

Data Dictionary and Verification Process

Date: November 5, 2025

To be included in our dataset, the following requirements must be met: The dataset currently includes killings and deaths following intentional police use of force. The data includes police shootings that resulted in death, and instances where a person died after being subjected to other types of police weapons (e.g., tasers, batons), physical interventions (e.g., physical holds, punches, kicks), or environmental forces as a result of police conduct (e.g., fatal car chases, falling from windows/balconies).

There are 4 primary requirements that must be met:

- 1) Someone was killed;
- 2) The on-duty police officer(s) intentionally used force;
- 3) Killing or death occurred in Canada;
- 4) Killing or death occurred as of the year 2000.

Definition of Police-Involved Death

A death is included in our database if police used intentional use of force with any form of weapon or restraint. We also include deaths where police use environmental force—such as a no-knock raid or violent entry. We do not include cases where no such force was used, including deaths as the result of a vehicle crash involving police, falls that may occur when police are present, deaths in relation to medical distress when no force or restraint was used, as well as deaths that occurred in custody after an arrest. While we focused on individuals who died in an incident when police force was used, confirming an official cause of death is beyond the current scope of this project, due to limited access to coronial records. As a result, inclusion in the database does not mean that there is a causal link between the type of force used and the individual's death.

Parameters for Dataset: Police Use of Force vs. Deaths in Custody

For the purpose of this dataset, we are to include cases where deaths have occurred as a result of explicit and/or implicit police force used during the interaction between individual(s) and the police. Any cases that occur while in custody following police arrest or apprehension will be highlighted in the “Deaths in Custody” portion of the database.

Adding Cases

New cases are identified via a series of Google alerts, and regular and ongoing online searches for past and current police killings and deaths on accredited media websites (Killer Cops Canada and le C.R.A.P.). When a new case is identified, a member of our team adds information about the case into a spreadsheet based on the variables we collect.^[1]

We only add information into the spreadsheet from either the coroner documents, oversight body sources (e.g., SIU report), or accredited media sources (e.g., CBC News, etc.). We aim to use the coroner sources or oversight body sources, however, often we must initially rely on accredited media sources.

Verifying Cases

A summary of the findings relevant to each variable is then subject to a verification process. Verification occurs by a second member of our team, who independently confirms that the information is an accurate summary of what is included from the sources. To confirm information, we review the information found on the listed websites as well as doing an independent search of credible sources. Once a case is verified, it is assigned to a number, is added to the database, and is then made available on our website.

Step-by-Step Process of Adding and Verifying Cases

1. First person will enter the data into the “cases to be verified” subtab.
 - a. We are now including environmental forces as part of the database; as such, these cases will be included with the rest of the cases.
 - b. Make sure to provide your initials in the first column and inform the verifier that it is ready to be reviewed.^[2]
 - c. Please note: any cases that fall into “deaths in custody” should be added into the appropriate subtab (“updated deaths in custody”), followed up by an email sent to Lindsay with the details of the case.
 2. Second person (person verifying) will verify the cases
 - a. If there are questions around the cases, please highlight the section (i.e., the box that contains information that you have a question about) and add comments to flag. Please note, if the first person has questions at the time of adding cases, they will follow this same protocol.
 3. Once cases have been verified, the second person (verifier) will put their initial in the left column (verification 2) within the verified spreadsheet.
 4. The second person (verifier) will carry over the cases into the “Master List” subtab. Please review Andy’s notes on how to properly add in the cases to avoid any technological issues.
 - a. Please note the following key steps:
 - i. On the Master List, you will need to manually enter the individual’s name and year. The remaining information can be copied/pasted.
 - ii. Make sure that numbering of the green column on the Master Data spreadsheet matches the numbering on the Website Data spreadsheet.
1. Example: Dillon Breed is listed as case 815 under the green column, which is the same number on the website data spreadsheet.

- iii. Ensure that the name of the police services matches previous inputs. While media reporting will spell it one way on their websites, we want to ensure consistency on our excel. Any deviations like an additional 's', etc. will make it difficult when we try to analyze data.
- b. If there are questions or things that need to be flagged for the first person or Alex, please make sure to keep the cases in the “to be verified” subtab. These cases will be discussed at our biweekly meetings.
5. Once case(s) have been added to the Master List spreadsheet, review the website spreadsheet. You will have to once again manually enter the name and year on this spreadsheet. Once this is complete, verify on the website that the case has been properly added. This once again will be done by the second person (verifier)
6. The verifier (second person) will then remove the case from the “cases to be verified” spreadsheet.

Case Input: Description

All cases require a brief description of the incident. This information will not be made publicly accessible and is only for our own review and awareness. Case descriptions should be approximately 3-4 sentences (if applicable) and include the following:

- Date and time of the incident (if applicable)
- Context: events leading up to or following the interaction (what led to the call/interaction, whether individual was taken to hospital or not, etc.), any relevant information as it pertains to the interaction (e.g., things police or individual may have said or done, whether any additional weaponry or violence was used on the individual that can't be captured in highest use of force column, etc.).

Information may be found in the reporting of the case, either through accredited sources or oversight agencies.

Sources

Data collection occurs via web-scraping from publicly available sources, including government reports, press releases, and accredited Canadian media sources (Eisenstein 2022). All cases in our dataset are from government sources of data or verifiable accredited media sources. We have drawn on the following sources of online data to compile the database^[3]:

Existing data sets: CBC Deadly Force, the only existing and public data set we were aware of, and to which we had access, (<https://newsinteractives.cbc.ca/longform-custom/deadly-force/>). Used as a foundation for the database.

Accredited Canadian media: Online via targeted searches for dates, locations, police services, or names of individuals.

Police oversight body reports: Online on various oversight body website data portals and media release webpages (e.g. <https://www.siu.on.ca>, <https://www.alberta.ca/alberta-serious-incident-response-team>, <https://iiobc.ca/>).

Coroner's inquest reports: Online at various provincial coroner's websites (e.g. <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/life-events/death/coroners-service/inquest-schedule-jury-findings-verdicts>, <https://www.ontario.ca/page/2024-coroners-inquests-verdicts-and-recommendations>), as well as the independently-run <https://inquestscs.ca/knack.com/inquestscs/#>.

Other tracking initiatives: Online at <https://killercopscanada.wordpress.com/> and <https://www.lacrap.org/>. Only used as contextual information and to identify other sources.

Variables

The variables associated with the Tracking (In)Justice data set provide specific information about every recorded case. A description of each of the variables is provided below. For more complex categories such as gender, mental health, and race, the Tracking (In)Justice project looks toward definitions and categories adopted by Statistics Canada and our expert partner organizations (e.g. JusticeTrans and Centre for Research Innovation on Black Survivors of Homicide, Disability Justice Network Ontario) as reflected in evolving classifications of information collected about population demographics in this country.

Variable: Victim ID

Description: Unique identifier for victim

Variable Type: Text

Example: 764

Variable: Date

Description: Date reported on which the death occurred according to credible media sources or government documents. Please note: if there are multiple dates listed (e.g., date of incident vs. date of death are different), refer to the date of death.

Variable Type: Text

Example: 2020-08-21 (year-month-day)

Variable: First Name

Description: The first name as presented in the credible media or government reports emanating from the case. In some instances, the name may be changed if the preferred name of the victim is suggested by family members of loved ones. We will refrain from using the individual's dead name

Variable Type: Text

Example: John, Unknown

Variable: Middle Name

Description: The middle name as presented in the credible media or government reporting emanating from the case. In some instances, the name is changed if the preferred name of the victim is suggested by family members of loved ones. We will refrain from using the individual's dead name. If there is no middle name listed, we will keep that column blank.

Variable Type: Text

Example: Nathaniel, Elizabeth.

Variable: Last Name

Description: The last name as presented in the credible media or government reporting emanating from the case. In some instances, the name is changed if the preferred name of the victim is suggested by family members of loved ones.

Variable Type: Text

Example: Smith, Unknown

Variable: Age

Description: The reported age of the victim according to credible media sources or government documents. We require the specific age of the individual, not the general age group (i.e., if it says that the victim is in their 60s but does not specify the exact age, we will leave it as "unknown")

Variable Type: Text

Example: 20, Unknown

Variable: Gender

Description: The gender that a person internally feels ("gender identity" along the gender spectrum) in their daily life. A person's gender may differ from sex assigned at birth, can change over time, and may be different from what appears on legal documents. If a source notes the individual's self-identified gender, our team will default to that source, despite what other sources may state.

Variable Type: Categorical

Values: Man, Woman, Non-Binary, Two-Spirit, Two Spirit, Trans Man, Trans Woman, Unknown

Variable: Race

Description: The reported race that the victim was identified as according to credible media sources or government documents. Note: if the individual is listed as becoming deceased on a reserve, we will list the individual as Indigenous (unless conflicting information is presented in the wording of the reports).

Variable Type: Categorical

Values: White, Black, Latin American, South Asian, Asian, Indigenous, Arab, Unknown, Other

Variable: Province

Description: The province or territory where the death occurred according to credible media sources or government documents

Variable Type: Categorical

Categories: ON, QC, AB, SK, BC, MB, NB, PEI, YT, NT, NU NS

Variable: Police Service

Description: Police service involved in incident according to credible media sources or government documents

Variable Type: Text/Categorical

Categories: See Appendix A. Note: please avoid adding in multiple inputs of the same police service into the spreadsheet. Any additional spacing/letter, etc. will add a new variable and make it difficult when pulling information from the spreadsheet.

Variable: Highest Level of Force

Description: The highest level of force used by police during an incident where fatality occurs. While there may be several forms of force used during the incident, we are flagging the highest example of force. In most cases, the highest level of force used is gunshot(s). There are a few cases where police claim that they did not fire their weapons, or it is unclear what happened, in such cases, these details are indicated in the ‘notes’ column.^[4]

Variable Type: Categorical

Categories: Environmental Force, Gunshot, Restraint, Other Immediate Weapons, Taser/CEW, Physical Force, Unknown, Other^[5]

Variable: Armed Type

Description: This category is used to identify whether the victim was armed or not, and which type of weapon they were alleged to be in possession of. In cases where police are solely stating that the individual may have been in possession of a weapon, we will verify with other independent reports/reporting to confirm to the best of our ability. If we are unable to pinpoint whether this is certain, we will identify it as “Unknown”.

Variable Type: Categorical

Categories: Knife, axe, or other cutting instruments; Vehicle; Firearm; Bat, club or other swinging objects; Air gun or replica gun; Chemicals or sprays, Other; Unknown^[6]

Variable: Person labeled as in Crisis

Description: For the purpose of this category will be defined based on the explicit terminology used in media reports and other credible sources (i.e., the report or source has to clearly state that the person was experiencing a mental health crisis at the time).^[7]

Variable Type: Categorical

Categories: Yes, No, Unknown

Variable: Location

Description: Location of fatality recorded using a tiered system: (1) city/town/region; (2) neighbourhood; (3) intersection, address, hospital location where individual died. Information will be gathered based on reports (e.g., if a specific intersection is explicitly stated) or determined by the police force involved. Note: this variable has not yet been made available on the website.

Variable Type: Text

Examples: Peel region, Dundas and Yonge St, Brampton Civic Hospital - 2100 Bovaird Drive East, Brampton, ON. L6R 3J7

Appendix A: List of Police Services

Barrie Police Service	Calgary Police Service
Edmonton Police Service	Halifax Regional Police
Hamilton Police Service	Kativik Regional Police Force
Kingston Police Service	London Police Service
Medicine Hat Police Service	Niagara Parks Police
Niagara Regional Police	OPP
Ottawa Police Service	Peel Regional Police
Prince Albert Police Service	Quebec City Police Service
RCMP	Royal Newfoundland Constabulary
Service de police de la Ville de Quebec (SPVQ)	Surete du Quebec
Toronto Police Service	Vancouver Police Department
Winnipeg Police Service	York Regional Police
Waterloo Regional Police Service	

Appendix B: Highest Level of Force

Category	Definition	Example
Environmental Force	The use of physical surroundings, infrastructure and various external conditions that facilitate or contribute to police-involved deaths that are not classified as a direct force (i.e., human-human interaction is not entirely required).	- Ø Fatality because of dangerous collisions/pursuits on highways, roads, lakes, etc. - Ø Deaths as a result of no-knock raids
Gunshot	Police use of a gun(s) directed at the individual	Ø Fatal shooting
Restraint	Physical means of subduing an individual or keeping them under control	Ø Physical use of force to restrain individual (pinning individual on the ground, spit hood, 4-point hold)
Other Immediate Weapons	This use of force option involves the use of a less-lethal weapon. Less-lethal weapons are those whose use is not intended to cause serious injury or death. Impact weapons and aerosols fall under this heading.	- Ø Tear gas - Ø Batons - Ø Pepper sprays or aerosols
Taser/CEW	Use of electrical weapons which generally pulse high voltage and low power into a subject in order to override his/her motor and sensory nervous system	- Ø Stun guns - Ø Taser (note: police may use a taser as an initial tactic prior to using other weapons)
Physical Force	Use of force that leads to an individual's fatality	- Ø References to physical altercations between police and individual - Ø Punching or beating

Unknown	Cases where method of force is unclear and/or not specified	Ø Reporting that the individual became unconscious and passed away, but no additional details regarding how that happened or to what extent police were involved in the physical killing outside of the altercation
Other	Use of force that does not fit into the aforementioned categories	Ø Crossbow Ø Explosives

Appendix C: Armed Type

Category	Definition	Example
Knife, Axe, or other cutting instruments	In possession of a weapon(s) that fall within the description of a cutting instrument	Ø Kitchen knife
Vehicle	In possession of a vehicle at the time of the incident	Ø Car or other motor vehicles (boats, motorcycles, etc.)
Firearm	In possession of a firearm at the time of the incident	Ø Gun
Bat, club or other swinging objects	In possession of an item that is typically used to swing at something	Ø Sporting equipment that is typically swung (baseball bat, golf club) Ø Hammer
Airgun or Replica Gun	In possession of an item that resembles a firearm, but is not an actual firearm	Ø Replicas of antique firearms Ø Guns that use compressed air to launch projectiles (BB guns, pellet guns)
Chemicals or sprays	In possession of any chemicals or sprays that could be used to inflict bodily harm on someone/something	Ø Tear gas Ø Pepper spray Ø Bear spray
Other	In possession of a weapon(s) that does not fit the aforementioned categories	Ø Screwdrivers
Unknown	Unclear as to whether the individual was armed or not based on the details of the report	Ø If there is mixed messaging around whether the individual had a weapon or not and we cannot verify/confirm (e.g., reports that state that police suspected that the individual was

		carrying something)
None	No reference to the individual being armed with any weapon or material that could be defined as possible weapon	Ø Individual was unarmed Ø No references to the individual being armed

[1] We will assign team members to either add cases or verify them, with the flexibility to switch roles on a monthly basis.

[2] Previously, communication has been done via Basecamp through the “Ping” function.

[3] In some instances, for contextual information only, we examine academic research, victim obituaries, and also civil litigation documents related to police misconduct.

[4] It is important to note that confirming an official cause of death is beyond the scope of this project. As a result, inclusion in the database does not necessarily mean there is a causal link between the type of force used and the individual’s death.

[5] See Appendix B for detailed descriptions

[6] See Appendix C for detailed descriptions.

[7] A person in crisis is defined as a member of the public whose behaviour brings them into contact with police either because of an apparent need for urgent care within the mental health system, or because they are otherwise experiencing mental or emotional distress, which is witnessed through behaviour that is categorized as “erratic”, “threatening” or “dangerous” and are responded to by police.