

# Use of lethal force: a serious problem in Latin America and the Caribbean

- **Lethal Force Monitor's second edition is a collective, regional study that includes eight countries. It will be launched this Wednesday, January 26th. The analysis gathers data on the lethal force use in incidents involving state agents, looking to understand the phenomenon and to prevent its abuse.**
- **Venezuela is the country with the most extreme cases of abuse. One out of every three homicides registered in this country is due to security forces' use of firearms.**
- **In Brazil, there are more than 114 civilians killed for every public security agent on duty who is a victim of homicide.**
- **The countries with more public security agents' homicides are Venezuela, Mexico, Colombia and Brazil.**
- **The study shows a problem in the region regarding access to public data and reliable information that allows to understand the phenomenon of the use of lethal force.**

**Bogota, January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2022.** Generating data on the use of lethal force by states in the region, but also against public security agents. These two objectives have been the engine of the Monitor of Use of Lethal Force, an initiative that was born in 2019 and that this Wednesday (January 26th) launches its second edition.

In this comparative study, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, El Salvador, Jamaica, Mexico, Trinidad & Tobago and Venezuela participated with a shared methodology.

The results of the Monitor provide specific numbers on this problem aiming to be base better elements to address policies to prevent the abuse of lethal force by public agents.

The researchers from the eight countries agree that the Monitor reveals important challenges in most of the states analyzed.

Venezuela stands out as the country in which the abuse of force is the most extreme, with one out of every three homicides registered is due to state agents' intervention.

"Public authorities must abstain from making statements that encourage use of lethal force by public security agents, let alone justify abuses. Phrases such as "a good criminal is a dead criminal" or "one bullet, one kill" are not uncommon by public officials or candidates in the region and actively promote abuses and summary executions" the report states.

The Monitor also reveals that there is a significant deficit of public information on the use of lethal force in Latin America and the Caribbean. "Even though it is possible to access information through official requests, data is often incomplete, deficient and, in some cases, non-existent" remarks the report. The researchers call for this type of information to be consolidated and published regularly, for example, through annual reports from a public institution, so that the issue can be followed by the state and civil society.

## Resultados por países

**COLOMBIA.** Between 2018 and 2020 there were 697 civilians killed with firearms allegedly by the actions of the security forces. Worrying numbers that should be analyzed in a context of growing social protests, where the Public Force has been the main tool used by the state to answer to social demands.

An effective supervision and civilian control over the use of force by public agents is still a pending task in Colombia, where there are high levels of impunity. Of the total number of civilian deaths allegedly killed by the Public Force with firearms registered between 2018 and 2020, the Prosecutor's Office has opened investigations in less than 10% of the cases.

On the other hand, in this same period, 388 agents were killed by homicide with firearms.

**MEXICO.** In the last three years there have been between 10 to 15 civilian deaths for every death soldier, indicating an abuse of lethal force. At the same time, the lethality index (civilians killed/civilians wounded) has increased.

The number of civil police killed by firearms in service is very high, the vast majority being local police, not federal security forces. This phenomenon reflects the institutional oblivion and the budgetary cut to the local police forces.

It was not possible to make a complete national diagnosis of the use of lethal force, due to the absence of information on a large number of police in Mexico, particularly municipal police, despite the state's duty to register and centralize information on the use of force.

**CHILE.** The absence of institutional data in Chile reveals the urgency of legislating on the registration and transparency of information on the use of lethal force. Data from the press do not reveal excessive use of lethal force, but there is a need for greater transparency on this phenomenon.

**BRAZIL.** The number of civilians killed by public security agents is very high and was still growing between 2018 and 2020, reaching almost six thousand per year. In contrast to the number of civilians killed, the number of public security agents' victims of homicide on duty decreased. In those three years, 114 civilians were killed by state agents for every officer killed. The figures demonstrate a disproportionate and excessive use of force by the Brazilian state, which has been on the rise.

**TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO.** The incidence of the use of force is high, and so is the risk to security agents. The rate of agent homicide victims per 1,000 agents is the highest in the entire region. The lethality rate against civilians is also above the acceptable limit, with police causing more deaths than injuries. There is a need for continued training in use of force policies and research to understand the factors that may affect the use of force.

**EL SALVADOR.** Between 2018 and 2019, 406 civilian deaths were registered at the hands of security forces according to official data, of which the majority are young men accused of being "gang members", thus justifying a possible abuse of force and human rights violations.

The results show that security forces generate more than twice as many deaths as injuries in their armed interventions, a ratio that reveals an abusive use of lethal force. In fact, the lethality rate against civilians (number of deaths over number of wounded) is 7 times higher than the rate against public security agents, which reveals that lethal force is not applied by the state in accordance with the principle of proportionality.

**VENEZUELA.** The victims who die due to the intervention of the public security forces belong to the popular sectors and peripheral neighborhoods of the country. Most of these cases occur in the context of police operations, officially and discursively justified by "citizen security".

Venezuela represents the most extreme case of abuse of the use of force in the region, since the percentage homicides by the security forces reaches 33%. In other words, one out of every three homicides that occur in the country is a consequence of the intervention of state security forces. In Venezuela there is no transparency about this phenomenon, as the official figures were obtained through the United Nations and exclusively for 2018. Press data, however, indicate that the situation has been getting worse in 2019.

**JAMAICA.** Jamaica has the second highest incidence in the region after Venezuela. However, the risk of death of its public agents is very small. More than 85 civilians are killed by public security agents for every agent killed in similar circumstances, a level close to Brazil. This represents a picture of systematic abuse of lethal force by the state.

The launch of the Monitor of Lethal Force in Latin America and the Caribbean will be broadcast on the following Facebook accounts: @monitor.fuerzaletal, @IIJUNAM, @ideaspaz and @PPDCIDE on January 26th at the following hours: **11am MEX/SLV, 12m COL/JM, 1:00pm VE/TT, 2pm CHL/BR and 5pm UK.**

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