

# **The Impact of Body-Worn Cameras on Police Use of Force and Community Relations**

## **Introduction**

The use of body-worn cameras by police has expanded rapidly across the U.S., with over 80% of departments now employing cameras in some capacity (Lum et al., 2019). Scholars and policymakers argue that such a policy can enhance transparency within law enforcement by actively monitoring officers' performance in real time. However, critics contend its effectiveness is often hindered due to inadequate implementation or departments refusing to adopt it. Despite immense interest in the policy, empirical evidence on body camera effectiveness remains inconclusive and fragmented across different jurisdictions. This highlights the need for rigorous research to evaluate how body cameras affect how policing is conducted about the use of force and community relations.

This study investigates body-worn cameras' impact on key policing outcomes through an experimental design across multiple U.S. cities. The research questions examine: i). Does the adoption of body-worn cameras reduce the use of force incidents and citizen complaints against police compared to control conditions? ii). Does the use of body cameras enhance public perceptions of policing? Deterrence theory and procedural justice theory are used to hypothesize that body cameras will lower the rate of use of force and improve attitudes toward police by increasing transparency and accountability mechanisms. The experiment will randomly assign camera adoption at the precinct level across ten large police departments and compare outcomes over one year against control precincts in the same cities. Key variables collected will include documented use-of-force incidents, citizen complaints, officer injuries, policing activity levels, arrests, community attitudes, and perceived legitimacy based on surveys.

This research makes several key contributions to knowledge. First, the randomized controlled design provides strong internal validity to make causal claims regarding the impacts of body camera adoption. Second, the multi-city sample allows for greater generalization of findings. Third, the study comprehensively evaluates body cameras, accountability, and community relations outcomes across various forces. Fourth, the research tests underlying theories on how body cameras are expected to influence police and citizen behaviors. The findings will inform policymakers and police administrators on body-worn cameras' effectiveness in enhancing policing strategies and rebuilding community trust.

## **Literature Review**

A growing body of research has examined the implementation and impacts of body-worn cameras in policing contexts, yielding some valuable insights but also inconsistencies across studies. This section will review critical areas of the literature related to body camera usage and its effects on force, accountability, and community perceptions. The main point is whether or not adding body cameras to law enforcement officers can prevent them from using too much force.