

How police body cam videos impact jurors differently than dashcam videos

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A team of researchers at Northwestern University has found that people serving as mock jurors tend to view police officer intent differently when viewing events captured using body cams versus dash cams. In their paper published in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, the group describes their study, in which they used volunteers as stand-ins for jurors watching either real or staged police action video

events.

The use of body cams by [police](#) officers has become routine in the U.S.—their use is based on the idea that [video](#) footage of encounters between police and the public will make police officers more accountable for their actions. Many jurisdictions have passed laws requiring their use after multiple instances in which questions were raised about the intent of the officers involved and their subsequent actions, particularly in cases when the victim was unarmed. In this new effort, the researchers have sought to determine if the existence of body cam video does, in fact, have an impact on how jurors view the behavior of a police officer involved in a questionable act.

The study involved 1,916 volunteers serving as mock jurors during trials of [police officers](#) and the acts they committed in the line of duty. Some were also asked whether an officer should be indicted. Volunteers were shown video from actual crime scenes or staged event video. Also, some of the staged video was filmed from multiple perspectives. Volunteers were also shown dash cam video of the same events. Afterward, each [volunteer](#) filled out a questionnaire.

The researchers found differences in how volunteers viewed the intent of the officer involved in an incident based on different video. More specifically, they found that mock jurors were less likely to find fault with an officer based on body cam video than they were when watching the same event on dash cam video. But this difference was nullified when the body cam video included footage of the arms and legs of the officer wearing the [body](#) cam.

The researchers suggest their findings indicate that people are less likely to judge a police officer negatively when they are unable to see the officer in the footage—the disassociation prevents them from being able to judge the intent of the person wearing the camera.

More information: Broderick L. Turner et al. Body camera footage leads to lower judgments of intent than dash camera footage, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (2019). [DOI: 10.1073/pnas.1805928116](https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1805928116)

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