



# WHEN CAN THE POLICE USE FORCE—

and what happens when they do?

**Police use of force is in the national spotlight**

## WHAT IS POLICE USE OF FORCE?

The means of compelling compliance or overcoming resistance to an officer's command(s) in order to protect life or property or to take a person into custody.

Types of force include:

**Verbal**

**Physical**

**Chemical**

**Impact**

**Electronic**

**Firearm**

## WHY DO POLICE USE FORCE?



**Establish control  
in a situation**



**Protect others  
or self**



**Make an  
arrest**

# WHEN CAN POLICE USE DEADLY FORCE?

## In defense of others

Subject poses threat of serious physical harm or death

## In self-defense

Officer fears serious physical harm or death

## DEATHS FROM POLICE USE OF FORCE ARE RARE

In 2008, there were an estimated

# 67 MILLION

face-to-face encounters between citizens and police nationwide

Translates to more than

# 1 MILLION

face-to-face  
contacts with police  
each week

Deaths resulting from police use of force occurred in

**1** out of every **67,000** contacts

according to sources cited by the Washington Post

**ABOUT 0.0015% OF ALL FACE-TO-FACE CONTACTS**

## WHEN IS THE AMOUNT OF FORCE USED BY POLICE CONSIDERED LAWFUL OR JUSTIFIED?

When a local prosecutor, judge, or jury determines that the amount of force used in a situation was "**objectively reasonable**" under the Fourth Amendment to compel compliance

### Reasonableness

is judged by what a reasonable officer would do on the scene in context of:

**TRAINING**

**EXPERIENCE**

**CIRCUMSTANCES  
ENCOUNTERED**

**"Reasonable" force**

Constitutionally permissible

**"Unreasonable" force**

Violation of the Fourth Amendment

**Just because an officer can use force in a situation does not mean he or she should**

# When is police use of force excessive or “unreasonable”?

Officer uses "greater force than was reasonably necessary" to compel compliance

## WHAT FACTORS ARE CONSIDERED IN DETERMINING THE "REASONABLENESS" OF ALL FORCE USED BY THE POLICE?



Severity of crime at issue



Does subject pose an immediate threat to the officer or others?



Is the subject resisting arrest or attempting to flee?



Mental health of subject



Availability of less-lethal options



Objective facts of the incident

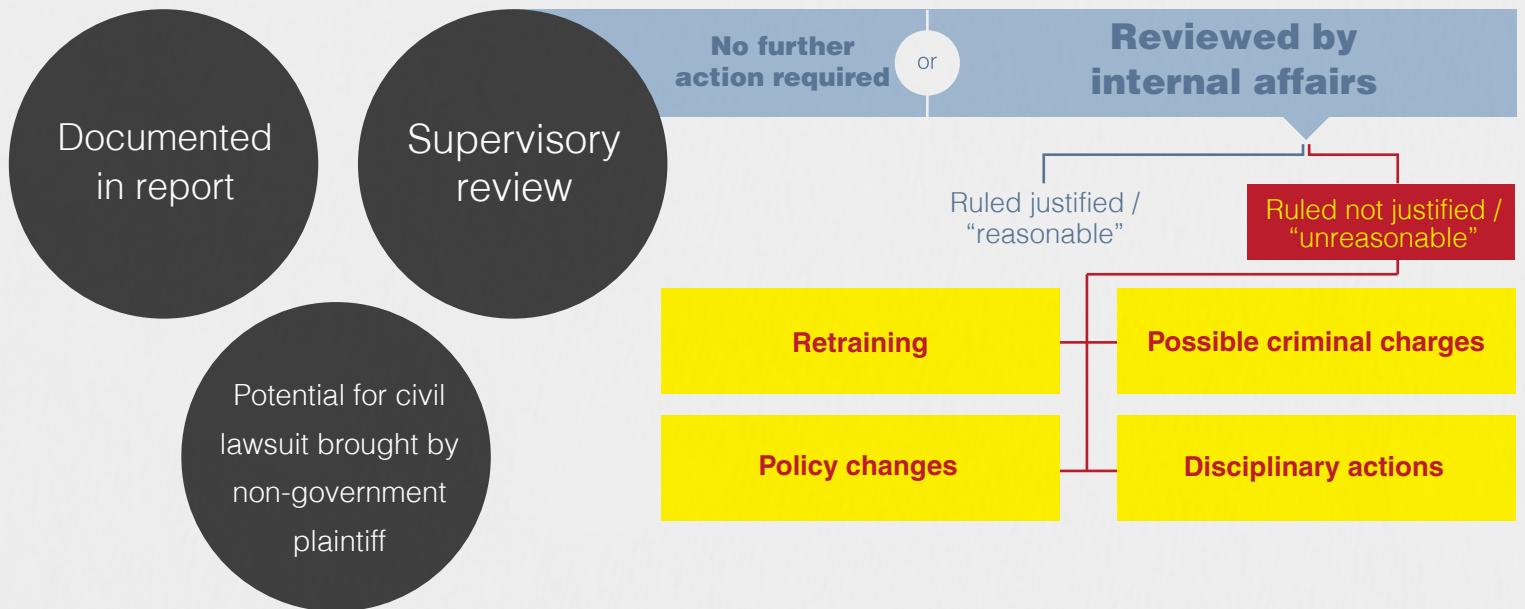
## WHAT'S NOT CONSIDERED IN DETERMINING REASONABLENESS?

Facts unknown to police at the time of incident

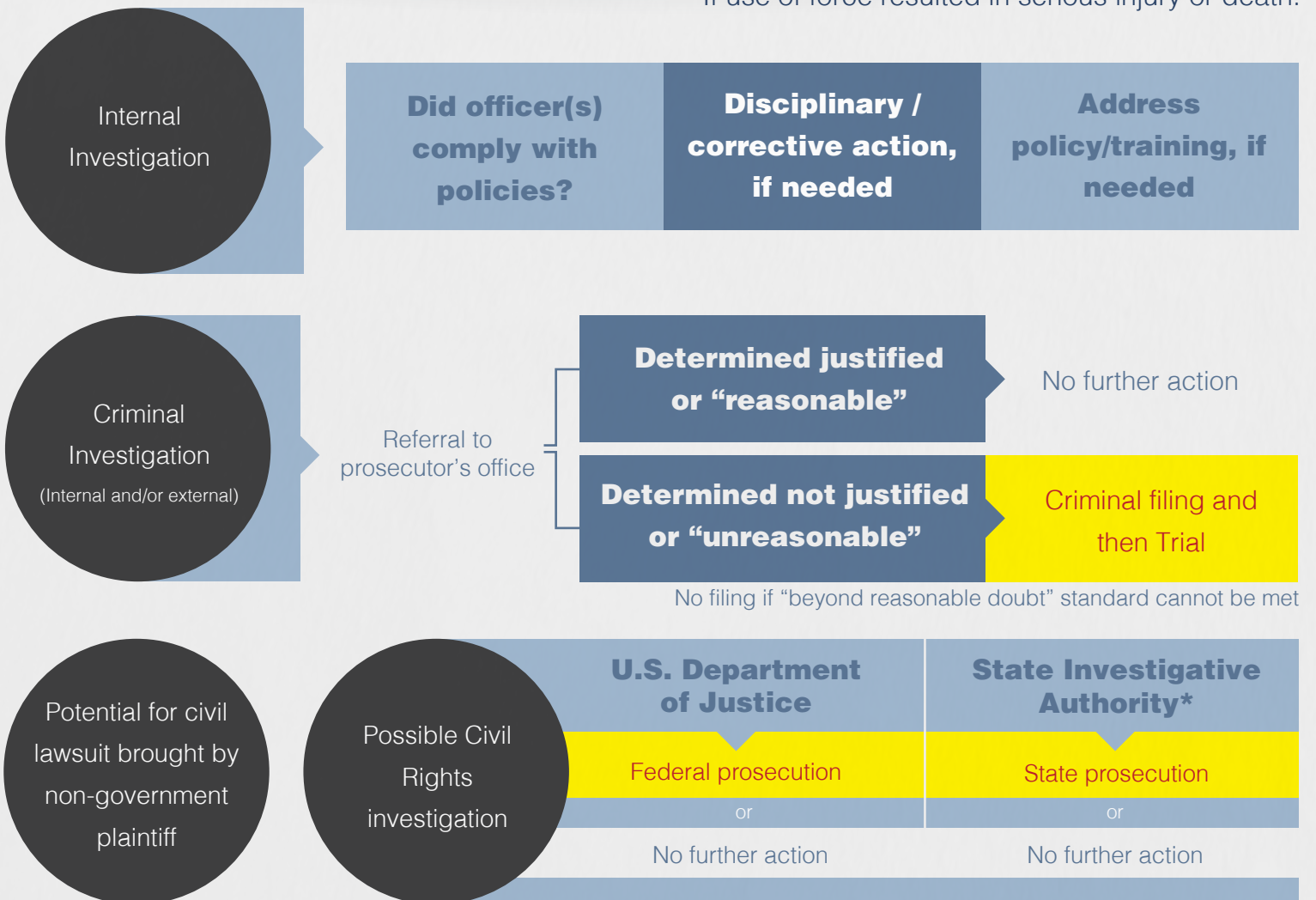
An officer's intent or motivation

# HOW IS A POLICE USE-OF-FORCE INCIDENT INVESTIGATED?

If use of force did not result in serious injury or death:



If use of force resulted in serious injury or death:



\*Usually a state/local prosecutor

Disclaimer: The full nature and complexity of police use of force cannot be fully conveyed in any single illustration. Use-of-force investigations vary by state and jurisdiction, so this infographic should be viewed as a general reflection of police use of force and use-of-force investigations.

For sources see: [bit.ly/use-of-force](http://bit.ly/use-of-force)

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