

The University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy
Winter 2025

“Police Reform and Police Legitimacy”
PPHA 37106

Instructor: B. Robert Owens, Lecturer, browens@uchicago.edu

TA: [TBA]

Time: Tuesdays, 5pm–7:50pm

Location: Keller 0023

Office hours with instructor: By appointment

Course description

This course introduces students to the concept of legitimacy in policing, the legal and policy bases for contemporary police reform efforts, and evidence for the practical impact of those efforts.

Policing in the United States has been plagued by systemic problems for decades. Predictable failures and cultural barriers to reform impact police agencies small and large, in every state and region of the country. For decades before the mass protests that erupted in the summer of 2020 after the murder of George Floyd, local, state and federal efforts to reform the police have yielded halting progress and ambiguous, partial evidence about what works. Ubiquitous video records of police-civilian interactions have changed the relationships among the police, the public, local political authorities, and the media. At the same time, policing itself is changing in profound ways. New technological capabilities have increased public expectations of transparency and efficiency in policing while raising concerns about privacy and due process rights. Local police have taken on an expanding portfolio of responsibilities, including presence in public schools, mental health crisis response, and counter-terrorism. The relationship between the federal Department of Justice and local law enforcement agencies has undergone sharp shifts with each change between Democratic and Republican administrations since the Obama Administration.

This course will equip students to understand the issues at stake in the contemporary policy debates surrounding policing. Course topics include: the organizational structure of policing, its functional purpose, the normative expectations of citizens and communities that rely on the police for protection, and how police performance is measured. We will examine the trajectories of cities that have gone through local- or federal-led systematic police reform programs and evaluate the impact and promise of specific policy choices. The course will conclude with a consideration of the scope and limits of the concept of “police reform” and how the policy discourse around the goals of reform has changed over time.

Expectations, accommodations, assignments, and grading

The class will meet once weekly for three hours on Tuesday evenings. The first part of each class will be a lecture introducing the topic. After a break, the second part of class will be dedicated to discussion. Students are expected to come to class fully prepared to discuss all the readings. During the quarter, two weekly classes (weeks 4 and 7) will include a structured group exercise that will be evaluated as part of your final grade. More detailed guidance on preparation and evaluation standards will be given prior to those class sessions.

The instructor will be available for office hours on Zoom or in person, by appointment. Individuals and small groups are equally welcome and encouraged to schedule time.

The course assignments will deal with difficult and contentious topics, including police violence and its aftermath. Students who wish to take the class should be prepared to engage academically with this challenging material and should come with a firm commitment to engage one another in respectful, open, and

rigorous discourse. Please contact the instructor early on with any concerns about this general policy or specific readings. Additionally, do not hesitate to contact the instructor with questions about disability accommodations or for support in accessing other university-wide resources.

The relative weight of these components in the final grade will be:

- 30% Class contributions and Canvas posts
- 10% In-class exercise week 4
- 10% In-class exercise week 7
- 50% Final paper of approx. 3,000 to 6,000 words

Each student is expected to contribute at least two discussion posts on Canvas over the quarter; more than two posts are welcome. Students should make every effort to be present for every class and should inform the instructor in advance if they must miss a class. If any student has to miss class in week 4 or week 7, they will complete an alternative written assignment for evaluation. For the final paper, students may either (1) respond to one of several prompts, to be distributed in advance; or (2) choose another paper topic in consultation with the instructor. Final papers should be submitted online through the course Canvas site with only student ID attached (no names). Papers will be graded anonymously. Late final papers will be downgraded one grade per day (A to A-, etc.) for each day they are late. Papers more than 8 days late will not be accepted.

Readings

Three books are recommended for purchase and have been ordered to the Seminary Coop bookstore:

- Malcolm Sparrow, *Handcuffed* (Brookings, 2016)
- Michelle Phelps, *The Minneapolis Reckoning* (Princeton University Press, 2024)
- Neil Gross, *Walk the Walk* (Metropolitan, 2023)

All other required readings will be made available on the course website. Those that are accessible through open-source platforms are also linked below.

Schedule

Week 1: The problems in 21st century policing

Readings:

1. Michelle Phelps, *The Minneapolis Reckoning: Race, Violence, and the Politics of Policing in America*. Princeton University Press (2024) (Introduction, Chapter 1, Chapter 4, pp. 1–44, 103–141).
2. Simon Balto, *Occupied Territory: Policing Black Chicago from Red Summer to Black Power*. University of North Carolina Press (2020) (Chapter 5, pp. 154–189).

Week 2: Legitimacy, procedural justice, and legal estrangement

Readings:

1. Tom Tyler, “Enhancing Police Legitimacy.” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 593:1, 84–99 (2004).
2. Monica Bell, “Police Reform and the Dismantling of Legal Estrangement.” *Yale Law Journal* 126, 2054–2150 (2017).
3. Victor Rios, *Punished: Policing the Lives of Black and Latino Boys*. New York University Press (2011) (pp. 52–63).
4. James Forman, *Locking Up Our Own: Crime and Punishment in Black America*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux (2017) (Chapters 3–4, pp. 78–150).

Week 3: Accountability and oversight I: Local oversight and civil litigation

Readings:

1. U.S. Department of Justice, *Investigation of the Chicago Police Department* (2017), pp. 46–70, 74–79. <https://www.justice.gov/opa/file/925846/download>
2. Michelle Phelps, *The Minneapolis Reckoning: Race, Violence, and the Politics of Policing in America*. Princeton University Press (2024) (Chapter 5, pp. 142–172).
3. Joanna Schwartz, *Shielded: How the Police Became Untouchable*. Viking (2023), (Chapters 5–6, pp. 71–116).

Week 4: Accountability and oversight II: Federal oversight**Readings:**

1. Donald Horowitz, “Decreeing Organizational Change: Judicial Supervision of Public Institutions.” *Duke Law Journal* 1983, pp. 1265–1307 (1983).
2. U.S. Department of Justice, *Investigation of the Chicago Police Department* (2017), pp. 22–45, 129–34. <https://www.justice.gov/opa/file/925846/download>
3. *State of Illinois v. City of Chicago* (2019), pp. 46–76, skim remainder. <https://cpdmonitoringteam.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/FINAL-CONSENT-DECREE-SIGNED-BY-JUDGE-DOW.pdf>
4. Press release, “Monitor Hickey Files Comprehensive Assessment, Part II,” October 11, 2024. <https://live-chicago-imt.pantheonsite.io/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/2024.10.11-IMT-Comprehensive-Assessment-Part-II-News-Release-1-1.pdf>

IN-CLASS EXERCISE: CHARTING THE FUTURE OF POLICE OVERSIGHT IN CHICAGO**Week 5: Interpreting police data and measuring performance****Readings:**

1. Malcolm Sparrow, *Handcuffed: What Holds Policing Back, and the Keys to Reform*. Brookings Institution Press (2016) (Chapter 2, pp. 40–92).
2. Franklin Zimring, *The City that Became Safe: New York’s Lessons for Urban Crime and Its Control*. Oxford University Press (2012) (Chapters 1 and 5, pp. 1–27, 136–150).
3. City of Chicago Office of Inspector General, “Report on Race- and Ethnicity-Based Disparities in CPD’s Use of Force” (2022). <https://igchicago.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Use-of-Force-Disparities-Report.pdf>
Optional:
Dean Knox, Will Lowe, and Jonathan Mummolo, “Administrative Records Mask Racially Biased Policing.” *American Political Science Review* 114:3 (2020).

Week 6: Police use of force: law, policy, statistics**Readings:**

1. Franklin Zimring, *When Police Kill*. Harvard University Press (2017) (Chapters 2–3, pp. 23–73).
2. *Vos v. City of Newport Beach, California* (9th Circuit Court of Appeals, 2018).
3. Roland Fryer, “An Empirical Analysis of Racial Differences in Police Use of Force.” *Journal of Political Economy* 127:3 (2019).
4. Chicago Police Department, “De-escalation, Response to Resistance, and Use of Force” (G03-02) (2023). <http://directives.chicagopolice.org/#directive/public/6214>

Week 7: Police technology**Readings:**

1. Sarah Brayne, *Predict and Surveil: Data, Discretion, and the Future of Policing*. Oxford University Press (2020) (Chapters 4 and 8, pp. 56–73, 136–148).

2. City of Chicago Office of Inspector General, “The Chicago Police Department’s Use of ShotSpotter Technology” (2021). <https://igchicago.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Chicago-Police-Departments-Use-of-ShotSpotter-Technology.pdf>
3. Henry Josephson et al., “ShotSpotter helps gunshot victims receive rapid first aid. Does that change the debate?” *Chicago Tribune*, September 12, 2024, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/2024/09/11/opinion-shot-spotter-chicago-response-to-victims/?share=htec0pon1ceipcpptis>
4. Eric Piza et al., “The Impact of Gunshot Detection Technology on Gun Violence in Kansas City and Chicago: A Multi-Pronged Evaluation” (2023). *National Institutes of Justice*. <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/308357.pdf>
5. SoundThinking, “ShotSpotter Controversy: The Truth Behind Gunshot Detection Technology and the Web of False Claims” (browse thoroughly) <https://www.soundthinking.com/soundthinking-responds-to-false-claims/>

IN-CLASS EXERCISE AND PRESENTATION: POLICING TECHNOLOGY ADOPTION AS A POLICY PROBLEM

Week 8: Police culture

Readings:

1. John Crank and Robert Langworthy, “An Institutional Perspective of Policing.” *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 83:2, 338–363 (1992).
2. Neil Gross, *Walk the Walk: How Three Police Chiefs Defied the Odds and Changed Cop Culture*. Metropolitan Books (2023) (Introduction, Chapters 3, 7–8, pp. 1–14, 43–52, 99–132).
Optional: Monica Bell, “Anti-Segregation Policing.” *New York University Law Review* 95, pp. 729–765.

Week 9: The future of policing

Readings:

1. Malcolm Sparrow, *Handcuffed: What Holds Policing Back, and the Keys to Reform*. Brookings Institution Press (2016) (Chapter 5–6, pp. 171–230).
2. Amna Akbar, “An Abolitionist Horizon for (Police) Reform.” *California Law Review* 108, pp. 1781–1846.
3. Philip K. Dick, “The Minority Report” (1956)
https://archive.org/details/Fantastic_Universe_v04n06_1956-01/page/n5/mode/2up?view=theater

FINAL PAPERS DUE MONDAY, MARCH 10, 2025