Ensuring Accountability and Transparency: The Need for Proper Regulation of Police Drone Use in Democratic Societies

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**Abstract**

In a democratic society governed by the rule of law, the use of new technologies by the police must be properly regulated. When police technology is used incorrectly and without legitimate reason, it can become hostile in the eyes of the public. Lack of proper safeguards and regulations can also lead to lack of accountability for actions in the line of duty. This article focuses on two main aspects. Firstly, it describes issues posed by rapid implementation of new technologies by the police and emphasizes the need for proper oversight of police drone activities. Secondly, it presents findings from socio-legal research conducted between 2019 and 2023. This study combines doctrinal legal research with empirical studies conducted in Poland, Germany, Spain, and the United Kingdom. It includes in-depth interviews with police officers, national aviation safety agency officers, and foreign experts, supplemented by field observations of police drone use in practice. The article concludes with critical remarks on current legislation, highlighting significant inadequacies, particularly in Polish regulations, and calls for a new approach to police accountability and transparency.

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1. Introduction

Police accountability is an essential aspect of law enforcement that ensures police officers adhere to established ethical and legal standards. In today’s society, where incidents involving police misconduct have captured public attention and sparked widespread debate, the importance of accountability mechanisms cannot be overstated. This essay explores the intricate balance between maintaining public safety and enforcing the accountability of those tasked with this critical responsibility. By examining the evolution of accountability measures, current challenges posed by drones, and potential reforms, the article’s aim is to shed light on how effective policing can align with community trust and legal principles. Through this analysis, the essay will underscore the pivotal role that accountability plays in the justice system, proposing ways to enhance transparency and integrity within police forces. This sets the stage for a deeper discussion on the necessity of rigorous accountability mechanisms in policing practices of using drones.

The use of extensive surveillance by police forces represents a profound shift in the dynamics of public space and personal privacy. Surveillance technologies, such as CCTV cameras, body-worn cameras, and drones, have become ubiquitous in many urban settings. These tools provide law enforcement with unprecedented capabilities to monitor public areas, ostensibly to deter crime and enhance safety. However, the pervasive nature of such surveillance raises significant concerns about privacy and the potential for overreach. The main worry with widespread surveillance is the erosion of privacy. When every movement in public (and sometimes private) spaces is subject to monitoring, the sense of personal privacy diminishes. This can lead to a chilling effect where individuals may feel inhibited from freely expressing themselves or engaging in activities, even if they are perfectly legal [1:339]. There is also the risk of police overreach. Surveillance tools can sometimes be used for purposes beyond their original intent, such as tracking political activists, monitoring protesters, or even looking into private property, which are stark deviations from their supposed crime prevention objectives. Such uses can undermine democratic freedoms and civil liberties [1:329]. Another critical issue is the security and management of the data collected through surveillance. The storage and handling of vast amounts of data open the door to potential misuse, whether through internal corruption or external hacking. Data breaches can expose sensitive personal information, leading to significant consequences for individuals affected [1:336]. Perhaps one of the most detrimental effects of extensive surveillance is its impact on public trust in the police. When citizens feel they are constantly being watched, it can erode trust in law enforcement agencies, fostering feelings of alienation and suspicion. This is particularly pronounced in communities that feel disproportionately targeted by such surveillance measures [1:332]. To mitigate these risks, it is crucial for there to be clear legal frameworks and robust oversight mechanisms that regulate the use of surveillance technologies. Transparency about how surveillance data is collected, used, and protected, along with stringent accountability measures, can help balance the benefits of these technologies with the need to protect civil liberties and maintain public trust.

* 1. **Historical Context of Police Accountability**

The concept of police accountability is not a new one, but it has evolved significantly over the years as societal values and legal frameworks have changed. Historically, the oversight of police behavior has been marked by periods of reform, public outcry, and legislative action, reflecting the shifting dynamics between law enforcement agencies and the communities they serve.

In the 19th century, modern policing began to take shape in Western societies, modeled primarily after the London Metropolitan Police, often considered a model of modern policing, established in 1829. Early police forces were often used by local governments to maintain control and enforce social order rather than protect citizens' rights. Accountability mechanisms were minimal, typically internal, and heavily influenced by local politics, leading to widespread corruption and abuse of power [2:524].

The latter half of the 20th century witnessed significant strides toward formalizing police accountability in response to public demand for democratic governance and human rights. Countries across Europe began establishing more formal oversight bodies, such as ombudsmen and independent police complaints commissions, tasked with overseeing police conduct. These bodies were meant to offer a recourse to citizens who had grievances against police actions, marking a shift toward greater transparency and accountability [2:525].

In contemporary times, European police accountability continues to evolve. The introduction of technologies like body-worn cameras and the implementation of EU-wide directives aimed at standardizing police conduct are part of ongoing efforts to enhance oversight. High-profile incidents of police misconduct continue to spur public debate and legislative action, reflecting a dynamic dialogue about the role of policing and the necessity for effective oversight mechanisms. The historical context of police accountability in Europe underscores a gradual but consistent shift towards greater transparency and democratic oversight. Understanding this evolution is crucial as societies continue to grapple with the balance between ensuring public safety and upholding the civil liberties of individuals. This is especially important in times of rapid technological advancements as oftentimes proper regulations do not keep up with the speed of technological innovations. The example of such notorious case are drones, which widespread use by the police is not properly regulated and poses new challenges for police accountability, as well as risks to personal rights and liberties [2:530].

* 1. **The Use of Police Drones**

As is often the case, civil drones have their origins in military technology. Today, the primary similarity between civil and military drones is that they are both unmanned. These drones, however, vary significantly in their usage, size, shape, construction, and mode of operation. Therefore, while the term "drone" is convenient, it is imprecise and often leads to misunderstandings, particularly when different groups use it to describe vastly different devices. The American terminology, rooted in military technology, uses the term UAV (Unmanned Aerial Vehicle) to refer to a device operated by a trained military pilot. To distinguish between military and civilian devices, the term RPA (Remotely Piloted Aircraft) was introduced [3:2].

The European Union has adapted this terminology from the American RPA but generalized it for civil aviation. The EU divides UAVs into RPAS (Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems) and autonomous drones, with RPAS being the primary term used in its regulations. It is important to note that these differences are not trivial regarding public perception and legislation. "Drone" is not a legal term, especially in the European Union. Its military connotations, often reinforced by media references, contribute to the public perception of police militarization, further exacerbated by reducing direct contact between citizens and police officers.

With rapid advancements in technology, drones quickly emerged as ideal tools for the security and public safety sectors. Their potential applications included facilitating border protection, maritime surveillance, and enhancing disaster prevention efforts for events such as forest fires, floods, and earthquakes. Operating at low altitudes, drones could be instrumental for police agencies in identifying civilians, gathering evidence, tracking escapees, and assessing other security risks. Most notably, drones were seen as a cost-effective alternative to helicopters, which are often too limited and expensive for widespread use [4:2].

Projections estimated that by 2035, the demand for drones in the EU would reach 60,000 units, with the development of technology enabling longer and further flights expected to gradually decrease this number [4:8]. Initially, police forces attempted to use drones as mobile CCTV cameras, though with limited success. A case in point is the Liverpool Police, who spent three years to arrest a suspect using a drone, only to have the case dismissed in court due to the illegal use of the drone [5].

Some authors emphasize that the perception of technology “*lies at the intersection of two domains: aesthetics (perception relations) and politics (power relations)*” [6:324]. This concept underscores the crucial role of vision in surveillance, highlighting that it involves not just seeing and being seen, but also represents the asymmetrical nature of power and visibility. Direct eye contact fosters social connections and builds relationships. However, when this relationship becomes asymmetrical — where one is aware of being watched without knowing who is watching — it can be dehumanizing. This imbalance can lead to heightened feelings of aggression and distrust [6:326].

Ever since police agencies began adopting drone technology, concerns regarding personal privacy have intensified. Unlike CCTV cameras, which are fixed in elevated positions to monitor specific areas, drones offer much more flexible surveillance capabilities. Drones are not stationary and can easily change positions, allowing them to cover much larger areas. More importantly, their ability to provide an aerial overview means that the higher their altitude, the larger the area they can survey. This aerial perspective also makes it easier to peer into private apartments, plots, and houses. Even if invading private space is not the primary intent of police drone operators, it is almost inevitable that private property will be recorded while monitoring public spaces.

In the early days of police drone adoption, lawmakers had not adequately addressed this issue. Although evidence obtained in this manner is generally inadmissible in court, it does not mitigate the fact that private property is being recorded without a warrant. Consequently, privacy concerns have eroded public support for drone surveillance. Research shows that, even when accounting for pro-privacy beliefs and anti-surveillance views, any type of drone surveillance activity — such as monitoring citizens around their homes, workplaces, or public spaces — diminishes public support for police drones [7:1029].

1. Methods

This article draws upon legal research and empirical studies conducted in Poland, Germany, Spain, and the United Kingdom. These countries were specifically selected because, at the time the study was conceived, their national police forces were operating drones under extensive regulations (with the exception of Poland). During the course of the study, the legal landscape in Europe evolved significantly with the adoption and national implementation of European Union regulations, impacting how drones are used and regulated across these countries.

As previously mentioned, there is a notable lack of research on the legal framework within the European Union concerning the implications of police use of drones. This gap is particularly evident in areas related to privacy invasion, police accountability, and the balance between protecting citizens' rights and ensuring police effectiveness. Consequently, the first part of this study focused on doctrinal legal research. This approach involves providing a systematic exposition of the rules governing a specific legal category, analyzing the relationships between these rules, identifying areas of difficulty, and potentially predicting future developments [8:38]. It entails a thorough analysis of legal provisions, rules, norms, guidelines, and the intentions, propositions, and principles of legislators. However, as Chynoweth points out, understanding legal doctrine alone does not offer a complete picture of the law; it requires the application of legal rules and doctrine to specific facts [9:28-29]. Moreover, as Hutchinson and Duncan note, although doctrinal legal research has long been the cornerstone of legal studies, there has been no recent necessity to explain or classify it within a broader cross-disciplinary research framework. They argue that the doctrinal method is often so implicit and tacit that many within the legal field consider it unnecessary to articulate the process. This does not mean the method should not be detailed, but it must be contextualized within the real world [10:85].

Research was conducted into the regulation of police drone use in Poland, Germany, Spain, and the United Kingdom. This research included national and local legislation, internal police regulations, and court decisions where available. To identify the most relevant issues and sources, general searches were conducted using *Google* and *Google Scholar*, which facilitated a more detailed categorization and examination of internal police regulations and court decisions. Some sources were easier to access than others. British legislation was the most accessible, thanks to the *Freedom of Information Act* and detailed information shared by Kent and Sussex Police on their websites regarding their drone usage. German regulations were also relatively easy to find, with ample academic papers available on the topic. In contrast, studying regulations in Poland proved challenging due to a lack of specific legislation and the Polish police's reluctance to share internal regulations with the public. The most challenging research was in Spain, not due to a lack of regulations — Spain was selected for its extensive legislation — but because of the scarcity of English translations of the legal texts. This language barrier also hindered the empirical studies, as even the Spanish EU Aviation Safety Agency (AESA)[[1]](#footnote-1) had limited information available in English. Consequently, interpreters were employed on several occasions to complete the research.

Before describing the empirical studies, it is important to note that doctrinal legal research had to be conducted twice. Initially, this research was performed during the early stages of the grant program. However, as previously mentioned, a new EU-wide legal framework was adopted and implemented into national legislations during the course of the research. This necessitated a repeat of the doctrinal research, which proved to be extremely useful. Understanding the existing regulations in each country allowed for a unique analysis of the implementation process from a national perspective. While Spain, Germany, and Poland had already aligned their legislations with the new regulations, the United Kingdom, having left the European Union, did not adopt the new system and is not a member of the European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA).

Building on the findings from the doctrinal legal research, empirical research was then conducted. This involved in-depth interviews with police officers, national aviation safety agency officers, and foreign experts in the field. Police departments and aviation safety agencies were contacted via email, requesting a designated individual willing to participate in an interview. Experts were approached directly via email to arrange meetings. Each email outlined the interview topics and the study's purpose. In several cases, requests for additional details about the interview structure and specific inquiries were made and provided. Participants were also informed that all interviews would be voice-recorded due to the study's nature. Most interviews were conducted in person and on-site, while four had to be conducted remotely due to participants' scheduling conflicts, and one due to illness. Each in-depth interview was structured and conducted based on a pre-prepared questionnaire.

In addition to the interviews, permission was granted on three occasions to observe police officers using drones in their work. The first observation took place in the UK, where the processes of preparation, flight, and after-mission reporting were demonstrated. The other two observations occurred in Poland, where police officers allowed observations during traffic control operations and provided insights into their usual procedures. Field notes were made in all three cases to document the observations.

1. Results

The following section presents the results from doctrinal legal research, in-depth interview responses, and field study observations. The first part outlines the current state of legislation in the EU (including Spain, Germany, and Poland) and the United Kingdom. The second part covers three key areas: a) the most common use cases of police drones, b) officer attitudes towards drones and their opinions on accountability, and c) observations from limited field studies on the practical use of police drones.

* 1. **Legislation**

In the European Union, two key legislative acts govern the use of drones by the police. The first is *Regulation (EU) 2018/1139[[2]](#footnote-2)*. This regulation aims to create a unified airspace within the European Union and mandates that police officers adhere to the same certification, testing, and operational rules as civilians when flying drones, with minor exceptions. Specific regulations, airspace classifications, and types of drone missions are beyond the scope of this study. However, one notable provision requires that everyone not involved in a drone mission be informed when such a mission is ongoing. This means drones should, at a minimum, have bright lights to increase their visibility.

The second significant act is *Directive (EU) 2016/680[[3]](#footnote-3)*. This directive mandates that all member states protect citizens' fundamental rights and freedoms, particularly their right to personal data protection. It ensures that the exchange of personal data by competent authorities within the Union is not restricted or prohibited due to data protection concerns. Furthermore, it requires police agencies to appoint dedicated data administrators and grants citizens the right to access, manage, and delete their personal data processed or stored by the police. Additionally, it mandates that each member state establish appropriate time limits for the erasure of personal data or periodic reviews of the need for data storage.

Spanish regulations align with both Regulation (EU) 2018/1139 and Directive (EU) 2016/680. Prior to these EU regulations, Spain had its own unique legislation governing drone use—Royal Decree 552/2014. With the implementation of the new EU acts, the Spanish Aviation Safety and Security Agency (AESA), which operates under the EU's EASA framework, has become the main regulatory body overseeing drone use in Spain. However, AESA primarily publishes information in Spanish, making it difficult to access information easily. It is also worth noting that the tests drone operators must take to fly in Spanish airspace are available only in Spanish. Despite these language barriers, it is evident that Spanish laws are fully compliant with the new EU framework.

Similarly to Spain, as of December 31, 2020, Germany replaced its national drone regulations with the aforementioned European regulations. The German Federal Aviation Office (FAO), which operates under the EASA framework, has confirmed that the new EU regulations are fully adhered to and that German regulations are now compliant with this updated European framework.

Poland has also implemented the new EU framework. The Polish Civil Aviation Authority, which operates under EASA, maintains records of all registered drone pilots and can share this information with Polish police upon request. Polish law differs somewhat from other countries regarding surveillance competencies. Under the Polish National Police Act, the police have the authority to surveil all public spaces and can also surveil private spaces during interventions. This broad authority grants Polish police the right to use any surveillance technology in their duties. This legislation is controversial, particularly because the ability to surveil private spaces during interventions was introduced simultaneously with the implementation of Directive (EU) 2016/680, which aims to strengthen citizens' fundamental rights and freedoms. Nevertheless, the Directive has at least regulated how long the Polish police can store personal data — a previously unregulated and contentious issue. Police can now store personal data for a minimum of 30 days and a maximum of 60 days before deleting it.

As for the United Kingdom, thanks to the *Freedom of Information Act 2000* (FOIA), information regarding regulations, policies, and other acts is readily accessible. FOIA also facilitates obtaining information from relevant authorities, making it easy to gather necessary details. Any type of surveillance data gathered, processed, or stored by British police is governed by the *Police Act*, the *Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act* (RIPA), and the *Protection of Freedoms Act* (PoFA). Additionally, British police must comply with the principles of the *Management of Police Information* (MoPI), which outlines the issues that need consideration to comply with the law and manage risks associated with police information.

Perhaps the most crucial regulation is the requirement to adhere to the principles of the *Surveillance Camera Code of Practice* (SCCP). This mandates that police agencies create and follow a *Data Protection Impact Assessment* (DPIA) concerning the use of drones. While some paragraphs of this assessment are redacted and not publicly accessible, it is important to note that British police recognize the unique aerial perspective of drones, which may inadvertently capture members of the public in the vicinity of an operation. To minimize this risk, drone pilots are instructed not to record routinely unless they have a specific policing purpose.

* 1. **Police Drones Uses and Police Officers Opinions on Accountability**

A study conducted in Poland, Germany, Spain, and the United Kingdom found that police drones are used relatively infrequently compared to the wide range of tasks typically performed by police officers. The two primary uses for drones are search and rescue operations and monitoring traffic. When questioned about other potential applications, such as city or crime scene mapping, monitoring public assemblies or protests, and regular CCTV-like surveillance, the responses varied. A German officer stated, “*we wanted to and we tried to monitor protests, but our [aviation] laws make it very difficult to perform such a task*”. A Spanish officer noted that “*during COVID-19, we used drones to urge people to stay home*”, adding that “*there is a unit that regularly monitors beaches*”. In the United Kingdom, an officer mentioned, “*we used drones to surveil cities during our pilot programs, but we rarely use them this way anymore*”, explaining that regular CCTV cameras usually provide sufficient information. Polish police “*mainly use drones for search and rescue operations due to the management’s approach*”. Official statistics indicate that using a police drone in search and rescue operations can locate a missing person 191 seconds faster than teams without a drone [11].

All respondents noted that using a drone is quicker and cheaper than using a helicopter, and it appears that drones are consistently viewed as an alternative to helicopters rather than to technologies like CCTV cameras. It was emphasized that drones are intended to supplement helicopters, not replace them, by using drones as the initial response. Several respondents from different countries also highlighted several drawbacks of using drones. Firstly, they mentioned the dependency on weather conditions: “*If it’s too windy, it won’t fly; if it rains, it won’t fly. Same with fog, too much sun, or extreme cold*”. Another issue was connectivity, which can be “patchy” in highly urbanized areas, hindering the officer’s live view on the screen and increasing the risk of crashes without proper precautions. Perhaps the most serious critique came from three respondents who felt that drones are not as useful as they are portrayed to the public (and police agencies). A British officer stated:

*[…] it’s all just a gimmick. Sure, it’s nice to have a view from the air, but in most instances, what does that give us? It makes for a great PR stunt, but from my perspective, I have to prepare a flight plan, assemble the team, perform proper checks before the flight, and then make sure to properly store the data and draw up a report. There are few instances where drone missions have significant advantages over traditional policing.*

In contrast, a Spanish officer stated, “*of course they [drones] are useful. Monitoring beaches is tiresome and takes a long time, and this saves us time and resources, including personnel*”. When asked about the bureaucracy surrounding drone missions, he replied, “*whether you go on a foot patrol or fly a drone, you have to write a report. What difference does it make?*”.

Regarding privacy concerns, respondents had mixed reactions. Generally, they acknowledged the importance of respecting privacy. A respondent from the UK noted, “*our regulations put citizens’ privacy first. We cannot simply fly the drone whenever we feel like it. We need to justify the flight, set a specific route, and assess privacy risks*”. A German officer added, “*citizens’ privacy and personal data are very important to us, and we try to minimize the data we gather to the bare minimum*”. In Poland, a respondent agreed that privacy is important, but when asked about instances of recording private property while monitoring traffic, seemed not to fully grasp the issue. A Polish officer confirmed the conclusion from doctrinal legal research, stating, “*there is no law against recording private property by accident while operating a drone during a legitimate task*”.

* 1. **Field Observation**

On three occasions, permission was granted to observe actual police drone missions. The first observation took place in the UK. The British officer demonstrated a high level of professionalism, providing insight into the necessary steps for conducting the flight. A note was made, indicating that preparations were similar to those for civil flights: equipment checks, map reviews, and weather condition assessments. Another observation highlighted the strict adherence to procedures: a set flight plan was executed, no communication with the officer during the flight, post-flight checks performed, and a memo with an appropriate form filled out afterward.

Two other flights were observed in Poland, where police officers monitored traffic. In both cases, the drone operator sat in a car piloting the drone, while another officer stood near the road. When the operator spotted a car committing a traffic offense, such as illegal overtaking, reckless driving, or speeding, he informed the officer standing by the road. The officer would then stop the car, inform the driver of the violation, and issue a traffic ticket. During one incident, a driver refused to accept the ticket and was shown the recording of the violation after a prolonged discussion.

Several notes were taken during both observations. Regarding the professionalism of the police officers, it was noted, "*Both officers are extremely professional; the drone operator focuses on the flight and speaks only when a traffic offense is spotted; the other officer is calm and forthcoming when informing drivers of their violations*". It was also observed that "*the drone operator clearly knows what he's doing, operating the drone perfectly and in compliance with aviation laws*". However, while the first observation was near a busy road surrounded by open fields, the second was near a spot where several houses bordered the road. This was noted as well: "*The drone clearly records not only the road but also private property. People sitting in their gardens can be seen but are not the focus of the operator*".

Conclusions from field observations confirm prior assumptions. Depending on the selected place, monitoring traffic using drones causes significant privacy concerns, as drones can inadvertently capture images and data from private properties adjacent to public roads, potentially infringing on individuals' rights. Secondly, the effectiveness of drone surveillance is heavily dependent on weather conditions; high winds, rain, fog, and extreme temperatures can severely limit their operational capabilities. Thirdly, connectivity issues in highly urbanized areas can lead to intermittent data transmission, hindering real-time monitoring and increasing the risk of operational failures. Moreover, there are legal and ethical considerations regarding the continuous surveillance of citizens, which can foster public mistrust and raise concerns about over-policing and the potential for abuse of power. Lastly, the integration of drone data with existing traffic monitoring systems poses technical and logistical challenges, requiring robust infrastructure and data management protocols to ensure accuracy and reliability.

1. Conclusion

It is no surprise that drone technology is increasingly utilized by police agencies for various purposes. However, the scope of tasks performed with this technology remains limited. Through doctrinal legal research, in-depth interviews, and field observations, this study examined the most common use cases and assessed deficiencies in applicable regulations. The results suggest that police drones are primarily used as tools to assist officers in their tasks, rather than as technology capable of supplementing or replacing their work. This was corroborated by the general attitude of police officers from the surveyed countries.

The research also highlighted significant inadequacies in both legislation and the dissemination of information and education to the public and local communities, particularly in Poland. Drones should not be treated simply as mobile CCTV cameras. Their aerial perspective allows police to observe private property, creating an asymmetry in the relationship between police officers and citizens. Regulating all recording devices uniformly is unacceptable in a democratic country governed by the rule of law. Moreover, the lack of transparency to the public undermines police legitimacy. Police should inform the public about the purpose, intended uses, and potential benefits of police drones to improve overall perceptions of this technology [12:249]. Transparency and explicit communication about the situations in which police drones might be used are crucial [12:251]. This was generally evident in the studied countries, with the possible exception of the United Kingdom, where current regulations facilitate public access to information and align more closely with community policing strategies.

Despite the increasing success of drone technology in police work, it remains a developing field. Regulations often struggle to keep pace with emerging innovations. The groundwork laid by the European Union’s aviation laws and The Data Protection Law Enforcement Directive offers significant opportunities for national legislators. This study demonstrates that member states like Spain and Germany have used this opportunity to implement key regulations that safeguard citizens’ right to privacy while balancing police efficiency and accountability. These countries found the transition easier because their existing laws were already somewhat aligned with new EU regulations and they had a history of developed privacy protection and police drone accountability legislation. The United Kingdom, post-Brexit, has pursued a different path, yet its solutions still exemplify how to maintain police visibility and transparency. Although not perfect, UK laws provide an accessible framework for the purpose, limitations, and privacy impact assessments of police drone use.

Conversely, the current state of Polish legislation leaves much to be desired. Despite incorporating the EU’s aviation law and The Data Protection Law Enforcement Directive into national laws, Poland’s legislation did not address specific issues arising from the integration of drone technology into police work. Polish laws do not differentiate between a CCTV camera, a body-worn camera, and a drone. In this particular field, significant groundwork remains. To meet Western standards, a distinct police drone act should be adopted. This act should be based on best practices from other countries and should encompass the types of operations police can use drones for, the purposes of these operations, how they are to be conducted and documented, and how privacy risks should be assessed. It should also require police to minimize these risks and ensure compliance with the regulations.

The integration of drones into police operations necessitates a new form of police accountability to address the unique challenges and ethical concerns associated with this technology. Traditional oversight mechanisms are insufficient for managing the complexities introduced by drone surveillance, such as privacy violations, data security, and potential misuse. Comprehensive regulations and transparent policies must be established to govern the deployment and use of drones, ensuring they are operated within the bounds of the law and respect citizens' rights. Independent oversight bodies should be empowered to monitor drone activities, investigate complaints, and enforce compliance with established standards. Additionally, clear guidelines on data retention, access, and sharing are essential to protect sensitive information and prevent unauthorized use. Public engagement and education on the legitimate uses and limits of police drones can further enhance trust and accountability, ensuring that this powerful tool is used responsibly and ethically in law enforcement.

There are several ways to achieve greater transparency and accountability in police drone use. Firstly, in the event of a monitored activity, a simple notice stating that a police drone will be used is insufficient. The notice should explain why the event will be monitored, what attendees can expect, and how this measure ensures their safety. Secondly, each police drone should be easily distinguishable from civilian drones, either through color, markings, or both, and should always be equipped with signaling lights to enhance visibility. Additionally, while providing an audio notice to nearby public that a police drone is in use is a reasonable idea, this notice should not be given without context. Simply stating that a drone is in use could be perceived as repressive. Instead, clear information must be provided to ensure that passers-by understand the reasoning behind the drone's use and its intended benefits for public safety.From the start of this study, it was evident that British police, in compliance with regulations, excel in transparency and information dissemination regarding their drone operations. It is common to find detailed records of police drone flights on their websites, including specific start and end times, the purpose of the flights, and the outcomes achieved. This approach minimizes doubt and suspicion that can arise with the widespread use of drone technology.

Further research on this topic is necessary. This study had some limitations, mainly due to time constraints. Global pandemic prolonged the empirical part of the study, which forced the author to repeat the doctrinal legal research due to changing regulations. This had a negative effect on the number of in-depth interviews conducted. Despite study’s limitations, it highlighted that the issue extends beyond privacy concerns; it relates to the broader context of how lawmakers institute policing and approach police accountability. Countries where the use of police drones is positively assessed tend to have a more holistic approach to law-making, whereas others do not. Future research should explore the effect of police drones on public perception of police. Although some research on this topic is emerging in the US [7], there is still a lack of comprehensive studies on police drone use within the EU.

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3. Directive (EU) 2016/680 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data by competent authorities for the purposes of the prevention, investigation, detection or prosecution of criminal offences or the execution of criminal penalties, and on the free movement of such data. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)