

Stage I

Literature Review

In 2020 alone, 53.8 million U.S. residents reported having contact with law enforcement (Tapp & Davis, 2020). While the majority (88%) of respondents reported having satisfactory interactions with police, about 2% or 1 million respondents reported having negative experiences, characterized by the threat and/or use of force as well as other forms of misconduct (Tapp & Davis, 2020). Police misconduct, defined by the New York Police Department (NYPD) Civilian Complaints Review Board, is any action or charge that may result in an officer being subjected to an administrative trial process (Cubitt et al., 2022). Conduct that falls under this category includes, but is not limited to, improper use of force, abuse of authority, discourteous behavior, and offensive language (Cubitt et al., 2022). In recent years, police misconduct has become a prominent issue in the eyes of the American public, especially given racial/ethnic disparities in experiences, with numerous high-profile cases resulting in the death of many lives. Releases of police misconduct records in recent years have allowed researchers to better characterize and understand the escalating problem at hand.

Research has shown that there are several correlates of police misconduct. In general, male officers are more likely to get complaints than their female counterparts (Harris & Worden, 2014). Younger, less experienced officers are also at higher risk along with officers with military experience (Harris & Worden, 2014). Officers who are more productive (i.e. with more arrests and stops) and who have more civilian interaction are also more likely to accrue greater complaints of police misconduct (Harris & Worden, 2014; Rozema & Schanzenbach, 2019). Some reports have also suggested that officers from minority populations may also be more likely to commit misconduct, though other studies have suggested that this may be a result of differential task or geographic assignment to high-crime precincts (Cubitt et al., 2022; Harris & Worden, 2014).

Police misconduct records only represent a small portion of actual misconduct cases; it is estimated that approximately only a third of complaints end up being actually filed (Harris & Worden, 2014). Of those filed, legal and institutional barriers make it difficult for complaints to result in disciplinary measures. Reports have shown that only an eighth of civilian-initiated complaints are sustained, with most complaints often being declared as either exonerated (act verified but found to be proper), unfounded, or not sustained (insufficient evidence) (Harris & Worden, 2014). If sustained, about 1 of 24 cases result in sanctions for officers involved, with most sanctions often not commensurate with the misconduct that occurred (Harris & Worden, 2014).

Past work looking into police misconduct at various police departments across the nation has identified significant patterns. Rozema & Schanzenbach (2019), while examining police misconduct in Chicago, found that officers with moderate numbers of misconduct allegations were at no greater risk of committing serious misconduct than officers who had no misconduct allegations at all. Instead, they found that officers who were in the top 1% quartile of misconduct allegations were more likely to commit serious misconduct, generating almost 5 times the number of payouts and 4 times the total damage payments. When complaints against officers are sustained, almost 36% of offending officers accrue another sustained complaint at some point during their career (Harris &

Worden, 2014). The risk of obtaining another complaint was found to be higher in the first months succeeding the first complaint but dropped significantly afterward. Notably, officers who are sanctioned for the complaint are not only more likely to engage in misconduct but do so more rapidly (Harris & Worden, 2014). Overall, findings suggest that a small subset of repeat offenders are responsible for a large portion of police misconduct reported, encompassing over \$1.5 billion in lawsuit settlements across the nation (Cubitt et al., 2022).

Cubitt et al. (2022) also noted that differences in case outcomes depend on officer and complainant characteristics. Female officers, for example, while less likely to accrue misconduct allegations in general than their male counterparts, were more likely to be sanctioned with remedial management action. Black and Hispanic civilians who submitted a complaint of police misconduct were 4.7 and 1.6 more likely to receive a not sustained ruling compared to White citizens (Headley et al., 2020). One study also found that racial mismatches between officer and complainant were linked to differing case outcomes (Wright II, 2020). The study found that Black complainants were more likely to receive a sustained ruling when misconduct was alleged against a white officer. On the other hand, white complainants were less likely to receive a sustained ruling when alleging misconduct against a black officer. These results differed across city departments, however, suggesting geographic differences.

Research Question(s)

The issue of police misconduct is important, especially given rising cases of police violence, police brutality, and fatalities as a result of such misconduct. Such issues have resulted in the loss of multiple lives, increased racial tensions across the US, and fractured public trust in law enforcement. The literature has explored various factors linked to police misconduct and has similarly evaluated predictors of not only future misconduct but also misconduct case outcomes.

Few studies, however, have examined the impact of media coverage on police misconduct. Those who do have primarily limited their analysis to the impact of media coverage on public perceptions of police misconduct (Chermak et al., 2006; Dowler & Zawilski, 2007). No article to date has assessed the role that the media can play in influencing misconduct case outcomes, despite the potential pressure that media can have on ensuring that sufficient sanctions are levied.

To address this gap, in this study, we will utilize a dataset of police misconduct cases drawn from the New York City Police Department (NYPD) to do the following:

1. Assess the impact that media coverage/visibility of a given police misconduct incident has on its case outcome.
2. Using the literature, identify and verify additional factors predictive of police misconduct case outcomes such as race, gender, and location.
3. Develop a supervised model to predict case outcomes for police misconduct cases.

Data

To answer these questions, I will utilize police misconduct cases from the NYPD. Established in 1845, NYPD is one of the oldest and largest police departments in the nation, encompassing over 36,000 officers and 19,000 civilian employees (*About NYPD*, n.d.). Across its 78 precincts, the department serves over 8.5 million different individuals. The Civilian Complaint Review Board (CCRB), which separated from NYPD in 2000, has compiled a database of over 395,000 police misconduct cases from 2000 to 2025 (*Civilian Complaint Review Board (CCRB) Database*, n.d.). The database contains 4 datasets:

1. Allegations Against Police Officers: a list of all closed allegations made against NYPD officers, including information about the complainant, the officer, allegation, and resulting deposition (*Civilian Complaint Review Board: Allegations Against Police Officers | NYC Open Data*, n.d.)
2. Complaints Against Police Officers: a list containing information such as dates, locations, and circumstances surrounding the allegation (*Civilian Complaint Review Board: Complaints Against Police Officers | NYC Open Data*, n.d.)
3. Police Officers: a list of all NYPD officers and the number of total and substantiated complaints on their record (*Civilian Complaint Review Board: Complaints Against Police Officers | NYC Open Data*, n.d.)
4. Penalties: a list containing case and trial penalty information (*Civilian Complaint Review Board: Penalties | NYC Open Data*, n.d.)

To get media coverage information, I will use a subset of data available from the Mapping Police Violence Project, which used google alerts to get news articles on police violence events to construct their dataset (*Mapping Police Violence*, n.d.-a). Currently, the Mapping Police Violence Project has records of 48 separate police violence incidents, with associated news article links, that occurred between 2013 and 2024 (*Mapping Police Violence*, n.d.-b). Given the sample size, separate scraping of newspaper APIs, such as the New York Times Article API, may need to be conducted.

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