

Assessing the number of police-related deaths in the UK as police killings

(1) Summary

People's Tribunal on Police Killings (PTPK) analysis shows that in the 55 years from April 1970 and March 2025 there have been at least 3,015 police-related deaths in England and Wales, 295 in Scotland and 130 in the North of Ireland. These numbers include police-related road traffic fatalities, fatal shootings and "deaths in custody".

The information below details the sources of data, which cases have been included and some of the reasons why the numbers quoted above may underestimate the true totals.

(2) Methodology

The data period used for this analysis is from **1 April 1970 to 31 March 2025**. The start date corresponds to the earliest official data published in England & Wales. The end date which has been chosen is just prior to the People's Tribunal on Police Killings inaugural hearings in April 2025. Whereas some other sources quote deaths only from 1990 or later, it was felt appropriate to consider a longer period which covers most cases in living memory of parents, siblings, partners or children of those who have died.

PTPK has examined the classification of police-related deaths which is used by the IOPC (Independent Office for Police Conduct) in England and Wales, which divides these into five categories:

1. Road traffic fatalities
2. Fatal shootings
3. Deaths in or following police custody
4. Apparent suicides following police custody
5. Other deaths following police contact

The definitions of these are explained in more detail in section 6 below.

In line with common practice, the total number of deaths which are quoted only include those within categories 1 to 3. The totals would be significantly higher if category 4 and 5 deaths were included, but such data has only been collected in recent years and the extent of direct police involvement varies significantly from case to case. The numbers in these categories are dependent on the extent to which police forces have reported them to the complaint oversight bodies and on the availability of resources to conduct subsequent investigations.

PTPK has used available information to create its own extensive database listing deaths in each of the categories. This includes links to press and other related reports. Names have only been gathered for about half of the cases, as these were not always included in the published data.

(3) England & Wales

The table below shows that there were **at least 3,015 police-related deaths (categories 1-3) in England & Wales between 1 April 1970 and 31 March 2025** (there were over 2,000 in the shorter period since 1 April 1990). Official data from annual reports has been used where possible. Initially this was published by HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary (excluding London) and by the

Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis (covering London). Subsequent data was provided by the PCA, the IPCC (from 2003) and the IOPC (from 2018). Road traffic fatalities before 1 April 1997 was not available in these reports, so these have been collated by PTPK using local newspaper archives (these will be underestimates because not all cases will have been found).

IOPC/IPCC reports from 2003/4 to 2024/5 show 1,495 category 4 (apparent suicides following police custody) and 1,164 category 5 deaths (other deaths following police contact) over this period. These cases are not included in the totals for this analysis.

Deaths during/after police contact in England & Wales, Categories 1-3 (1970-2025)			
5-Year Date Range	Category 1: Road Traffic Fatalities	Category 2: Fatal Shootings	Category 3: Police Custody Deaths
1 Apr 70 – 31 Mar 75	10*	3	104
1 Apr 75 – 31 Mar 80	31*	2	190
1 Apr 80 – 31 Mar 85	50*	1	231
1 Apr 85 – 31 Mar 90	57*	8	271
1 Apr 90 – 31 Mar 95	95*	13	259
1 Apr 95 – 31 Mar 00	76*	8	259
1 Apr 00 – 31 Mar 05	168	13	168
1 Apr 05 – 31 Mar 10	177	16	109
1 Apr 10 – 31 Mar 15	102	5	80
1 Apr 15 – 31 Mar 20	148	19	86
1 Apr 20 – 31 Mar 25	151	10	95
Totals:	1,065	98	1,852
Cumulative Totals:	1,065	1,163	3,015

(4) Scotland

HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary for Scotland (HMICS) annual reports list 257 deaths in police custody from 1975-2006 (on average about 8 per year). Police Investigations & Review (PIRC) annual reports between 2013/14 and 2024/25 show that they started investigations into 38 deaths in police custody (on average about 3 per year) as well as 202 deaths following police contact (on average about 17 per year) during this period. There have therefore been **at least 295 deaths (=257+38) in police custody (category 3 deaths) in Scotland from 1 April 1970 to 31 March 2025.**

Note that the population of Scotland in mid-2024 was 5.55 million, which was 9.0% of the population of England and Wales. As there were 3,015 police-related deaths in England and Wales (categories 1-3), on a proportional basis you might expect an additional 270 deaths in Scotland. The evidence collected shows that the actual number of deaths has been higher than this, mainly due to higher death rates in the more urbanised areas around Glasgow and Edinburgh.

(5) North of Ireland

The CAIN (Conflict Archive on the Internet) database includes details of 66 police-related deaths in Northern Ireland during the conflict between 1968 and 1998, mainly shootings (including 8 deaths in 1969). Press releases by the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland, which was established on 6 Nov 2000, refer to another 72 police-related deaths. There have therefore been **at least 130 police-related deaths (=66-8+72) in North of Ireland from 1 April 1970 to 31 March 2025.**

Note that the population of North of Ireland in mid-2024 was 1.93 million, which is 3.1% of the population of England and Wales. As there were 3,015 police-related deaths in England and Wales (categories 1-3), on a proportional basis you might expect an additional 94 deaths in Northern Ireland. The evidence collected shows that the actual number of deaths has been higher than this, which partially reflects the higher number of police shootings during the 1968-98 conflict.

(6) Death Categories

The IOPC (Independent Office for Police Conduct, the public body responsible for overseeing the system for handling complaints made against police forces in England and Wales) divides police-related deaths into 5 categories:

Category 1. Road traffic fatalities

Defined as: “deaths of motorists, cyclists or pedestrians arising from police pursuits, police vehicles responding to emergency calls and other police traffic-related activity”; this category includes any death which is caused by a driver who is being followed/pursued by police, or caused by the driver of a police car or van.

Category 2. Fatal shootings

Defined as: “fatalities where police officers fired the fatal shot using a conventional firearm” ; this category includes people who have died after being shot using bullets or baton rounds.

Category 3. Deaths in or following police custody

Defined as: “fatalities while a person is being arrested, being taken into detention or while being detained by police”; this category mainly includes deaths in a police station (including suicides) or after an arrested person has been taken to hospital, but sometimes the death occurs at a private address, in a public place or in a police vehicle. It includes deaths of people who have been arrested or detained by police under the Mental Health Act 1983.

Category 4. Apparent suicides following police custody

Some people kill themselves after being released from a police station, especially those who are being accused of a serious violent or sexual offence or those who are mentally ill. Only cases which are subject to an investigation are included.

Category 5. Other deaths following police contact

Defined as: “deaths that follow contact with the police, either directly or indirectly, that did not involve arrest or detention under the Mental Health Act 1983 and were subject to an independent investigation”. Example would be: a woman who called the police to raise concern about her ex-partner and was killed by that ex-partner before the police responded, a man who shot himself dead during a police siege, or someone who fell from a building while trying to escape from a police raid.

For more detailed definitions, see: “Annual deaths during or following police contact report - 2024/25”, Box A (pages 5/6): <https://www.policeconduct.gov.uk/publications/annual-deaths-during-or-following-police-contact-report-202425>