



BEST PRACTICES FOR CURBING EXCESSIVE USE OF FORCE

January 2024

A small but growing body of rule of law research highlights specific steps Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL) projects can take to effectively curb excessive use of force (UOF). Procedural justice and de-escalation training have reduced excessive UOF levels, as has good supervision. INL can advise partner countries on elements of good UOF laws/policies and how to track it.

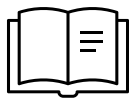
BACKGROUND

Partners frequently ask INL to provide UOF assistance, including training on appropriate UOF and the provision of UOF non-lethal equipment. The assistance INL provides has long been grounded in subject matter expertise and knowledge of local and regional contexts. INL’s [Foundations of Criminal Justice](#) helps guide the bureau’s sequencing of foreign assistance support, including UOF assistance. There is also a small but growing body of research on how best to curb excessive UOF, which INL summarized in a cable. For more information, read the full [cable](#).

FINDINGS

- Law enforcement organizations that train on and incorporate procedural justice or de-escalation principles and have the right supervisory engagement can reduce excessive UOF.
- Defining UOF in a jurisdiction and collecting credible data on law enforcement’s UOF can help increase the likelihood of a successful UOF project and improve transparency and accountability.
- External accountability mechanisms are associated with reduced excessive UOF if they have investigatory and disciplinary powers.

RECOMMENDATIONS



Law enforcement organizations should train on and incorporate procedural justice or de-escalation principles.	INL UOF projects should include specific engagement with supervisors throughout an agency’s chain of command.	INL should encourage host governments to define UOF and what excessive force means in their jurisdictions.	UOF policies should authorize force only when deemed necessary and in proportion to the threat being confronted.	Deaths occurring during law enforcement encounters should be reported publicly by law enforcement.
---	---	--	--	--



DETAILED FINDINGS

- **Law enforcement organizations that train on and incorporate procedural justice or de-escalation principles and have the right supervisory engagement can reduce excessive UOF.**
 - **Procedural Justice (PJ)** trains officers to let community members explain their actions and to then explain the legal bases for the officers' response to those actions. In a U.S. study, when PJ-trained patrol officers were assigned to crime hotspots, citizens in those hotspots were less likely to perceive officers as using unnecessary force. Crime incidents also declined by 14 percent in those hotspots.
 - **De-escalation** trains officers in strategies to prevent and manage aggression, including early intervention, communication styles, and the selection of appropriate responses in potentially violent encounters. Research links de-escalation training to a 28 percent reduction in UOF incidents and a 36 percent decline in officer injuries.
 - The right **supervisory engagement** can decrease UOF. Research finds that police whose supervisors meet with them, review a recent incident in which the officer was engaged, and point out both areas of success and potential for improvement were noticeably (up to 50 percent) less likely to engage in UOF in the six weeks following the discussion, compared to officers who received only "status quo" supervision.





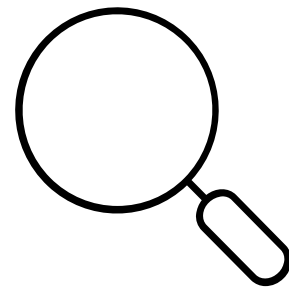
DETAILED FINDINGS CONTINUED

- **Defining UOF in a jurisdiction and collecting credible data on law enforcement's UOF can help increase the likelihood of a successful UOF project and improve transparency and accountability.**

UOF definitions vary and often include a spectrum of activities ranging from law enforcement presence to the use of lethal weapons. INL should encourage host governments to define UOF and what excessive force means in their jurisdictions.

There are significant gaps in measurement related to law enforcement's UOF. Lack of credible data on UOF incidents undermines transparency and accountability.

- **External accountability mechanisms are associated with reduced excessive UOF if they have investigatory and disciplinary powers.** Research from India found that such mechanisms are linked to a 45 percent reduction in deaths of pre-trial detainees. Less empowered external monitoring bodies elsewhere appear not to have affected UOF rates.



LEARNING-TO-ACTION

INL is and/or plans to use these findings in two ways. First, INL's law enforcement experts who conduct assessments related to the use of force are already incorporating these findings into relevant recommendations for INL sections. Second, INL sections launching new projects with use of force components will be able to draw on this evidence to inform project design. To facilitate this, INL is engaging in targeted outreach to relevant officers.