

Final Paper: Open Data

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What data on police conduct tells us about reforms needed in Chicago



1. Policy Issue and Context

A study published this year in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences found that police violence is a leading cause of death for men in the United States (Edwards et al, 2019). For people of color, the risk is especially high: approximately 1 in every 1,000 black men can expect to die this way. The phenomenon has been characterized as a crisis by civil rights groups such as Black Lives Matter, and is the basis for broader sentiment of mistrust toward the police nationwide--especially in the city of Chicago where Black people make up 29% of the population, but account for 76% of police killings. Despite demands for increased accountability from policy platforms, there is no consensus on the proper reforms to improve this situation. For instance, body cameras have been promoted as a means to foster accountability through increased visibility on police activity in the field, but the actual impact of this technology is disputed (Ripley, 2017). In light of this, **the current report asks: what can be learned from data available about allegations against the police and police use of force in order to make more informed policy decisions?** The results reveal 1) low transparency in current data reporting practices by the Chicago Police Department, 2) a need to further understand the possible correlation between police violence and racial minority in Chicago, 3) a need to improve citizen feedback streams, and 4) a need for policies that address police activities at a systems level.

2. Review of Data Available

The Chicago Police Department (CPD) currently makes data available to the public through a "Transparency Dashboard" (CPD, 2019). The dashboard covers three main categories--namely accountability, use of force and gun offenders--and is a combination of police-recorded information and citizen feedback, which is available for submission via online form. Despite the positive aspects of this effort, there are limitations to the use of this dashboard for a number of reasons. First, the data is aggregated in visualizations, some of which cannot be manipulated or filtered. Second, the data appears to be available for download, but the link is broken, making it impossible to view the data in its original raw format. Finally, there may be a reporting bias due to 1) the un-user friendly reporting mechanism, which is time intensive for users (up to 30 minutes to file a complaint) and 2) the inability of citizens to participate directly in data related to use of force. In recent years, there have been grassroots efforts to redress these shortcomings through collaborative databases that collect more granular information. Initiatives such as Mapping Police Violence and Chicago Citizens Police Data Project paint a clearer picture of officers involved in complaints, the location where complaints are made, background information of individuals killed by the police (e.g. offender record), and links to further documentation.

3. Description of the Data

- Citizens Police Data Project: Initiative that collects and publishes information about police misconduct in Chicago (CPDP, 2019)
- Census Data: ACS DEMOGRAPHIC AND HOUSING ESTIMATES , 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019)
- Boundaries: Census tract boundaries in Chicago (Chicago Data Portal, 2010)

4. Findings

1) Figure 1 shows a map of Chicago divided by racial make-up. The centroids represent complaints of excessive use of force and illegal search issued to the police. **As is pictured, complaints are clustered in majority Black neighborhoods, signalling a possible correlation between race and police violence in Chicago.**

2) For the vast majority of complaints filed against the police, no follow up action is taken. This trend, pictured in Figure 2, signals a bottleneck in accountability processes, which prevents closure in citizen-police feedback loops. **There is a need to improve feedback processes regarding citizen allegations in order to ensure all complaints are resolved.**

Figure 1. Complaints Filed Against the Police in Chicago

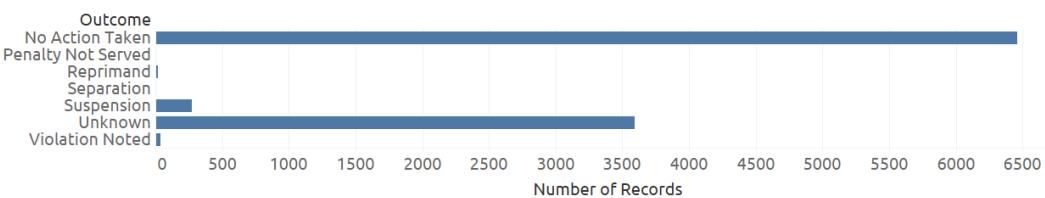
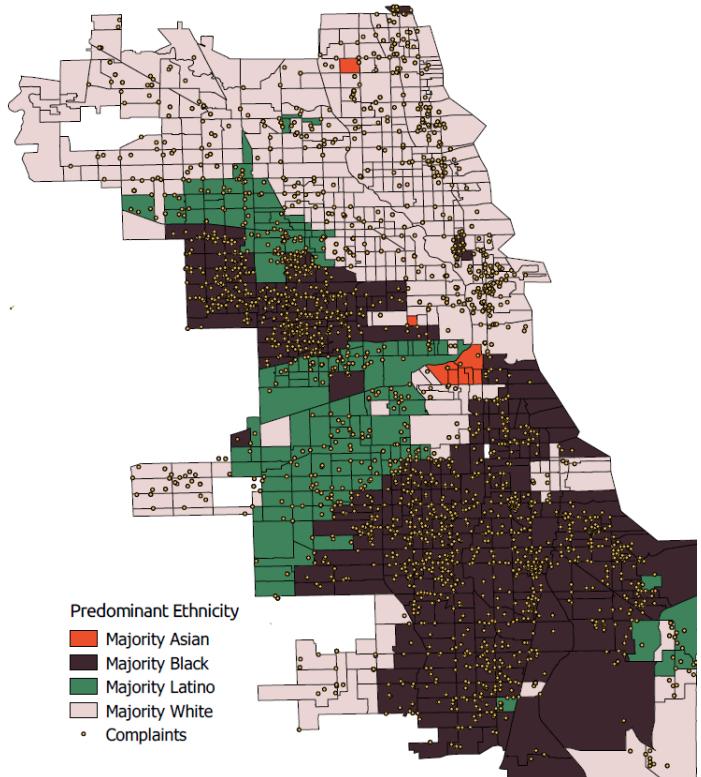
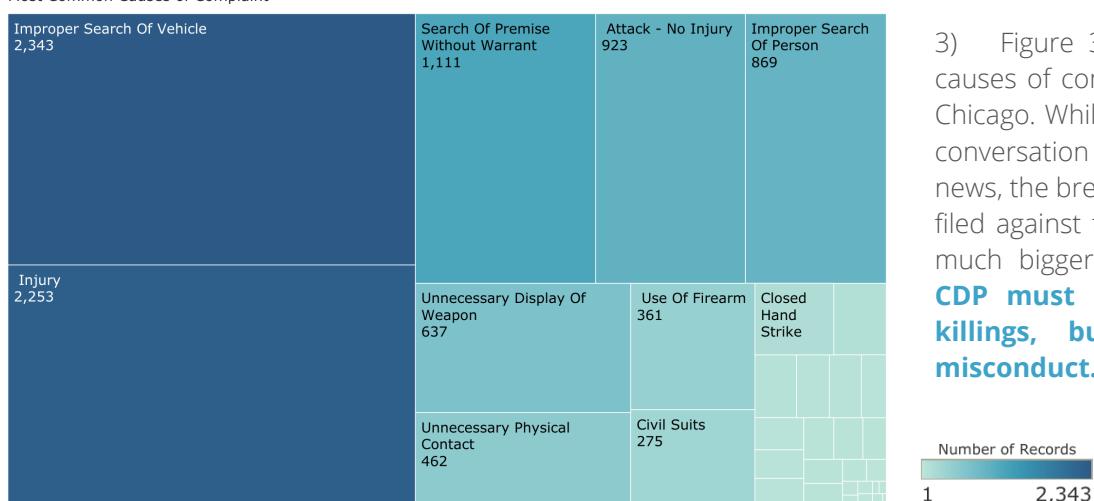


Figure 2. Outcomes of Complaints Filed against the Police

Figure 3.
Most Common Causes of Complaint



3) Figure 3 graphs the most common causes of complaints against the police in Chicago. While police killings dominate the conversation about police violence in the news, the breadth and scope of complaints filed against the police signal a potentially much bigger problem. **Reforms of the CDP must not only focus on police killings, but a wider culture of misconduct.**

5. Final Remarks

Reforms of CDP should address the possibility of racial bias in police conduct, as well as bottlenecks in accountability processes. With respect to accountability, the Transparency Dashboard could be improved to ensure the data is accessible in raw, machine readable format. CDP should also focus accountability efforts on improving the rate of resolved complaints to close feedback loops between citizens and the police department. Finally, reforms should seek to address a broader culture of misconduct evidenced by the breadth and scope of complaints made against the police, instead of only on police killings alone. For more interactive visualizations of the Citizens Police Data Project you can consult <https://public.tableau.com/profile/maria.giorda#!/vizhome/OpenDataDashboard/Sheet4?publish=yes>.

References

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