



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The use of body cameras by the uniformed police of the State of São Paulo: Implementation Process and Impact on the Deaths of Adolescents



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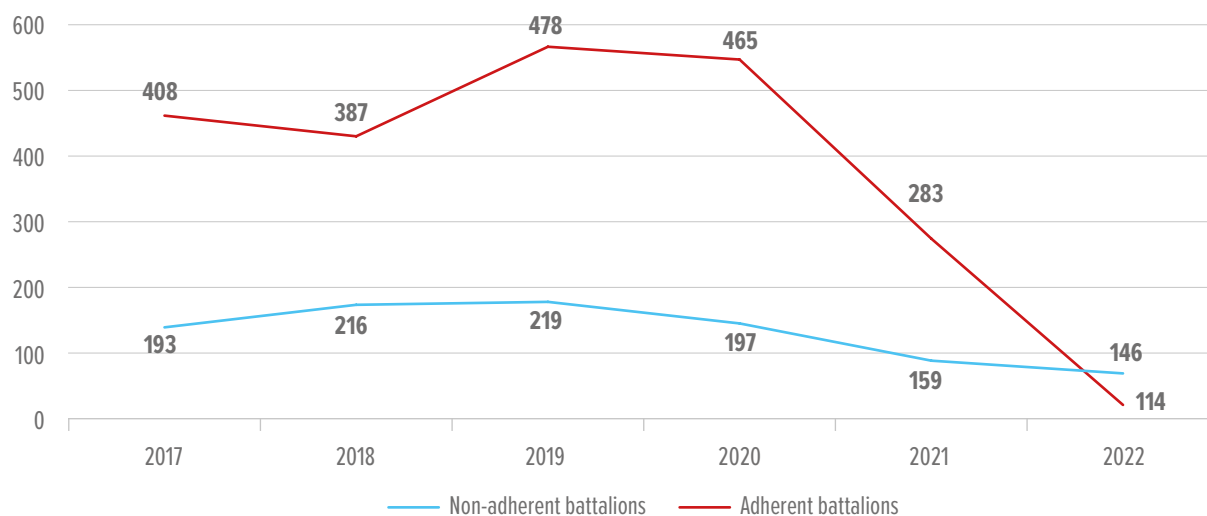
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- ▶ The use of body cameras by law enforcement agents has been seen as a sign of the professionalization of police forces. A report by the Bureau of Justice Statistics published in 2018 indicated that in 2016 47% of the police departments in the United States were already using body cameras. In larger police departments, this percentage reached 80%.
- ▶ The uniformed police in São Paulo implemented its “*Olho Vivo*” (Keen Eye) Program in mid-2020. By the end of 2022, 62 of the 135 battalions of the *PMESP* (Uniformed Police of the State of São Paulo) were part of the program, representing 45.9% of the total.
- ▶ Data obtained by the Brazilian Forum of Public Security from the “*Letalidade Policial em Foco*” (Police Lethality in Focus) database, curated by the Special Action Group for the External Control of Police Activities (*GECEP*) of the State Prosecutor’s Office of São Paulo (*MPSP*), **indicated a 62.7% reduction in deaths due to interventions by on-duty uniformed police officers between 2019**, the period immediately before implementation of the cameras, **and 2022**.
- ▶ **Among the battalions participating in the program the reduction reached 76.2%. This number is much higher than the reduction observed in battalions that did not use body cameras, where the reduction was 33.3%.**

GRAPH 1: Victims of police killings by on-duty uniformed police officers
per year - battalions adhering to the program vs. those not adhering (2017-2022)



Source: Prepared by the authors, based on the São Paulo State Public Prosecutor's Office "Police Lethality in Focus" report.

TABLE 1: Victims dying because of on-duty interventions by uniformed police officers
per year - battalions adhering to the "Olho Vivo" Program and battalions not adhering (2019-2022)

	Battalions not adhering	Battalions adhering	Total
2019	219	478	697
2020	197	465	662
2021	159	283	442
2022	146	114	260
Variation (in %)	-33.3	-76.2	-62.7

Source: Prepared by the authors, based on the São Paulo State Public Prosecutor's Office "Police Lethality in Focus" report.

- ▶ Police experiences of wearing body cameras in Brazil are recent and still scarce, but cameras have been identified as a promising mechanism for reducing deaths caused by the police and enhancing public trust. Policies that have the potential to impact police violence also resonate with policies aimed at protecting children and adolescents from violence.
- ▶ According to São Paulo's Committee for Preventing Homicides among Adolescents, there were nearly 1,000 deaths resulting from police interventions in the state between 2015 and 2018, where the deceased were under the age of 19. This age group accounted for more than one in every three individuals killed by the São Paulo police during those years.¹

1 Lives protected: For a Safer State for Our Boys and Girls. June 2019. In: https://www.pelavidadeadolescentes.com.br/_files/ugd/d89e7e_de3f8a6b27bc48519a128b6afb0d0b71.pdf

- ▶ As happens in the rest of the country, 99% of the victims in police interventions in São Paulo were male. One aspect of São Paulo's peculiarities, however, is the high percentage of adolescent victims killed in police interventions. **In 2017, more than one-third of all the deaths caused by on-duty uniformed police officers resulted in the deaths of children and adolescents aged between 10 and 19 years old (36%).**
- ▶ **Between 2019 and 2022, there was a 66.7% reduction in the number of adolescents killed by on-duty uniformed police officers.** In absolute numbers, there were 102 adolescent victims of police killings in 2019, but only 34 in 2022.

TABLE 2: MDIP [deaths as a result of police intervention] victims of on-duty police officers by age band (2017 to 2022)

Absolute numbers	10 to 14 years old	15 to 19 years old	20 to 29 years old	30 to 39 years old	40 to 49 years old	50 to 59 years old	60 years old or older
2017	6	171	208	85	18	2	2
2018	3	146	216	97	30	12	1
2019	2	102	236	138	48	9	4
2020	1	95	214	112	34	9	3
2021	2	42	140	69	31	7	1
2022	1	34	105	46	16	3	1
Variation (2019/2022)	-50,0	-66,7	-55,5	-66,7	-66,7	-66,7	-75,0
(Variation) 2017/2022	-83,3	-80,1	-49,5	-45,9	-11,1	50,0	-50,0

Note: This table considers only the cases of victims whose age was informed on the Public Security Department's database

Source: Prepared by the authors based on data produced by the Public Security Department's Analysis and Planning Coordinating Body.

- ▶ In terms of racial profile, 62.7% were black (black and brown), 34.7% were white, 0.1% were Asian, and in 2.5% of the cases the race/color of the victim was not filled out in the police report. **Between 2019 and 2022, the rates of deaths caused by the police reduced by 66.2% among whites and 64.3% among blacks.**

TABLE 3: Death rate of the victims of on-duty uniformed police officers' interventions by race/color (2017 to 2022)

	White	Black
2017	0.7	2.7
2018	0.8	2.6
2019	0.9	2.7
2020	0.8	2.6
2021	0.4	1.7
2022	0.3	1.0
Variation (2019/2022)	-66.2	-64.3
Variation (2017/2022)	-58.3	-63.5

Source: Prepared by the authors based on data produced by the Public Security Department's Analysis and Planning Coordinating Body.

- ▶ To estimate the total number of lives saved by the program, we compared the reductions in monthly averages of MDIP in each of the groups before and after the implementation of COP to the reductions in the same averages in the battalions without COP. In this procedure, we applied the percentage reduction observed in the non-participating battalions of the program to the monthly average of the program's battalions before its implementation. This allowed us to estimate what the expected number of deaths would have been in each group of battalions with COP if the declining trend had been the same as those without COP. The difference between the expected number of deaths and the actually observed number represents the reduction that can be attributed to the program. Using this technique, assuming that all the additional reduction in the battalions with COP compared to the others was due to the use of cameras, **we estimate that approximately 184 deaths have been prevented in the 62 participating battalions of the "Program Olho Vivo" since the policy's inception in August 2020 until December 2022.**
- ▶ Another effect observed after the introduction of body cameras was the reduction in the number of police officers killed during their working hours. **The number of police officers who were victims of homicide while on-duty decreased from fourteen in 2019 to just six in 2022.**
- ▶ One of the potential effects of wearing body cameras is related to the reduction in corruption and extortion cases involving officers who use this device. Corrupt officers who engage in illicit practices during their working hours are unlikely to do so if they know they are being recorded, as this

could risk producing evidence against themselves. Reports of corruption and extortion registered by the Internal Affairs Department of the *PMESP* (Uniformed Police of the State of São Paulo) showed a 37.5% decrease in 2022 compared to 2019, the period immediately prior to the introduction of body cameras. Reports of extortion and corruption reported to the Police Ombudsman also reduced by 55.3%.



Recommendations

▶ **Body cameras should be part of a broader public policy**

The incorporation of body cameras worn by police officers in São Paulo was part of a larger process. Introduction of the “*Olho Vivo*” Program is part of a comprehensive project that has strengthened governance, control, and accountability aspects in the management of the work of the uniformed police. The setting up of the Risk Mitigation Commission, the expanded use of less lethal weapons, and the re-establishment of the Lethality Commission have also contributed to the reduction in police violence in recent years and contributed to a process of professionalizing the police force. Technology, however, should not be seen as a panacea for solving the problem of the excessive use of force by the police.

▶ **Details are essential when adopting body camera policies**

- ▶ The exact place the cameras are positioned on the uniform is important for the quality of the recorded images. In São Paulo they are placed on the chest, which ensures the best angle for capturing images and is at an appropriate height for recording relevant events, including those involving the officers themselves.
- ▶ The method chosen for attaching the cameras to the uniform is also relevant: a robust mounting structure is used in São Paulo to prevent accidental detachment.
- ▶ The decision on what to record is crucial. The model adopted in São Paulo involves continuous image recording. There is a distinction between routine videos (recorded without activation) and intentional videos (recorded by deliberate activation and including the 90 seconds before activation). The differences in image resolution, audio recording, and storage time between these types of videos imply different possibilities for their use. The cloud storage model that has been adopted also has implications due to the large storage space demanded by the massive volume of recorded material.
- ▶ The chain of custody of the videos is also an important aspect to consider when designing the policy, as it alters the possibilities of using the footage as evidence in criminal cases. No registered user has the ability to edit the videos on the server where they are stored, ensuring that the raw recording data cannot be altered. The image storage system also maintains records of all accesses to any image, allowing for a reconstruction of all accesses that can be used as evidence in criminal cases.

► There is still work to be done in São Paulo

The seemingly positive results of the “*Olho Vivo*” Program so far should not divert attention from areas that still need improvement in São Paulo. Access by both the Public Prosecutor’s Office and the Public Defender’s Office to the footage needs to be improved. In order to achieve this, agreements that provide legal security and enable the parties to use the footage must be signed. A more comprehensive regulation regarding access to these images by those representing parties who are killed or injured by the police, or by their families should also be developed. Finally, there are still battalions that have still not adopted body cameras, and we cannot accept 256 deaths during police intervention in 2022 to be routine. Furthermore, it should be noted that in 2023 there was an increase in deaths caused by the police, which raises warning signals.

► Identifying and holding perpetrators of violence accountable is essential at all times

Despite the reduction in deaths caused by police intervention in 2022, 256 people were still killed by officers on duty and 126 by off-duty officers. For each of these deaths, just as for murders and homicides, efforts need to be made to strengthen investigations and provide definitive answers.

► In their interactions with adolescents, the police must be knowledgeable

The professionalization of the police forces in São Paulo and in Brazil as a whole must move towards recognizing the different needs of different populations. The outcome of a successful police encounter without the use of violence is directly related to the police Skills’ repertoire and the legal tools available to the officer involved in the encounter. The frequency with which encounters between police and adolescents escalate into violence is historically much higher than with adults. Adolescents are, as a rule, more impulsive than adults; they have less experience in recognizing boundaries in tense situations; and they have fewer mechanisms and/or the skills required to de-escalate arguments and fights. Treating adolescents the same as adults does not work. Security agents have a greater responsibility in such cases to avoid the use of force.

► Continue and deepen the studies on the subject

It is crucial to prioritize ongoing research and understanding of the factors and policies that impact the reduction of police lethality, as doing so will allow for a more comprehensive understanding of cause-and-effect relationships, enabling the development of increasingly robust public policies on the topic.



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