

The Research Basis for More Restrictive Use of Force Standards

Over 40 years of research supports the conclusion that more restrictive use of force standards reduce police violence. In 1979, criminologist James Fyfe published a [study](#) examining the effect of the NYPD's adoption of a more restrictive use of force policy, which included a ban on shooting at people in moving vehicles and a requirement that officers use lesser alternatives when possible (the minimum level of force possible) rather than deadly force. His groundbreaking research found that civilian killings *and* injuries by police dropped significantly following the adoption of this policy - and that officers were less likely to be killed or injured under this more restrictive policy as well. Since then, researchers have found significant reductions in police shootings after more restrictive use of force policies were adopted in [Omaha](#), [Kansas City](#), [Los Angeles](#), [Dallas](#), and [Memphis](#). Additionally, when Philadelphia repealed its restrictive deadly force policy in 1974, researchers [found](#) that police shootings rose substantially and then dropped again when the city adopted a new deadly force policy in 1980 that limited deadly force to only be used, "in defense of life when no alternatives exist." These researchers found that police shootings [dropped 67% within one year](#) of the adoption of this more restrictive use of force standard in Philadelphia and remained at historically low rates for 10 years thereafter.

On a national level, researchers have found that when the US Supreme Court decided in 1985 (the Tennessee v. Garner decision) to adopt a more restrictive deadly force standard than had previously been in place, police killings [dropped](#) across the country by 16%. [Recent research](#) has identified additional policies that lead to reductions in police violence - including the requirement that an officer report whenever they point a firearm at a civilian. For example, a recent [study](#) found the adoption of a policy requiring officers report when they point a firearm was associated with a "gradual, permanent reduction" in police shootings in Dallas, especially police shootings of unarmed people. [Legal scholars](#) and [public health experts](#) have expanded this discourse as well - articulating the legal and public health rationales for more restrictive use of force policies including the requirement to use de-escalation, issue a verbal warning before shooting, establish a use of force continuum, and require alternatives be used before deadly force, as critical steps to restraining police power and reducing the harm they can cause.

Finally, in 2016, we conducted an [analysis](#) of the 100 largest US cities found eight types of restrictions in police use of force policies that were associated with lower rates of killings by police. This is the largest study on this topic to date and its findings echo the findings from past research, supporting the efficacy of policies like banning shooting at people in vehicles, the requirement officers exhaust alternatives prior to using deadly force and the requirement that officers report whenever they point a firearm at people. Moreover, our research found that having more of these use of force restrictions in place was associated with *significantly fewer police-involved killings* compared to departments with fewer of these policies in place. In that study, we also found that police departments

with more restrictive use of force policies have better outcomes in terms of officer safety and have no impact on crime rates. The research is clear: more restrictive use of force policies like the kind we are advocating for through the 8Can'tWait campaign can save lives right now.