

Police Misconduct Investigation Processes: Police Officer Perceptions of Fundamental Fairness

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Abstract

Police misconduct has historically garnered much research attention. Internal affairs (IA) processes exist within police departments to investigate such cases of misconduct. Yet, sworn officers may distrust IA processes, potentially hampering its effectiveness and its amenability for reform. The purpose of this study was to examine police officers' perceptions of the IA process in its current state and their amenability to various types of IA reforms (e.g., civilian oversight committees, independent investigators). We collected survey data from a sample of 115 police officers from various police departments in New Jersey, USA. The results indicated that police officers vary in their perceptions of IA processes, such as the fairness of IA processes, their amenability to reforming IA systems, and what reforms were perceivably appropriate. Findings also indicated greater amenability for revisions to the current IA process, primarily among lower-ranking police officers and Black officers. Implications for policy and practice are discussed.

Keywords

procedural justice, police legitimacy, police misconduct, internal affairs, policing, civilian oversight

Introduction

A social contract paradigm of law and order exists within the United States. The tradeoff is the potential receipt of citizen protection by police officers from those who seek to cause them potential harm.

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As a result, police officers are tasked with upholding and enforcing those laws. Officers have the power and authority to take others' liberties and in rare, but tragic occurrences, their lives. A dilemma arises when police officers do not respect the obligation to wield that power with constitutional integrity. Misconduct committed by officers can cause police organizations to lose legitimacy and trust in the communities they serve (Goldsmith, 2005; Seron et al., 2004; Tyler, 2006). Occasionally, "street cop" encounters with civilians are the origins of misconduct complaints. These front-line officers are usually the only contact with law enforcement that many civilians will experience. These interactions could influence perceptions of democracy and fairness (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003).

Negative or disrespectful treatment of civilians by officers is influential in shaping the perceptions toward police in general (Avdija, 2010; Weitzer & Tuch, 2004). Efforts have thus been made to maintain accountability for officers' actions. For example, technology is increasing efforts to reduce misconduct (Fisher & Hermann, 2015), but reform is still limited (Rushin, 2013). There remains a need for police organizations to integrate operational compliance with Constitutional mandates into departmental policy in order to reduce misconduct occurrences (Walker & MacDonald, 2009). Immediate changes to organizational culture have been achieved through minor operational modifications (Mummolo, 2018), resulting in decreased misconduct complaints (Donner et al., 2016; Klockars et al., 2000). Transferring the responsibility of investigating misconduct complaints from the police department to an independent, qualified investigator could initiate accountability change necessary to improve police legitimacy or community, yet that usually only occurs when legal conflicts prevent an investigation from being conducted within the department.

The most prominent mechanism for addressing cases of police officer misconduct is the internal affairs (IA) function, a departmental unit that investigates allegations of misconduct raised against its officers by citizens or others within the department (e.g., Noble & Alpert, 2008). While establishing the IA function represented an important step toward greater accountability and fairness in policing, the IA process has limitations and may require its own reform efforts, as we will discuss. One focal issue that we seek to understand is whether the IA process is perceived favorably by sworn officers of various ranks, which can have important implications for both the current effectiveness of IA investigations (e.g., levels of cooperation with the investigative process) and departments' amenability for future IA reform efforts (e.g., whether officers embrace versus resist change). In this research, we thus seek to understand better officers' perceived fairness of their current IA processes, their amenability to potential reforms to the IA process, and where differences in these perceptions and amenabilities may exist. We sought to examine these perceptions at all departmental levels. For simplicity, we use the term "officer" throughout this manuscript in a broad, rank-agnostic sense rather than referring solely to nonranked officers, with which the public commonly associates the term.

The Contemporary IA Function

Providing historical context first is necessary to understand the origin of the police accountability process. Referred to by many agencies as simply "internal affairs" or "professional standards units," investigating police misconduct is a function rooted in nineteenth-century police practice, originating with the New York City Police Department's "Commissioners of the Metropolitan Police" in 1895 (Kelly, 1993). Despite variations created in the early twentieth century and then later, following the civil rights movement (Harnett, 1984), the primary function remains the same, meaning that investigators serve within the same agencies as accused officers for non-criminal investigations. Though many jurisdictions across the United States implemented different forms of civilian oversight and calls for police accountability have grown stronger throughout the years, the process has remained the same since its inception, or "frozen" and resistant to change.

In most states today, a complainant's mechanism to seek redress for alleged police misconduct is to file a complaint at the police departments where accused officers work. The American Civil Liberties

Union (ACLU, 2018) endorsed this method should citizens feel that police officers violated their rights. The ability to file such complaints allows a citizen to have a voice, seek justice, and create an opportunity to improve overall police-community interaction (Dunn, 2010; Lersch & Mieczkowski, 2005).

A standard operational procedure in police departments is an established IA or professional standards unit comprised of internal police administrators who investigate reported complaints against officers and typically report directly to the police chief. Investigations from the IA unit can either be reactive (i.e., a citizen files a complaint, which is then investigated) or proactive in nature (Noble & Alpert, 2008). As an example of the latter, a critical component of the IA function is the early warning system (EWS), where officers' performance data are compiled, such as use-of-force reports and citizens' complaints. Officers with potential issues are subsequently identified, authorities are notified, and intervention is conducted before reaching disciplinary stages (Walker, 2015; Walker et al., 2000, 2001). Beyond its investigative functions, IA units may also conduct audits and inspections and serve as a repository for the results of all investigations carried out within a department (Noble & Alpert, 2008). Notably, the IA unit does not solely handle citizen complaints but also complaints or concerns filed by colleagues of the officer under investigation (e.g., from a senior officer or a partner).

Internal investigations of administrative policy and procedure violations require a lessened burden of proof of misconduct than do criminal cases (i.e., a preponderance of evidence rather than proof beyond a reasonable doubt), rendering the verification of complaints in the latter more difficult (Hassell & Archbold, 2010; Liederbach et al., 2007). Despite this lesser burden of proof, internal misconduct investigations still require substantive evidence, resulting in typically few sustained allegations (Hassell & Archbold, 2010; Liederbach et al., 2007). Thus, the likelihood of receiving justice might be perceived as an anomaly. Additionally, given the sensitive nature of IA cases and the potential for reputational harm to officers under investigation, an IA unit's work is often highly confidential. While such confidentiality preserves the integrity of the IA process and protects investigated officers from harm against false claims (Noble & Alpert, 2008), it also potentially reduces transparency of the process for both citizens and officers who reside outside of the IA unit.

Citizen Concerns Regarding the IA Process. Prevalent media reports indicate a concern for the lack of police accountability in communities across the United States. In small- to mid-sized police departments, IA investigators and accused officers frequently have a pre-existing familiarity with each other due to factors such as working together in previous roles within the agency. As a result, citizens may perceive the investigation's outcome as biased in favor of implicated officers (Klockars et al., 2006), leaving complainants dissatisfied (Waters & Brown, 2000). Indeed, research shows that while citizens may file complaints against officers for various reasons (e.g., punishing the officer, seeking an apology, documenting the officer's behavior), these complaints are often accompanied by cynicism that no action will be taken to address the complaint (Walker, 1997). Even when citizens know that a department investigated their complaint, they may not know what policies or procedures were used to investigate the complaint or what factors contributed to the decision that was made about the officer (Worden et al., 2018). To summarize, from the perspective of citizens, the mere establishment of the IA process does not seem sufficient for establishing trust in law enforcement, and additional procedural considerations are needed, such as providing greater transparency for how complaints are handled and resolved.

Officer Perceptions of the IA Disciplinary Process. What might surprise police detractors is that many officers do not believe in the "code of silence" (Weisburd et al., 2000). Police officers are less inclined than their civilian public worker counterparts to comply with a culture that subscribes to such a code (Rothwell & Baldwin, 2007). Many studies have suggested that adherence to this "code" was less likely if an increased consciousness of organizational fairness existed

(Wolfe & Piquero, 2011). Officers who believe that fairness exists in their respective organizations are less likely to commit acts of misconduct (Donner et al., 2015; Enciso et al., 2017; Nix et al., 2015) and more likely to report it (Long et al., 2013). Fairness is more important to some police officers than the outcome of the investigations against them (Crank & Caldero, 1991; DeAngelis & Kupchik, 2007; Miller, 2010a), and perceived unfairness is particularly distressing (Elovainio et al., 2002; Noblet et al., 2009).

Ironically, despite their purpose of enhancing fairness within law enforcement agencies, IA processes are often perceived as unfair by police officers, and the IA investigators are often distrusted. Some officers have reported that higher level officials in their department were less likely to receive equitable discipline for similar infractions (Fragale et al., 2009). Other officers contend that supervisory power influences the harshness of punishment over their subordinates (Wiltermuth & Flynn, 2013). Additionally, some officers believe that civilians use the IA process as retaliation against them for just doing their jobs (Prenzler et al., 2010). Such concerns about the IA process can negatively influence officers' willingness to comply with the process (Brooks-Crew et al., 2022), making it paramount to understand and address these concerns.

Research regarding police officers' perceptions of IA investigators and the mechanisms used within their organizations indicates that few positive interactions occur. Rank-and-file officers view IA investigators as untrustworthy (Miller, 2010a) and adversarial (Crank, 2014). Potentially supporting the reasons for this distrust, research suggests that the severity of sanctions can be affected by various factors unrelated to the nature of the misconduct being investigated (e.g., officer race and rank; Worden et al., 2023). Additionally, a historical aspect of an "us versus them" mentality (Reuss-Ianni & Ianni, 1983) from subordinates toward IA commanders still exists today. Many supervisors investigate their subordinate officers accused of administrative policy and procedure violations. Indeed, IA sanctions toward officers tend to be more severe when they come from an internal complaint rather than a citizen (external) complaint (Worden et al., 2023). This internal process often leads to officers' negative feelings toward their supervisors (Anshel, 2000). The subsequent organizational stressors created by these negative feelings often result in poor performance and decision-making (Graf, 1986; Hart & Cotton, 2002; Hickman et al., 2011; Shane, 2010) and commissions of police misconduct (Bishopp et al., 2016; C. Harris & Worden, 2014; Wolfe & Piquero, 2011), impacting police-civilian interactions.

Officers can suffer extreme stress due to the lack of communication common in IA investigations (S. Miller et al., 2008). Maguen et al. (2009) found a relationship between negative work-environment stress and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms in police officers. Scholars contend that conducting future research on organizational stressors is more critical than previous research on typical and well-known job stressors (i.e., threats to personal safety and shift work; Adams & Buck, 2010; Brooks & Piquero, 1998; Shane, 2010; Volanti & Aaron, 1994). The existing literature suggests that the current IA process is one primary stressor for police officers.

Police Officer Resistance to IA Reform: The Example of External Oversight Bodies

Increasing interest in police misconduct investigation reform culminated with many agencies conforming to civilian oversight groups and other external oversight entities (e.g., Farrar, 2013). The implementation of these groups could potentially enhance accountability within police departments. For example, evidence suggests that civilian oversight involvement increases the likelihood of sustained complaints against officers (Terrill & Ingram, 2016). Previous research supported the hypothesis that for civilian oversight committees to succeed, transparency and independence were needed from the department/officer in question (Greene, 2007). Likewise, a salient example comes from the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO), a government-independent organization investigating complaints against public entities (NIPSO, 2023). NIPSO reviews and investigates

complaints from citizens who were either unable to have their complaint investigated by the public entity in question or who were dissatisfied with the way in which their original complaint was handled. Whether initiated by a citizen or self-initiated, the results of NIPSO investigations are later published online in order to maintain transparency with the public.

While some organizations have benefitted in their accountability from these oversight groups, other organizations have failed to show signs of improvement (Clarke, 2009). Self-protective resistance continues from both rank-and-file officers and police leadership (Bobb, 2003), such as preventing oversight committees from obtaining needed data to perform their necessary functions. Likewise, Lee et al. (2017) found that officers generally reported an unfavorable opinion about civilian oversight boards, and only 65% reported being willing to report misconduct issues to an external investigative unit, the Office of Professional Accountability (OPA). Cooperation from police agencies continues to be a challenge and is key to the survival of civilian oversight groups and police accountability measures (Harris, 2012; Livingston, 2004; Miller & Merrick, 2001). Even with initiatives such as an ombudsman program (e.g., NIPSO), concerns can still exist regarding how complainant cases are handled (Sen, 2010).

Lack of trust is not limited to that of civilians toward the police. Some officers believe that civilians tend to be influenced by the media and community (Clarke, 2009), which questions their ability to make fair and objective decisions. Another concern is whether civilians have a competent procedural grasp of the IA process. IA investigations tend to be intricate and require high investigative competence levels (S. Miller, 2010b). Many civilian oversight groups consist of civilians possessing little to no formal investigatory training (Moran, 2016). As a result, many police leaders remain reluctant to accept policy changes or disciplinary recommendations from civilian oversight committees (Ferdik et al., 2013).

Civilian oversight committees were tasked to achieve deterrence and police misconduct investigation reform, though many groups are ill-equipped to accomplish these goals. The premise is valid, but the methodology is flawed. Indeed, a host of concerns have been levied regarding such committees, both for civilians and officers (Finn, 2001). From the civilian perspective, civilians may be hesitant to serve on oversight committees for fear of retaliation from officers or they may lack resources to effectively market themselves to agencies and engage in outreach. Civilians also lack the power to subpoena documents or individuals that would normally allow for a more thorough investigation. Additionally, as hearings from civilian oversight committees tend to be public (Finn, 2001), officers who are investigated may still suffer reputational damage even if they are found innocent by the committee. From the officers' perspective, there are concerns that a civilian oversight committee would interfere with police work and that civilians are not adequately informed of the realities and complexities of officers' jobs, yielding a perceivably unfair process (Finn, 2001).

The police culture is insular and not traditionally conducive to change (Crank, 2014; Margolis, 2022), although reform efforts may be more successful if police officers develop greater trust in the review process. Trust is essential to effective police operations and is considered mutually necessary by supervisors and subordinates alike (Shea, 2015). For example, retaining an impartial, trained investigator whom officers believe is free from internal or external politics could successfully implement change. Despite its promise to foster accountability while maintaining impartiality to those under investigation, there has been minimal discussion about utilizing such a method. For the possibility of such a change, there must be an "unfreezing" of the current IA process. However, such an unfreezing would require that law enforcement community members are sufficiently aware of the need for IA reform and are motivated to support these changes. Next, we draw from organizational justice theories to argue why officers may indeed be ready for such an unfreezing.

Internal Affairs Reform: Lewin's Change Theory

Here, we consider what steps may be required for IA reform efforts to succeed, given the general resistance among departments to change their current IA processes. To do so, we draw upon

Lewin's (1947) change theory. Lewin's change theory has long served as a foundation for explaining organizational change management (Robbins & Judge, 2009; Sonenshein, 2010). Lewin (1947) deduced that to create successful behavioral or process changes authentically, a three-step procedure must occur: (1) "unfreezing" the current state or process, (2) implementing the desired change, then (3) "refreezing" the new process permanently (Burke, 2017). This procedure, known as the changing-as-three-steps (CATS) paradigm, is praised for its prevalent influence on modern change theory (Hendry, 1996; Levasseur, 2001; Michaels, 2001). However, other scholars criticize this theory as simplistic (Child, 2005; Clegg et al., 2005; Kanter et al., 1992). A limited number of studies have addressed the police culture's resistance to change, utilizing Lewin's CATS theory (Christmas, 2012; Degnegaard, 2010; Drew, 2011; Durmaz, 2007; Duxbury et al., 2018; Grant & Toch, 2012). Although several contemporary theoretical frameworks relating to change are available, we believe the first step in Lewin's CATS theory—"unfreezing"—is appropriate to examine the potential for officer acceptance of new IA systems. Thus, this paper's purpose is twofold: (a) to serve as the catalyst for communicating to stakeholders why this change is necessary, and (b) to ascertain police officers' potential acceptance of those proposed changes, as recommended in Step 1 of Lewin's CATS theory.

Organizational Justice Theories and Organizational Change

Research suggests that people are sensitive to issues of fairness, both in and out of the workplace (e.g., Colquitt et al., 2005; Lind & Tyler, 1988). This concern for fairness not only pertains to the types of outcomes one receives (*distributive justice*; Deutsch, 1975), but extends to the procedures leading to those outcomes (*procedural justice*; Leventhal, 1980) and the manner in which one was treated throughout the process (*interactional justice*; Bies & Moag, 1986). For example, research suggests that while people typically react negatively after receiving an undesirable outcome (e.g., being denied a promotion, being laid off), high levels of procedural justice can offset these reactions altogether (Brockner & Wiesenfeld, 1996). It is no surprise, then, that various types of fairness perceptions have been linked to important organizational outcomes, such as job performance, counter-productive work behaviors, and employee attitudes (for meta-analyses, see Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Colquitt et al., 2013).

In the context of organizational change, and particularly enacting changes to IA systems, we suggest that perceived unfairness is one potential mechanism that could cause an "unfreezing" of a long-held process. When a system is perceivably unfair, a common reaction is to do away with it or initiate corrective action against it, often propelled by emotional reactions such as anger or resentment (Barclay et al., 2005). Doing so increases the likelihood that one can benefit from the system in the future. In the current research, we suggest that police officers' perceived fairness of their departments' IA processes will predict whether the same officers would support reforms to the IA process. As we will later discuss, data suggest that officers may already perceive IA systems as unfair, making this point in time potentially opportune for systemic changes to IA processes.

"Unfreezing": A Catalyst Toward Reforming Internal Affairs. A precursor must exist to create change in an organization. According to Gleick (1987), organizational change can be routinely chaotic, with variables in a constant flux state, coupled with resistance and a lack of control. Change often brings rise to variations in reactions and consequences (Dawson, 1994; Eilam & Shamir, 2005; Lewin, 1947).

As stated earlier, Lewin (1951) believed in a three-stage process for planned organizational change. The first and most critical step to prompting real change is "unfreezing," which entails awareness, need, and motivation for change. Communicating why change is necessary usually

transpires through statements or actions (Carter, 2008). As a result, scholars recognized a critical action within this step: The need to create motivation to change (Cummings et al., 2016; Schein, 2010) through education and the communication of a compelling vision. Understanding why change must occur is critical in this step (Nicolas, 2017; Weick & Quinn, 1999). Critical discourse must evaluate competing perspectives and elicit potential solutions to organizational issues (Fear et al., 2006; Lewin, 1951). Catharsis often results from these conversations, which may limit preconceptions (Allport, 1945). Catharsis resistance is lessened through communication and intervention techniques to heighten awareness of the need for change, thus spawning openness to the burgeoning change process (Goodstein & Burke, 1991). Lewin (1946), too, concluded that the benefits of knowledge gained effectively prepare people for future change (Coghlan & Jacobs, 2005). We believe that our research findings may potentially create conversations leading to the successful completion of the first step.

The second step involves the required disturbance of stationary equilibriums customarily maintained by organizational order (Burnes, 2020; Lewin, 1943). Examples in the policing realm include the use of chokeholds being outlawed after Eric Garner's death or the formal, public rejections of police leaders by their police unions. Lewin (1951) pointed out that this type of provocation can "break open the shell of complacency and self-righteousness" (p. 229; Toch, 1980). According to Walton et al. (2017), social movements arise to produce sustained challenges against existing power systems. In this study, we posit that the current social campaign against law enforcement in the United States exemplifies those statements and actions that can initiate unfreezing. Public complaints of police misconduct, brutality, and deadly force often constitute thematic underpinnings of calling for increased internal accountability (Walker & Archbold, 2020) and can help motivate the creation of new accountability methods.

Once the change is fully implemented, the third and last step, or "refreezing" of the new process, ensues, which can still create controversy and discord if policymakers do not adhere to the first two steps. Officers could revert back to the prior system if leaders do not embrace and support the modifications. Still, the predisposition to resist systemic changes in policing appears to have lessened because of persistent mass protest, public demand, and media coverage. For instance, many police departments now implement procedural justice training positively impacting police-community relations (Wood et al., 2020). In other words, external social pressure has created the awareness and equilibrium disturbance necessary to initiate change to a long-held system, which is required, according to Lewin.

Summary

Opportunities are available despite the raised issues with current IA practices and limited reform. In New Jersey, where this study was conducted, police departments can employ IA investigators who are not affiliated with their particular agencies. These individuals are retired law enforcement IA investigators who acquired training in such competencies as interviewing techniques, administrative law, and recognizing deception (Verry, 2011). Although available in New Jersey, this option is not commonplace. For this reason, we explored whether or not this operational transition could be accepted as a process change. We then used survey questions to assess perceptions of officers' interpretations of this potential change. Specifically, we examined the following research questions:

Research Question 1: How do police officers perceive the internal affairs process, in its current state?

Research Question 2: How do police officers perceive potential efforts to reform the internal affairs process?

Research Question 3: What demographic or other background characteristics are associated with the above perceptions regarding the internal affairs process?

First, we sought to understand police officers' perceptions of fairness regarding current IA investigations. Second, if the findings indicate that officers perceive the current process as unfair, we wanted to discern if they felt that an external function relocation and unaffiliated investigator could achieve the desired impartiality. Investigators from outside the police department should be used to promote fairness and legitimacy to both citizens and police officers alike (DeAngelis & Kupchik, 2007; S. Miller & Blackler, 2017). However, the current IA function has been embedded for decades. Gauging potential stakeholder acceptance of change is the primary goal here. Few studies have examined police officers' perceptions concerning due process during IA investigations. Would employing retired IA investigators unaffiliated with the department where the police officer misconduct originated provide a viable alternative that provides fundamental fairness?

Lastly, the current research informs efforts to enhance the IA process by exploring individual differences that may be associated with perceptions of the IA process and openness to reform efforts. For example, our research may identify where or among whom there is openness to IA reform or willingness to support such efforts or, conversely, where there is resistance to IA reform. We felt that individual differences were particularly important to examine, given that some of the research we reviewed indicated that IA decisions could be influenced by job-irrelevant factors such as the officer's demographic background and rank (e.g., Cabral & Lazzarini, 2015; Worden et al., 2023). These background characteristics could, in turn, contribute to differences in how officers perceive the IA process, given differential experiences with the process based on these characteristics. This study explores police officers' perceptions of the IA process and how change may be possible in future reform efforts.

Methods

We utilized an electronic survey in the current research. Our rationale behind the survey questions stemmed from focusing on specific topical areas regarding the IA function along with understanding officers' perceptions across the topical areas. As mentioned earlier, we use the term "officers" here to refer to sworn police personnel of various ranks (e.g., police officers, lieutenants, captains), rather than exclusively referring to nonranking officers. It was vital to explore the contemporary IA function regarding perceptions on how it currently operates. We also wanted to explore if the IA function is perceived as influenced by outside factors. Accountability regarding the IA function was important to capture as well as perceptions on the possible relocating of IA investigations outside of police departments, essentially implementing a new model. Lastly, as with all survey research, it was necessary to ask demographic questions to possibly surface differences in perceptions based on variables such as gender, race, title, assignment, etc.

Participants

We utilized snowball sampling to recruit police officers as participants in our study. Initial study invitations were sent to Police Chiefs throughout the State of New Jersey, requesting that their subordinates be allowed to participate. The invitations were limited to New Jersey because of the researchers' familiarity with multiple police leaders and access to a New Jersey Chief's email training list. There were 936 officers on the email list, with approximately 500 of them having the title of Police Chief. The remaining amount of contacts was lower-ranking members who represented the Chief. Chiefs who approved departmental participation were asked to forward our study invitation (including the survey link) to their officers in a snowball sample. A total of 201 respondents began the survey, of whom 83 respondents had no information and three respondents had incomplete data, yielding a final sample size of 115 respondents (see Table 1 for demographics). We did not ask

Table 1. Sample Demographics.

Variable	n (%)	Variable	n (%)
Age		Race	
25–34	14 (12.2)	African American/Black	10 (8.7)
35–44	46 (40.0)	Asian	1 (0.9)
45–54	43 (37.4)	Latino/Hispanic	11 (9.6)
55 or older	9 (10.4)	White (non-Hispanic)	81 (70.4)
		Other	2 (1.7)
Gender		Prefer not to answer	10 (8.7)
Female	9 (7.8)		
Male	103 (89.6)	Rank	
Prefer not to answer	3 (2.6)	Police officer	24 (20.9)
		Detective	11 (9.6)
Military service		Sergeant	17 (14.8)
Yes	17 (14.8)	Lieutenant	34 (29.6)
No	93 (80.9)	Captain	11 (9.6)
Prefer not to answer	5 (4.3)	Deputy chief	3 (2.6)
		Chief	13 (11.3)
		Other	2 (1.7)

Note. A subset of the demographics information is provided in Table 1. Upon request, additional demographic information can be made available.

participants to report their police department, to preserve confidentiality and enhance comfort levels with completing the survey.

Upon comparing our sample’s demographic composition to data collected by the New Jersey Attorney General’s Office in 2022,¹ we determined that our sample had proportionally more male respondents (males comprised 89.6% of our sample, versus 79.8% of the 2022 police population), had more White respondents (70.4% of our sample, versus 61.7% in the population data), and was generally older (77.4% of our sample was in their mid-30s to mid-50s, versus approximately 54.6% in the population data). We discuss this as a potential limitation later on.

Survey Administration

The survey instrument was delivered electronically using SurveyGizmo. A standard questionnaire protocol was used, such as voluntary respondent participation and complete anonymity. Surveys were used to collect demographic information (15 items) and perceptions of the current practice of IA investigations into police officer misconduct (31 items; see Table 2). The IA-focused items utilized a 5-point Likert-type scale, with value ranges defined as follows (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). Questions explicitly addressed the IA process and allowed for an exploration of how police officer perceptions of fairness pertained to the current police officer misconduct IA investigation process.

Analytical Approach

Because our survey respondents answered a large number of questions assessing various types of perceptions about the IA process (e.g., perceptions of how the process is conducted, about different types of reform efforts, about potential influences from third parties), we decided to use exploratory factor analysis (EFA) in order to distill survey responses down to a smaller number of variables, allowing for a simpler and more comprehensible analysis (Fabrigar et al., 1999;

Table 2. Factor Loadings and Communalities Based on Exploratory Factor Analysis Principal Axis Factoring with Promax Rotation for 27 Question from the IA Survey ($N = 115$).

Item	Factor						
	Unfair	Ext. Inf.	Reform	3rd Party	Proc. Just.	Move Adeq.	Protect ^a
I have personal knowledge of other officers who were treated unfairly in past IA investigations.	-.108						
Some IA investigators do not conduct investigations in a fair and objective manner.	-.62						
The IA function creates unnatural conflicts that prohibit fundamentally fair investigations.	-.46						
IA investigators and the operation are NOT influenced by politics resulting from media coverage.		1.00					
IA investigators and the operation are NOT influenced by politics resulting from public attention.		.97					
IA investigators and the operation are NOT influenced by elected officials.		.66					
IA investigators and the operation are NOT influenced by department politics.		.47		.36			
The current IA process should be reevaluated and restructured.			.81				
The current IA function should remain the same.			-.60				-.32
Administrative complaints against police officers should be investigated by independent, external investigators.			.45	.31			
I would be more amenable to moving the IA function out of the control of local police departments if the "criter of fact" was an Independent external investigator.				.70			
The possibility of fairness and objectivity for accused officers could increase with the utilization of retired, external investigators to examine cases.				.61			
The Early Warning System is an effective tool to identify officers "at risk" of committing increased acts of misconduct.				.58			
Relocating the IA function out of police departments would likely increase the chances of a fair and equitable investigation of complaints against officers.			.36	.56			
I would be more amenable to moving the IA function out of police departments if the police unions were more involved with the new process.				.52			
Disciplinary sanctions given to police officers subsequent to sustained IA investigations are usually administered fairly.					.61		
IA investigators DO NOT practice differential treatment during investigations.					.56	-.31	
Officers are allowed to effectively defend themselves against IA allegations of misconduct.				.35	.56		

(continued)

Table 2. (continued)

Item	Factor					
	Unfair	Ext. Inf.	Reform	3rd Party	Proc. Just.	Move Adeq. Protect ^a
Officers are kept consistently informed during IA investigations when they are the accused individual.					.52	
The current IA function is a fair and objective process.					.38	-.34
Civilians sometimes utilize the IA function to gain leverage in court, or for retaliation against officers for traffic tickets or arrests. ^b					.32	
I know or have known other officers who were exonerated through IA investigations.						-.67
I would be more amenable to moving the IA function out of the control of local police departments if the “trier of fact” was a judge.						-.61
I would prefer if all IA cases were investigated by the prosecutor’s office or NJ Attorney General’s Office.						-.61
I would be more amenable to moving the IA function out of the control of local police departments if the “trier of fact” was an IA investigator from another police department.						-.51
The IA investigations conducted by the prosecutors’ offices and/or the NJ Attorney General’s Office are fair and objective.						-.84
The current IA operation is sufficient to investigate the following effectively: inter –employee conflict.						-.68
The current IA operation is sufficient to investigate the following effectively: employee misconduct.						-.54
The current IA operation is sufficient to investigate the following effectively: demeanor complaints.						-.34
The IA function is unfairly biased in favor of citizen complainants concerning subsequent investigative findings.						.61
Police officers should be held accountable for misconduct						-.33

Note. Factor loadings < 0.30 are not printed. Positive (negative) values indicate that the factor is more strongly represented by greater agreement (disagreement) to the respective survey question. IA = internal affairs; Unfair = IA process is perceived as unfair; Ext. Inf = IA process is perceived as free from external influences; Reform = In favor of reforming IA processes; 3rd Party = Wanting third party oversight of the IA function; Proc. Just = Perceive the IA process as procedurally just; Move = Wanting to move the IA process out of local departments; Adeq. = Perceiving the IA process as adequate for addressing specific complaints; Protect = Wanting to protect police officers against scrutiny from citizens.

^aThe eighth factor was dropped due to evidence of poor internal consistency reliability.

^bItem dropped from its respective factor due to conceptual dissimilarity with the rest of the items on the factor. N = 114.

Goretzko et al., 2021). When surveys include various single-item questions, it is possible that several of those questions may actually assess aspects of the same underlying theoretical construct, which would be reflected by more similar response patterns between those questions than between other questions in the survey. An EFA enables researchers to identify groups of survey items that demonstrate such similar response patterns and may thus reflect a common underlying construct (i.e., a factor; Bryant & Yarnold, 1995). We would then compute an average of each respondent's responses to the questions in the group, yielding one score that represents the underlying construct (as opposed to several scores reflecting responses to each individual question). Additionally, the use of an EFA provides an opportunity to explore the development of a repeatable and consistent scale of measurement in this topic area.

We used maximum likelihood as the method for extracting factors in our EFA, which assumes a multivariate normal distribution in survey responses to each question. We used a direct oblimin rotation, meaning we set a fairly balanced restriction on how correlated the extracted factors from our EFA could be; direct oblimin identifies factors that are reasonably distinct from one another while still allowing factors to be correlated (Field, 2018). For each identified factor, an eigenvalue statistic is calculated which represents how much shared variance the factor explains in responses to the questions (Bryant & Yarnold, 1995). As is common practice, we only examined factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.00. After identifying different types of IA perceptions using this approach, we then examined bivariate relationships between these different perceptions and explored how they were predicted by several demographic factors.²

Results

The EFA revealed eight factors with initial eigenvalues greater than 1.00. The eight factors cumulatively explained 59.58% of the variance in responses to the survey questions. Of the 31 items examined, 30 items loaded $|\geq .30|$ or higher onto at least one factor in the pattern matrix. To keep the factors as distinct as possible, each of the 30 items was ultimately assigned to the one factor that it loaded the strongest onto. One item (i.e., perceiving citizens as using IA processes for retaliation) was dropped from a factor due to conceptual dissimilarity with the remaining items on the factor reflecting *Procedural Justice* (see description below). An eighth factor—which seemed to reflect protectionist attitudes toward police—was dropped due to subsequently poor internal consistency reliability levels ($\alpha = .27$; i.e., responses to the questions in that factor did not intercorrelate strongly enough to maintain confidence that they represented the same underlying construct). As a result of the EFA, the remaining, underlying seven factors were interpreted as follows (see Table 2):

1. *Unfairness*: Perceiving the IA process as treating officers unfairly and lacking objectivity.
2. *Free from External Influence*: Perceiving the integrity of the IA process as safeguarded from external influences, such as from media, public attention, elected officials, and departmental politics.
3. *Pro-Reform*: Perceiving the IA process as needing reevaluation and structural/procedural change.
4. *Third Party Oversight*: Wanting greater third party involvement in the IA process, such as by having independent, external investigators overseeing the investigative function, and by leveraging Early Warning Systems (EWS) to identify officers who are at risk of engaging in misconduct.
5. *Procedural Justice*: Perceiving the IA process as procedurally fair, such as by being objective, treating all parties equally, and giving adequate opportunity to defend oneself against allegations of misconduct.

6. *Move IA Process Out*: Reporting feelings favoring moving IA processes out of the purview of local departments, effectively no longer wanting to keep IA oversight “in-house.”
7. *Adequate*: Perceiving IA processes as adequate for effectively addressing specific complaints, such as employee misconduct, inter-employee conflict, and demeanor complaints.

Having identified the factors above, we next examined bivariate correlations between the various IA perceptions. All correlational and descriptive statistics for these factors are reported in Table 3, and so we thus focus here on broader themes from the analysis. First, we found significant bivariate relationships between pro-reform attitudes, wanting greater third party oversight in the IA process, and wanting to move the IA function out of local departments. This suggests that our participants perceived the latter two as types of IA reform. Second, participants who perceived the IA process as unfair or having lower levels of procedural justice were also more likely to favor reforming the IA process, including wanting greater third party oversight in the process. Third, in contrast to the previous theme, we found that the desire to move the IA function out of local department control was not associated with perceived unfairness or perceptions of procedural justice, potentially indicating that simply relocating the IA function externally is not perceived as sufficient to correct any potential biases that may exist within the system. Altogether, our data suggest a close connection between the perceived fairness of the IA process and the desire to reform it.

Lastly, we examined whether demographic characteristics predicted perceptions of the IA process. Specifically, we examined the effects of participants' age, work experience, rank, and race.³ We examined bivariate relationships between the former three characteristics, which were ordinal in nature, and IA perceptions using Spearman rank-order correlations (see Table 3). Results of these analyses revealed that participants who were older, had greater work experience, or had a higher rank were significantly less likely to support IA reform. Furthermore, older participants generally perceived IA processes as significantly more procedurally just.

We next examined the effects of race on IA perceptions using one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), which allows us to compare average scores on a dependent variable across distinct groups (in our case, officer race). We removed from analyses participants who selected “Asian” ($n = 1$) or “Other” ($n = 2$) as their race, due to insufficient subgroup sample size, and we removed participants who selected “Prefer Not to Answer” due to conceptual ambiguity in how to interpret this category. Full ANOVA results are presented in Table 4.

ANOVA results revealed that race significantly influenced two types of perceptions of the IA process. First, we found that Black participants perceived the IA process as significantly lower in procedural justice than White participants. Second, we found that Black participants perceived the IA process as significantly less adequate for addressing various types of charges, relative to both White and Hispanic participants. No other significant race differences were found in our analyses. Our findings thus indicate that Black officers in particular tended to have fairness concerns regarding the IA process, whereas opinions about IA reform (and related perceptions) did not differ by race.

Discussion

The IA function has become a staple of many police departments, given the importance of ensuring accountability for police misconduct. Yet, as we noted at the onset of our paper, research suggests that police officers may have concerns about the objectivity of the IA process, which may affect both the current system's effectiveness and future efforts to reform the IA process. To explore this issue, in the current research, we surveyed New Jersey police officers of various ranks to understand how police officers perceive the current IA process (RQ1) and potential efforts to reform it (RQ2), as well as what demographic and background characteristics are associated with differences in these perceptions (RQ3). Notably, before this study, it was unclear if officers would consider (a) an IA

Table 3. Perceptions of IA Processes: Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Correlations.

Variable	M (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Unfair	3.28 (.90)	(.77)									
2. Ext. Inf.	2.70 (1.14)	-.43***	(.90)								
3. Reform	3.11 (.96)	.51***	-.49***								
4. 3rd Party	2.76 (.87)	.25**	-.21*	(.78)							
5. Proc. Just.	3.11 (.95)	-.49***	.58***	.38***	(.78)						
6. Move	2.60 (.84)	.02	.01	-.50***	-.05	(.82)					
7. Adeq.	3.57 (1.00)	-.38***	.33***	.20*	.39***	.02	(.72)				
8. Rank ^a	—	-.21*	.29*	-.51***	-.07	.57***	.11	(.82)			
9. Experience ^a	—	-.17	.11	-.30***	-.09	.39***	.09	.23*	—		
10. Age ^a	—	-.13	.12	-.29**	-.08	.10	-.03	.16	.55***	—	
				-.24*	.08	.07	.06	.08	.53***	.67***	—

Note. Scores on variables 1–7 range from 1 to 5, with higher scores reflecting higher levels of the labeled construct. Internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha) for each factor is reported in parentheses along the diagonal. Alpha values greater than .70 are generally deemed as acceptable for factor scores (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). IA = internal affairs; Unfair = IA process is perceived as unfair; Ext. Inf. = IA process is perceived as free from external influences; Reform = In favor of reforming IA processes; 3rd Party = Wanting third party oversight of the IA function; Proc. Just. = Perceive the IA process as procedurally just; Move = Wanting to move the IA process outside of local departments; Adeq. = Perceiving the IA process as adequate for addressing specific complaints. N ranges from 114 to 115.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

^aVariables were ordinal and thus examined using Spearman rank-order correlations.

Table 4. Effects of Race on IA Process Perceptions.

Dependent variable	Omnibus statistics			Group-level statistics		
	<i>F</i> (2, 99)	<i>p</i>	η^2	Black (<i>n</i> = 10)	Hispanic (<i>n</i> = 11)	White (<i>n</i> = 81)
Unfair	1.57	.213	.03	3.60 (1.20)	3.48 (.56)	3.16 (.88)
Ext. Inf.	.72	.490	.01	2.45 (1.35)	2.50 (1.00)	2.81 (1.15)
Reform	.40	.674	.01	3.33 (1.09)	3.00 (1.01)	3.07 (.92)
3rd Party	.89	.413	.02	3.06 (1.07)	2.68 (.99)	2.69 (.79)
Proc. Just.	3.39	.038	.06	2.54 (1.15)^a	2.87 (.89)	3.26 (.88)^a
Move	.13	.881	.003	2.60 (1.14)	2.48 (.67)	2.62 (.84)
Adeq.	3.18	.046	.06	2.93 (1.44)^{a,b}	3.76 (.73)^a	3.70 (.87)^b

Note. Unfair = IA process is perceived as unfair; Ext. Inf. = IA process is perceived as free from external influences; Reform = In favor of reforming IA processes; 3rd Party = Wanting third party oversight of the IA function; Proc. Just. = Perceive the IA process as procedurally just; Move = Wanting to keep the IA process housed within local departments; Adeq. = Perceiving the IA process as adequate for addressing specific complaints. *N* ranges from 101 to 102. Degrees of freedom for the ANOVA examining the “Move” dependent variable were $df_1 = 2$, $df_2 = 98$. Means and standard deviations (in parentheses) are presented for participants of each race. Statistically significant findings are presented in bold font, indicating a low probability that the overall pattern of observed group differences is due to chance. For each dependent variable, groups sharing the same superscript letter significantly differ from each other at $p < .05$ (Tukey’s Least Significant Difference).

process revision and (b) qualified individuals outside of their police departments having the authority to investigate them (e.g., a judge, a different department), given that recent research in this area has mainly focused on civilian oversight boards.

Our findings revealed a variety of perceptions of the current IA process—such as regarding its (un)fairness, its adequacy for handling specific complaints, and its freedom from external influences—and of IA reform more generally—such as regarding their openness to seeing the IA process reformed, having third party oversight of the process, or having the IA process remain internal at the local, departmental level. We found that these perceptions varied substantially among officers in our sample, indicating a lack of consensus about what to do with the current iteration of the IA process. Such a lack of consensus resonates with past research, which generally shows ambivalence within the law enforcement community regarding how misconduct complaints are handled (e.g., Worden et al., 2018, 2023) and toward various types of law enforcement reform efforts (e.g., Finn, 2001; Lee et al., 2017; Prenzler, 2019).

In line with Lewin’s (1947) change theory, officers’ perceptions of the current IA process were also associated with their attitudes toward IA reform. For example, we found that officers who were more open to IA reform, such as having greater third party oversight of the process, also tended to perceive the current IA process as generally unfair, inadequate, and/or vulnerable to external influences. Our data thus suggest that organizational justice perceptions—in this case, the overall perceived fairness of the IA process, as well as procedural justice concerns in particular—can create an impetus for “unfreezing,” enabling otherwise slow-changing systems to become more amenable to change.

However, unfreezing may not be so simple given the variability in perceptions noted earlier. As a first step toward understanding the source of this variability, we found that perceptions of the IA process and IA reform were partly associated with officers’ rank, experience, age, and race. Turning first to the former three characteristics, our data suggest that officers of higher ranks, more experienced, and older age tended to view the IA process more favorably and were less open to IA reform efforts. We will focus our discussion here on rank, given that higher-ranking officers are not only generally older and have more work experience but also wield greater decision-

making authority. Police leaders may be more resistant to the suggestion that individuals outside the police department should investigate complaints, and they may be less likely to consider relocating the IA function from their respective departments, even if unions were involved in the process.

Furthermore, nonranking officers generally reported more willingness to concede to potential changes to the IA process and the investigator across most categories in this study. Interestingly, these findings diverge from those of Reynolds and Helfers (2018), who found that rookie officers tended to perceive greater organizational justice at work, in general. We suggest that the officers' perceptions in our sample toward the IA process may be distinct from their broader perceptions of their jobs. Indeed, research suggests that employees' attitudes can vary across specific facets of their jobs (for a review regarding job attitudes, see Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012). These results provide new and significant insight regarding the interrelationship between police leaders and those they command. Nonranking officers who work the streets are more likely to be on the receiving end of internal investigations. These findings suggest a distrust of their IA investigators possessing the sole authority to investigate them.

Suppose the findings are juxtaposed with Lewin's "unfreezing" step. In that case, the results indicate that higher ranking officers may resist the potential of "unfreezing" the IA process, despite public calls for change. On the other hand, their subordinates are more welcoming of the thaw. Given that research suggests that officers of higher ranks or greater tenure tend to receive less severe outcomes from IA investigations (Cabral & Lazzarini, 2015), higher-ranking officers may be shielded from the flaws of the IA system more so than lower-ranking officers. Our findings speak to the importance of greater dialog across ranks so that police leaders are more aware of potential systemic issues that should be addressed.

Lastly, we found that Black officers perceived the IA process as less procedurally just than White officers and as less adequate than White and Hispanic officers. Our findings suggest that Black officers' views of the IA process may be more closely aligned with Black citizens than with their fellow officers, given evidence that Black citizens also hold salient concerns about the handling of police misconduct (e.g., MacLean, 2021; Pryce & Whitaker, 2023; Walker, 1997). Our findings also resonate with some research showing that officer ethnicity influences their experiences during misconduct investigations (e.g., Smith et al., 2015; Worden et al., 2018), though the evidence is generally mixed. For example, Worden and colleagues (2018) found disparities in misconduct sanctions for non-White officers but not for Black officers in particular, relative to White officers. As another example, McElvain and Kposawa (2004) found no significant race differences in the likelihood of an officer being investigated for using force. There is clearly more to be untangled regarding officers' experiences with the IA process, including how race shapes these experiences.

Study Limitations and Future Research Directions

Though our analyses provide insights into officers' resistance to change and satisfaction with the current IA process, our research is not without limitations. First, the majority of our sample was White, male, and ranking officers. We note, however, that the skew in terms of race and sex is typical for law enforcement. Although our sample had slightly more officers who were White, male, and older than the broader population of police officers in New Jersey, based on data from the Attorney General's Office (see Footnote 1), the demographics of our sample were still fairly comparable to this broader population.

Additionally, only approximately 20% of the respondents to the survey were nonranking police officers. The lower proportion of nonranking officers may have occurred due to our recruitment approach, which followed a top-down process in which police chiefs were asked to forward our recruitment call to the rest of their departments. While such an approach may have increased the number of ranked officers that our study reached, it may have had an inverse effect on lower-ranking

officers further along the chain of command. We suggest that future research should consist of demographically balanced samples. Even though such samples would technically not represent the law enforcement population, as described above, they would enable a deeper dive into the unique challenges different demographic groups face.

Second, we relied on a combination of convenience sampling and snowball sampling through our reliance on an email list for recruitment, together with requesting for police chiefs to forward our recruitment call to their respective followers. Such an approach may limit the generalizability of our findings due to self-selection effects, such as officers who are more willing to discuss the IA process or have salient opinions about it being more likely to participate. We felt that such a recruitment approach was critical for obtaining a sufficient sample size, given our past experiences conducting research with police officers. Specifically, we have observed that officers are more willing to consider research participation when the opportunity is shared by a fellow officer, as opposed to being “cold-contacted” by a research team (hence, our reliance on snowball sampling). We, therefore, suggest that researchers utilize multiple recruitment approaches to gain access to a broader array of officers within a department.

Third, our data are cross-sectional, so we cannot draw conclusions about causality in the phenomena we examined. For example, while we suggested that the status of ranking officers may contribute to their perceptions of the IA process as being fair, it is also possible that there are certain characteristics of officers who view the process as fair (e.g., being a high performer or working “by the books”) that make them more likely to climb the ranks into higher positions. Future research could, therefore, explore perceptions of the IA process utilizing different methodologies, such as longitudinal research, field experiments, and experience sampling methods. Regarding the first three limitations we have described, we also encourage efforts to constructively replicate and extend our findings (including in other states and countries), to more accurately assess the generalizability of our results.

Lastly, we chose not to collect agency-level data from our respondents, which prevented us from accounting for relevant organizational-level factors, such as the details about their department’s IA process, organizational culture, or department size. We felt that it was necessary to avoid collecting such information to preserve respondents’ confidentiality and maintain their comfort levels with the survey, especially given the voluntary nature of their research participation and the lack of a pre-existing relationship with these officers. These organizational factors are certainly meaningful for better understanding both *why* and *where* IA processes may be perceived (un)favorably and may be met with more or less resistance in terms of potential reform.

As an additional future research direction, our findings suggest that nonranking officers and officers from underrepresented groups (particularly, Black officers) believe that fundamental fairness is negatively affected by the current IA process. Further research should examine potential injustices (both actual and perceived) within police departments in the United States and if system changes mitigate those perceptions. Such an inquiry could be investigated in various ways, such as through quasi-experiments (e.g., retrospectively examining how changes to the IA process in different departments impacted different groups of officers) or qualitative methods (e.g., conducting in-depth interviews with officers of different races/ethnicities and/or of varying ranks).

Implications for Policy and Practice

Changing organizational norm structures is usually a difficult endeavor. However, further policing reform analyses, such as the current study, can set an impetus and valuable starting point for policy change consideration. As stated earlier, communication with stakeholders and awareness of the ensuing changes require their input and opinions.

There has been much recent media attention focused on the distrust of the police from specific community members (Graziano & Gautier, 2018). Over decades, the continuation of this distrust has led to widespread protests against police officers nationwide (Walker & Archbold, 2020); or, the equilibrium is disturbed, which Lewin (1947) asserts is a window of opportunity for reform. Only legislative policy-makers retain the ability to remove IA investigations from within police departments. This study answered the question regarding an initial and often formidable challenge: whether that goal can be accomplished with police officer cooperation. At least from the nonranking perspective and among Black officers, there is potential for reform, whereas more generally, we see wide variability in openness to reform. Police unions would likely insist on participating in any IA disciplinary process modification, requiring approval from the attorneys' general offices (Margolis, 2022). Extrapolating from our findings, potential hindrances to change could emerge from higher levels in the law enforcement hierarchy. From a policy standpoint, we also recommend further exploring whether perceived unfairness of the IA process among Black and nonranking officers reflect systemic issues, and whether protections should be implemented to establish fairness and trust in the process.

Practically, based on our findings, we believe that IA reform can only succeed to the extent that as many officers support such reforms as possible. As with most forms of organizational change, we believe that a needs assessment would be critical in order to identify whether, why, and which groups of officers may feel resistant to such reforms. Our data also suggest potential misalignment across law enforcement ranks in the perceived effectiveness of the IA process, indicating a potential need for more open dialog. It may be the case that nonranking officers are not as aware of the rigor that goes into misconduct investigations, reflecting transparency issues that could undermine trust in the system (e.g., Lee et al., 2017). Conversely, ranking officers may benefit more from the system (Cabral & Lazzarini, 2015) and would therefore be less likely to encounter the issues faced by non-ranking officers in such investigations, leading to unacknowledged blindspots. Greater open-minded dialog across ranks could possibly promote mutual understanding.

Conclusion

The literature demonstrates a long history of calls to action and policy recommendations, much of it repetitive. In other words, we are aware of the substantial research criticizing the persistence of perceived injustices by those wronged by certain police officers and the subsequent lack of due process. As stated earlier in this paper, the aim is to initiate the unfreezing stage of police accountability reform. Through our research, we should see that citizens are not alone in wanting this unfreezing to occur; not all officers want to maintain the status quo of the current IA system. We show that the rank-and-file officers (who, notably, are the ones who engage the most with communities day-to-day) and Black officers tend to share sentiments similar to those exhibited by the broader public regarding IA reform. We advocate for greater dialog among officers of all ranks and backgrounds to understand the strengths and shortcomings of the current system more thoroughly, and we view this current time as representing an opportune moment to create meaningful change toward greater accountability. We hope our research will contribute to a more just society and inspire additional work toward this goal.

Authors Note

Lead authors Shea and Gonzalez contributed equally to this paper.

Data Availability Statement

The data that supports the findings of this study are available from the authors upon request. A supplemental file is included that contains tables from the manuscript.

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Notes

1. To access the 2022 demographic data from the New Jersey Attorney General's Office, visit <https://njoag.app.box.com/s/xx73qw1w4i03jnxnk9z6acphrzsuba4y>
2. We refer readers wishing to evaluate responses to our individual survey items to our supplemental materials on the Open Science Framework: https://osf.io/e2zx5/?view_only=91a1f99a920548d5a6565c3c9edd8f90
3. Results of correlational analyses indicated that age, work experience, and rank were significantly intercorrelated, but not high enough to indicate conceptual redundancy (i.e., $.50 < rs < .70$). We therefore deemed each variable to be distinct enough to examine separately in subsequent analyses.

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Author Biographies

Thomas Shea, Adjunct Professor for the American Public University System, started his career with the Long Branch Police Department in 1998 after serving honorably in the United States Marine Corps during Operation Desert Storm. After completing his police career in February 2017, he served as the Program Director and Founder of the Law Enforcement Executive Leadership program at Seton Hall University, and a nationwide subject matter expert (SME) consultant. He has authored comprehensive security plans and policies, published academic and professional articles and a police practice book, and has presented nationwide at professional conferences regarding security and policing topics.

Manuel Gonzalez, Assistant Professor, received his PhD in industrial-organizational psychology the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. Much of his research revolves around two broad topics: (1) the influences of emotions in the workplace on personal, interpersonal, and organizational outcomes, and (2) justice-related and ethical issues in the workplace. These topics sometimes bring his research into additional areas such as leadership, personality, and distractions in the workplace. Dr. Gonzalez has also worked as a consultant in the area of personnel selection and assessment and taught in the Law Enforcement Executive Leadership program at Seton Hall University, both which have helped to shape his research interests.

Bernard Jones, Assistant Professor in the Division of Criminal Justice, Legal Studies, and Homeland Security, earned a D. Sc. degree from New Jersey City University in the area of civil security leadership, management, and

policy, an M.S. degree from New Jersey Institute of Technology in Emergency Management—Business Continuity, an M.S. degree from Kean University in Management Information Systems and a B.S. degree from the University of Phoenix in Management Information Systems. He is a certified business continuity and disaster recovery professional with more than 20 years of experience reviewing, implementing, and managing enterprise business continuity, disaster recovery, and emergency management programs. His research and teaching interests focus on organizational resilience, disaster preparedness, and emergency management. His research agenda focuses on how organizations quantify their resilience posture, allowing them to work toward addressing their organizational resilience weaknesses and, in turn, enhancing their disaster preparedness.

Robert Verry, Professor, served as the Chief of Police for the South Bound Brook Police Department (NJ), retiring in March 2008. Presently, he is a full-time Associate Professor of Criminal Justice, Paralegal Studies, and Political and governmental Affairs at Centenary University. Additionally, Bob is a Licensed Private Detective and certified Paralegal and serves as a Representative/Consultant before the Public Employment Relations Commission. His book, “Mechanics of a Police Internal Affairs Investigation” (ISBN-13: 978-1932777970), was published nationally in 2011. Bob is a founding member of New Jersey’s Internal Affairs Association and has served as President since the 2004 commencement. Bob is/was, directly and indirectly, involved in well over 1,000 police misconduct investigations and presented over 100 seminars across New Jersey related to IA investigations, including, but not limited to, an introductory course that reviews the Attorney General Internal Affairs Policy and Procedure; Employee Discipline; Understanding Past Practice; and Controlling Absenteeism.