

Decision Processes Colloquia

Monday, April 6, 2026

Where: JMHH 360

When: 12:00 – 1:20 pm

Jens Ludwig

Edwin A. and Betty L. Bergman Distinguished Service Professor
University of Chicago

Predicting police misconduct

ABSTRACT:

Algorithms provide new ways of understanding and improving decisions, particularly those that hinge on a prediction. In this paper we examine a setting where people articulate their predictions, decisions and reasoning in the form of expert rules: Police misconduct. Many US cities predict misconduct risk using written-down expert rules that are part of a department's early intervention system, which is used to prioritize officers for supportive interventions. Using data from the Chicago Police Department (CPD) we show that even a fairly basic supervised learning algorithm is nearly 300% more accurate than CPD's expert rules and 81% more accurate on average than a set of 24 expert rules from around the country. What do the experts get wrong? They seem to believe that the world is more discontinuous or non-linear than it actually is, a sort of threshold bias, consistent with a body of research suggesting that people think categorically.

