

How can AI help
our partners uncover
police misconduct?

AI and what is true

Human Rights
Data Analysis Group

2024

In these challenging times, I find solace in our community and the work we do together. We know what it feels like to push for progress when things feel intractable, standing with our partners in seemingly impossible circumstances.

I joined HRDAG in 2009 to work on a complex sampling problem in the Historic Archive of the National Police in Guatemala. A few years later we presented expert witness testimony in a case that found former Police Chief Col. Héctor Bol de la Cruz guilty of command responsibility for the 1984 disappearance of Edgar Fernando García, a

labor leader and student activist.



There is a direct thread from that project in Central America to the police misconduct databases in the U.S. we

work on today. Leveraging statistical tools to make sense of institutional patterns of violence has been at the heart of our work for over 30 years.

Currently, we are expanding the toolkits we and our partners use by carefully including machine learning and AI models. We employ these tools in ways that take advantage of AI's strengths (scale and replicability) and minimize its weaknesses (getting things wrong) by setting rules and tests to know if the model got the "right" answer and extracted the correct information. That requires the kind of sustained collaboration, relying on partners' lived experiences for crucial guidance, that HRDAG has honed for decades.

Megan

Megan Price, Executive Director

HRDAG uses AI models to help our partners uncover hidden truths buried in masses of documents. But we must ensure that our technical tools are getting it right.

“One of HRDAG’s core principles is understanding and meaningfully addressing the cost of being wrong,” says HRDAG data scientist Bailey Passmore. *“As we explore deploying LLMs [large language models, or AI tools] in our projects, we think critically about how to design and evaluate LLM tasks so there is a tangible measure of success.”*



Bailey Passmore,
HRDAG data scientist

For years, HRDAG has worked with partners in Chicago and New Orleans to use AI tools to build public databases of police violence and misconduct.

Human rights violations, including police violence and misconduct, have historically been hard to uncover.

But that is changing, thanks to efforts by our partners using the latest technical tools. HRDAG believes that data science can help members of the public hold the officers and agencies responsible for that violence accountable.

The Citizens Police Data Project, Chicago

After the Invisible Institute won lawsuits granting access to decades of complaints of misconduct by Chicago police officers, hundreds of thousands of records became available in a variety of formats, from written summaries of allegations to tables listing names, rank, dates, offense, and more. Journalists at the Invisible Institute made scanned images of the documents available online, via the Citizens Police Data Project (CPDP). HRDAG worked closely with the Institute to make more of the information accessible to the public, including training and hosting Trina Reynolds-Tyler as our 2019 Human Rights Intern.

HRDAG’s work with Trina, now the Institute’s Director of Data, on the CPDP led to two subsequent collaborations. The first, called **Beneath the Surface**, recruited hundreds of local volunteers to create a machine learning model to categorize evidence of gender-based violence in police interactions. The volunteers reviewed outputs from the model closely, to ensure that categorizations using machine learning remained consistent with manual decisions.

That project led directly to our next collaboration, investigating how Chicago police mishandle missing persons cases, especially those involving Black women and girls. Trina’s work won a Pulitzer Prize earlier this year.



Trina Reynolds-Tyler,
Invisible Institute
Director of Data

Louisiana Law Enforcement Accountability Database

The relationships we built working on CPDP connected us to Ayyub Ibrahim, a researcher at the **Innocence Project New Orleans**, and part of the team that worked for years to build the Louisiana Law Enforcement Accountability Database (LLEAD).

LLEAD is a public tool for transparency, consolidating information about police and prosecutorial misconduct, and police use of force from more than 500 law enforcement agencies throughout Louisiana.



Ayyub Ibrahim,
Innocence Project
New Orleans Director
of Research

“Most of the documents existed only on paper. They were not digitized,” says Ayyub. *“The data was out there for anyone who wanted it, but there was a massive hurdle in processing it.”*

One of those hurdles included the fact that some parishes buried records of misconduct hearings in city council meeting minutes. So HRDAG’s Tarak Shah used natural language processing to extract the key information into a structured format that could be included in LLEAD.

This inspired Ayyub to think more creatively about other uses for similar machine learning (or AI) tools. Now he is helping the team experiment with LLMs to extract the names of officers involved

in wrongful convictions in New Orleans. The success of these experiments has encouraged us to expand their application across other projects, including police use of force documents in Puerto Rico. As we build out these use cases, we incorporate evaluation metrics for the models directly into the analysis pipeline.

National Police Index

This year the Invisible Institute, Innocence Project New Orleans, and HRDAG launched a new data tool known as the National Police Index (NPI). The NPI is one of our most ambitious collaborations to date, harnessing the expertise of the Institute’s Sam Stecklow, the Innocence Project’s Ayyub Ibrahim, and HRDAG’s



Tarak Shah,
HRDAG data scientist

Tarak Shah. The tool allows residents of 17 states to access the employment history for all of the law enforcement officers in their state. These histories could identify “wandering law-enforcement officers” who are fired by one department, sometimes for serious misconduct, only to find work at another agency. *“Police often avoid accountability by moving to another agency rather than face discipline,”* said Tarak. *“This tool, allowing anyone to look up and track the histories of such officers, provides an invaluable service for the human rights community.”*

AI is powerful. With our community partners, we can use these tools to shed light on what is true within the data. Your support makes all this possible.

We thank this year's generous supporters

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HRDAG by the numbers

HRDAG's fiscal year is July 1–June 31	2023-24	2022-2023
Beginning cash balance	\$ 317,361	\$ 621,946
Income		
Foundation grants	\$ 848,823	\$ 1,089,656
Revenue from contracts	122,435	69,867
Direct public support	157,475	58,730
Total income	\$ 1,128,732	\$ 1,218,253
Expenses		
Salaries and consultants	\$ 1,021,441	\$ 1,280,215
Travel and conferences	23,891	40,551
Rent, utilities, and technology	59,937	43,024
Supplies and other direct costs	9,870	29,387
Administration ¹	101,130	108,854
Total expenses	\$ 1,216,270	\$ 1,502,031
Ending cash balance ²	\$ 229,822	\$ 338,169

¹ HRDAG operates as a fiscally sponsored project of Community Partners (communitypartners.org), a nonprofit organization that helps community leaders build and sustain effective programs that benefit the public good. Administrative fees to Community Partners support their back-office services and the legal framework that allows HRDAG to focus on our mission.

² We strive to close every fiscal year with a non-zero cash balance. A portion of this balance constitutes our reserves which we maintain year-to-year for financial stability and programmatic agility. The majority of this non-zero cash balance is meant to be spent over a specific period of time and/or on a specific project. The size of this balance varies year-to-year, depending on when grant funds are received.

The HRDAG Team

Our current team includes executive director Dr Megan Price, director of research Dr Patrick Ball, data scientists Tarak Shah and Bailey Passmore, operations coordinator Suzanne Nathans, data processor Michelle Dukich,



MJ Duran, Patrick Ball, and Maria Gargiulo as Patrick accepts the John Maddox Prize for standing up for science, November 2024

statistician Maria Gargiulo, and dedicated consultants, interns, and fellows.

While we are based in San Francisco, our partners are located in various states and countries around the world. We are supported by an active advisory board composed of Julie Broome, Elizabeth Eagen, William Isaac, Alex Hanna, Paul Wesson, and Naomi Roht-Arriaza.

The Human Rights Data Analysis Group works closely with human and civil rights advocates to analyze and understand data. We build scientifically defensible, evidence-based arguments that have been the foundation of statistical claims made by truth commissions, UN missions, NGOs, and war crimes prosecutors in more than 30 countries. Our U.S. work unpacks how misguided technology can reinforce racism in the criminal legal system, and we provide technical support to partners' on-the-ground advocacy efforts in the Bay Area, Chicago, Louisiana, Puerto Rico, and beyond.



Support our work
hrdag.org/donate

“You don’t need to accept something is a truth just because a person in authority tells you it’s so.”

— Benjamin B. Ferencz, the U.S. Army chief prosecutor at one of the Nuremberg trials of Nazi war criminals, from his book *Parting Words*, written at the age of 100.

HRDAG

33
years and
counting

HRDAG gratefully acknowledges our major funders, including:

