

STUDY

BODY-WORN CAMERAS, LAWFUL POLICE STOPS, AND NYPD OFFICER COMPLIANCE



The Law Enforcement
KNOWLEDGE LAB

A Cluster Randomized Controlled Trial

A RESEARCH SUMMARY OF:

Braga, A. A., MacDonald, J. M., & McCabe, J. (2021). [Body-worn cameras, lawful police stops, and NYPD Officer Compliance: A cluster randomized controlled trial](#). *Criminology*, 60(1), 124-158. doi:10.1111/1745-9125.12293

TOPIC AREA:

- Body-Worn Cameras
- Stop-and-Frisk
- Unlawful Stops
- Citizen Complaints

QUESTIONS ADDRESSED:

- Can body-worn cameras reduce unlawful stops?
- Can body-worn cameras reduce citizen complaints?
- Can body-worn cameras increase police compliance with the requirement to document all stops?
- Can body-worn cameras be used to better identify problematic police-citizen encounters?



KEY FINDINGS

- BWCs did increase the number of stop reports submitted by police officers by 39%, and significantly reduced the number of citizen complaints against police officers by 21%.
- Reports by officers wearing BWCs were more likely to reveal unlawful stops, frisks, and searches of younger minority males when compared to stop reports submitted by officers who were not wearing cameras.
- BWCs may increase officer compliance with agency directives to document all citizen stops.
- BWCs did not significantly change the number of arrests, arrests with force, summons, domestic incident reports, or citizen crime complaint reports.

METHODS USED:

- This study employed the largest single-site randomized field experiment conducted to date of BWCs and the first to explicitly control for treatment “contamination effects” by design. This means that the design of the study helped to guard against treatment “contamination” across individual officers and civilians.
- This evaluation used cluster randomization in which clusters—groups of subjects, rather than individual subjects—are randomly assigned to receive BWCs.
- BWCs were randomly allocated by precinct to treatment or control groups for a one-year intervention period in 2017.

LIMITATIONS:

- The study does not identify the reason why BWCs reduced citizen complaints against police by 21%. Future studies should be designed to explicitly answer this question.
- This study is also limited by diminished statistical power to conduct important subgroup analyses, such as whether BWCs reduce the number of complaints per stop or whether certain kinds of complaints were affected by the use of BWCs.

HOW DO THESE FINDINGS APPLY TO MY AGENCY?



BWCs can increase compliance with officer directives to document stops, and to reduce citizen complaints.



BWCs can be used by law enforcement supervisors and leadership to monitor and address unlawful stops, compliance with directives, and to conduct early intervention.

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