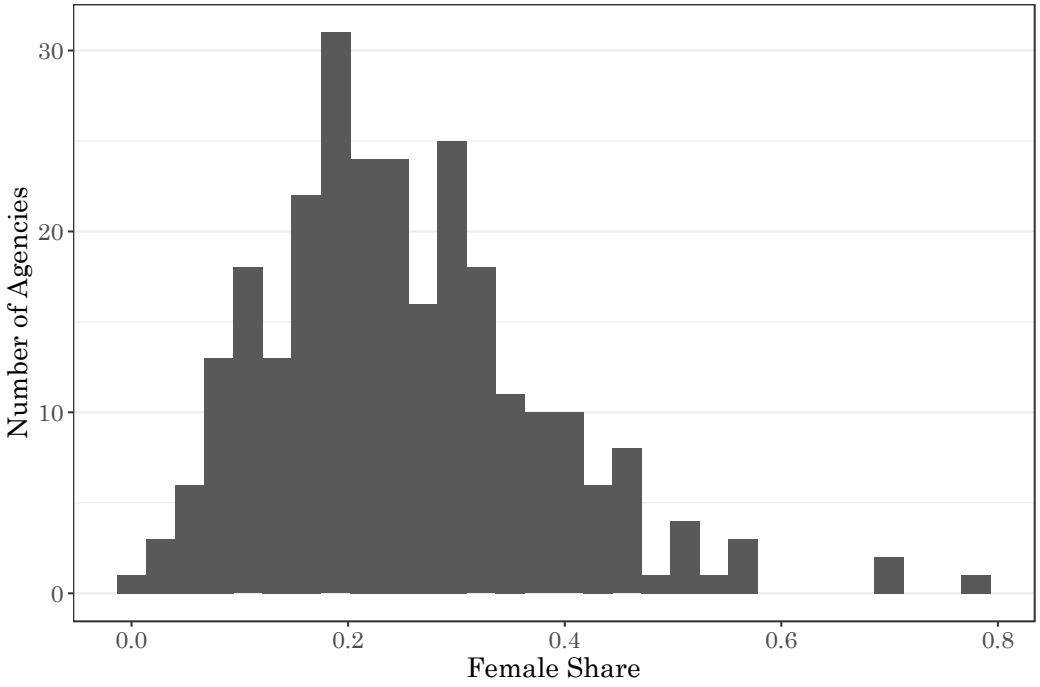


Figure 2. Histogram of Female Share of Agencies with 50 Job Stints or More on January 1, 2016

Panel A: Law Enforcement Agencies



Panel B: Private Security Agencies



2. Crossover

So far, we have shown that officers on either side of the private-public boundary differ starkly on observable characteristics. We next explore the extent to which these individuals cross that boundary. It is commonly said that many cops retire or transition to private security, but our data say otherwise. Note that we exclude moonlighting because it does not involve moving from employment in one sector to the other. As discussed above, we suspect moonlighting represents a small proportion of all private security work in Florida anyway.

a. From Police to Security Officer

Because our private security data are comprehensive only from January 2016 to July 2021, we cannot measure directly the total share of public officers who leave law enforcement and go into private security. To estimate this figure, however, we focus on the set of public officers who separated from an agency in 2015 and appear to have left law enforcement permanently. We measure how often these officers secure a private job within five years of separation. As the second column of Table 3 shows, roughly 2,000 Florida officers separated in 2015 and were not subsequently hired by another public agency. Among them, just 3.0% and 3.2% became unarmed and armed guards, respectively, within five years. (As a point of comparison, in the first column we depict the proportions of *all* officers employed in 2015 who later moved into various private security positions, which are far lower.)[30]

Of course, more of these officers may have moved into private security after the five-year period we observe in our data, but we suspect the number is very low. As we show in Figure A.1 in Appendix A, among the police officers who quit in 2015, the vast majority who became security guards within our observation window did so in the first few years; exceedingly few did so thereafter. Assuming this trend continues, this issue likely biases our crossover estimate downward only very slightly.

[30] We note that the lower crossover rate among all those employed in 2015 relative to those who separated in that year provides some reassurance about the quality of our matching, despite the absence of individually identifying information in the two datasets.

Table 3. Proportion of Law Enforcement Officers in 2015 Who Enter Private Security Within Five Years

Subsequent Employment	Employed during 2015	Permanently separated during 2015
	N = 44,419	N = 2,030
Any Position	1.9%	6.8%
Unarmed Guard	1.0%	3.0%
Armed Guard	0.8%	3.2%
Investigator	0.3%	1.2%

We note that because we match on name and year of birth—which do not uniquely identify individuals—we may incorrectly match the records of a police officer and a security guard who share the same name and year of birth, an error that would lead us to *overstate* the extent of crossover. To probe the extent of this bias, we re-estimate our crossover figures for the subset of officers who have rare names, as described above. Our crossover estimates for this group of officers are lower but substantively similar: 2.0% and 2.4% of police officers with rare names who left the field permanently in 2015 subsequently landed a job in unarmed and armed security, respectively, within five years.

That the flow of police officers into private security is so limited means that, at any given time, there are very few former cops among the stock of security officers. We estimate that, from 2016 to 2021, roughly 2% of private security officers in Florida were previously police, including fewer than 1% of unarmed private guards and around 3.5% of armed guards.[31] Former cops appear to make up a miniscule fraction of all private officers, whether they're licensed to carry or not.

As noted, our employment data cover only contract security and thus exclude the minority of security jobs at proprietary firms. We do not believe, however, that proprietary work would dramatically change our estimate of the proportion of private guards who were previously cops. Although FDACS does not collect employment data on proprietary security, it does require everyone who works as an *armed* proprietary guard (including former cops) to obtain a G license. We can therefore identify former cops who hold G licenses even if they do not appear in FDACS' employment data. Even if we rely on assumptions that would dramatically overstate the proportion of all armed guards—both contract and proprietary—who are former cops, our estimate remains small. For example, if we assume *every* former cop with a G license worked in proprietary armed security and we *also* assume *every* non-former cop with a G license did not, the total share of armed guards who are former

[31] Restricting to officers with rare names, these figures are 1.1%, 0.6% and 2.7%, respectively.

cops is no more than 10%. Bear in mind that the true number is likely far smaller because many former cops likely obtain G licenses without actually working in proprietary armed security and, similarly, many non-former cops with a G license likely do work in that field. While we cannot repeat this exercise for unarmed private guards—because *unarmed* proprietary guards need no license from FDACS—the proportion of unarmed proprietary guards who are former cops is almost certainly lower than the proportion of armed guards, as is the case for contract officers.

Although few former police officers work in private security, those who do may have an outsized influence in the profession, contributing to the commonly held belief that private security is crawling with former cops. We use jobs in private security management as a rough proxy for influence.[32] While we do not consistently observe the timing of management positions, 8.5% of private managers are matched to a law enforcement employment stint in the FDLE data, suggesting that they were at some point a law enforcement officer. We note, however, that when we subset on individuals with rare names, the proportion falls to 4.1%.

b. From Private Security to Police

What of movement in the reverse direction? How often do private security officers take jobs in policing? Once again, we cannot measure the total share of private officers who become police later in their careers. Similar to our previous analysis, however, we can estimate how often private officers employed in 2016 took a job in policing by the end of our observation window, July 2021.[33] Private officers move into police work even less frequently than police move into private security. Indeed, we find that 1.4% of private security officers working in 2016 were employed in a police agency by 2021 and 1.2% of

[32] A manager is "any person who directs the activities of licensed security officers at any agency or branch office" (Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, 2019, p. 2). We note that we also have information on the principal corporate officers of each licensed private security firm in Florida. We do not, however, have name information for the subset of principals who are not licensed security officers—potentially over half of all principals—and for a small fraction of licensed security officers. Therefore, we cannot observe whether these individuals have previously worked in policing. Among principals who are licensed and for whom we do observe name information, roughly 14% are former cops. We place little weight on this statistic because former cops are likely heavily overrepresented among licensed principals relative to unlicensed ones.

[33] To examine movement from private security to policing, we focus on 2016, rather than 2015, because our private security data are comprehensive starting only in 2016. We also do not impose five-year bounds because the separation dates in the private security dataset are more often subject to error than in the public police data.

security officers who quit a job in 2016 were employed in a police agency by that time.[34]

Unlike in the previous subsection, because we have data on private security only from 2016 to 2021, we cannot measure the proportion of police who are former security officers.

3. Private Security as a Second Choice

Are the high levels of occupational segregation we observe primarily driven by workers self-selecting into their respective occupations or by the market sorting them?[35] A complete answer to this question requires more information than is available to us, but a few data points suggest market sorting is important.

In our review of online forums, we found anecdotal evidence that many guards turn to private security only when they can't become cops—in part because policing has higher compensation, job security, and promotional opportunities. According to one poster, "Security guards are in my experience people that always wanted to be a cop and never could cut it or meet the requirements" (BigMig, 2002).

While we cannot identify every private security officer who would become a cop if they could, we can observe the subset of this population who took the BAT—one of the first requirements for law enforcement certification—and failed. The first column of Table 4 shows that among those who took and failed the BAT in 2015, 15% got a private security job within five years—a huge number given that they could have chosen from hundreds of other occupations.[36] Moreover, note that the high correlation between BAT failure and private security is not merely driven by the fact that *all* those who take the test are attracted to private security. Indeed, those who fail are over twice as likely as those who pass to become guards (presumably because many of those who pass find policing jobs).

[34] Among individuals with rare names, these figures are 0.8% and 0.8%, respectively. Because they are more conservative, we report upper-bound estimates for individuals in the FDACS data who match with multiple people in the FDLE data. For example, if a private security officer links to multiple people in FDLE, we assume that person had a subsequent policing job if any of the multiple matches in FDLE had a subsequent policing job. The lower-bound results are substantively similar.

[35] The two effects may be related, of course—self-selection could arise in response to past or anticipated market-side selection.

[36] This figure is also 15% among individuals with rare names.

Table 4. Proportion of People Who Pass or Fail the BAT in 2015 and Enter Private Security or Law Enforcement Within Five Years[37]

Subsequent Employment	All 2015 BAT participants		All 2015 BAT participants with no policing job after	
	Failed BAT N = 821	Passed BAT N = 9,805	Failed BAT N = 793	Passed BAT N = 6,885
Any Private Security	15%	6.5%	15%	7.0%
Unarmed Guard	8.2%	3.4%	8.3%	3.7%
Armed Guard	6.6%	3.0%	6.4%	3.1%
Investigator	0.4%	0.1%	0.4%	0.2%
Law Enforcement	3.4%	30%		

A second (and noisier) proxy for job-seekers who strike out on the policing market is individuals who pass the BAT but have no police employment thereafter. The final column of Table 4 shows that, among this group in 2015, 7.0% landed jobs in private security within five years.[38] Taken together, these results provide support for the hypothesis that the high levels of occupational segregation we observe are not driven entirely by worker self-selection.

B. Wandering into Private Security

While the volume of crossover from public to private security is low, those officers who make the journey tend to have troubling work histories. Prior work has found that a substantial proportion of fired public officers in Florida wandered into jobs at other law enforcement agencies within a few years (Grunwald & Rappaport, 2020). Table 5 shows that fired police move into private security at a similar rate. The second column reports that 13% of police officers who were fired in 2015 for a "moral character violation" or a violation of agency policy landed another job in policing within five years. And 11% moved into private security, with 3.1% becoming unarmed guards and 6.5% becoming armed ones.[39] All told, 24% of fired cops end up either in policing or private security. The crossover rates are significantly lower for those officers who separated *voluntarily* in 2015: as reflected in the third column, just 2.2%

[37] Because they are more conservative, this table reports lower-bound estimates for individuals in the FDLE data who match with multiple people in the FDACS data. For example, if a person who fails the BAT links to multiple people in FDACS, we assume that person landed a D license private security job only if all the FDACS matches had a D-license job. The upper-bound results are substantively similar.

[38] This figure is 6.8% among individuals with rare names.

[39] These figures are 9.6%, 0.9%, and 7% among individuals with rare names. The second estimate is somewhat unstable due to the small number of officers fired in 2015—292 in total—and the low rate at which officers move into private security.

became unarmed guards and another 2.1% became armed ones within five years.[40] As the righthand side of the table shows, the rates at which law enforcement officers move into private security are similar when, as in Table 3, we exclude those officers who separated from a law enforcement position in 2015 and landed another law enforcement position afterwards.

Table 5. Proportion of Law Enforcement Officers Who Enter Private Security or Re-enter Law Enforcement Within Five Years, Conditional on Cause of Separation in 2015[41]

Subsequent Employment	Separated during 2015				Permanently Separated during 2015			
	Overall N =3,299	**Fired** N = 292	**Not Fired** N = 3,007	**p-value**	**Overall** N = 2,030	**Fired** N = 249	**Not Fired** N = 1,781	**p-value**
Any Private Security	5.5%	11%	5.0%	<0.001	6.5%	12%	5.7%	<0.001
Unarmed Guard	2.2%	3.1%	2.2%	0.4	2.6%	3.2%	2.5%	0.7
Armed Guard	2.5%	6.5%	2.1%	<0.001	3.1%	7.2%	2.5%	<0.001
Investigator	1.0%	1.7%	0.9%	0.3	1.1%	1.6%	1.1%	0.7
Rehired in Policing	31%	13%	33%	<0.001				

Firings may not capture all police officers who get in trouble and then transition to private security. Some might, for example, see the writing on the wall after disciplinary action and quit before they are fired. Table 6 isolates police officers who received a complaint for a moral character violation in 2015 and shows that they were over four times as likely to move into private security as other officers—7.0% versus 1.6%, a statistically significant difference.[42]

[40] Among individuals with rare names, these figures are 1.6% and 1.4%, respectively.

[41] Because they are more conservative, this table reports lower-bound estimates for individuals in the FDLE data who were fired and match with multiple people in the FDACS data. For example, if a person who was fired from policing links to multiple people in FDACS, we assume that person landed a D-license private security job only if all the FDACS matches had a D-license job. The upper-bound results are substantively similar.

[42] These figures are 5.2% and 0.9% among individuals with rare names.

Table 6. Proportion of Law Enforcement Officers Who Enter Private Security Within Five Years, Conditional on Discipline History[43]

Subsequent Employment	Overall N = 44,419	Complaint during 2015 N = 357	No complaint during 2015 N = 44,062	p-value
Any Position	1.6%	7.0%	1.6%	<0.001
Unarmed Guard	0.8%	2.5%	0.8%	0.002
Armed Guard	0.6%	3.6%	0.6%	<0.001
Investigator	0.3%	1.4%	0.2%	0.002

The disproportionate rates at which these officers, along with fired officers, move into private security produce a striking stock of private officers who are also former cops: roughly a quarter of both armed and unarmed guards who had previously worked in law enforcement, respectively, had been fired at least once from a public law enforcement position.[44] Moreover, 21% and 16%, respectively, had received at least one complaint.[45] Examining firing and complaints together, roughly 28% and 30% of armed and unarmed guards who are former cops had been fired or faced complaints for serious moral character violations during their policing careers.[46]

Due to statistical noise stemming from the infrequency of administrative discipline in the private security sector, we cannot estimate directly whether private guards who were fired from policing perform worse than others. But our estimates are alarming given that prior work in public policing has found that when fired officers land new work in law enforcement, they are more likely than others to be fired again and to receive disciplinary complaints for violent, sexual, or integrity-related misconduct (Grunwald & Rappaport, 2020).

Why do private firms hire officers who were deemed unfit to serve in a police department? Our data cannot answer that question, but one possible explanation is that a private firm may be unaware of an officer's past record. Even public agencies sometimes fail to uncover a candidate's tarnished work history due to an inadequate background check or reluctance on the part of a former employer to disclose negative information (Cohen, 2019; Goldman & Puro, 2001). Moreover, unlike public agencies in Florida, which are expected

[43] Because they are more conservative, this table reports lower-bound estimates for individuals in the FDLE data who received a complaint in 2015 and match with multiple people in the FDACS data. For example, if a law enforcement officer who received a complaint in 2015 links to multiple people in FDACS, we assume that person landed a D-license private security job only if all the FDACS matches had a D-license job. The upper-bound results are substantively similar.

[44] These figures are 24% and 21% among individuals with rare names.

[45] These figures are 23% and 17% among individuals with rare names.

[46] These figures are 32% and 26% among individuals with rare names.

to contact FDLE to confirm prior employment and discipline in ATMS before hiring (Florida Department of Law Enforcement, 2013), private firms are not required to do so and may not have ready access to this resource.

Alternatively, firms might knowingly employ fired former cops because they perceive that the risks are worth the benefits. For one thing, some officers may have been fired for reasons only loosely related to job fitness. For another, former police officers may bring special advantages. They typically have more training and experience and may be able to leverage their professional contacts to obtain inside information from police agencies (Joh, 2004). It is also a good signal that they satisfied the more stringent hiring requirements to become a cop in the first place. And it's easier for former police officers to obtain licenses to work in private security and carry a firearm (Fla. Stat. § 493.6105).

IV. IMPLICATIONS

We next explore the descriptive, normative, and theoretical implications of our two main findings: first, that the private security and police labor markets are highly segregated even though they serve related functions and, second, that many guards who were previously police officers have troubling professional histories. We then step back to consider the implications of a growing private security market and what it might teach us about both traditional law enforcement and its abolitionist alternatives.

A. Mechanisms of Occupational Segregation

Jobs in policing are typically more desirable than those in private security. Wages and benefits are higher and are often accompanied by a generous pension.[47] The national median salary for law enforcement is $66,000, compared to merely $31,000 for security guards (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023a, 2023b). Policing also offers more job stability—often secured by collective bargaining agreements and statutory employment protections—and opportunities for promotion.

With this in mind, the heavy concentration of Black people, women, and non-citizens in the private sector raises serious concerns about the possibility that members of these groups are being funneled into less desirable jobs. This kind of occupational segregation can contribute to lasting economic inequality. One recent study, for example, found that racial segregation of the civil service under Woodrow Wilson increased the Black-white earnings gap by demoting

[47] Notably, police departments have contributed to this compensation gap by outsourcing to private security firms and then demanding those firms decrease wages. When warned such a move would result in less qualified guards at a local jail, one police chief responded, "We will take the lower cost" (Murphy et al., 2019).

Black civil servants to lower-paid positions, which in turn reduced their returns to education and their rate of home ownership. What is more, the descendants of Black civil servants affected by Wilson's policies exhibit lower educational attainment, earnings, and social mobility (Aneja & Xu, 2022).

Our data do not permit us to establish any particular explanation for the occupational segregation we observe. Likely there are multiple forces operating simultaneously. Worker preferences surely matter. Some job candidates might be turned off by the machismo perceived to pervade law enforcement workplace culture. Negative perceptions of the profession more generally—which may well be worse than perceptions of private security—might also reduce potential candidates' interest in joining the force. Of course, these worker preferences and perceptions are themselves endogenous to legal and policy decisions that have shaped policing. And in any event, our finding that workers who fail the BAT for policing frequently end up in private security suggests that, rather than lack of interest, there is substantial pent-up demand for policing jobs among those underrepresented in the profession.

Also important is discrimination, which may exclude some applicants and deter others from applying. Empirical studies of other labor markets show that applicants with Black- or foreign-sounding names perform worse in the early stages of the hiring process (Kline et al., 2022). The same problem may plague policing, and perhaps more so than in private security where there is a perception that many firms are simply looking for "warm bodies." Moreover, after the hiring process, discrimination on the job may hasten exits from the field. One recent study, for example, found that white police supervisors are less likely to nominate Black officers for departmental awards conditional on their work performance, which the authors trace to supervisor bias in advocacy decisions (Rim et al., 2023).

Stringent hiring requirements in policing may also disproportionately screen out women, Black people, and other people of color. Law enforcement agencies, for instance, impose tighter restrictions based on criminal records, which Black applicants tend to have in greater numbers, in part due to bias in law enforcement (Grunwald, 2023). Indeed, we found that roughly 10% of private security officers have arrest records, which may impede the pursuit of alternative careers in policing. Public agencies often also have stricter criteria related to education, financial stability, past employment, and recreational drug use. One study of a metropolitan department found that 79% of Black applicants who had reached the background-check stage were disqualified; some of the most common reasons were "financial responsibility" (*e.g.*, negative credit history, previous bankruptcy, or foreclosure), employment history (*e.g.*, job instability, tardiness, absenteeism, inefficiency, poor working relationships), and use of illicit substances (Kringen & Kringen, 2014).

Beyond hiring standards, the process for becoming a cop is also more complex and time-consuming. As an extreme example, then-Chief William Bratton acknowledged in 2016 that it can take over four years to be hired by the New York Police Department, "leaving applicants who are unfamiliar with the system feeling adrift and discouraged" (Swarns, 2015). These hurdles may pose special obstacles for people of color and women, who may have less time, fewer financial resources, and fewer policing contacts to help navigate the process (Swarns, 2015).

Concerns about occupational segregation, coupled with worries about diversity and staffing shortages in law enforcement today, should prompt reexamination of barriers to entering the police profession. Only bona fide occupational qualifications ought to stand. To put the point differently, there may well be entry requirements, like Florida's ban on noncitizens, that screen out underrepresented groups without materially improving the quality of the workforce ("Height requirement," 1973). These barriers should be eliminated, or at least scrutinized carefully. At the same time, it is critical to maintain stringent personnel standards for policing, as recent evidence suggests that officers minted when hiring standards are lax tend to underperform (Saltiel & Tuttle, 2022).

B. Regulating Private Security

Our data confirm what many already suspect: that private security is a landing pad for cops who have run into trouble. Data scarcity makes it impossible to observe whether these officers continue to engage in misconduct after moving into private security, but two facts ought to make us worry. One is that it's difficult to fire cops,[48] suggesting that those who have been fired may have seriously misstepped. The other (mentioned above) is that, relative to peers, cops who were fired from their last police job are twice as likely to be fired again or receive complaints for violent, sexual, or integrity-related misconduct (Grunwald & Rappaport, 2020; see also Carton et al., 2016; McElvain & Kposowa, 2008; Rozema & Schanzenbach, 2019). Against this backdrop, our findings provide compelling empirical support for reevaluating private security licensing and hiring practices. As others have noted, one piece of low-hanging fruit would be to extend licensing requirements and regulatory

[48] The principal impediments are understood to be statutory and contractual protections embedded in collective bargaining agreements and related laws. For a review of the relevant empirical literature, see Cunningham et al. (2020) and Rad et al. (2023). Even when officers are fired, moreover, including for serious misconduct, they are frequently reinstated by labor arbitrators (Kanu, 2022; Gottfried & Horner, 2019; Rushin, 2019, 2021).

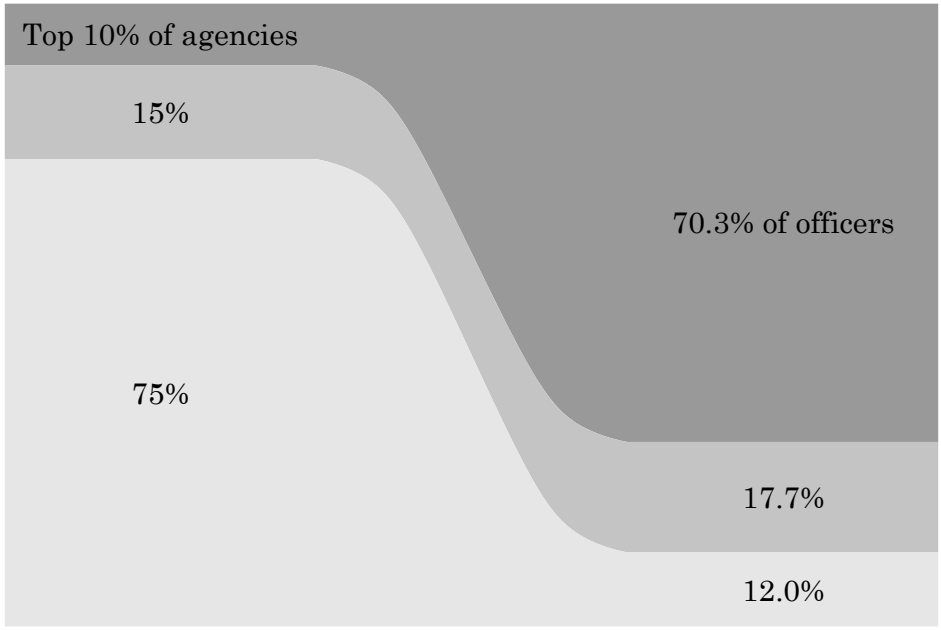
oversight to proprietary security—where at least some former officers must land (Rushin, 2012).[49]

To the extent that policymakers seek to enhance regulation of private security, our data establish a few additional empirical facts, beyond our principal findings, which support targeting regulation at agencies rather than individual officers. First, although there are thousands of firms in Florida, the market is highly concentrated in a small number of very large companies. Figure 3 shows our most conservative estimate of concentration: the largest 10% of private security agencies employ at least 70% of all private security officers, and the next 15% percent, another 18%.[50] This hyper-concentration may be relatively new. One private security expert observed that G4S's entry into the American market in the early 2000s "helped drive an industrywide trend of consolidation and scale" such that a "handful of massive corporations dominat[e] the industry" today (Murphy et al., 2019). Indeed, Allied Universal is not just the biggest player in private security; it's the third-largest employer in North America, after only Walmart and Amazon (Semuels, 2023).

[49] One might reasonably wonder whether the presence of a significant number of justice-involved individuals in the private security industry provides an additional reason to tighten licensing and hiring requirements. There is little research on the relationship between criminal history and job performance, but what evidence is available generally tends not to bear out this line of thinking (Griffith & Harris, 2020; Lundquist et al., 2018; Minor et al., 2018). Moreover, even were there some social costs from employment of justice-involved individuals, there are doubtless enormous social benefits as well, as suggested by the existence of government programs dedicated to facilitating such employment relationships (Federal Bonding Program, 2022).

[50] As noted, our estimates include some uncertainty because we lack separation information for a non-trivial minority of employment stints. To be conservative, we elect to present the results produced by assumptions that produce the smallest estimates of market concentration: we assume stints for which we lack separation information close the day after they open.

Figure 3. Concentration of Officers in Private Agencies



Second, turnover in private security is high, far higher than in law enforcement. Our data show, for example, that the average job in private security in Florida is no more than a year or two long, while the average policing job is over five years. As private security experts Clifford Shearing and Philip Stenning (1981) observed, "Attempts to impose sophisticated regulatory controls over industries with such a high turnover of personnel are almost inevitably doomed to failure" (p. 234).

Taken together, these basic facts suggest that a regulatory regime may have deeper and more enduring impact if it targets agencies rather than individual officers. One set of proposals might aim directly at the problem of hiring tarnished cops. States could, for example, require licensing agencies or firms to conduct background checks that involve contacting former law enforcement employers. States might also expand access to state databases tracking police officers' employment and disciplinary histories. But the insight that regulation ought to target agencies rather than officers might also be used to regulate more than hiring. States could, for example, require firms to obtain accreditation or undergo site visits, records audits, or internal policy reviews. Other approaches might focus on data collection, requiring firms to track information on arrests, stops, searches, interrogations, and use of force by their officers (Rushin, 2012).

C. The Future of Policing

Stepping back from the practical to the theoretical, we conclude by considering what, if anything, private security may be able to teach us about

the future of policing—and its alternatives. Instead of the ways in which police and private security can be "functionally indistinguishable" (Stoughton, 2017b, p. 127), we probe in this discussion some of the important respects in which they differ, and in which private security is significant precisely because it represents an alternative model of security provision.

Consider one way of describing the results we've just presented. Our data reveal a large pool of workers, mostly Black—many women, and a fair number with criminal records—who labor to maintain public safety. They are in uniform, but they are not the police; they lack both the "super powers" and the immunity from accountability the police enjoy (Butler, 2016, p. 1446; see also Schwartz, 2023). They are also not the state; indeed, they are regulated by the state only lightly, if at all. They are instead an alternative to the police, and to the state. Most of them do not carry guns, and the ones who do appear to use them rarely.[51] As far as we can tell, they generally eschew force in favor of subtler, preventive intervention, often relying on the deterrent effect of their presence alone.

These workers, in turn, cluster into agencies that are themselves diverse. It is common for 50 to 75% of employees at Florida firms to be Black and for 30 to 50% to be women. This second-order diversity may very well breed a diversity of organizational cultures, affording communities a meaningful and continuing choice among alternatives to policing. The very existence of such alternatives, moreover, weakens the police monopoly on public safety that has for so long gifted law enforcement outsized power in local politics.

This (admittedly tendentious) description, at least when stated in the broad generalities we've just offered, echoes now-familiar calls for alternatives to policing, including most prominently calls within the contemporary police abolition movement. That movement, led by Black people and especially Black women, sets out a vision of public safety without the police. "Contrary to assumptions that abolitionists don't care about safety," leading abolitionist thinkers "recognize that safety is a basic human need," and "think, talk, and

[51] In the data we received from FDACS, there were 222 reported incidents of armed private officers discharging a firearm between 2016 to 2021, which means officers fired at an annual rate of 1 to 2 times per 1,000 officers per year. We do not have comparable data on firearm discharges for public police officers. The *Tampa Bay Times*, however, collected data on the number of times Florida police fired a weapon *and injured* someone between 2009 and 2014. Using their data, we find that Florida officers fired at and injured someone at an annual rate of 3 times per 1,000 officers. Given that not all shots hit their intended target (estimates range from 20 to 50%), we can infer that police fire their weapons substantially more often than armed private officers do, at least in part because they face dangerous situations more often.

strategize about it constantly" (Kaba & Ritchie, 2022).[52] They just do not think that it should (or legitimately can) come from the police (Kaba, 2020). Abolitionist thinkers strive "to recognize and break with [an] obtunded conception of safety, the illusory carceral safety presented as something only the state can produce" (Kaba & Ritchie, 2022).

Instead, the abolitionist program embraces, among other things, "alternative first responders" (McLeod, 2019, p. 1628)—ideally "people from the community" (McHarris & McHarris, 2020), accountable to the community, who, whether or not in uniform (Rex, 2022), sit outside the state's "criminalizing institutions" (8 to Abolition, n.d., p. 1) and often outside the state altogether. Instead of sending "armed strangers" into crises (Project NIA, 2021, p. 4; see also 8 to Abolition, n.d., p. 2), who might do more harm than good, unarmed community members, some with previous justice involvement (Youth Alive, 2018), "aim to intervene before conflicts escalate" (McLeod, 2019, p. 1628). Just putting "eyes on the streets" and "hang[ing] out on the block," some abolitionist practitioners insist, can often be enough (MASK, 2020). Yet there is "no one-size-fits-all in community violence intervention" (Farias, 2023). A thousand flowers bloom (see Project Nia, 2021), offering affected community members a choice in how to respond to violence and disorder. Every success, moreover, tends to undermine the myth of the thin blue line (Kaba & Ritchie, 2022).

And yet, notwithstanding these more-than-passing similarities between the world some abolitionists want and certain aspects of the world of private security that (as this paper reveals) exists today, we expect that most abolitionists would sharply reject any suggestion that private security companies present even tentative pathways to abolitionist futures. Abolitionists are not fighting to swap out police for corporatized, profit-driven private security. Indeed, prominent abolitionists reject the notion that safety is "a commodity that can be manufactured and sold to us by the carceral state or private corporations" (Kaba & Ritchie, 2022). While private security officers may "look like" or even be from some of the communities in which they work, when they don the uniform, they are no longer "of" the community, but rather of the firm. And the firm, in turn, answers (only) to those who pay; in the end, it exists to protect private wealth and the safety of those who can afford it (Bowles & Jayadev, 2014; Jayadev & Bowles, 2006; see also Shearing & Stenning, 1983). It is difficult to see in Allied Universal and Securitas the sort of community-focused mutual aid that abolitionists envision or the expertise that "[m]ental health service providers, social workers, violence

[52] We do not mean to suggest that there is any singular, fixed abolitionist vision of public safety; we acknowledge a multiplicity of perspectives. Nor do we argue that private security and abolition are the same thing, as will become clear shortly.

interventionists, victim/survivor advocates, [and] religious leaders" can bring to bear on a crisis brewing among their neighbors (Project NIA, 2021, p.4).[53]

If the decentralized, unarmed, privately accountable, and demographically diverse world of private security bears certain similarities to the abolitionist vision of public safety and, perhaps, just as many differences, it is worth asking: is there anything redeemable in the private security model? The question is difficult to answer without more granular knowledge about what private security officers do and how well they do it. Of course, one might be encouraged by the fact that scores of people who are not police—Black people, women, justice-involved individuals, noncitizens—make a living doing security work. A diverse security force can help build community trust and make residents feel safer.[54] Indeed, one might even say that, to a greater extent than is commonly appreciated, public safety is *already* provided by non-state and generally non-violent actors. If that takes the point too far, perhaps the suggestion might be that private security provides a pool of candidates well-positioned to train and participate in genuinely "community-based public safety approaches" (8 to Abolition, n.d., p. 4).

Given how little we know about private security in action, the more fruitful question may be whether there's anything useful we might learn about police—or their absence—by further study of the private sector (for a similar suggestion, see Sklansky, 1999). For example, research about how well various models of private security control crime could teach us about what aspects of security work—public or private—are critical and when (and how) non-police actors can keep us safe. To illustrate: Private security officers are sometimes maligned for their apparent inactivity—the implication being that crime control requires cops who go out and arrest the "bad guys." But a growing body of evidence suggests that arrests and prosecutions are not essential to controlling crime (e.g., Mello, 2019). The mere presence of a watchful eye, it appears, has a meaningful deterrent effect—an observation that shouldn't surprise anyone who's read Jane Jacobs (Jacobs, 1961; see Blesse & Diegmann, 2022). Indeed, one recent study found that the presence of civilian guards on blocks students use to travel to and from schools reduced total crime by 17% relative to blocks without such guards (Gonzalez & Komisarow, 2020); another found a similar reduction in violent crime (McMillen et al., 2019). Research like this is invaluable; much more is needed.

Another example: Many commentators and activists believe that statutory and contractual protections against discipline, obtained in large part

[53] On abolition and mutual aid, see Hayes & Kaba (2023) and Spade (2020).

[54] There is also evidence, from the public sector, that Black, Hispanic, and female officers use coercive enforcement tactics less often, especially against Black civilians (Ba et al., 2021; Hoekstra & Sloan, 2022).

by powerful police unions, go too far in shielding police officers from accountability for misconduct (e.g., Campaign Zero, n.d.). The Movement for Black Lives, for example, lists "the power to hire and fire officers" among its principal goals (M4BL, 2023). Relatively little is known, in contrast, about the labor and employment environment in private security. If it turns out, as we suspect, that even unionized private security officers can be fired roughly at will, private security might be able to show us what accountability in security work looks like in a world without police unions.

Finally, one might also ask a different, more pessimistic, question about all this: might the abolitionist vision itself collapse (some might say, be co-opted) into something resembling the private security sector? "Community-based and explicitly abolitionist organizations must fund their work like everyone else," observes journalist Cristian Farias (2023). For community violence prevention programs, that funding is pouring in from philanthropies and every level of government (Brownlee, 2023; Farias, 2023). But here, as elsewhere, there's no such thing as a free lunch. Funders are pushing providers to professionalize and adopt "NGO-style methods of tracking and narrating accountability and effectiveness, including measurable reductions in violence" (Farias, 2023; see also Brownlee, 2023). The accompanying oversight, Farias cautions, "carries risks of co-optation, entanglement, and even straying from the founding principles of the practice" (Farias, 2023).

V. Conclusion

If shrinking the police footprint will mean enlarging that of the private security sector, as some recent evidence suggests, our findings may provide a glimpse at the future of security provision in American communities. While we know too little to say whether we ought to fear or welcome this particular vision of our future, what we can say is that it would, contrary to what many have claimed, involve a drastic change in who provides security services. Future research, we hope, will round out our understanding of how private security functions, enabling better-informed public decisions about the appropriate balance of policing, private security, and other public and community-based services altogether.

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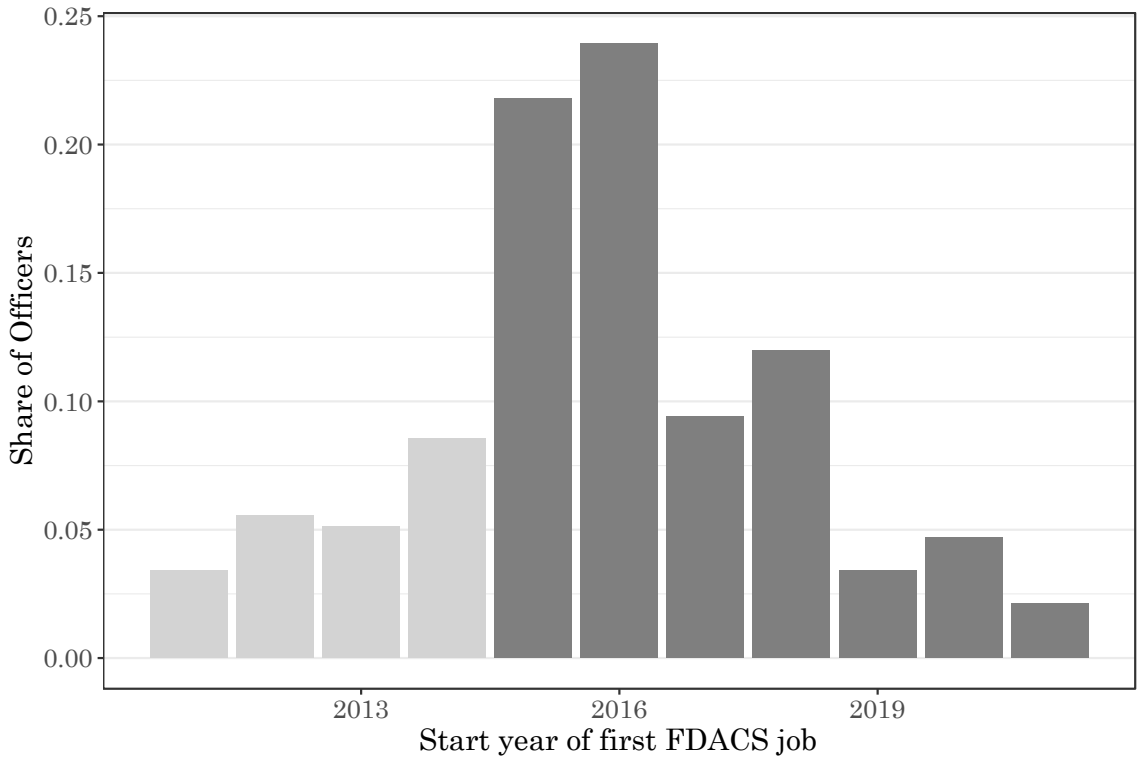
VI. APPENDIX A: SUPPLEMENTARY FIGURE

Figure A.1. Share of Police Who Left Policing Permanently in 2015 and Secured Employment in Private Security, by Year[55]



[55] This graph isolates police officers who separated in 2015, did not obtain employment in policing thereafter, and did obtain employment in private security. Among those officers, the figure reports the proportion who secure employment in private security by year. We represent in light gray the small number of officers who left policing permanently in 2015 but who are linked to private security stints from before 2015.

VII. APPENDIX B: DATA AND PROCEDURES

We begin by describing the two principal datasets that form the basis of our study: FDACS data on private security and FDLE data on public police. We then describe the process by which we match individuals across the datasets to measure crossover between the two fields.

A. Private Security Data

1. FDACS Raw File

Our primary dataset on private security was extracted by FDACS on July 30, 2021. FDACS policy requires that private security licenses are deleted from the agency's system five years after they expire. We therefore observe all licenses active on at least one day between 2016 and 2021 and all employment stints associated with those licenses, including stints that predate 2016.

The structure of the raw FDACS dataset is unusual and best understood as a license-employment-level file. If a private security officer obtains employment under a particular license, this stint is reflected in a single row. When individuals use multiple licenses to obtain a job (e.g., armed guards need both a D and G type license) then one row appears for each license. Finally, if a license was granted but never used to obtain employment, it will appear as a single row with all employment-related variables missing. Altogether, the FDACS dataset contains 665,283 records total, representing 434,212 unique licenses.

We derive from the raw FDACS data two files. First, we create a license-level file with the following columns:

- License ID, which includes the license type (*e.g.*, D, G)
- Status of license
- Expiration date
- Name
- Address of residence
- County of residence
- Date of birth (DOB)
- Gender
- Race
- Whether the licensee has military history
- For G licensees, an indicator for whether the licensee is a US citizen

Address and DOB are provided for most but not all licensees. They can be missing for two reasons. First, Florida excludes addresses and DOBs from the state's public record law for current and former judges, state attorneys,

firefighters, and sworn law enforcement personnel who request an exemption (Fla. Stat. § 119.071). In these cases, we cannot observe the basis for exemption, and FDACS does not request evidence to prove eligibility. Second, Florida law exempts addresses from mandatory disclosure for all class C licenses (Fla. Stat. § 493.6122). Ultimately, DOB and address are present for about 79% and 77% of individuals, respectively.

We also derive an employment-level file with the following columns:

- License ID
- Status of license
- Expiration date
- Name of employing agency
- License ID of employing agency
- Start date
- End date

This employment data is derived from Employee Action Reports, which private security agencies are required to file when a licensed officer is hired or separates. While agencies can and do face discipline for failing to submit Employee Action Reports, we believe that in a substantial fraction of cases, agencies fail to report the end of employment. For example, among the 106,079 employment rows for which there is no separation information, the corresponding license has already expired in 24,536 rows. We assume these stints have ended.

For the few analyses that rely on information about start and end dates, we produce our results twice under different assumptions: first, assuming stints with no end date terminated the day after beginning and, second, assuming these stints remained active at least until July 2021, when the dataset was extracted by FDACS. For most cases, both assumptions are likely wrong. We use them, however, to arrive at lower- and upper-bound estimates on the potential duration of stints for which we have not observed an end date. In general, the substantive conclusions of our analyses do not change based on which assumption we make.

2. Identifying Unique Individuals

Internally, FDACS uses Social Security Numbers to identify individuals and link their respective licenses. These numbers, however, were not provided to us and the agency was unable to create an alternative unique identifier. We therefore created a unique person-level identifier to link licenses associated with the same person.

One challenge is that individuals can have multiple licenses with different information. Someone might, for example, be listed as "John Doe" on one license and "John A Doe, Sr." on another. He might also have different address information—perhaps because he moved—or different DOB information due to data-entry error. As a result, we cannot identify individuals simply based on unique combinations of name, DOB, and other identifying characteristics.

Instead, we link licenses we believe belong to the same individual even when license-level information about the individual is not identical. One common solution, probabilistic record linkage models, would generate unacceptably high levels of erroneous linkage because we have many individuals and relatively little identifying information. For that reason, we link licenses based on a deterministic record linkage algorithm that we designed.

We clean the data in several ways before applying our algorithm. First, we split full names into a first, middle, and last name and use the peopleparser package in R to extract suffixes. We also remove all punctuation and convert all letters to uppercase. Second, we modify a small number of DOBs with obvious data-entry errors. Third, when addresses are available, we use the Placekey API to convert them into a "Placekey," which serves as a unique representation for a given location. The advantage of this approach is that variations of the same address receive the same Placekey.

We next apply an algorithm to assign a unique identifier to licenses we believe are associated with the same person. We begin by assigning each license a preliminary unique person identifier. Then, in each step described below, if two rows with different preliminary person identifiers appear to belong to the same person, then all rows with either of the two person identifiers are reassigned the same identifier. For example, if the algorithm believes that licenses A and B are associated with the same person and also believes that licenses B and C are associated with the same person, then it determines that all three records are associated with the same person. Our algorithm links licenses based on the following steps:

1. We first link records that match perfectly on first, middle, and last name and DOB. This eliminates 62,019 redundant individuals from our dataset.
2. We then drop the requirement that records must match on middle name and link records based on first name, last name, and DOB. Matches gained here are frequently cases in which records with a middle name are matched to those without one. There are occasionally matches with different middle initials, but our

manual review of the data suggests these are correct matches because they share other information, like addresses. Although it is possible for two records to match with conflicting middle name information beyond the initial, this never occurs in practice because of the DOB restriction. This eliminates 1,929 redundant individuals from our dataset.

3. We then link records that match perfectly on first name, last name, and county, and match approximately on DOB, where an approximate match is defined as DOBs within one character of each other. This eliminates 251 redundant individuals from our dataset.
4. We then link records that match perfectly on DOB and county and match approximately on full name, where an approximate match is defined as names within two characters of each other. This eliminates 779 redundant individuals from our dataset.
5. To address cases where differences in name are greater than two characters, we link records that match perfectly on DOB, county, and Placekey, and match approximately on full name, where an approximate match is defined as full names within four characters of each other. This eliminates 190 redundant individuals from our dataset.
6. To address cases where data-entry errors in DOB are greater than one character, we then link together records that match perfectly on first name, last name, Placekey, and birth year. This eliminates 73 redundant individuals from our dataset.
7. For individuals who have no address or have no DOB information, we also use employment information by linking records that match perfectly on first name, last name, employing agency, county, and hire date. We reject any such matches where DOB is present and doesn't match. This eliminates 4,804 redundant individuals from our dataset.
8. We then link records that match perfectly on first name, last name, employing agency, county, and termination date. We reject any such matches where DOB is present and doesn't match. This eliminates 2,981 redundant individuals from our dataset.
9. Finally, we link records that match perfectly on first name, middle initial, and last name and are missing DOB. This eliminates 25,566 redundant individuals from our dataset.

After performing these linking steps, we drop the following records:

1. 5,543 rows that are associated with class E or EE recovery licenses.

2. 14,406 rows associated with licenses that expire before 2016.
3. 3,305 rows associated with licenses that have a status of "DENIED".

Ultimately, this process produces a list of 299,297 unique individuals from the 607,880 rows in the raw FDACS dataset.

3. Identifying Unique Employment Stints

For two reasons, one employment stint can have multiple rows in the FDACS database. First, and most commonly, a single stint may be associated with multiple licenses, with one row per license. Second, and far less common, a stint can be associated with only one license and still have multiple rows with either identical start and end dates or overlapping start and end dates. Collapsing rows is challenging in part because, as noted, agencies do not always update the FDACS data when an employment stint has ended. If someone has worked at an agency at two different times but the separation information for the initial stint has not been updated, we may erroneously treat the two jobs as one.

To address this issue, we rely on additional data to fill in gaps. If a set of one or more employment rows has no present start date, we impute the start date of these rows to be January 1 of the start year of the oldest license among these rows. Similarly, if a set of one or more employment rows has no present end date, we impute the end date of these rows to be the latest license expiration date among these rows. We then rely on these imputed start and end dates when necessary in the linking steps described above.

Our methodology for identifying unique employment stints resembles our methodology for identifying unique individuals. We start by assuming each employment row is a unique stint. We then link groups of rows if at least one row in each group appears to belong to the same stint. For example, if the algorithm believes that rows A and B are associated with the same stint and also believes rows B and C are associated with the same stint, then it determines that all three records are associated with the same stint. The algorithm takes the following steps:

1. We link rows if they share the same person, employer, and either a non-missing hire date or a non-missing termination date.
2. We then link rows if they share the same person and employer and the employment periods—defined by the start and end date (if present)—overlap by at least one day.

Ultimately, this process aggregates 453,153 employment rows into 407,753 unique stints.

Due to incomplete data, we are forced to drop the following stints:

1. 1,213 stints where some rows have a termination date and others do not.
2. 9,955 stints that have neither hire dates nor termination dates.
3. 12,134 stints that have a missing hire date.
4. 3 stints that have start dates before 1960 or after July 30, 2021.

After these exclusions, we retain 384,448 unique employment stints.

4. Disciplinary Records

FDACS publishes biannual newsletters, which, among other things, report final orders for administrative complaints against both licensed and unlicensed individuals and agencies (see Fla. Stat. § 493.6123). The newsletters contain information about the name and location of the individual or agency and the final disposition of the proceeding.

From internet searches and public records requests, we obtained all FDACS newsletters in PDFs from January 2004 through December 2021. We extracted the text about disciplinary actions in a tabular format.

In total, we have 12,030 instances of discipline. We use name and location information to link discipline to individuals using the following steps:

1. We parse the names of individuals in the discipline dataset into first name, middle initial, and last name.
2. We use location information to identify the county in which the licensee resides with the Google Maps API.
3. We match a disciplinary record to an individual in the FDACS dataset if both records share the same first name, middle initial, last name, and county.
4. We eliminate disciplinary records that match to multiple individuals.

In total, we link 5,115 or 42% of all disciplinary incidents to individuals in FDACS. This low match rate reflects that most complaints occurred before 2016 and that our primary FDACS dataset contains information only on active licenses starting in 2016. Among the 3,940 disciplinary actions that occur after 2016, we match 3,236 or 82%.

5. Firearm Incident Dataset

Licensed security agencies are required by law to submit a "Firearms Incident Report" to FDACS no more than five days after G-licensed employees discharge a firearm in the course of their duties.[56] We observe the license associated with each report and date of submission to FDACS. In some cases, FDACS receives multiple notifications or opens multiple investigations of the same incident. In these cases, multiple dates will be indicated on that individual's G license.

For each individual, we extract all dates of firearm incidents. If two dates are within 180 days of each other, we assume the second is a duplicate. Ultimately, we remove 19 dates within 180 days of a prior date, resulting in a dataset of 222 firearm incidents.

6. Agency-Level Dataset

We also obtained from FDACS an agency-level dataset, extracted on April 25, 2023, which contains the address, license numbers, and names of FDACS private security agencies and the license numbers of any principal officers and, separately, managers as of the date of extract. We link these data with our primary FDACS data to identify managers.

B. Public Law Enforcement Data

Our policing data come primarily from ATMS, which was provided by the FDLE. We rely on four files in particular.

1. FDLE Employment Dataset

The employment-level file contains the employment history on all sworn and civilian employees of all public law enforcement agencies in Florida. While there are employment stints that begin earlier, the data appear to become reliable in the mid-1980s. The dataset contains 603,298 employment stints, of which 174,146 are sworn full-time law enforcement stints.

In general, each row represents a single employment stint. For each stint, we observe unique identifiers for the employee and employing agency; whether the position is full-time, part-time, or auxiliary; whether the position is in law enforcement, corrections, concurrent (i.e., both law enforcement *and* corrections) or if the employment is civilian; and the start and (if applicable) end dates of employment. Unlike in FDACS, start and end date records appear very reliable.

[56] FLA. ADMIN. CODE ANN. r. 5N-1.142.

We also observe a separation code describing the reason a stint ended. This code usually indicates that a stint ended with a voluntary resignation or retirement or, occasionally, a transfer within the agency to another position. In some cases, however, the code indicates the officer was fired. We classify a separation as a firing if the separation occurred as a result of a "moral character violation," a violation of agency policy, or if an officer resigned while under investigation for a "moral character violation" or violation of agency policy. The specific separation codes we include in this classification are as follows:

Separation Code	Description	Frequency
AU	Administrative - Unfavorable (Historical Use Only)	1,494
INV	Under Investigation (Historical Use Only)	443
MCV	Terminated for Violating Ch. 943.13(4), FS or Moral Character Standards	1,400
MIS	Misconduct (Historical Use Only)	1,778
NC	No Cause for Decertification (Historical Use Only)	1,589
VAP	Terminated for Violating Agency/Training Center Policy (No Moral Character Violation)	1,467
VS-IAP	Resigned/Retired While Being Investigated for Violating Agency/Training Center Policy	1,411
VS-L-IAP	Resigned/Retired In Lieu of Termination for Violating Agency/Training Center Policy	420
VS-L-MCV	Resigned/Retired In Lieu of Termination for Violating Moral Character Standards	325
VS-MCV	Resigned/Retired While Being Investigated for Violating Moral Character Standards	1,388
VS-WNR	Resigned - Would Not Rehire (Historical Use Only)	849

All told, separations involving one of these separation codes account for 12,573 of 161,553, or 7.8%, of separations of sworn law enforcement officers that are not transfers within the same agency.

2. FDLE Person Dataset

The person-level dataset includes, among others, every person who has held a sworn law enforcement position in Florida and every person who has taken the BAT for law enforcement. Each row contains a person identifier; first, middle, and last name; gender; race; and birth year. There are a total of 508,143 individuals in the dataset. Included among them are 121,004 individuals who hold or have held full-time law enforcement employment and 195,891 individuals who have taken the BAT for law enforcement.

3. FDLE BAT Dataset

Those who wish to become a sworn law enforcement officer in Florida must pass the BAT, which consists of 120 multiple-choice questions, before entering basic training. A person may take the exam multiple times, and every attempt is recorded. Across 256,249 attempts, we observe 195,891 unique examinees. For each attempt, we observe a person identifier, the exam date, and an overall Pass/Fail Grade. About 85% of attempts result in a passing grade.

4. FDLE Complaint Dataset

The complaint-level dataset includes "moral character" complaints against law enforcement officers. Florida law requires that agencies investigate complaints should they have cause to believe a moral character violation has occurred. If the agency finds a moral character violation has occurred, they must report this violation to FDLE. The FDLE may also initiate a complaint. We observe 6,889 moral character complaints against officers, including the agency at which the officer worked and the date the complaint was opened.

C. FDLE-FDACS Linkage

To observe crossover between private security and public policing, we link the person-level datasets from FDACS and FDLE using, again, a deterministic merge process. We begin by linking all individuals who share a first and last name. We then remove links where both records either have birth-year information or a recorded middle initial and at least one of those does not match.

The resulting set of links between the FDACS and FDLE data is not a one-to-one mapping because a person in one dataset may match to multiple people in the other. To address this problem, we produce lower- and upper-bound estimates when we rely on the FDACS-to-FDLE linkage. To estimate the share of private security officers who have previously worked in law enforcement, for example, we estimate both (1) an upper bound that assumes private officers have previously worked in policing if they match to at least one

individual in our FDLE dataset who has a prior policing job and (2) a lower bound that assumes they have not previously worked in policing if they match to at least one person in the FDLE dataset who does not have a prior policing job or do not match to any individual in the FDLE dataset. Because multi-person matches are relatively uncommon, these upper- and lower-bound estimates are typically very similar.