Judicial Power to Regulate Plea Bargaining

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JUDICIAL POWER TO REGULATE PLEA BARGAINING

Darryl K. Brown*

ABSTRACT

Plea bargaining in the United States is in critical respects unregulated, and a key reason is the marginal role to which judges have been relegated. In the wake of Santobello v. New York (1971), lower courts crafted Due Process doctrines through which they supervised the fairness of some aspects of the plea bargaining process. Within a decade, however, U.S. Supreme Court decisions began to shut down any constitutional basis for judicial supervision of plea negotiations or agreements. Those decisions rested primarily on two claims: separation of powers and the practical costs of regulating plea bargaining in busy criminal justice systems. Both rationales proved enormously influential. Legislative rulemaking and state courts both largely followed the Court in excluding judges—and in effect, the law—from any meaningful role.

This Article challenges these longstanding rationales. Historical practice suggests that separation of powers doctrine does not require the prevailing, exceedingly broad conception of “exclusive” executive control over charging and other components of the plea process. This is especially true in the states, many of which had long traditions of private prosecutors and judicial oversight over certain prosecution decisions, as well as different constitutional structures. By contrast, English courts—based on both common law and legislation—retain some power to review such decisions. Moreover, assertions that legal constraints on plea bargaining would fatally impair the “efficiency” of adjudication is belied by evidence of very high guilty plea rates.

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both in England, where bargaining is more regulated, and in U.S. courts before the Supreme Court closed off meaningful grounds for judicial review.
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INTRODUCTION

The pervasiveness of plea bargaining and the rarity of trials are familiar features of American criminal justice systems. For years the federal courts have achieved more than 95 percent of all convictions through guilty pleas, and in most state courts, the figures are in the same ballpark. But the “triumph” of plea bargaining (in George Fisher’s description) hardly distinguishes criminal adjudication in the United States from the practices of legal systems elsewhere. Plea bargaining, or some comparable form of abbreviated, consent-based adjudication process, is widely and routinely relied upon in criminal justice systems worldwide as an alternative to trials. Even though negotiated settlements of criminal prosecutions fit much less comfortably in the civil law tradition than the common law tradition, civil law jurisdictions have adopted their own variants of plea bargaining as well.

1. See infra note 156 and accompanying text.
2. See generally George Fisher, Plea Bargaining’s Triumph, 109 YALE L.J. 857, 859-61 (2000) (arguing that plea bargaining has “won” because it is now the predominant practice in the U.S. and other common law nations).
3. See WORLD PLEA BARGAINING: CONSENSUAL PROCEDURES AND THE AVOIDANCE OF THE FULL CRIMINAL TRIAL, at xxii (Stephen C. Thaman ed., 2010) [hereinafter WORLD PLEA BARGAINING] (noting that while it is clear that many European nations have been traditionally hostile to American-style plea bargaining, most have adopted it).
4. See Bron McKillop, What Can We Learn from the French Criminal Justice System?, 76 AUSTL. L.J. 49, 55-56 (2002) (stating that 99.8 percent of French criminal cases are adjudicated in lower courts with expedited processes); Thomas Weigend, Lay Participation and Consensual Disposition Mechanisms, 72 REVUE INTERNATIONALE DE DROIT PÉNAL 595, 595-96 (2001) (Fr.) (describing trend toward plea bargaining or similar nontrial adjudication in many countries). See generally JENIA I. TURNER, PLEA BARGAINING ACROSS BORDERS (Hiram E. Chodosh ed., 2009) (describing bargaining practices in Germany, Russia, Bulgaria, China, and Japan); WORLD PLEA BARGAINING, supra note 3, at xx (noting that many countries that rely on a strict legality principle have made “radical steps towards confession or plea bargaining”); Arie Freiberg, Non-Adversarial Approaches to Criminal Justice, 17 J. JUD. ADMIN. 205 (2007) (AustL.) (discussing the high plea bargaining rate in Australia).

Despite lamentations for the “vanishing trial” and criticisms of plea negotiation practices, the basic appeal of negotiated guilty pleas is easy to understand. Negotiated settlements are perfectly adequate and uncontroversial in many cases. Some defendants are quite willing to plead guilty. Oftentimes facts are relatively simple; evidence of guilt is comprehensive and unambiguous without trial; and the criminal charge does not call for normative assessments of “reasonable justification,” “recklessness,” or the like.

Originally, a core function of the common law trial was to gather evidence. After the early common law era in which jurors were expected to know many facts or investigate on their own, the trial became a means to produce evidence, such as witness testimony that sometimes even the parties had not previously heard. The evidence-gathering function of trials is much less necessary today, for many reasons. New forms of evidence, such as audio and visual recordings and various kinds of forensic analysis, provide key evidence well before trial. Police have firsthand knowledge of many crimes, such as drug or weapon possession, and they often gather statements from witnesses and suspects. Moreover, many offenses—such as possession crimes—are defined in ways that are easy to prove.

Many criminal cases simply do not require a trial to determine what happened or what liability should follow from it. But it is not always easy to agree on which cases are clear from pretrial investigation sources and which are not.

In addition, even though national wealth—measured by per capita GDP—has never been higher, there is a strong consensus that governments for the last half century or much longer cannot afford to fund criminal justice systems that adjudicate more than a small fraction of prosecutions through ordinary trials. Legislators,

prosecutors, and nearly everyone else share the U.S. Supreme Court’s conclusion that “‘plea bargaining[]’ is an essential component of the administration of justice,” without which “the States and the Federal Government would need to multiply by many times the number of judges and court facilities.”

We accept plea bargaining because many believe that without it ... our system of criminal justice would grind to a halt.”

The same view is now common in criminal justice systems outside the United States as well.

There are good reasons to be skeptical of this conventional wisdom, many of which I have offered elsewhere. Nonetheless, contemporary demands on courts to adjudicate criminal charges exceed courts’ capacity to do so through ordinary jury trial process.

These systemic developments cut across national boundaries and probably go a long way toward explaining why U.S. jurisdictions have much company in the routine practice of plea bargaining.

While plea bargaining is pervasive worldwide, U.S.-style bargaining rules are not. Under state and federal law, plea bargaining is, in effect, unregulated. To be sure, there is a body of law that governs plea bargaining. For example, prosecutors cannot use illicit pressures to coerce defendants into pleading guilty, and judges must ensure that defendants knowingly waive their trial rights and that any guilty plea has a “factual basis.”

The law of plea bargaining, however, is much like the law of free markets, which is the source of its underlying logic and rationality. As is true for parties in the


10. See, e.g., Donna Hackett, Commentary, 46 CANADIAN J. CRIMINOLOGY & CRIM. JUST. 501, 501 (2004) (“Plea bargaining has become absolutely essential to the Crown’s management of the high volume of criminal cases.”) (author is a justice on the Ontario Court of Justice).


private market realm, parties in criminal litigation are free to negotiate and employ any tactics that ordinary criminal law does not prohibit. That means that prosecutors cannot perpetrate frauds or threaten physical harm, and the terms of agreements must be within existing criminal and sentencing laws. But as in the market realm, nearly anything else goes. In particular, prosecutors can act strategically and add charges solely if a defendant insists on trial, and they can pressure defendants by leveraging circumstances such as limited defense resources, pretrial detention that disrupts work and family obligations, or the threat of prosecution against family members if defendants refuse to plead guilty.

In short, American plea bargaining is highly—probably uniquely—"deregulated." It is less regulated than comparable domains of executive branch enforcement authority, and probably less regulated than the criminal justice systems of other common law jurisdictions. In this Article, I explore reasons why this is so and, in the process, suggest how it could change. The first reason, taken up in Part II, arises from a presumption that prosecutorial decision making is an "exclusively executive" endeavor. This view has evolved into a flawed body of federal and state constitutional law, often grounded in separation of powers jurisprudence, that is inconsistent with the history of criminal justice administration in many states, and has led courts to reject even the most modest and plausible oversight of prosecutorial authority. This jurisprudential conception, which is remarkably consistent across state and federal jurisdictions, has stripped courts of any capacity to regulate even at the extremes of prosecutorial plea bargaining tactics. As a point of comparison, Part III describes some of the key provisions of English criminal law that enable courts to play a modest, but meaningful, role in monitoring prosecutorial charging discretion. Charging decisions are central to the most controversial and problematic forms of plea bargaining, and English law demonstrates one plausible route by which courts can play an appropriate oversight role, consistent with the traditional common law powers of judges and prosecutors.

13. See infra note 16.
14. See infra note 137.
15. See BROWN, supra note 11, at 95-97.
Part IV recalls a body of doctrine in federal constitutional law through which U.S. courts have exercised meaningful oversight of prosecutorial discretion in the plea bargaining context. The U.S. Supreme Court eventually shut down this mode of plea bargaining regulation and elected to build the federal constitutional law of plea bargaining around a market-inspired understanding of the practice modeled closely on the private law of contract. State courts overwhelmingly followed suit and, if only through inaction, legislatures did as well. This market- and contract-based understanding of plea bargaining provides not only a template for the public law governing plea negotiations but also a normative justification for the fairness and desirability of unregulated bargaining, without legal standards or judicial scrutiny, even in the most extreme instances of plea bargaining practice. The Conclusion suggests that this market-inspired normative vision, as well as the assumption that prosecutorial discretion is immune from legal regulation and oversight, will have to change before American plea bargaining can be regulated to the modest, but important, degree that governs much of U.S. civil law enforcement and much of criminal law enforcement outside the United States.

I. LEGAL REGULATION AND JUDICIAL OVERSIGHT OF PROSECUTORIAL DISCRETION

Decisions about which criminal charges defendants will face play a central role in plea bargaining. Prosecutors typically have an array of choices for how to charge a particular suspect on a particular set of facts, and those decisions are affected by the subsequent plea bargaining process. Prosecutors can charge multiple offenses or the most serious ones, and offer to drop some charges or reduce the severity of charges, in exchange for a guilty plea. Alternately, prosecutors can request that defendants plead guilty to the initial charges and warn that they will add more serious charges if defendants refuse to plead guilty. Charging tactics of this sort are routine and well documented in U.S. courts.16

Because they are left to prosecutors’ discretion, charging decisions are the least regulated aspect of the criminal process. In jurisdictions with limited judicial sentencing discretion due to mandatory sentencing law or narrowly tailored guidelines, prosecutors’ charging choices have tremendous, sometimes determinate, influence over the punishments that attach after a defendant’s guilty plea or trial conviction. Unrestrained charging discretion combined with broad criminal codes and power to define sentencing differentials are the sources of prosecutorial power and leverage in plea bargaining.

This state of affairs might be reformed in several ways. Jurisdictions might return to indeterminate sentencing policies that give judges wide discretion over punishments, which would diminish the

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17. See BROWN, supra note 11, at 96-97.
importance of prosecutorial charge selection. They might cull their criminal codes to reduce the number of offenses and punishments that apply to any given criminal act. Or they might somehow affect a sea change in professional prosecutorial culture—perhaps by transforming prosecution offices into nonpolitical civil service bureaucracies—so that tactically selecting and adjusting charges violates professional norms or administrative rules. Another possibility, however, is at least as feasible as any of those (surely more so than the last), and also wholly compatible with any of them. We could increase legal regulation of prosecutorial charging decisions, with judges taking on a modest, but meaningful, capacity to oversee the most extreme and blatantly tactical exercises of prosecutorial power. Regulation could take the form of statutory criteria, administrative regulations, common law, or constitutional law. The reluctance to this path, by courts and legislatures in nearly all U.S. jurisdictions, is widespread, and to a significant degree, it has become embedded in constitutional doctrines regarding separation of powers at both the federal and state levels. Prosecutorial discretion wholly free of judicial oversight, however, is not as longstanding or as uniform a tradition as state and federal courts now tend to assume.

The next two Sections sketch some of the history of executive authority over criminal charging to make the case that, especially in state criminal justice systems, a judicial power that is consistent with constitutional structure and historical practice could play a more meaningful role in regulating plea bargaining.

A. Exclusive Executive Authority and Separation of Powers

It has become a truism that “[g]overnmental investigation and prosecution of crimes is a quintessentially executive function.”18 The federal executive’s power during the prosecution process is at its apex in the initial decision whether or not to initiate criminal charges. The Supreme Court has repeatedly concluded that the Federal Constitution gives “the Executive Branch ... exclusive authority and absolute discretion to decide whether to prosecute a case.”19 For

roughly the last century (but only that long), federal courts have
adopted the view that prosecutorial charging discretion is a “special
province of the Executive Branch” as an inference from the Constitu-
tion’s Take Care Clause, which assigns to the executive the duty to
“take Care that the Laws be faithfully executed.”20 On top of this

20. Heckler, 470 U.S. at 832 (quoting U.S. CONST. art. II, § 3). The first time the Supreme Court
linked federal prosecution discretion to the Take Care Clause was in Ponzi v. Fessenden, 258 U.S. 254, 262 (1922). “The Attorney General is the head of the Department of
Justice. He is the hand of the President in taking care that the laws of the United States in
protection of the interests of the United States in legal proceedings and in the prosecution of
offenses, be faithfully executed.” Id. (internal citations omitted). A federal district court made
the connection a half century earlier. See United States v. Corrie, 25 F. Cas. 658, 668
(C.C.D.S.C. 1860) (No. 14,869); see also Rebecca Krauss, The Theory of Prosecutorial Dis-
discussing Corrie, Ponzi, and the evolution of prosecutorial power under the Take Care
Clause). For subsequent Supreme Court references, see United States v. Armstrong, 517 U.S.
456, 464 (1996) (“A selective-prosecution claim asks a court to exercise judicial power over a
'special province' of the Executive.... They have this latitude because they are designated by
statute as the President's delegates to help him discharge his constitutional responsibility to
'take Care that the Laws be faithfully executed.'”) (citations omitted); Morrison, 487 U.S. at
656-57 (affirming independent prosecutor statute, inter alia, because the prosecutor remained
in the executive branch and despite President's lack of control, and judges did not 'supervise' the
prosecutor); Heckler, 470 U.S. at 832 (“[W]e recognize that an agency's refusal to institute
proceedings shares to some extent the characteristics of the decision of a prosecutor in the
Executive Branch not to indict—a decision which has long been regarded as the special
province of the Executive Branch, inasmuch as it is the Executive who is charged by the
Constitution 'to take Care that the Laws be faithfully executed.'”).

Lower courts have also addressed distinctions in judicial and executive powers, defining
prosecution as part of the latter. See United States v. Scott, 631 F.3d 401, 406 (7th Cir. 2011)
(“Under our system of separation of powers, prosecutors retain broad discretion to enforce
criminal laws because they are required to help the President 'take Care that the Laws be
faithfully executed.'”); United States v. Woods, 576 F.3d 400, 409 (7th Cir. 2009) (“There is
nothing that this court either could or should do about the prosecutorial discretion that is
exercised at the charging stage.”); United States v. Moore, 543 F.3d 891, 900 (7th Cir. 2008);
In re United States, 503 F.3d 638, 641 (7th Cir. 2007); United States v. Roberson, 474 F.3d
that the Judiciary be given responsibility for the appointment and supervision of a ... [p]rosecutor ... is most unfortunate.... The Courts must remain neutral. Their duties are not
prosecutorial.”).
textual rationale, courts cite a practical one: they view enforcement decisions as “ill-suited to judicial review.”

In addition to the executive’s exclusive authority to commence a prosecution, courts generally have presumed that the separate decision to terminate a prosecution also belongs to the executive branch. That too can be inferred from the Take Care Clause, but it draws additional support from common law tradition, which accorded prosecutors exclusive control over the power to nolle prosequi, or dismiss, charges that they earlier filed in court. Between the decisions to initiate and terminate criminal charges, however, courts have jurisdiction over the case, which enables judges to play some role in supervising how the case proceeds and what the parties do during those proceedings. “[T]he primary constitutional duty of the Judicial Branch to do justice in criminal prosecutions” gives judges a basis for some authority over executive discretion during adjudication, even if they have none before that point. The Supreme Court has used that authority, for example, to reject generalized claims of executive privilege that would withhold evidence from a criminal proceeding.

During the adjudication process, the Court has emphasized its less absolutist account of separation of powers doctrine, which acknowledges the legitimacy of one branch having

21. Wayte v. United States, 470 U.S. 598, 607 (1985); see also United States v. Giannatassio, 979 F.2d 98, 100 (7th Cir. 1992) (Posner, J.) (“Prosecutorial discretion resides in the executive, not in the judicial, branch, and that discretion, though subject of course to judicial review to protect constitutional rights, is not reviewable for a simple abuse of discretion.”).

22. See Commonwealth v. Tuck, 37 Mass. (20 Pick.) 356, 364-66 (1838); 1 JAMES FITZJAMES STEPHEN, A HISTORY OF THE CRIMINAL LAW OF ENGLAND 496 (London, MacMillan & Co. 1883); Charles H. Winfield, Nolle Prosequi, 5 CRM. L. MAG. 1, 6-8 (1884). The only traditional limit on nolle prosequi power comes at a later stage: once a jury is sworn, jeopardy attaches and a prosecution-initiated dismissal can bar re-prosecution. Tuck, 37 Mass. (20 Pick.) at 365. Since the nineteenth century, states have varied their statutory rules on whether a judge must approve dismissal or the prosecutor’s nolle prosequi power is unilateral, but that distinction has little practical effect. Judges cannot command prosecutors to prosecute; refusal to dismiss amounts only to the power to bar the prosecutor’s authority to re-file the same charge later.

For a representative modern statement of prosecutors’ nolle pros power, see State v. Vixamar, 687 So. 2d 300, 303 (Fla. Dist. Ct. App. 1997) (noting “the prosecutor’s exclusive discretion to decide whether a criminal case should be discontinued and in the absence of a procedural rule authorizing judicial intervention” (citing State v. Matos, 589 So.2d 1022 (Fla. Dist. Ct. App. 1993))).


24. Id.
some input in a matter assigned primarily to another. “[S]eparate powers were not intended to operate with absolute independence,” but rather with “interdependence” and “reciprocity.”

An example of the judicial authority in the context of prosecutorial charging discretion that accords with this interdependent conception of separation of powers is the Supreme Court’s decision in *Blackledge v. Perry.* Perry was convicted of misdemeanor assault in a state court bench trial. State law provided for appeal in the form of a de novo jury trial, which Perry demanded. While the second trial was pending, the prosecutor indicted Perry under a felony statute for the same conduct. Perry alleged the greater charge was a vindictive response to his appeal that violated due process, and the Supreme Court agreed. *Blackledge* held that the Due Process Clause barred prosecutors from responding to a defendant’s appeal by indicting him on a more serious charge for the same conduct.

*Blackledge* thus defined a constitutional limit on prosecutorial charging discretion. More broadly, the Court recognized the judiciary’s competence to supervise criminal charging decisions in some circumstances; not all charging decisions in every context are exclusively executive. The executive branch’s “absolute discretion to decide whether to prosecute a case” need not be quite so absolute after all. Or rather, properly understood, prosecutorial discretion need not be viewed as incompatible with some constraints, at least at the outer bounds, defined by legal standards and enforced by judicial review. The same point can be drawn from equal protection doctrine, which prohibits prosecutors from basing decisions to charge on intentional allocation of power and resources.

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25. Id.
27. Id. at 22.
28. Id.
29. Id. at 23.
30. Id. at 25, 27.
31. Id. at 28-29.
racial bias and gives courts the power to investigate and remedy racially biased charges.\textsuperscript{33}

\textit{Blackledge}, however, is now only nominally good law and has instead come to represent a doctrinal road not taken. The Supreme Court effectively overturned \textit{Blackledge} in later decisions that have confined the \textit{Blackledge} holding to its facts and imposed insuperable proof burdens for vindictiveness claims in contexts other than the unusual one of demands for de novo jury trials.\textsuperscript{34} Most importantly in the plea bargaining context, the Court held in \textit{Bordenkircher v. Hayes} that \textit{Blackledge}-style tactical charging decisions intended to influence defendants' choices about exercising other rights—in Hayes's case, the right to trial—are wholly permissible in the context of plea negotiations.\textsuperscript{35} That discretionary authority gives prosecutors an enormously powerful tool in the plea negotiation process. The same is true of equal protection doctrine for similar reasons. In \textit{United States v. Armstrong}, the Court nominally recognized a standard by which courts guard against discriminatory prosecutions, but then made its requirements insuperably difficult to meet.\textsuperscript{36} Beyond these two constitutional doctrines, federal courts have not defined other standards that would give courts meaningful authority to review suspect prosecutorial charging decisions.\textsuperscript{37} State courts have done little better. Likewise, Congress and state legislatures have uniformly chosen not to specify such standards for judicial review by statute.

As a result, prosecutors functionally have exclusive authority not only over the initial decision to charge but also over critical post-charging litigation tactics, especially with regard to changing or dismissing charges. Courts concede the potential for abuse of power. The Supreme Court has acknowledged that “[t]here is no doubt that the breadth of discretion that our country’s legal system vests in

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{34} See United States v. Goodwin, 457 U.S. 368, 376-81 (1982) (imposing prohibitive “actual vindictiveness” requirement for prosecutorial vindictiveness claims).
  \item \textsuperscript{35} 434 U.S. 357, 364-65 (1978) (approving prosecutor's increase in charge severity as a means to encourage plea bargaining).
  \item \textsuperscript{36} 517 U.S. at 464-65.
  \item \textsuperscript{37} See Wayte v. United States, 470 U.S. 598, 610-11, 613-14 (1985) (nominally acknowledging limits on charging decisions motivated by defendants’ exercising fundamental rights such as free speech, but deferring to prosecutorial discretion).
\end{itemize}
prosecuting attorneys carries with it the potential for both individual and institutional abuse.”  

But the Court has been firm in its view that this risk—even in light of the “constitutional duty of the Judicial Branch to do justice in criminal prosecutions”—does not justify courts taking a meaningful role to guard against it, either as a matter of constitutional law or of the judiciary’s inherent supervisory authority. “In our system, so long as the prosecutor has probable cause to believe that the accused committed an offense defined by statute, the decision whether or not to prosecute, and what charge to file ... generally rests entirely in his discretion.”

Lower courts widely reaffirm this point in broad terms. A statement by the Seventh Circuit is typical: “A judge in our system does not have the authority to tell prosecutors which crimes to prosecute .... Prosecutorial discretion ... is not reviewable for a simple abuse of discretion.”

It may be that the powers accorded to each branch in the federal system were intended to operate with “interdependence” and “reciprocity.”

But with regard to criminal prosecution, the executive branch enjoys something close to “absolute independence.”

B. History of Criminal Prosecution Authority

The common law tradition clearly accords the “decision whether or not to prosecute” to prosecutorial as opposed to judicial control. But that does not necessarily mean that decisions to prosecute are exclusively in the executive’s control—much less that they have been so “always and everywhere.” Nor does it foreclose a meaningful judicial role in supervising some aspects of prosecution decision

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38. Bordenkircher, 434 U.S. at 365; see also Armstrong, 517 U.S. at 463-65; Wayte, 470 U.S. at 607.
40. Bordenkircher, 434 U.S. at 364; see Purkett v. Elem, 514 U.S. 765, 767-68 (1995) (noting a comparable level of faith in prosecutorial rectitude, and establishing a presumption against prosecutors’ racial bias in striking potential jurors from the jury).
41. United States v. Giannattasio, 979 F.2d 98, 100 (7th Cir. 1992); see also United States v. Cox, 342 F.2d 167, 171 (5th Cir. 1965).
42. Nixon, 418 U.S. at 707.
43. Id.
44. See Bordenkircher, 434 U.S. at 364.
45. Morrison v. Olson, 487 U.S. 654, 706 (1988) (Scalia, J., dissenting) (noting the power of criminal prosecution “has always and everywhere—if conducted by government at all—been conducted never by the legislature, never by the courts, and always by the executive”).
making, as Blackledge once confirmed. The strongest version of the claim that prosecution is always an activity exclusive to executive officials is a comparatively recent one. Even within the federal system, in which the case for that view rests on the firmest ground, some early federal practices undermine it. In state justice systems, as well as in common law systems outside the United States, the claim of longstanding exclusive executive control over prosecution simply does not hold.

C. Prosecutorial Power in the Federal System

The Federal Constitution creates a more unitary structure for the executive branch than do most state constitutions, especially with respect to criminal justice administration.\(^{46}\) Several historical practices suggest that the power of criminal prosecution was not always understood as an exclusively executive power to the degree that most courts today tend to assume. For one, private parties were allowed to initiate federal actions closely analogous to criminal prosecutions—*qui tam* actions.\(^{47}\) Those claims were understood as quasi-criminal because the plaintiff brought them on behalf of the federal government, the alleged victim of fraud or theft.\(^{48}\) Litigating on the government’s behalf, the successful *qui tam* relator shared

\(^{46}\) Cf. The Federalist No. 47, at 301 (James Madison) (Clinton Rossiter ed., 1961) (discussing debate about the separation of the judiciary, legislature, and executive at the time of the founding); The Federalist No. 51, supra, at 321 (James Madison) (“In order to lay a due foundation for that separate and distinct exercise of the different powers of government, which to a certain extent is admitted on all hands to be essential to the preservation of liberty, it is evident that each department should have a will of its own.”); Rachel E. Barkow, Separation of Powers and the Criminal Law, 58 Stan. L. Rev. 989, 992-94 (2006) (giving an overview of separation of powers debates focused on criminal justice administration). Moreover, the meaning and scope of the unitary executive created by the Federal Constitution remains a topic of scholarly debate. Some of that debate focuses on federal prosecution authority. Compare Lawrence Lessig & Cass R. Sunstein, The President and the Administration, 94 Colum. L. Rev. 1, 16-22 (1994) (arguing for executive authority outside the President’s control), and Harold J. Krent, Executive Control over Criminal Law Enforcement: Some Lessons from History, 38 Am. U. L. Rev. 275, 301-04 (1989) (expressing a similar, nonexclusive executive authority view of presidential power), with Saikrishna Prakash, The Chief Prosecutor, 73 Geo. Wash. L. Rev. 521, 538-39 (2005) (arguing for a strong unitary conception of executive power, including presidential control over prosecution).

\(^{47}\) See Krent, supra note 46, at 296-303.

\(^{48}\) See id.
any monetary award with the government. More significantly, federal crimes were sometimes prosecuted by state officials in state courts—officials clearly not under the control of the federal executive branch. Moreover, even the first federal prosecutors were not clearly or formally under the President’s control. The Judiciary Act of 1789 created the office of the Attorney General as well as federal district attorneys, but the latter did not report to the former until 1861. 

Beginning in 1820, district attorneys reported to the Treasury Secretary, who in turn was required by statute to report to Congress. The Department of Justice was not created until 1870.

From evidence such as this, Larry Lessig and Cass Sunstein concluded that “the decision ‘who should prosecute whom’ was a decision the early Congresses at least thought far more subtle and complex than do the believers in a strongly unitary executive.” Some scholars disagree about the implications of this history in the broader debate about presidential authority. But that debate is only weakly related to the debates about the nature of judicial

49. While federal criminal law in its earliest decades evidenced no significant judicial supervision in prosecution powers, the federal executive hardly maintained close or exclusive control over enforcement. Federal crimes were sometimes prosecuted by state rather than federal officials and occasionally by private parties, who could pursue close analogs to criminal prosecutions in private qui tam actions. See id. at 300; see also Lessig & Sunstein, supra note 46, at 20. Even today federal courts have power to make interim appointments for federal prosecution vacancies and to appoint special prosecutors to handle criminal contempt charges. See 28 U.S.C. § 546(d) (2012); see also 153 Cong. Rec. 6599-600 (2007) (statement of Sen. Diane Feinstein) (explaining that federal district courts have had authority to make interim appointments to unfilled U.S. Attorney offices since at least 1863). On federal judicial appointment of prosecutors for criminal contempt, see Young v. United States ex rel. Vuitton et Fils, 481 U.S. 787, 809-10, 814 (1987).

50. See Lessig & Sunstein, supra note 46, at 18-19; Krent, supra note 46, at 303-04.

51. The Judiciary Act of 1789, 1 Stat. 73, § 35.

52. See id.

53. See id.; Charles Tiefer, The Constiationality of Independent Officers as Checks on Abuses of Executive Power, 63 B.U. L. Rev. 59, 75 (1983) (“The Attorney General did not control or supervise federal district attorneys; his function was merely to advise the President and the Cabinet.”); see also Prakash, supra note 46, at 555-57 (noting President Washington lacked statutory authority to control federal district attorneys but nonetheless extensively dictated instructions to them, and concluding that Washington’s control over district attorneys and other federal attorneys was “wide ranging and complete”).

55. Lessig & Sunstein, supra note 46, at 21; see also id. at 17-18 (discussing the history of the Comptroller of the Treasury, who enjoyed some independence from presidential control, as the first centralized federal prosecution authority).

56. See Prakash, supra note 46, at 521.
oversight of prosecutorial discretion on constitutional grounds in the manner of Blackledge or—should Congress so provide—on statutory grounds. More importantly, the degree of executive control over federal prosecutions is irrelevant to understandings of the scope of executive authority in state criminal justice systems, in which more than 90 percent of criminal cases are adjudicated.57

D. Prosecutorial Power in State Systems

State justice systems arise from state constitutions that differ in significant ways from their federal counterpart, especially when it comes to criminal justice administration. In general, many state constitutions draw less rigid distinctions between executive, legislative, and judicial roles than does the Federal Constitution.58 As a result, a number of state courts have approved arrangements that likely would be barred in the federal context, such as expansive delegations of rule-making authority to agencies, or the appointment of legislators to executive boards.59 Several state courts exercise greater authority than their federal counterparts by providing advisory opinions to other branches, and many have constitutional rule-making authority.60


58. ROBERT F. WILLIAMS, THE LAW OF AMERICAN STATE CONSTITUTIONS 235-45 (2009) (providing an overview of differences in state separation of powers law); see id. at 237 (noting that forty state constitutions have explicit separation of powers provisions, unlike the Federal Constitution); cf. Prentis v. Atl. Coast Line Co., 211 U.S. 210, 225 (1908) (“[W]hen, as here, a state constitution sees fit to unite legislative and judicial powers in a single hand, there is nothing to hinder so far as the Constitution of the United States is concerned.”).


60. WILLIAMS, supra note 58, at 291, 296; see, e.g., In re Advisory Op. to the Governor, 732 A.2d 55, 62-64, 73 (R.I. 1999) (describing differences in state and federal separation of powers). One implication of the nonunitary executive structure is that state courts may have
in the judicial rather than the executive branch well into the twentieth century; a few states still do, including Florida, Louisiana, Tennessee, and Texas.\footnote{61} Most states also depart from the federal model of the unitary executive. In forty-three states, attorneys general are directly elected.\footnote{62} In the remainder they are appointed either by the Governor, the legislature, or—in Tennessee—the state supreme court.\footnote{63} In most states, chief local prosecutors are also independently elected, and state law frequently gives the attorney general little authority to supervise or remove them.\footnote{64}

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\footnote{61. See FLA. CONST. art. V, §§ 17–18 (creating elected state attorneys—and public defenders—in the “Judiciary” article that also creates courts); LA. CONST. art. V, §§ 18–20, 22, 26 (defining courts, elected judges, and elected district attorneys within the judicial branch); TENN. CONST. art. VI, § 5 (providing for locally elected prosecutors and an Attorney General appointed by the state supreme court within the “Judicial Department”); TEX. CONST. art. V, § 21 (providing for the election of county or district attorneys); State v. Hayes, 75 So. 3d 8, 12 n.1 (La. Ct. App. 2011) (noting that unlike federal law, prosecutorial power under the Louisiana Constitution is in the judicial, not the executive, branch); Meshell v. State, 739 S.W.2d 246, 253 (Tex. Crim. App. 1987) (“By establishing the office of county attorney under Article V, the authors of the Texas Constitution placed those officers within the Judicial department.” That office is “vested with the constitutional duty ‘to represent the State’ in state courts (quoting TEX. CONST. art. V, § 21)). Connecticut amended its constitution in the 1980s to follow the federal model more closely and locate prosecutors in the executive branch. See CONN. CONST. art. IV, amended by CONN. CONST. art. XXIII. Until then, prosecutors were appointed by judges. GEORGE COPPOLO, CONN. GEN. ASSEMBLY, OFFICE OF LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH, 2005 R-0139, APPOINTMENT OF CHIEF STATE'S ATTORNEY AND STATE'S ATTORNEYS (2005), https://www.cga.ct.gov/2005/rpt/2005-R-0139.htm [https://perma.cc/T3E6-RHEA].


63. See ME. CONST. art. IX, § 11 (legislature appoints Attorney General); N.H. CONST. pt. II, art. 46 (Governor and the Executive Council appoint the Attorney General together); TENN. CONST. art. VI, § 5 (state supreme court appoints Attorney General).

64. See generally Michael J. Ellis, The Origins of the Elected Prosecutor, 121 YALE L.J. 1528 (2012) (describing prosecution systems in various states and the origins of U.S. election of prosecutors). Many states vest the duty to prosecute expressly with local prosecutors rather than the Attorney General. See 7 AM. JUR. 2D Attorney General §§ 15, 34 (2016); 7A C.J.S. Attorney General § 67 (2016). Some state Attorneys General have formal authority to supervise or take over local prosecutions, but they exercise it only rarely; others lack even formal power save in special circumstances, such as authorization by the Governor. For statutes limiting Attorney General power to intervene in local prosecution, see, for example, COLO. REV. STAT. ANN. § 24-31-101(1)(a) (West 2015); N.Y. EXEC. LAW § 63(2) (McKinney 2015). For
In addition to these contemporary differences, the history of prosecution authority and practice in the states also differed sharply from the federal experience, especially in the nation’s first several decades. In the colonial era and roughly the first half century of the republic, public prosecutors in state systems were appointed in various ways—by governors, legislatures, and in some jurisdictions by judges. Often part-time or short-term officers, they were commonly paid by the case or by the conviction. Full-time public prosecutors were not widespread, even in larger cities, until the examples of statutes authorizing general or supervisory power to the Attorney General, see, for example, CAL. GOV’T CODE § 12550 (West 2015); WASH. REV. CODE ANN. § 43.10.090 (West 2015). For decisions describing limits on powers of the Attorney General under state law, see People v. Knippenberg, 757 N.E.2d 667, 672 (Ill. App. Ct. 2001); Johnson v. Pataki, 691 N.E.2d 1002, 1005 (N.Y. 1997) (describing Governor’s statutory authority to replace locally elected prosecutors and the state Attorney General’s power to take over local prosecutions only after authorization from the Governor); Commonwealth v. Mulholland, 702 A.2d 1027, 1037 (Pa. 1997).

Legislation often authorizes local prosecutors within a state to devise prosecution policies independently, although statewide prosecutor associations can exert some influence toward more uniform practices. See, e.g., FLA. STAT. ANN. § 741.2901 (West 2015) (requiring local prosecutors to devise policies regarding domestic violence prosecutions); WISC. STAT. ANN. § 908.075(5) (West 2015) (same); FLA. STAT. ANN. § 775.08401 (repealed 2011) (requiring that “[t]he state attorney in each judicial circuit” adopt “uniform criteria” for charging under certain sentence-enhancement statutes, and each circuit’s policy to be on file with the state prosecutor association, but prohibiting judicial enforcement of such policies).

See, e.g., Ellis, supra note 64, at 1537 (noting judicial appointment of prosecutors in Kentucky and New York, and legislative or gubernatorial appointments elsewhere); see also GEORGE FISHER, PLEA BARGAINING’S TRIUMPH: A HISTORY OF PLEA BARGAINING IN AMERICA 247 n.13 (2000) (describing an 1809 Massachusetts statute that transferred power to appoint county attorneys from the Governor to the court); MIKE MCCONVILLE & CHESTER L. MIRSKY, JURY TRIALS AND PLEA BARGAINING: A TRUE HISTORY 35 (2005) (describing early systems of judicial or gubernatorial appointment of prosecutors until the office became an elected one in 1847); id. at 28, 35 (noting courts appointed private lawyers as substitute prosecutors when district attorneys failed to appear); id. at 35 (indicating that before 1847, the district attorney was “appointed by the Governor’s Council of Appointment and approved by the judges of the Court of General Sessions”); cf. JULIUS GOEBEL JR. & T. RAYMOND NAUGHTON, LAW ENFORCEMENT IN COLONIAL NEW YORK: A STUDY IN CRIMINAL PROCEDURE 367 (1944) (noting that in Colonial New York, judges as well as the Governor ordered prosecutions and nolle prosequi); ALLEN STEINBERG, THE TRANSFORMATION OF AMERICAN CRIMINAL JUSTICE: PHILADELPHIA, 1800-1880, at 58, 79-80, 149-58 (1989) (describing judicial management of crime investigation and criminal enforcement, especially on temperance issues; the role of public prosecutors in courts dominated by private prosecutors; and reform that changed the district attorney’s office into an elected one after 1850).

mid-nineteenth century. Most states instituted direct, local election of prosecutors (as well as judges) during a wave of state constitutional reforms in the 1840s-1860s.67

Elections failed in many places, however, to reduce political party influence.68 Today, forty-five of the fifty states follow that model, a regime of highly decentralized law enforcement and policy making sharply different from the unitary executive model in which federal prosecutors are under presidential control through the Attorney General.69 Of the five states that do not elect local prosecutors, three allow the Governor to nominate candidates who must be confirmed by the legislature.70 Two of the smallest states, Delaware and Rhode

67. JED HANDELSMAN SHUGERMAN, THE PEOPLE’S COURTS: PURSUITING JUDICIAL INDEPENDENCE IN AMERICA 6, 57-102 (2012) (describing this era of state constitutional reform and explaining that reformers hoped that electing state judges would make the judiciary independent from Governors and legislatures). During this era, the state constitutions of Indiana, Maryland, Michigan, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Virginia made local prosecutors elected positions. See, e.g., IND. CONST. of 1851, art. I, § 11; MD. CONST. of 1851, art. III (forbidding the creation of state Attorney General office); id. art. V; MICH. CONST. of 1850, art. VIII, § 1; id. art. X, § 3; N.Y. CONST. of 1846, art. X, § 1; N.C. CONST. of 1868, art. IV, § 29; VA. CONST. of 1850, art. VI, § 19; see also McCONVILLE & MIRSKY, supra note 65, at 25-42 (describing New York’s early systems for judicial and gubernatorial appointment of prosecutors, until elections of prosecutors began in 1847); STEINBERG, supra note 65, at 157-58 (describing Pennsylvania’s shift to election of judges in 1851 and Philadelphia’s first election of the district attorney in 1850).


69. See generally Ellis, supra note 64 (describing the origins of U.S. election of prosecutors and systems in various states). On local prosecutors’ plenary authority and limits on supervision by state attorneys general, see supra note 64.

Island, elect an Attorney General who appoints the statewide prosecution staff.71

More notably for understanding the scope of executive authority, some states followed English practice and relied significantly on private prosecutors to initiate and litigate criminal charges. In states such as New York and Pennsylvania, this remained the practice into the latter part of the nineteenth century, well after the advent of elected prosecutors.72 Public prosecutors did not gain their full monopoly over criminal charging in some states until a century or more after the nation’s founding, although they typically had the authority to take over—and either press or dismiss—a private prosecution. That is still the case for public prosecutors in common law jurisdictions outside of the United States.73 Consequently, courts tended to play a somewhat greater supervisory role over prosecutors.74 The early power of appointment in a few places gave them influence, and judges had various means by which to somewhat check private prosecutors. As a threshold matter, criminal complaints could proceed only if a judge found probable cause (except where serious offenses had to go through grand juries). Additionally, private prosecutors who lost might be ordered to pay the defendant’s costs or face liability for malicious prosecution.75

Moreover, many states adopted statutes in this era that gave judges a new power that prosecutors had exercised exclusively at common law. New statutes in most states required judicial approval of prosecutors’ nolle pros requests.76 These rules, initially adopted


72. See McConville & Mirsky, supra note 65, at 35 (discussing New York practice in the nineteenth century); Steinberg, supra note 65, at 58, 78 (describing private prosecutors and judicial supervision of prosecution in nineteenth-century Philadelphia).

73. See infra Part II.74

74. In the 1800s in New York City, judges had power to appoint private attorneys when public prosecutors failed to appear. See McConville & Mirsky, supra note 65, at 35.

75. See Steinberg, supra note 65, at 184 (discussing an 1859 law that empowered jurors to order that litigation costs be split between defendant and prosecutor); John C. Jeffries, Jr., The Liability Rule for Constitutional Torts, 99 Va. L. Rev. 207, 220-25 (2013) (discussing prosecutor liability for malicious prosecution in the nineteenth century).

76. See Annotation, Power of Court to Enter Nolle Prosequi or Dismiss Prosecution, 69 A.L.R. 240-44 (1930) [hereinafter Power of Court] (“Under statutes in some states, however, and independently of statute in a few jurisdictions where long practice has established the
in the early nineteenth century, gave judges a different kind of authority over public and private prosecutors—the power to compel enforcement, rather than the power to bar charges as unfounded or to facilitate sanctions for frivolous charges. Whatever legislatures’ intention in creating this judicial veto on prosecutorial discretion, courts in every state have effectively rejected it.77 Perhaps because public prosecutors gained both exclusive control of criminal charging and democratic legitimacy from their elective status, courts have uniformly interpreted these statutes to require exceeding judicial deference to prosecutors’ nolle pros requests, rendering judicial authority on this point practically irrelevant.78 A smaller number of state legislatures—at least a dozen—have additionally empowered

rule, the prosecuting attorney does not have the power to enter a nolle prosequi without the consent of the court. The present annotation is devoted to a discussion of the question of whether or not the court has the power, or the right, to enter a nolle prosequi."

(internal citations omitted); see also ABRAHAM S. GOLDSTEIN, THE PASSIVE JUDICIARY: PROSECUTORIAL DISCRETION AND THE GUILTY PLEA 14 (1981).

77. GOLDSTEIN, supra note 76, at 14-15 (discussing the initial purposes of the statutes and criticizing courts for abandoning their statutory authority to prosecutors); POUND, supra note 68, at 187.

78. See Power of Court, supra note 76 (providing a broad overview of state nolle pros laws). Enactment of these statutes often predated prosecutorial elections and initially was a tool for judges to control private prosecutors or public ones they had appointed. New York granted courts nolle pros authority in 1829, during the state’s era of private and judicially appointed prosecutors. McCONVILLE & MIRSKY, supra note 65, at 35 n.112 (citing 1829 Revised Statutes of the State of New York, Title IV, Sec. 68, p.730 & Sec. 54., p.726). The federal rule is Fed. R. Crim. P. 48(a), first enacted in 1944. Fed. R. Crim. P. 48(a) advisory committee’s note to 1994 amendment. For examples of courts interpreting their authority over nolle pros requests to require deference to prosecutors’ preferences, see, for example, Genesee Cty. Prosecutor v. Genesee Circuit Judge, 215 N.W.2d 145 (Mich. 1974). For federal cases, see, for example, United States v. Smith, 55 F.3d 157 (4th Cir. 1995); United States v. Perate, 719 F.2d 706, 710-11 (4th Cir. 1983); Dawsey v. Gov’t of V.I., 931 F. Supp. 397, 401-06 (D.V.I. 1996); United States v. Smith, 853 F. Supp. 179 (M.D.N.C. 1994).

A standard explanation for deference is that judges lack means to compel prosecutors to litigate charges at trial. See, e.g., United States v. Greater Blouse, Skirt & Neckwear Contractors Ass’n, 228 F. Supp. 483, 489 (S.D.N.Y. 1964) (“Even were leave of Court to the dismissal of the indictment denied, the Attorney General would still have the right to . . . in the exercise of his discretion, decline to move the case for trial. The Court in that circumstance would be without power to issue a mandamus or other order to compel prosecution of the indictment, since such a direction would invade the traditional separation of powers doctrine.”). But judges have options short of mandamus. Presumably they could hold prosecutors in contempt for failure to appear, as they could for all other attorneys. And whenever prosecutors retain an interest in charges they seek to dismiss, judges could incentivize them by ruling that failure to litigate charges results (as for civil parties) in forfeiture of the claim or dismissal with prejudice.
judges to dismiss criminal charges on their own, without the prosecutor’s request or consent, “in the interest of justice” or on similarly broad grounds. 79 Here too, however, state appellate courts overwhelmingly seem to have narrowly construed judicial power granted by these statutes, and trial judges seem to rarely use them. On the other hand, a Massachusetts statute that authorizes judges to dismiss charges over a prosecutor’s objection seems to get more use. That provision empowers and authorizes judges to dismiss charges without the prosecutor’s consent if a defendant enters a conditional guilty plea and then completes a supervised probation period with terms set by the court. 80 At least a few other states grant courts similar authority. 81

From the foregoing, it should be easy to see that not all aspects of prosecution authority have always been insulated from judicial supervision. The decision whether to charge was not exclusively executive; it was also sometimes exercised by private parties. 82 Moreover, courts had meaningful tools for input on whether a prosecutor’s preferred charge should proceed or be dismissed, and


For the standard position on this point, see, for example, State v. Vixamar, 687 So. 2d 300, 303 (Fla. Dist. Ct. App. 1997) (“[I]t is the prosecutor’s exclusive discretion to decide whether a criminal case should be discontinued and in the absence of a procedural rule authorizing judicial intervention.” (citing State v. Matos, 589 So. 2d 1022, 1023 (Fla. Dist. Ct. App. 1991))).

80. MASS. GEN. LAWS ANN. ch. 278, § 18 (West 2015); see also Commonwealth v. Powell, 901 N.E.2d 686, 689-90 (Mass. 2009) (discussing this statute and the history of this procedure). The practice authorized by the statute seems to have originated as a judicial innovation incorporated into state common law. See Commonwealth v. Brandano, 269 N.E.2d 84, 88 (Mass. 1971) (stating that trial court must hold adversary hearing before dismissing criminal charges over prosecutor’s objection).

81. See, e.g., State v. Krotzer, 548 N.W.2d 252, 254-55 (Minn. 1996) (holding that a judge may, over the prosecutor’s objection, stay adjudication upon defendant’s guilty plea in special circumstances). But see State v. Foss, 556 N.W.2d 540, 541 (Minn. 1996) (finding no “special circumstances” like those in Krotzer and reversing trial court’s stay of adjudication over prosecutor’s objection).

82. See supra notes 47-48, 72 and accompanying text.
whether malice played a role in charging decisions.\textsuperscript{83} From this history and states’ distinctive constitutional structures, one would expect to see some state constitutional law, common law, or statutes that sustained a \textit{Blackledge}-like standard through which courts could play a balancing role and guard against outlier instances of prosecutorial vindictiveness or abuse of discretion. For the most part, however, one does not. State criminal justice systems overwhelmingly follow the federal model on separation of powers and treat most aspects of prosecutorial decision making as an executive activity immune from judicial interference.\textsuperscript{84}

Some examples make the point. The vast majority of states strengthen executive authority by prohibiting jury instructions without the prosecutor’s consent on a species of lesser-included offenses—those that fit the trial evidence but are not “necessarily” included within the elements of the charged offense. To do otherwise, in the words of the California Supreme Court, may violate separation of powers by “usurp[ing] the prosecution’s exclusive charging discretion.”\textsuperscript{85} Likewise, many states cite separation of powers concerns in barring judges from dismissing valid charges before trial.\textsuperscript{86} In Texas, the state’s highest criminal court has taken this view and held that trial judges lack authority to “invad[e] the exclusive province” of prosecutors by dismissing charges with prejudice even though Texas prosecutors are constitutionally within the

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{83} See supra notes 75-76 and accompanying text.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{84} See, e.g., State v. Perleberg, 736 N.W.2d 703, 706 (Minn. Ct. App. 2007) (rejecting judicial review of prosecutor’s choice to charge conduct as several offenses rather than a single one because “a prosecutor has broad discretion in the exercise of the charging function and ordinarily, under the separation-of-powers doctrine, a court should not interfere with the prosecutor’s exercise of that discretion’ absent special circumstances” (quoting Foss, 556 N.W.2d at 540)); see also People v. Wabash, St. Louis & Pac. Ry. Co., 12 Ill. App. 263, 264-65 (App. Ct. 1882) (stating, in one of the earliest state decisions describing a prosecutor’s wide discretion, that the prosecutor “is charged by law with large discretion in prosecuting offenders against the law. He may commence public prosecutions, in his official capacity by information and he may discontinue them when, in his judgment, the ends of justice are satisfied”). For an overview of U.S. prosecutorial power and the lack of judicial supervision, see Abby L. Dennis, Note, \textit{Reining in the Minister of Justice: Prosecutorial Oversight and the Superseder Power}, 57 DUKE L.J. 131, 134-45 (2007).

\textsuperscript{85} People v. Birks, 960 P.2d 1073, 1075 (Cal. 1998); \textit{id.} at 1088 & n.17 (concluding most states follow the same rule); \textit{id.} at 1089-90 (discussing prosecution authority and separation of powers).

\textsuperscript{86} See Commonwealth v. Pellegrini, 608 N.E.2d 717, 719 (Mass. 1993).}
Judicial Department. For the same reasons of “exclusive prosecutorial discretion,” Texas trial judges have no authority to require that prosecutors subpoena their trial witnesses, even though a subpoena is necessary in order for a defendant to raise—and a trial judge to rule on—a pretrial challenge to whether a witness may testify.

Many state court statements on the parameters of prosecutorial authority are as sweepingly phrased as those of any federal court. Troublingly, the implication is that separation of powers jurisprudence would bar even legislation authorizing even modest judicial review of prosecutorial discretion for abuse of discretion or an even more deferential standard. In most cases, because no such statute was at issue, this constitutional limit is only implicit—as in the California rule on lesser-included offenses, or the Texas decision on witness subpoenas. Case law directly addressing the constitutionality of statutes that give judges some role regarding prosecution decision making is rare because such legislation is rare. One example, however, comes from Wyoming. The Wyoming Supreme Court invalidated a statute that had granted courts authority to order a prosecutor to pursue a charge when the judge found probable cause for a crime such as, in that case, in-court perjury by a police officer. The court concluded that even the legislature could not alter the state separation of powers implication that “the charging decision is properly within the scope of duty of the executive branch.”

On the other hand, some states have recognized the judicial capacity for a modest supervisory role over critical aspects of prosecutorial discretion. Statutory authority noted above for judges to

87. State ex rel. Holmes v. Denson, 671 S.W.2d 896, 900 (Tex. Crim. App. 1984) (holding that the trial judge “usurped his authority in invading the exclusive province of the [prosecutor]”).
89. See supra note 85 and accompanying text.
90. See supra notes 87-88 and accompanying text.
92. Id. at 873.
dismiss charges filed by prosecutors, or to reject their requests to nolle pros charges, are the clearest examples. Despite the general pattern of judicial deference to prosecutors, some state courts have departed from federal conceptions of separation of powers. Notwithstanding its rule against judges adding lesser-included-offense instructions at trial, the California Supreme Court has concluded that dismissal of charges is a “judicial function.” Further, the court cautioned that granting prosecutors a veto over dismissal decisions could violate separation of powers, and it invalidated statutory provisions that required prosecutorial consent before judges reduced certain offenses to misdemeanors, sentenced offenders to drug treatment in lieu of prison, or struck prior convictions that trigger enhanced punishment. Perhaps the strongest assertion of judicial authority on state constitutional grounds comes from the New Jersey Supreme Court in the context of sentencing. The New Jersey legislature gave prosecutors the power to invoke mandatory sentence terms—as well as to control access to pretrial diversion programs—as part of their charging discretion. The state’s high court held that those statutes are constitutional only if prosecutors are guided in those decisions by statewide charging and plea bargaining guidelines, which courts use as a basis to review prosecutorial decisions.

93. See supra notes 76, 78 and accompanying text.
95. Id. at 636-37 (concluding that, in California, disposition of pending charges is a judicial function; a statute that gives prosecutors control over judicial dismissal of allegations affecting sentencing would violate separation of powers); see also CAL. PENAL CODE § 1385 (West 2015) (“The judge or magistrate may, either of his or her own motion or upon the application of the prosecuting attorney, and in furtherance of justice, order an action to be dismissed.”).
96. People v. Navarro, 497 P.2d 481, 485, 488-89 (Cal. 1972) (invalidating statute giving prosecutor power to veto a judicial decision to commit a convicted defendant to a drug treatment program in lieu of prison); Esteybar v. Mun. Court, 485 P.2d 1140, 1141 & n.1 (Cal. 1971) (holding that a statutory scheme that granted magistrates the authority to reduce a “wobbler” offense to a misdemeanor but conditioning the exercise of this power on the approval of the prosecutor violated separation of powers); People v. Tenorio, 473 P.2d 993, 997 (Cal. 1970) (holding that a statutory provision giving prosecutors the power to preclude the court from exercising its discretion to strike a prior conviction for purposes of sentencing violated separation of powers doctrine).
97. See, e.g., N.J. STAT. ANN. §§ 2C:35-12, 2C:43-12 (West 2015).
98. See State v. Brimage, 706 A.2d 1096, 1106 (N.J. 1998) (reviewing a prosecutor’s decision to invoke statutory provision for mandatory sentence in context of a plea bargain); State
Statutes that grant judges powers other than dismissing charges or reducing sanctions are less common, especially on decisions that intersect with prosecutorial charging discretion. In a few states, statutes mandate that prosecutors provide reasons for decisions not to file charges after a judge has found probable cause at a preliminary examination. Judges review those reasons and—if they are insufficient—can order the prosecutor to pursue the charges. Note that this applies only to a specific subset of all prosecution decisions to not pursue charges—a distinctive group for which judges have considerable pre-charging access to case facts. Like the authority to disapprove prosecutors’ nolle pros motions, these statutes effectively give judges the power to order prosecutors to pursue charges that they would prefer to drop—the very core of “the decision whether or not to prosecute” that Bordenkircher declared to be “entirely in [the prosecutor’s] discretion.” Presumably for that reason, courts in the few states with such statutes have interpreted the power narrowly and seem to exercise it sparingly.


99. See MICH. COMP. LAWS ANN. § 767.41 (West 2015) (stipulating that in certain cases, prosecutors must file reasons for not charging, and that a court, upon review, can order prosecutor to file charge); NEB. REV. STAT. ANN. § 29-1606 (West 2015) (same); see also COLO. REV. STAT. ANN. § 16-5-209 (West 2015) (same); PA. R. CRIM. P. 506 (requiring prosecutors to give court-reviewable reasons for decisions not to prosecute upon a private complaint). Because this statutory scheme applies only to a small subset of cases, this judicial power is narrower than that exercised by English courts as discussed below.


Finally, at least two states have a different kind of restriction on charging discretion. In New York and California, statutes restrict—nominally if not effectively—prosecutors’ power to reduce or dismiss charges after the initial indictment when they normally would have done so as part of a plea bargain. In both states the statutes have been interpreted in ways that make them easy to avoid, resulting in the statutes having little practical force. Both states have plenty of plea bargains, and appellate decisions—which do not necessarily tell the whole story—provide little evidence that courts rely on the statutes to limit prosecutors’ charge bargaining. Still, the longstanding existence of the statutes confirms their state constitutionality; these limits on prosecution decisions to reduce or dismiss charges do not unduly interfere with prosecutors’ executive prerogative.

E. Conclusion

In sum, compared to the federal system, many states have distinctive constitutional structures and long histories of prosecution by actors other than executive branch officials. Those differences should lead states away from the error of viewing all critical aspects of prosecutorial discretion as exclusively executive and immune to any judicial input. Some state statutes and doctrines demonstrate—albeit mostly in marginal terms—some possibilities for judicial checks on prosecutorial authority. There are good reasons to question the strong conception of separation of powers doctrine in the federal context, where it prohibits meaningful judicial oversight of prosecutorial discretion about filing, amending, or dismissing charges. That kind of constitutional barrier has an even weaker basis in many states, notwithstanding the overly broad assumptions by state and federal courts alike about our system of criminal

102. CAL. PENAL CODE § 1192.7 (West 2015); N.Y. CRIM. PROC. LAW § 220.10 (McKinney 2015).
103. See, e.g., People v. Brown, 223 Cal. Rptr. 66, 72 n.11 (Ct. App. 1986) (“Section 1192.7 applies only to bargains concerning ‘indictments or informations’ and thus does not limit plea bargaining concerning charges contained in complaints before the municipal or justice court.”); People v. Moquin, 570 N.E.2d 1059, 1061 (N.Y. 1991) (holding that the criminal procedure law provides courts no authority to vacate an illegal plea bargain after it has been imposed).
prosecution. In sum, state executive authority over criminal charging can accommodate specific legislative standards for—or checks on—that authority and a deferential role for the judiciary defined by legislative or even judicially defined standards.

In fact, even in the federal context there should be no dispute that separation of powers doctrine permits legislatively authorized judicial review. Congress surely can enact statutory criteria, guidelines, or mandates for executive branch enforcement actions and also provide for judicial review under those rules. This kind of statutorily authorized judicial review already exists for certain civil enforcement decisions made by federal executive branch departments. Charging decisions are not “ill-suited to judicial review” as a federal constitutional matter in all circumstances, and state constitutions are unlikely to present a stronger barrier. At most, that assumption is true only as a practical or prudential matter when no statute or regulation provides a basis for review, although courts are capable of fashioning meaningful standards as a matter of constitutional or common law. Judges are wholly competent to review some aspects of government enforcement decisions under sufficiently specific legal criteria, even if only to guard against extreme exercises of authority. Short of a wholesale revision of expansive criminal codes and determinate sentencing laws, some kind of review along those lines is the only route to meaningful regulation of plea bargaining.

104. See Bordenkircher, 434 U.S. at 364-65; see also Lafler v. Cooper, 132 S. Ct. 1376, 1397 (2012) (Scalia, J., dissenting) (“[M]any believe that without [plea bargaining] ... our system of criminal justice would grind to a halt.”); cf. State v. Eighth Judicial Dist. Ct., No. 66193, 2014 WL 6210281, at *2 (Nev. Nov. 13, 2014) (holding the state trial court abused its discretion in allowing defendant to plead guilty, withdraw his guilty plea, and plead guilty to a lesser offense (quoting United States v. Batchelder, 442 U.S. 114, 124 (1979) (“Whether to prosecute and what charge to file or bring before the grand jury are decisions that generally rest in the prosecutor’s discretion.”))).

105. See generally Heckler v. Chaney, 470 U.S. 821, 830-34 (1985); Motor Vehicle Mfrs. Ass’n of the U.S., Inc. v. State Farm Mut. Auto Ins. Co., 463 U.S. 29, 43, 52 (1983) (requiring federal administrative agency to provide rational reasons for rescinding motor vehicle safety requirements in light of legislation authorizing judicial review); Dunlop v. Bachowski, 421 U.S. 560, 563 n.2, 566 (1975) (holding that, under the Labor-Management Reporting and Disclosure Act, 29 U.S.C. § 482—which requires that the Secretary of Labor “investigate” a complaint of labor law violations and, “if he finds probable cause to believe that a violation ... has occurred ... he shall ... bring a civil action against the labor organization”—union members may seek judicial review of the secretary’s decision not to initiate civil enforcement action).

and to leaving executive power to be checked solely by the political process.

II. Regulation of Prosecutors in Common Law Systems

Regulation or judicial supervision of prosecutorial conduct is hardly a novel idea. Some civil law jurisdictions have long had a requirement of mandatory prosecution when evidence is sufficient.107 Some nations, such as Germany, amended mandatory prosecution to authorize prosecutorial discretion for some crimes, although apparently the mandate remains a significant norm that somewhat constrains exercises of prosecutorial discretion.108 By contrast, prosecutors throughout common law jurisdictions have always had wide discretion over whether to pursue charges well grounded in evidence.109 There are few restraints on authority by statutes, constitutional doctrine, or common law.110 But that freedom for

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107. Prosecutorial discretion is also the rule in some civil law systems such as Denmark, France, and the Netherlands. Germany, Italy, and Poland are among civil law jurisdictions with mandatory prosecution rules for some classes of offenses. See THE PROSECUTOR IN TRANSNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE (Erik Luna & Marianne L. Wade eds., 2012) (providing a summary of prosecutorial practices across nations); James Q. Whitman, No Right Answer?, in CRIME, PROCEDURE AND EVIDENCE IN A COMPARATIVE AND INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT 371, 377-87 (John Jackson et al. eds., 2008) (noting the differing civil law and common law understandings of the legality principle and trust in judges and prosecutors); see also JULIA FIONDA, PUBLIC PROSECUTORS AND DISCRETION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY 9 (1995) (discussing the legality principle, which "excludes all discretion from the early stages of the criminal process. Under this principle, prosecution of all offences where sufficient evidence exists of the guilt of the defendant is compulsory"); Isabel Kessler, A Comparative Analysis of Prosecution in Germany and the United Kingdom: Searching for Truth or Getting a Conviction?, in WRONGFUL CONVICTION: INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON MISCARRIAGES OF JUSTICE 213, 216 (C. Ronald Huff & Martin Killias eds., 2008) (discussing Germany’s “opportunity principle” that grants prosecutors broad discretion for low-level crimes but less discretion for more serious offenses).

108. See FIONDA, supra note 107, at 11 (describing historical reasons for Germany’s restrictions on prosecutorial power).

109. See, e.g., Smedleys Ltd. v. Breed [1974] AC 839 at 856 (Eng.) (“It has never been the rule of this country ... that criminal offences must automatically be the subject of prosecution.”).

110. For a classic analysis of American prosecutorial discretion to charge and to decline to charge compared to other officials, see KENNETH CULP DAVIS, DISCRETIONARY JUSTICE: A PRELIMINARY INQUIRY 188, 207-08 (1969) (“The affirmative power to prosecute is enormous, but the negative power to withhold prosecution may be even greater, because it is less protected against abuse... The plain fact is that more than nine-tenths of local prosecutors’ decisions are supervised or reviewed by no one.”).
prosecutorial authority did not arise from a trust in the public prosecutors or executive officials. England relied heavily on private prosecutors to a much greater degree, and for much longer, than did any American state jurisdiction. \footnote{111} The primary explanation for why common law jurisdictions never developed legal parameters for prosecutorial authority to the degree that many civil law jurisdictions did is that common law systems relied primarily on the structure of the adjudication process to oversee government officials: lay juries provided the main safeguard against abusive prosecutions.\footnote{112} Democratic review rather than judicial review checks prosecutors.

Times have changed. Plea bargaining has marginalized jury trials as the means of adjudication. But what has replaced the jury as an institutional safeguard? In American jurisdictions, very little—despite a deep-seated national skepticism of government power and the monopolization of prosecutorial authority by government officials. Courts have done little to develop bases for judicial review of charging decisions and bargaining tactics. Legislatures have granted prosecutors greater authority through determinate sentencing laws, which give prosecutors power over punishment terms, and through expansive criminal codes that multiply charging options.\footnote{113}

\footnote{111. Private prosecution still exists in England. The primary prosecution agency, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), was created in only 1985. See Prosecution of Offences Act 1985, c. 23, § 1 (Eng.); \textsc{Andrew Ashworth} & \textsc{Mike Redmayne}, \textsc{The Criminal Process} 222-23 (4th ed. 2010). The Director of Public Prosecutions was created in 1879 but did not handle most prosecutions until the CPS was created. See Glanville Williams, \textsc{The Power to Prosecute}, 1955 CRIM. L. REV. 596, 601-03 (Eng.). In the intervening century, police came to dominate filing of criminal charges, supplemented by private prosecutions—a system that eventually was viewed as providing insufficient supervision of charging decisions by police. \textit{Id.}}

\footnote{112. See \textsc{Sandra Guerra Thompson}, \textsc{Judicial Gatekeeping of Police-Generated Witness Testimony}, 102 J. CRIM. L. & CRIMINOLOGY 329, 392 (2012) ("The jury system gives lay people an important participatory role, designed to protect the accused, in the criminal justice system."); see also \textsc{Frederic N. Smalkin}, \textsc{Judicial Control of Juries and Just Results in the Common Law System: A Historical Perspective}, 46 IUS GENTIUM 105, 109-112 (2015). Formerly, the grand jury was an additional check on the initiation of serious charges, but it has been abolished in England and many U.S. states. In the jurisdictions where the grand jury remains, rule changes have largely converted it to prosecutors’ handmaidsen. On the weaknesses of grand juries, see \textsc{Andrew D. Leipold}, \textsc{Why Grand Juries Do Not (and Cannot) Protect the Accused}, 80 CORNELL L. REV. 260 (1995). For an argument that juries have little indirect effect on bargaining, see \textsc{Stephanos Bibas}, \textsc{Plea Bargaining Outside the Shadow of Trial}, 117 HARV. L. REV. 2463 (2004).}

\footnote{113. See \textsc{Harris v. United States}, 536 U.S. 545, 571 (2002) (Breyer, J., concurring) (stating that mandatory minimum statutes “transfer sentencing power to prosecutors, who can determine sentences through the charges they decide to bring”); see also \textsc{N.J. Stat. Ann.}}
On this front, however, the evolution of English and American criminal justice has diverged. And for that reason it is worth considering English practice for roads not taken to the regulation of plea bargaining by state and federal law.

III. JUDICIAL REVIEW OF PROSECUTION DECISIONS IN ENGLAND

The baseline rule regarding English courts’ oversight of charging decisions is, much like the American rule, highly deferential: “[J]udicial review of a prosecutorial decision is available but is a highly exceptional remedy.”114 Like its American counterparts, the English judiciary recognizes that prosecution decisions typically “turn not on an analysis of the relevant legal principles but on the exercise of an informed judgment of how a case against a particular defendant, if brought, would be likely to fare in the context of a criminal trial

§ 2C:35-7 (West 2015) (prohibiting judges from merging certain offenses for sentencing, and empowering prosecutors to trigger longer sentences through selection of charges); id. § 2C:35-12 (stipulating that a mandatory minimum sentence applies unless the prosecutor agrees to a lesser sentence, and that the court may not impose a lesser sentence than parties specified in plea agreement). But see id. (granting, in a 2010 amendment, judicial power to waive minimum period of parole ineligibility); see also FLA. STAT. ANN. §§ 775.084, 775.0843 (West 2015) (defining habitual offender criteria for more severe, mandatory punishments and giving prosecutors discretion to charge under such provisions). For an early example of a statute increasing prosecutor authority, see People v. Tenorio, 473 P.2d 993, 996 (Cal. 1970) (citing state statute that granted unreviewable discretion to the prosecutor). Federal prosecutors are forthright about charging offenses that carry mandatory minimums if they anticipate they will not agree with a judge’s use of her sentencing discretion. U.S. SENTENCING COMM’N, supra note 16, at 86 n.464 (2011), http://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/news/congressional-testimony-and-reports/mandatory-minimum-penalties/20111031-rtc-pdf/Chapter_05.pdf [https://perma.cc/V3LJ-G46R] (“[A] prosecutor is far less willing to forego charging a mandatory minimum sentence when prior experience shows that the defendant will ultimately be sentenced to a mere fraction of what the guidelines range is.” (alteration in original) (quoting testimony of Patrick J. Fitzgerald, U.S. Attorney, Northern District of Illinois)). See generally KATE STITH & JOSÉ A. CABRANES, FEAR OF JUDGING: SENTENCING GUIDELINES IN THE FEDERAL COURTS 130-42 (1998) (discussing prosecutorial discretion and noting that prosecutors exercise discretion under the sentencing guidelines when they decide what to charge, enter plea agreement, and suggest downward departures); Ronald F. Wright, CHARGING AND PLEA BARGAINING AS FORMS OF SENTENCING DISCRETION, IN THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF SENTENCING AND CORRECTIONS 247, 247-69 (Joan Petersilia & Kevin R. Reitz eds., 2012) (discussing the authority that prosecutors have over sentencing in jurisdictions that have sentencing guidelines).

before ... a jury." Nevertheless, defendants in English courts can challenge charging decisions as unlawful, including decisions to charge greater rather than lesser offenses, and courts permit victims to challenge prosecutors’ declination decisions, or their decisions to dismiss filed charges.

In fact:

[Review is less rare in the case of a decision not to prosecute than a decision to prosecute (because a decision not to prosecute is final, subject to judicial review, whereas a decision to prosecute leaves the defendant free to challenge the prosecution’s case in the usual way through the criminal court).]

The same standards apply to decisions to nolle pros charges, even though English law continues to adhere to the common law rule that prosecutors control the power of nolle prosequi. Courts justify this form of review on the premise that “a decision not to prosecute, especially in circumstances where it is believed or asserted that the decision is or may be erroneous, can affect public confidence in the integrity and competence of the criminal justice system.” For this reason, decisions not to charge in incidents that involve deaths in state custody get closer scrutiny to guard against prosecutors’ favoritism toward other law enforcement officials. Again, review is deferential and the actual number of judicial reversals of such decisions appears to be small. But unlike state courts’ authority not to grant nolle pros requests or federal court scrutiny of biased charging under the Armstrong standard, this authority is meaningful:

116. See infra note 133 and accompanying text.
120. R ex rel. Da Silva v. DPP [2006] EWHC (Admin) 3204 [20].
121. See supra note 111, at 221-22.
122. See supra note 36 and accompanying text.
English courts periodically disapprove of prosecutors’ decisions not to file criminal charges.

Challenges to prosecutorial discretion can be raised on several bases. English judges will intervene in a decision not to prosecute only when a complainant can demonstrate the decision was “(1) because of some unlawful policy, (2) because of a failure to act in accordance with settled policy as set out in the Code [for Crown Prosecutors], or (3) because the decision was perverse, i.e. one at which no reasonable prosecutor could have arrived.” Similar standards apply to the review of decisions to file charges. The reasonableness standard is not far removed from the kind of review American courts engage in under constitutional standards or with regard to administrative agency decisions, although here it does not extend to the context of criminal law administration. The bigger difference


124. See, e.g., R v. Inland Revenue Comm’r’s ex parte Mead [1993] 1 All ER 772 at 775-77. For the general standard of unreasonableness that justifies a judicial decision to quash a public agency’s decision, see Associated Provincial Picture Houses, Ltd. v. Wednesbury Corp. [1947] EWCA (Civ) 1, [1948] KB 229 (Eng.), see also ASHWORTH & REDMAYN, supra note 111, at 221.

125. See, e.g., Heckler v. Chaney, 470 U.S. 821, 828, 837 (1985) (although federal law guarantees that a person “adversely affected or aggrieved” by agency action or failure to act
lies in the legal status of prosecutors’ charging policies. The U.S. Attorney’s Manual and other federal Justice Department guidelines closely resemble in their form, substance, and formality the English Code for Crown Prosecutors.126 The critical distinction is that the latter is truly an administrative code. It exists by statutory mandate, has status equivalent to federal administrative regulations, and therefore serves as the basis for judicial review to ensure that the agency abides by its own guidelines.127 Changes to the Code for Crown Prosecutors must go through a formal process that includes public consultation—a notice and comment period in U.S. parlance.128 That is not true of U.S. Justice Department policies or state prosecution guidelines.129 Federal policies exist at the discretion of the Attorney General, and courts treat them as unenforceable provisions.130
Additionally, English courts may prohibit prosecutions on various grounds that constitute “abuse of process” by police or prosecutors. One strand of abuse of process doctrine resembles American law: courts will bar prosecution after prosecutors tell a defendant that a specific charge would not be pursued if the defendant can show reliance on the initial nonprosecution pronouncement. But English doctrine seems to be broader than American. A stay can be justified for police misconduct as well, including police promises not to prosecute, even though prosecutors control decisions to charge. Courts may stay prosecutions for abuse of process even when a fair trial is possible because they are acting within their inherent power to regulate and prevent abuse of the judicial process. A leading decision describes the rationale in rule of law terms:

[T]he judiciary accept a responsibility for the maintenance of the rule of law that embraces a willingness to oversee executive action and to refuse to countenance behaviour that threatens either basic human rights or the rule of law .... The courts, of course, have no power to apply direct discipline to the police or the prosecuting authorities, but they can refuse to allow them to take advantage of abuse of power by regarding their behaviour as an abuse of process and thus preventing a prosecution.

133. See Nembhard v. DPP [2009] EWHC (Admin) 194 [16]-[17] (describing the court’s authority to stay prosecutions for abuse of process); see also R ex rel. Smith v. CPS [2010] EWHC (Admin) 3593 [1], [44] (staying domestic violence prosecution from continuing under abuse of process standard after the CPS agreed to not prosecute); R v. Bloomfield [1996] EWCA (Crim) 1801 [8]-[9], [38], [1997] 1 Crim. App. 135 (quashing a drug conviction based on abuse or process standard). See generally ANDREW L-T CHOO, ABUSE OF PROCESS AND JUDICIAL STAYS OF CRIMINAL PROCEEDINGS (2d ed. 2008) (analyzing courts’ ability to stay criminal proceedings that are deemed to be an abuse of court process).
The remedy in such cases is to order a stay of prosecution—or, after trial, to reverse a conviction—rather than to dismiss with prejudice, but this power also appears to be sparingly used.

Overall, then, English courts’ supervision of prosecutorial discretion is deferential and concentrates on extremes of unfair or inconsistent enforcement actions, but review is nonetheless real and meaningful. No comparable law or judicial track record exists in U.S. state or federal courts, in which the standard view is that “so long as the prosecutor has probable cause to believe that the accused committed an offense defined by statute, the decision whether or not to prosecute, and what charge to file ... generally


137. But cf. Rogers, supra note 134, at 289 (observing that abuse of process case law has multiplied despite reminders it “is only to be exercised in the rarest of cases”). The law is clear that English judges, like their American counterparts, cannot stay or quash a valid indictment on grounds that public resources are limited or that other cases in a crowded docket should take priority. See R v. FB [2010] EWCA (Crim) 1857 [34], [2010] 2 Crim. App. 35 (holding that the trial judge had no power to quash a valid indictment on grounds that resources were limited). For a similar American decision, see People v. Stewart, 217 N.W.2d 894, 896 (Mich. Ct. App. 1974), and Czajka v. Koweek, 953 N.Y.S.2d 394, 397 (App. Div. 2012) (citing In re Soares v. Herrick, 928 N.Y.S.2d 386, 390 (App. Div. 2011) (holding that the district attorney has wide discretion over public resources to discharge duties)).

138. See, e.g., McArthur v. State, 597 So. 2d 406, 408 (Fla. Dist. Ct. App. 1992) (stating that the victim has no authority over decisions to prosecute—that power rests with the state’s attorney); Scanlon v. State Bar of Ga., 443 S.E.2d 830 (Ga. 1994) (holding that private citizens have no judicially cognizable interests in prosecutions or decisions not to prosecute); State v. Winne, 50 N.J. 70, 70 (N.J. 1963) (holding that prosecutors have the exclusive authority to handle the “criminal business of the state”). For a more subtle example of U.S. disfavor of restrictions on prosecutorial authority based on prior notice to defendants, consider judicial interpretation of the following federal statute:

_**Hearing before report of criminal violation.**_ Before any violation of this chapter is reported by the Secretary to any United States attorney for institution of a criminal proceeding, the person against whom such proceeding is contemplated shall be given appropriate notice and an opportunity to present his views, either orally or in writing, with regard to such contemplated proceeding.


A few states have rarely used provisions giving courts or private parties some ability to check public prosecutors. Two states require prosecutors to file reasons for a nonprosecution decision with the court in certain serious cases. See Mich. COMP. LAWS § 767.41 (2015) (requiring, in certain cases, that prosecutors file reasons with court for not charging; upon review, courts can order the prosecutor to file charge); NEB. REV. STAT. § 29-1606 (2015) (same). Additionally, Pennsylvania requires prosecutors to give reasons for nonprosecution, which courts may review only after receiving a private complaint. PA. R. CRIM. P. 506.
rests entirely in his discretion."American judges retain the power to dismiss prosecutions for outrageous government conduct, but only as an extraordinary remedy. They believe more strongly than their English counterparts that "the decision to prosecute is particularly ill-suited to judicial review" and stress more insistently the limits of judicial capacity.

Consider two additional barriers to review of decisions not to prosecute. Unlike English courts, U.S. state and federal courts deny standing to victims, their families, or other aggrieved parties, which strengthens the executive branch's monopoly of prosecution authority. Even if they entertained such claims, as federal courts do in

139. Wayte v. United States, 470 U.S. 598, 607 (1985) (quoting Bordenkircher v. Hayes, 434 U.S. 357, 364 (1978)); see also United States v. Giannattasio, 979 F.2d 98, 100 (7th Cir. 1992) ("Prosecutorial discretion resides in the executive, not in the judicial, branch, and that discretion, though subject of course to judicial review to protect constitutional rights, is not reviewable for a simple abuse of discretion."). See generally 27 C.J.S. District and Prosecuting Attorneys § 28 (2016) (collecting and summarizing cases that affirm wide prosecutorial discretion subject to judicial review generally only under deferential constitutional rules).

140. See, e.g., United States v. Dyke, 718 F.3d 1282, 1285 (10th Cir. 2013); United States v. Smith, 231 F.3d 800, 807 (11th Cir. 2000); United States v. Garza-Juarez, 992 F.2d 896, 904 (9th Cir. 1993) ("The government's conduct may warrant a dismissal of the indictment if that conduct is so excessive, flagrant, scandalous, intolerable and offensive as to violate due process."); United States v. Smith, 924 F.2d 889, 897 (9th Cir. 1991) ("For a due process dismissal, the Government's conduct must be so grossly shocking and so outrageous as to violate the universal sense of justice."); State v. Perleberg, 736 N.W.2d 703, 706 (Minn. Ct. App. 2007).

141. See Wayte, 470 U.S. at 607; see also United States v. Armstrong, 517 U.S. 456, 463-65 (1996); Giannattasio, 979 F.2d at 100.

142. See Pugach v. Klein, 193 F. Supp. 630, 635 (S.D.N.Y. 1961) (rejecting a petition for a writ of mandamus to compel a prosecutor to charge police officers with illegal wiretapping on the grounds that: "[F]ederal courts are powerless to interfere with [the prosecutor's] discretionary power. The Court cannot compel him to prosecute a complaint, or even an indictment, whatever his reasons for not acting."); People v. Birks, 960 P.2d 1073, 1089 (Cal. 1998) ("[P]rosecuting authorities ... ordinarily have the sole discretion to determine whom to charge .... The prosecution's authority ... generally is not subject to supervision by the judicial branch."); In re Padget, 678 P.2d 870, 875 (Wyo. 1984) ("We think it is clear that ... the charging decision is properly within the scope of duty of the executive branch."); cf. United States v. Williams, 504 U.S. 36, 46-47 (1992) (holding that the federal courts' supervisory powers over grand juries does not include the power to make a rule allowing dismissal of an otherwise valid indictment when the prosecutor has failed to introduce substantial exculpatory evidence to a grand jury).

143. See supra note 117 and accompanying text.

144. See Linda R. S. v. Richard D., 410 U.S. 614, 619 (1973) (holding that a crime victim lacks standing in federal court to seek an injunction against a state prosecutor's unconstitutionally discriminatory enforcement policy for the crime of failure to pay child support, because "a private citizen lacks a judicially cognizable interest in the prosecution or non-
many civil enforcement contexts, judges would need access to prosecutors’ stated reasons for opting not to charge. U.S. judges are loath to require explanations from prosecutors,145 while English courts commonly examine reasons conveyed either to the court or to victims, and they may even require prosecutors to disclose internal documents.146 The rare and marginal exceptions to the American hands-off approach prove the rule. Two states authorize courts to demand reasons from prosecutors for not charging based on a private complaint.147 Four states give their courts limited authority—rarely used—to assign special prosecutors when a public prosecutor “neglects” to pursue well-grounded charges.148 At the same time, such statutes confirm the constitutionality of granting courts


145. See Armstrong, 517 U.S. at 465.

146. See R ex rel. Da Silva v. DPP [2006] EWHC (Admin) 3204 [60] (noting use of redacted investigative report and case notes from CPS, but disavowing evaluation of evidence). English judges do not, however, examine underlying evidence against a suspect. Id. Under the ECHR, prosecutors in limited circumstances may have a duty to give reasons for nonprosecution. See Jordan v. United Kingdom, App. No. 24746/94 Eur. Ct. H.R. ¶¶ 82-86, 122-23, 142-45 (2001) (holding that under ECHR art. 2, prosecutors should give reasons to the victim’s family explaining the decision not to bring criminal charges after investigating a death caused by a police shooting); see also R v. DPP ex parte Manning [2000] EWHC (QB) 562 [33], [2001] QB 330 (Lord Bingham CJ) (“In the absence of compelling grounds for not giving reasons, we would expect the Director to give reasons in such a case [of nonprosecution] to meet the reasonable expectation of interested parties that either a prosecution would follow or a reasonable explanation for not prosecuting be given.”).

147. See COLO. REV. STAT. ANN. § 16-5-209 (West 2015) (permitting judge to require prosecutor to explain nonprosecution); P.A. R. CRIM. P. 506 (requiring prosecutor’s reasons upon private complaint objecting to nonprosecution).

148. See ALA. CODE § 12-17-186 (2015) (presiding judge may appoint an attorney to act as public prosecutor in cases of conflict of interest “or when the district attorney refuses to act”); no appellate decisions document that this power has ever been used); COLO. REV. STAT. ANN. § 16-5-209 (West 2015) (stipulating that upon affidavit alleging “unjustified” refusal to charge, a judge may require public prosecutor to explain reasons; if “arbitrary or capricious,” a judge may order prosecution or appoint a special prosecutor); MINN. STAT. ANN. § 388.12 (West 2015) (same, but whenever public prosecutor “is present,” the statute requires the prosecutor’s consent for any payment to the court-appointed prosecutor); N.D. CENT. CODE ANN. § 11-16-06 (West 2015) (authorizing courts to appoint special prosecutor if “the state’s attorney has refused or neglected to perform any” duties). Additionally, Pennsylvania allows courts to authorize private prosecutors to take over cases from public prosecutors. 16 PA. STAT. AND CONS. STAT. ANN. § 1409 (West 2015). Texas alone retains a unique “Court of Inquiry” procedure, also rarely deployed, that empowers judges to investigate suspected crimes and issue arrest warrants. See TEX. CODE CRIM. PROC. ANN. arts. 52.01-52.08 (West 2015).
capacities of this sort. Legislatures could enact judicially enforceable parameters for prosecutorial decision making, but following courts’ leads, they have opted to leave executive discretion almost wholly—and perhaps uniquely—unregulated. That policy is evident in other areas of law as well. U.S. prosecutors enjoy absolute immunity from civil liability for their unconstitutional conduct when acting in their prosecutorial function,\(^{149}\) regardless of the egregiousness of the violation or the severity of the injuries it caused. Save for judges, other government officials enjoy only partial or qualified immunity.\(^ {150}\) The Supreme Court has repeatedly emphasized its confidence in prosecutors’ professional integrity and trustworthiness as the reason it grants a strong presumption of lawfulness to their

149. See Jeffries, Jr., supra note 75, at 221-30. Compare Imbler v. Pachtman, 424 U.S. 409, 432 (1976) (“[I]n initiating a prosecution and in presenting the State’s case, the prosecutor is immune from a civil suit for damages under \$ 1983.”), with Mitchell v. Forsyth, 472 U.S. 511, 521 (1985) (denying absolute immunity to a prosecutor who authorized a warrantless wiretap on grounds he was not acting in his “prosecutorial capacity”).


The prospects of prosecutors facing criminal sanctions, even for flagrant misconduct, are vanishingly small. In 1996, three Chicago prosecutors (and four sheriff’s deputies) were indicted for conspiracy, obstruction of justice, and perjury that contributed to wrongful murder convictions. Charges against two of the prosecutors were dismissed before trial; the other was acquitted in 1999, as were the deputies. Although the local government paid a $3.5 million dollar settlement to the wrongfully convicted men, all prosecutors continued to practice law: one as a chief judge of a state circuit court, one as a federal prosecutor, and one as a defense attorney. See Andrew Bluth, Prosecutor and 4 Sheriff’s Deputies Are Acquitted of Wrongfully Accusing a Man of Murder, N.Y. TIMES (June 5, 1999), http://www.nytimes.com/ 1999/06/05/us/prosecutor-4-sheriff-s-deputies-are-acquitted-wrongfully-accusing-man-murder.html [https://perma.cc/57QJ-8BFD]; Ctr. on Wrongful Convictions, Police Perjury and Jailhouse Snitch Testimony Put Rolando Cruz on Death Row, NW. U. SCH. L., http://www.law.northwestern.edu/legalclinic/wrongfulconvictions/exonerations/il/rolando-cruz.html [https://perma.cc/YP28-QQRD] (last visited Mar. 20, 2016). For comparison, the German Penal Code defines felony-level punishments for prosecutors who file baseless charges, or who fail to pursue well-grounded ones. STRAFGESETZBUCH [STGB] [PENAL CODE], § 339, translation at http://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/englisch_stgb/englisch_stgb.html [https://perma.cc/W62M-TKHJ] (making perversion of justice by a judge or another public official punishable by imprisonment from one to five years); id. §§ 258, 258a (subjecting anyone who obstructs the punishment of another by an unlawful act to punishment of up to five years in prison or a fine); see also Markus D. Dubber, Criminal Law Between Public and Private Law, in THE BOUNDARIES OF THE CRIMINAL LAW 191, 204-05 (R.A. Duff et al. eds., 2010) (discussing the German Criminal Code and the punishment available for instances of official misconduct in criminal cases); Kessler, supra note 107, at 216 (stating that in Germany, police officers are not authorized to drop cases).
Why U.S. judges and legislators trust prosecutors more and regulate them less is a question for another day, but surely part of the explanation is that U.S. jurisdictions rely on the political process rather than the law to check prosecutorial abuse; the U.S. is alone in electing its prosecutors.\footnote{To be clear, this body of English law governing charging discretion is not expressly directed at prosecutors’ tactical use of charging options in the plea bargaining process. Charge bargaining is expressly permitted by the Code for Crown Prosecutors, within vaguely worded limits that courts apparently have no opportunity to enforce.\footnote{The point here is not that English law successfully restricts coercive or otherwise undesirable prosecutorial tactics in plea bargaining, nor that England significantly restricts plea bargaining.}}

English law embraces plea bargaining. Judicial sentencing guidelines authorize discounts for guilty pleas up to one-third less than a post-trial sentence. And England has plenty of plea bargaining. In the Crown Courts of England and Wales, which handle what U.S. law would label serious felonies, 73.5 percent of charged defendants pled guilty in 2009-2010, and 91 percent of convictions occurred through guilty pleas. In the federal courts the same year, 87.7 percent of charged defendants pled guilty and 96.7 percent of convictions came through guilty pleas. Thus, whatever limits English

154. Criminal Justice Act 2003, c. 44, Explanatory Notes ¶¶ 447, 489 (UK); SENTENCING GUIDELINES COUNCIL, REDUCTION IN SENTENCE FOR A GUILTY PLEA §§ 2.1, 2.2, 4.2 (2007), https://www.sentencingcouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Reduction_in_Sentence_for_a_Guilty_Plea_Revised_2007.pdf [https://perma.cc/CDP9-LCKR]; Attorney Gens. Reference Nos. 14 & 15 (Tanya French & Alan Webster) [2006] EWCA (Crim) 1335 [52], [2007] 1 All ER 718 (noting that the "[g]uidelines do no more than provide guidance [to judges]. There may well be circumstances which justify awarding less than a discount of one third where a plea of guilty has been made at the first opportunity").

155. CPS, ANNUAL REPORT AND ACCOUNTS 2011-12, at 85 tbl.7 (2012), http://www.cps.gov.uk/publications/docs/cps_annual_report_and_accounts_2012.pdf. Of the 26.5 percent of charged defendants who did not plead guilty, 12.9 percent went to trial (where 7.2 percent were convicted), and the remainder earned dismissal or judge acquittal. Id.

156. For 2009 federal data, see MARK MOTIVANS, BUREAU OF JUSTICE STATISTICS, DOJ, NCJ 233464, FEDERAL JUSTICE STATISTICS 2009—STATISTICAL TABLES 18 tbl.4.2 (rev. 2012), http://bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/fjs09st.pdf. In U.S. federal courts in the years 2007-2011, guilty plea rates increased from 95.8 to 96.9 percent of all convictions; the percentage of convictions following trial declined from 4.2 to 3.1 percent. U.S. SENTENCING COMM’N, 2011 SOURCEBOOK OF FEDERAL SENTENCING STATISTICS fig.C, http://www.ussc.gov/research-and-publications/annual-reports-sourcebooks/2011/sourcebook-2011 [https://perma.cc/V8K2-AA86]. Guilty plea rates within each of the twelve federal circuits showed little variation, ranging from 93.6 to 98.3 percent in 2011. Id. at tbl.10, https://perma.cc/4DD2-PQRK.

Data is less thorough for state courts, but figures appear to be similar. See, e.g., VA CRIMINAL SENTENCING COMM’N, 2014 ANNUAL REPORT 33 (2014), http://www.vcsc.virginia.gov/2014AnnualReport.pdf [https://perma.cc/FFX3-GSKL] (90 percent of felony sentences in circuit courts followed guilty pleas, 9 percent bench trials, 1.2 percent jury trials). In 2001, data from twenty-two states found 3 percent of state criminal cases were resolved by either bench or jury trial, the remainder by guilty pleas, dismissals or other disposition. See NAT’L CTR. FOR STATE COURTS, EXAMINING THE WORK OF STATE COURTS, 2001: A NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE FROM THE COURT STATISTICS PROJECT 63 (Brian J. Ostrom et al. eds., 2001), https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdfpages/Digitization/195881NCJRS.pdf [https://perma.cc/KUP4-E564]. Hawaii had the highest trial rate at 12.8 percent; Vermont’s rate of 0.9 percent was lowest. Id.; see also HUN. GREGORY E. MEZE ET AL., NAT’L CTR. FOR STATE COURTS, THE STATE-OF-THE-STATES SURVEY OF JURY IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS: A COMPREHEND REPORT 63 (2007), http://www.ncsc-jury.studies.org/~media/Microsites/Files/CJS/SOS/SOSCompendiumFinal ashx[https://perma.cc/J52U-ZNNW] (reporting similar, more recent data, although in different terms, for example, trials per 100,000 population).
law places on prosecutorial discretion are compatible with high rates of guilty pleas. The point here is simply that English law, built on traditions of common law and adversarial process shared across U.S. jurisdictions, demonstrates the feasibility of regulating some aspects of prosecutorial discretion, including a modest role for judicial oversight akin to U.S. judicial review in the context of administrative agencies. Some regulation of that sort is essential to meaningful regulation of plea bargaining, especially given contemporary conditions of expansive criminal codes—which multiply charging options—and mandatory sentencing rules, which turn charging decisions into sentencing decisions.\textsuperscript{157} In fact, as the next Part recounts, in the early years of modern plea bargain regulation, U.S. courts developed broadly comparable constitutional doctrines to ensure fairness in negotiated guilty pleas. But the U.S. Supreme Court eventually chose a different path for federal law, which states have largely followed.

IV. The Presumption of Fairness in Unregulated Bargaining

Limits on guilty plea sentence discounts and on prosecutorial charging discretion are important ways—probably critical ways—by which plea bargaining can be regulated. But they are not the only ways to regulate bargaining. After the U.S. Supreme Court finally acknowledged plea bargaining in 1971 and initiated constitutional regulation of its practice,\textsuperscript{158} federal courts began to develop a body

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{157} English law and practice differs in important respects on this point. English prosecutors do not make sentence recommendations or otherwise argue for specific sentences on the premise that sentencing is a judicial function. See R v. Atkinson [1978] 1 WLR 425 at 428 ("In our law the prosecution is not heard upon sentence. This is a matter for the court, after considering whatever has to be said on behalf of an accused man."); Sir John May, \textit{The Responsibility of the Prosecutor to the Court, in The Role of the Prosecutor} 90, 94 (J.E. Hall Williams ed., 1988) (author was a Lord Justice of Appeal). Since the 1980s, English prosecutors have assisted courts by drawing attention to governing sentencing law and relevant facts but still avoid American-style sentencing recommendations. \textsc{Andrew Ashworth}, \textsc{Sentencing and Criminal Justice} 377-78 (5th ed. 2010). Moreover, English law has significantly fewer mandatory sentencing rules, which makes charging decisions less determinative of punishments. But see Power of Criminal Courts (Sentencing) Act 2000, c.6, §§ 110-111 (UK) (establishing mandatory sentencing for the third offense of domestic burglary or Class A drug trafficking); Firearms Act 1968, c.27, § 51(1) (UK) (establishing sentencing guidelines for firearms offenses).
\item \textsuperscript{158} Santobello v. New York, 404 U.S. 257, 260-63 (1971).
\end{itemize}
of law that focused on the fairness of the bargaining process and of plea bargain terms. The Court in Santobello v. New York concluded that plea bargaining was “essential” to criminal justice administration but also that the Constitution put limits on how it is practiced. The principles that justify plea bargaining, the Court wrote, “presuppose fairness in securing agreement between an accused and a prosecutor.” Plea agreements “must be attended by safeguards to insure the defendant what is reasonably due in the circumstances.” The Court warned that federal courts “will vacate a plea of guilty shown to have been unfairly obtained.” The Constitution, Santobello strongly implied, requires judges to supervise plea bargaining.

Many lower courts took that Santobello language seriously and in the 1970s began to develop more specific fairness standards for plea negotiations grounded in Due Process doctrine. For a time, courts used those doctrines to exercise modest but meaningful judicial supervision over plea bargaining. With the jury now absent from adjudication, courts aimed “both to protect the plea bargaining defendant from overreaching by the prosecutor and to insure the integrity of the plea bargaining process.” Judges kept a close eye on whether prosecutors had met the “most meticulous standards of both promise and performance ... in plea bargaining.”

In order to facilitate meaningful judicial scrutiny, prosecutors had to create records that enabled judicial review of some aspects of their discretionary actions. In United States v. Bowler, the plea agreement included the promise that prosecutors would make their sentencing recommendation only after considering certain mitigating factors, such as a defendant’s cooperation and his health. That

159. See infra notes 165-66.


161. Id. at 261.

162. Id. at 262.

163. Id. at 264 (Douglas, J., concurring) (quoting Kercheval v. United States, 274 U.S. 220, 224 (1927)).

164. See id. at 262.


166. Id. (quoting Correale v. United States, 479 F.2d 944, 947 (1st Cir. 1973)); see also Palermo v. Warden, Green Haven State Prison, 545 F.2d 286, 286 (2d Cir. 1976) (“[F]undamental fairness and public confidence in government officials require that prosecutors be held to ‘meticulous standards of both promise and performance.’”).

discretionary assessment “is an evaluative function normally performed internally within the office of the prosecutor,” but the Seventh Circuit insisted on some disclosure about how prosecutors exercised their discretion: “[T]he Government’s evaluation of the specified mitigating factors must be set forth in the record at the time of sentencing.” 168 Numerous courts also called out prosecutors for half-heartedly fulfilling promises, particularly sentence recommendations, and required that they offer supporting arguments to trial courts for the recommendations to which they had agreed. 169 Another application of post-Santobello Due Process doctrine targeted the heart of prosecutorial charge manipulation in the bargaining process.

Before Bordenkircher v. Hayes, the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals required that prosecutors provide reasons to justify additional charges they filed against a defendant after he had rejected their plea bargain offer. 170 These requirements were not so different from requirements in English law under which prosecutors disclose to courts reasons for their discretionary decisions. 171 In many cases, making rationales for prosecutors’ actions transparent was the only way for courts “to ascertain whether or not the Government had in fact performed the promised evaluation.” 172 The alternative was separation of powers without the ability of one branch to check and balance the actions of another. More specifically, the alternative was to leave the judiciary incapable of determining the lawfulness of executive action in the adjudication process: “[I]t is not the privilege of the Government to make the determination as to whether or not it has honored its promise.” 173

168. Id.
169. See Geisser v. United States, 513 F.2d 862, 870-71 (5th Cir. 1975) (ordering prosecutors to make strong recommendations to the Parole Board as well as to the Department of State against a defendant’s extradition to fulfill promises made in a plea bargain); United States v. Brown, 500 F.2d 375, 377 (4th Cir. 1974) (holding that where the prosecutor promised to recommend a particular sentence, the mere half-hearted recitation of the recommended sentence without reasons for supporting it breached the plea agreement); Correale v. United States, 479 F.2d 944, 947 (1st Cir. 1973) (“[M]ost meticulous standards of both promise and performance must be met by prosecutors engaging in plea bargaining.”).
171. See, e.g., R ex rel. Da Silva v. DPP [2006] EWHC (Admin) 3204 [27] (discussing the rationale underlying the Crown Prosecution Service’s decision not to prosecute).
172. Bowler, 585 F.2d at 854-55.
173. Id. at 855.
Private contract law became an increasingly common reference point for the public law of plea negotiations, but after Santobello, lower courts concluded that Santobello's constitutional mandate that guilty pleas be “fairly obtained” required judges to scrutinize negotiated agreements between the government and defendants by more rigorous standards than the law of contract did for private parties in ordinary market transactions. For example, the Fourth Circuit held that while ordinarily private contract offers are not enforceable, the Due Process Clause mandated that prosecutors’ plea bargain offers were enforceable. In other words, prosecutors could not withdraw offers before a defendant had a chance to accept. On this point as well, federal constitutional law was, for a time, on a path not far removed from English law, which enforces some prosecution promises to victims to charge—or to defendants not to charge—in particular cases.

This body of Due Process doctrine suggests that the differences in the capacity of English and American judiciaries to oversee prosecutors do not arise from fundamental differences in constitutional or institutional structure. The problem is not that federal and state constitutions impose incontrovertible limits on judicial authority and insulate prosecutors more than English law does in the English justice system. This approach to Due Process law did not last because constitutional text and tradition dictated no specific answers in this realm; it left courts plausible options for what the law should be. The U.S. Supreme Court rejected it in favor of a different vision for federal constitutional law, one that draws heavily on contract law to limit judicial capacity and protect executive authority. It adopted a conception of how “our system” operates that differed both from the approach of many lower federal courts after Santobello and from English analogs, even though alternatives in which the judiciary played a greater regulatory role in plea

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174. Cooper v. United States, 594 F.2d 12, 15-19 (4th Cir. 1979). In Cooper, the prosecutor offered to dismiss three of four charges in exchange for defendant’s guilty plea and cooperation in other cases. Id. at 15. The defense counsel quickly met with his client and called to accept the offer four hours after it was extended, but during that time, a supervising prosecutor had vetoed the offer and so the office refused to abide by it. Id. The court held that the offer was enforceable. Id. at 19. Private contract law generally would not enforce an offer before acceptance, absent defendant’s detrimental reliance on the agreement. Id. at 15-17.

175. See, e.g., Choo, supra note 133, at 64-68.
bargaining were fully “available” in the sense that they were plausible routes for constitutional law development.\textsuperscript{176}

The Supreme Court built the contemporary constitutional law of plea bargaining upon a set of premises that excluded judges from a meaningful role in plea bargaining process or in assuring substantively fair outcomes from that process. This constitutional vision in turn has largely set the parameters for all state and federal law on plea bargaining. From its assumption that plea bargaining “is an essential component of the administration of justice,”\textsuperscript{177} the Court took the view that rules related to guilty pleas must maximize the efficiency of the bargaining process. To serve that aim, the Court looked to the private law of contract, and to the free-market premises that party autonomy and minimal state regulation maximize efficiency. In the Court’s view, “plea bargains are essentially contracts,”\textsuperscript{178} much like “any other bargained-for exchange.”\textsuperscript{179} In contrast to their English counterparts, the Justices cite private contract law treatises in plea bargaining decisions and draw on private contract principles for remedies to plea bargain breaches.\textsuperscript{180} The market-based rationality is at times almost comically explicit:

176. See supra notes 165-75 and accompanying text (arguing that inferior federal courts interpreted the Constitution to require some judicial oversight of plea bargaining).


180. United States v. Hyde, 520 U.S. 670, 677-78 (1997) (“[I]f the court rejects the Government’s promised performance, then the agreement is terminated and the defendant has the right to back out of his promised performance (the guilty plea), just as a binding contractual duty may be extinguished by the nonoccurrence of a condition subsequent.”). Courts similarly base remedies for breaches of plea agreements on those developed in private contract law. See Frye, 132 S. Ct. at 1411; Lafler v. Cooper, 132 S. Ct. 1376, 1388-89 (2012). For an example of a court addressing disputes about whether either party breached a plea agreement, see United States v. Ataya, 864 F.2d 1324, 1338 (7th Cir. 1988). See generally Nancy J. King, Judicial Oversight of Negotiated Sentences in a World of Bargained Punishment, 58 Stan. L. Rev. 293 (2005) (advancing several methods of improving judicial oversight of the plea bargaining process).
If the prosecutor is interested in “buying” the reliability assurance that accompanies a waiver agreement, then precluding waiver can only stifle the market for plea bargains. A defendant can “maximize” what he has to “sell” only if he is permitted to offer what the prosecutor is most interested in buying.  

These conceptual guideposts of markets and contract supported the turn to unregulated prosecutorial discretion and cut against judicial oversight of party behavior or substantive agreements. The Court rejected lower courts’ post-Santobello doctrines of plea bargain fairness by reconceiving fairness in constitutional law to match the notion of fairness that prevails in the private market realm. In the private sphere, fairness means autonomy from state regulation to compete against or negotiate with others and enter into contracts, with few legal standards about fair bargaining practices, conditions, and contract terms.

Conceptualizing plea bargaining as just another voluntary interaction between private parties undercut reasons to regulate prosecutorial behavior. Any “difficult choices” that prosecutors manufacture for defendants are taken as an “inevitable attribute of any legitimate system which tolerates and encourages the negotiation of pleas.” Judges should be concerned with little more than whether a defendant had competent legal assistance and had not “misunderstood the choices that were placed before him”; constitutional law has almost nothing to say about whether choices the state creates for defendants are fair or coercive. Fairness requires no specific attention because plea bargains, like private contracts, arise

183. Id. at 225 (emphasis added); see also Boykin v. Alabama, 395 U.S. 238, 242 (1969) (emphasizing the voluntariness of the guilty plea). However, in some states, agreements between prosecutors and defendants are enforceable only after a court has approved the agreement in a formal judgment. See, e.g., Fla. R. Crim. P. 3.172(g) (agreement not binding on either party until approved by court). Limited exceptions apply primarily if the defendant performed his part of the agreement to his potential detriment, sometimes by voluntarily submitting to forensic testing. For representative decisions taking this view and citing other courts adopting this approach, see State v. Vixamar, 687 So. 2d 300, 301-02 (Fla. Dist. Ct. App. 1997), and Commonwealth v. Scuilli, 621 A.2d 620, 622-26 (Pa. Super. Ct. 1993).
from “a process mutually beneficial to both the defendant and the State.”

With this transformation, Santobello’s fairness requirement lost any real force. Rather than viewing prosecutors as state officials on whom public law imposes distinctive obligations, constitutional law now largely treats prosecutors and defendants in the plea negotiation context like any two private actors competing and negotiating in a free market. By the time of its 1984 decision in Mabry v. Johnson, the Court had effectively done away with Blackledge-style scrutiny of bad prosecutorial motives and rejected any fair bargaining standard for prosecutors higher than that for other parties.185 Constitutional limits and judicial oversight for prosecutors would only impair the efficiency of adjudication. Likewise, Bordenkircher v. Hayes, which rejected judicial supervision of charging tactics to ratchet up pressure to plead guilty,186 serves the ambition of making plea bargains quicker and more likely.187 The same is true of United States v. Batchelder, which held that federal prosecutors have complete discretion in each case to choose between two identical statutes that carry separate punishments.188 On this point, like others, state courts have overwhelmingly adopted the same rule under state law.189

--84. Corbitt, 439 U.S. at 222.
186. See supra note 35 and accompanying text.
187. 434 U.S. 357, 364 (1978) ("[B]y tolerating and encouraging the negotiation of pleas, this Court has necessarily accepted as constitutionally legitimate the simple reality that the prosecutor's interest at the bargaining table is to persuade the defendant to forgo his right to plead not guilty.").
189. See Hart v. State, 702 P.2d 651, 662 (Alaska Ct. App. 1985) (adopting Batchelder, and noting that the "majority" of states have done the same); Commonwealth v. Parker White Metal Co., 515 A.2d 1358, 1368-69 (Pa. 1986) (upholding statute permitting prosecutors to choose between summary and misdemeanor offenses for same wrongdoing on Batchelder grounds); State v. Rooney, 19 A.3d 92, 102 (Vt. 2011) (adopting Batchelder position as state law and observing that "most states have embraced the reasoning in Batchelder"); Johnson v. State, 61 P.3d 1234, 1248 (Wyo. 2003) (following Batchelder along with "[m]any of our sister jurisdictions"). A small number of states depart from the Batchelder approach, mostly in pre-Batchelder decisions. See People v. Marcy, 628 P.2d 69, 74 (Colo. 1981) ("In sharp contrast to Batchelder, we have held consistently that equal protection of the laws requires that statutory classifications of crimes be based on differences that are real in fact and reasonably related to the general purposes of criminal legislation."); Spillers v. State, 436 P.2d 18, 23 (Nev. 1968) ("A state may not prescribe different penalties for the same offense without violating the equal protection concept."), overruled in part by Bean v. State, 465 P.2d 133 (Nev. 1970); State
The Court’s most recent decisions on plea bargaining fit this arc as well, despite modestly increasing one aspect of constitutional regulation. Missouri v. Frye,190 Lafler v. Cooper,191 and Padilla v. Kentucky192 all strengthened the constitutional right to effective assistance of counsel in the context of plea negotiations. Those decisions are committed to ensuring a defendant’s informed engagement in the bargaining process. In particular, a defendant must be told of a prosecutor’s plea bargain offer, receive competent advice on his prospects at trial, and be informed of certain kinds of nonpunitive collateral consequences, such as deportation, that follow from conviction.193 Those decisions aim to ensure a defendant’s capacity to negotiate about—or at least choose among—the options that prosecutors define. But none restrict coercive Bordenkircher-like plea bargaining tactics nor otherwise regulate plea agreement terms or negotiating practices.

CONCLUSION

The history of American criminal justice includes multiple practices by which executive power over criminal prosecution was constrained and supervised rather than left effectively unfettered. “Privatizing” prosecutorial authority—allowing that power to be shared with private actors—was one such check. Others arose from the various powers judges exercised: occasionally in a few states by appointing prosecutors or compelling them to explain charging decisions, but more often by their authority to control the pursuit or dismissal of charges that prosecutors initiated. Two broad sets of ideas led American criminal practice away from a balanced legal structure for criminal prosecution and in particular for plea

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bargaining: the idea that all key aspects of prosecution are exclusively the province of executive officials, and the belief that interaction between prosecutors and defendants works, and should work, much like the interaction of private parties in ordinary market settings. Neither of these ideas—perhaps more obviously the second—are compelled by federal constitutional law. But the Supreme Court elected to build constitutional doctrines on these premises, and a remarkable degree of state courts, as well as legislatures, adopted the same view. The result has been that the U.S. practice of plea bargaining is remarkably unregulated, even compared to other common law jurisdictions such as England. Both of these ideas, and the normative visions that support them, will have to change before it is possible to regulate plea bargaining sufficiently to bring its practice within a plausible conception of the rule of law.