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# Body-Worn Cameras and Their Ineffectiveness

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# What are Body-Worn Cameras (BWCs)?



**Body-worn cameras (BWCs):** small audio-video devices worn on officers' uniforms to record public interactions



**Greater focus on police transparency and visibility of officers' roles**



**Early adoption:** began in the early 2000s in the UK, later gaining traction in the U.S

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# The Importance of Discretion in Police Work and Its Impact on Public Engagement

- Police discretion is central to their role, guiding decisions based on situational circumstances
  - Officers can choose formal actions (arrests, citations) or informal resolutions (warnings, referrals) at their discretion
  - Around **48–50% of officers** agreed BWCs limit discretion, while **29–45%** disagreed (Newell & Greidanus (2018))
  - Toronto pilot: BWCs → more arrests, fewer Provincial Offences Act warnings
  - Study findings (Braga et al., 2018):
    - **5.2% more arrests**
    - **6.8% more citations**
    - **471 additional arrest reports**
    - **1,125 additional call events with citations**
  - Officers with BWCs may reduce discretionary warnings and increase punitive police-community encounters
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# How Increased Enforcement Activity Weakens Police Legitimacy





## Internal Perception: Strengthens

Increased enforcement activity and BWCs can strengthen internal perceptions of police effectiveness and legitimacy.



## Public Perception: Weakens

-  Police rely on public cooperation to report crimes and provide information.
-  Negative or intrusive enforcement can erode trust and reduce community support.

# Limitations



## Mixed Results & Context

Research on body-worn cameras (BWCs) shows **mixed results**, as their use in policing is relatively recent.

2014

BWCs were widely implemented after the **2014 police legitimacy crisis** to increase accountability and reduce police misconduct.



## Discretion & De-policing Concerns



Some studies find BWCs **limit officer discretion** and reduce use-of-force, while others suggest they may contribute to reduced police activity ("de-policing").



This paper highlights often overlooked **criticisms** of BWCs and considers alternatives to punitive policing practices.

# Recommendations/Next Steps

Expand  
**community-oriented**  
policing practices



Implement  
**transparent**  
BWC policies



Establish clear rules  
for footage retention  
and officer review



Restrict **political**  
surveillance and  
facial recognition



Introduce  
**community oversight**  
of BWC use



**Community-oriented policing** reduces the divide between police and communities by strengthening collaboration while maintaining effective policing.



Increasing **community input** in BWC use can strengthen partnerships, enhance police legitimacy, and promote reliance on trust and officer discretion rather than surveillance.

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**Thank you!**

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