



# The impact of recordings of police actions on organisational culture

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## Abstract

**Aim:** The Communications Service of the National Police Headquarters informed the media that body cameras were being tested by the police. The introduction of police body cameras is not only a technological innovation, but also a change that can significantly affect the organisational culture of law enforcement agencies. For this reason, the authors decided to examine the effect of camera footage in shaping the organisational culture of the police. In this study, the authors approach the practice of showing recordings from a sociological point of view, presenting both its advantages and disadvantages.

**Methodology:** The review and analysis of the relevant international literature, as well as domestic experiences and personal experiences gained during practical work, helped to process the topic. The authors approached the topic from its sociological aspect.

**Findings:** In the study, the authors came to the conclusion that there is enough research available regarding the new visibility and visibility, so it is essential to review and utilise body cameras before they are introduced in Hungary.

**Value:** The results of the investigation can be used not only in police work, but also in the education of law enforcement professionals.

**Keywords:** visibility, organisational culture, police action, accountability

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## Introduction

In the past few years, our digital world has changed and developed rapidly. Technological developments are advancing at such a rapid pace that the only limit to what equipment we buy for ourselves is actually only our wallet. Today, almost everyone has a mobile phone, the cameras of which are capable of recording what was previously only possible with professional cameras or video cameras. Of course, technological development and the advance of the media also affect the police and police measures. *‘In recent years, police work has changed from a low-visibility occupation to a high-visibility occupation’* (Keesman, 2023).

Thanks to the proliferation of smartphones, police officers (especially those in uniform) and police actions are routinely recorded on video. The sharing of footage on online platforms has resulted in increased scrutiny of police misconduct (Goldsmith, 2010). However, in several countries, the police do not only work by being filmed, but they also constantly use the body camera (BWC) or use the footage from public area cameras (CCTV). Visibility research generally focuses on when a police action is recorded (Miller, 2016). There is much less research on how police officers themselves use these recordings, whether for accountability or learning purposes or just to strengthen organisational cohesion. The use of body cameras can affect various aspects of organisational culture, including transparency, accountability, trust and communication. Here are some ways that body cameras can affect the organisational culture within the police force.

The Communications Service of the National Police Headquarters informed the Hungarian media in writing that the body cameras were put to trial use at the Budapest Police Headquarters. Body cameras that can be mounted on clothing significantly support the recording of illegal acts and police action, and the recordings can be used as material evidence later on. Based on the positive experiences, they are planning to purchase body cameras and introduce them to the Hungarian police (URL1). There are several European countries where law enforcement agencies already have ample experience in this regard. In our country, not only the police, but also the people performing individual law enforcement tasks,<sup>1</sup> including public area inspectors, field ranger and nature conservation service staff, are increasingly using body cameras to record their actions, given that they often do their work alone. In addition,

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1 See detailed list: Act CXX of 2012 on the activities of certain persons performing law enforcement duties and amending certain acts to ensure action against truancy.

the Magyar Államvasutak Zrt. (Hungarian state railways, hereinafter: MÁV) and the Budapesti Közlekedési Központ (Budapest Transport Center) also use body cameras during ticket inspection work (Héder, 2021). In such cases, in addition to recording the measures, the body cameras also ensure the protection of the wearer, assuming that the person subject to the measure is made to cooperate and deters a possible attack.

In this study, we will approach and present the video recordings of police actions from the perspective of organisational culture. On the basis of several existing studies, we are trying to provide assistance to the domestic law enforcement agency on the possible positive and negative effects of the introduction of body cameras. Just to mention a few examples, education is on the positive side, while data protection problems can arise on the negative side.

We examine what kind of footage the police officers show each other and in what organisational environment, and how this is related to the formation of organisational culture. In summary, we examine what types of footage the police show each other and why. Furthermore, what effect do the videos have on organisational culture and the behavior of individual police officers.

The Hungarian Police has already attempted to make video and audio recordings of police actions. To this end, service vehicles with distinctive markings were equipped with video and audio recording equipment. In the interior of the vehicle (on the center console), there was a Tablet PC on which the police could access various databases, so they could check the person and the vehicle on the spot. These generally involved warrant systems and vehicle or person registration. Thereby reducing the burden on duty officers (duty officers of the Activity Control Center) and speeding up police measures at the same time.

On the official website of the police, [www.police.hu](http://www.police.hu), the Communications Service of the National Police Headquarters announced on 27 02 2015 in an official statement that from 2 March, seven police stations – Debrecen, Dunaújváros, Fonyód, Nagykanizsa, Nyíregyháza, Pécs and Tatabánya – they begin recording police actions on video using industrial PCs installed in service vehicles ([URL2](#)). To ensure the legal background, the Act on the Police was amended, and the National Chief of Police issued ORFK instruction 31/2015. (17 XII) on certain rules for the use of image, image and sound recording devices installed in service vehicles.<sup>2</sup> Based on the idea of the police at the time, the recordings recorded by the video and audio recording equipment would have been used in criminal and infraction proceedings initiated due to crimes and

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2 Instruction 31/2015 (17 XII) of the National Chief of Police on certain rules for the use of image, image and sound recording devices in service vehicles.

violations committed on the spot. If the recordings are not needed, they will be deleted by the police within 30 days. The police also hoped that the equipment would reduce the number of violent behaviour towards the police and increase the law-abiding behaviour and the standard of professional work of the police. Body cameras were also tested by the police for the same reasons. The 60-day test period for this was between 1 January and 16 March, 2015 ([URL3](#)).

Industrial PCs and video and audio recording equipment installed in service vehicles were ultimately not introduced at the Hungarian Police for various reasons. The devices were removed from the vehicles and the ORFK instruction was repealed. Regardless of this, Article 42 of Act XXXIV of 1994 on the Police still provides the opportunity to record images, sound recordings, and make image and sound recordings.<sup>3</sup>

## The ‘new visibility’

Today, a large number of research indicate that the police (here we mainly mean the uniformed police or measures taking place in public areas) have entered a new era of visibility ([Haggerty & Sandhu, 2014](#)). The presence of cell phones with cameras and the development of the media put the previously invisible police in focus with their visibility on the front line ([Thompson, 2005](#)). Goldsmith examined the concept of ‘new visibility’ in two case studies from London and one from Vancouver, noting that with the development of technologies, it is inevitable that police abuses become public, which the police must deal with ([Goldsmith, 2010](#)). In addition to the spread and accelerated development of CCTV systems, the further introduction of BWC cameras further increases the possibility of publicising recordings of police actions (Doyle, 2006). We have previously mentioned the persons carrying out certain law enforcement tasks equipped with body cameras in our country (e.g. field guard, nature conservation guard, etc.), or the MÁV ticket inspectors. However, in their case, the body cameras primarily serve their personal safety, and only secondarily the recording, reviewability, and use of the measures. The Parliamentary Guard also uses body cameras, but the purpose of data management there is to comply with the rules for entering and staying in the protected facility, and to document any violations ([URL4](#)). Within the police, the border police service branch also uses body cameras and cab cameras, but the introduction of their use there is intended to suppress acts of corruption (Balla, 2019).

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3 Act XXXIV of 1994 on the Police.

In countries where body cameras are part of police equipment, it has become clear that their footage is an essential element of investigations and can be used as evidence. It can be said that the main question of research dealing with the issue of visibility was what happens in cases where recordings are used against the police. So, does the use of body cameras encourage greater self-awareness among police officers and reduce the potential for abuse and violence? Some researchers claim that with the spread of cameras in public areas, police have also become more cautious, as it is more difficult to avoid the public eye. The hyper-visibility of policing worldwide has encouraged citizens to be critical of police actions and, when appropriate, to file complaints against the police. For example, mobile phones are increasingly being used to offset the power imbalance between police and civilians (Newell, 2014). Publicised videos of police brutality increase social demand for surveillance (Dunham & Alpert, 2010).

The police occupational culture literature lists a number of ‘core characteristics’ that shape the everyday decisions and practices of police officers, such as law enforcement image and masculine ethos (Keesman, 2023). Other researchers have questioned this and do not consider recordings and their presentation to be such a key feature in shaping organisational culture. Research to date has largely ignored the effects of camera phones on police officers’ behaviour and has largely focused on whether police officers are filmed, rather than how police officers use these videos (Farrar, 2013).

Due to the hierarchical structure of the Hungarian Police, the subordinates are under constant management control, but in addition, the organisation demands loyalty and autonomy from them at the same time (Farkas, Sallai & Krauzer, 2020). The knowledge that police measures are recorded in real time encourages both the police and the citizen to follow the norm. The police officer follows and complies with the countless standards, legislation and instructions that apply to him, and the person subject to the measure cooperates during the measure. During an extraordinary event that may occur, the recording can be used at any time for objective investigation and assessment. There are many such recordings on video-sharing sites (mainly from the USA) of police chases or arrests, which are later used as evidence in court. On the other hand, it should be mentioned that the police action does not create a mutually exclusive role between the police officer and the citizen. Still, the recordings encourage the police to maintain professional standards and ethical behaviour, as they will be held accountable at any time by the recordings. It also has a positive effect on the basic communication of police measures (from both sides).

## Practical example

As part of a larger project, Dutch sociology professor Laura D. Keesman investigated the emotional and situational dynamics of violent police interactions. As part of this project funded by a European Union grant, between 2017 and 2021, she carried out an empirical investigation at the police of two major Dutch cities. The purpose of the study was to analyse the impact of the video recordings detailed above on organisational culture. In the study she later wrote, in order to preserve anonymity, she named both police stations and all the policemen included in the research by pseudonyms. During her field work, she took part in various raids, realisations, and arrests, after which she ‘breathed’ closely with the police. She was there with them when they had lunch, talked, gathered in the lounge, or when they were in public areas, patrolling. The policemen involved in the investigation gradually took the researcher into their confidence and shared sensitive videos and recordings with her. Thus, the professor had the opportunity to look into the life of a closed community and for the purpose of her research examine the organisational culture within the Dutch police.

During fieldwork and observation, she noticed that the presentation of video footage permeated many interactions in different police units. The police officers often showed each other the recordings either for learning, fun, or for the sake of organisational cohesion (Keesman, 2023). She visited several police stations where the bulletin boards were full of reports and photographs of successful police actions. This also strengthens the impression that the police like to look back on themselves, and that successful measures and investigations strengthen the feeling of organisational belonging. On the other hand, it fills the police with pride. The long-term observation made it possible to observe the significance of the presentation of video footage and its consequences in the everyday police environment. The professor took notes on when the police officers showed each other videos. At that time, she used different labeling methods, for example, in the area of presentation (dining room, field, office) or context (strength, self-reflection) or police behaviour. Later, based on these, she experienced overlaps, and then used them to check the established hypotheses during her data analysis.

In fact, it can be stated that regardless of gender, age, or position, every police officer had some kind of video recording that contained police action (chase, arrest, shooting, domestic violence, arresting drug dealers or shoplifters, etc.). However, there were also recordings that included the victimisation of policemen, when, for example, they were attacked while taking action. These recordings were stored either on their own mobile phones or on their office computers.

Most of the footage came from BWCs, CCTV, videos taken by the media or uploaded by civilians to the internet. Police officers often share footage of themselves or their colleagues with each other on social media or through various chat programs. They often edit footage or photoshop photos to prank each other. Police officers share videos in different contexts and locations. For example, in the briefing room, the common dining room, the canteen, offices, parking lots, cars (Keesman, 2023). Police work is not always action-packed and full of danger, but also includes relatively long, idle periods, although this is not true for all service branches (Fassin, 2017). During these periods, in addition to storytelling (previous measures), police officers engage in various video-sharing practices to socialise and perform organisational cultural activities to better understand the job (Keesman, 2023). In order for a video to be showable, it must show a successful police action or, where applicable, a questionable police action that includes unintentional errors. The video should also show the reason for negative or positive events and results. It is also common to share videos of violent incidents that are presented in the media. This not only draws attention to the dangers of police work, but also reinforces the police profession as inherently dangerous (Punch, 1979). While the risk perceived by the police is disproportionate to the actual risk (Cullen, Link, Travis & Lemming, 1983). They maintain an image that violence is always a threat (Paoline III, 2003). In addition, police officers reinforce their superior position and emphasise the police's sole right to use force. Both are classic topics of police culture (Westley, 1970).

There are videos that are popular and widespread within the police. Be it recording the arrest of a criminal or resisting a police action. Anyone, senior or rookie, has the right to present these recordings. The presentation of videos therefore flattens the sense of hierarchy. Like telling 'field stories' (Van Maanen, 1973), showing videos is also rewarding because it shows the skill, courage, or laughter of the policeman featured in it.

## Entertainment

First of all, the police show each other the videos to illustrate how exciting their work is. By showing the videos, they emphasise the danger and unpredictability of police work. On the other hand, the recordings highlight the physicality of their work. As one Dutch policeman put it: *'it makes it much more lively when you see your colleagues doing their job on the street'*. So, reliving the moments is very important among police officers. For example, when they watch a video of a riot on YouTube and show each other how they moved in such a dangerous

situation. This is when the WOW effect comes and they laugh at each other. Such videos are entertaining because they emphasise the ethos of bravery that is central to police culture (Keesman, 2023). Movies and series also convey how exciting, fast-paced and dangerous police work is. Perhaps that is why the police also think that this is how the police should be, and that is why they like to watch videos of themselves. By showing such videos, police officers maintain the illusion that the police profession is exciting and action-packed (Fassin, 2017).

The fun aspect of the videos comes when these footages are shown by the police at a large gathering. For example, at a year-end party. Showing such videos at police gatherings reminds police officers of their role in society and strengthens group cohesion. By making and editing videos, police officers create their own visual world that offers an alternative to media footage. This reinforces the us versus them mentality (Waddington, 1999). In any case, policemen like footage that emphasises a sense of superiority or portrays their authority. On one occasion, for example, during the empirical research, Laura D. Keesman experienced police officers showing each other a video recorded by CCTV. During the 2021 COVID-19 epidemic, a lockdown was ordered in the Netherlands and it was forbidden to receive visitors. Based on the recording, young university students (about 20 people) gather for a house party. When the policeman knocks on the door, a TikTok mix of the song 'Oh no' is playing on the recording. Then a lot of laughter broke out among the police officers watching the video, because the song enhances the feeling of getting caught and being successfully 'captured'. This reinforces the idea that the police are there to enforce the rules and there is no escaping them. During the pandemic, the police more often shared recordings that showed violations of the COVID-19 rules. This also provided them with a kind of excitement in a period that had become boring, and the video, if only for a short time, took them out of everyday life.

Many videos are also fun to show because they contain humorous footage. Researchers have long demonstrated that police officers use humor to interpret work experiences and process tragic events (Pogrebin & Poole, 1988) and to build organisational cohesion (Holdaway, 1988).

Recently, the Hungarian Police has been putting a lot more emphasis on appearing on social media. The police operate an official Facebook, Instagram and TikTok account on which they regularly post various articles or video recordings. The general purpose of these recordings is to promote the profession, raise the reputation of the police, and approach the profession from a human perspective. The content of the recordings is often light and funny, but most of the time they are about the presentation of effective investigations, measures and arrests. However, these recordings are not only intended for civilians, but



also for colleagues. One of the authors actively participates in the production of various video recordings in his county as a press officer. Based on the feedback from colleagues, the police will always look at it, analyse it and comment on it. In particular, recordings of successful arrests play an important role in organisational culture (increasing police ethos). There are no official statistics on it, but the feedback shows that colleagues are also interested in the recordings. Professional police officers are expected to be professional in relation to recordings, and each recording is often evaluated based on these. Civilians, however, often look at the footage through a different lens. The two points of view are similar, but they often differ from each other.

## Education

In general, police officers don't like criticism. However, the videos record their individual actions in black and white, which creates the opportunity to analyse them later. Of course, the projection of these recordings is not always positive. The videos confront the police officers with their possible weaknesses and mistakes, and create an opportunity to analyse and discuss them together. In addition to storytelling, the presentation of videos is also about recording and transferring knowledge (Shearing & Ericson, 1991). Video recordings of police actions are also used in our country for educational purposes. Most of these are about extraordinary events, or about police actions when things did not go as expected, the communication between the police was inadequate, or they did not act in accordance with the law. The triad of legality, professionalism and proportionality was 'damaged' from some aspect. Such recordings are also presented to future police officers at the Ludovika University of Public Service or at the Police Education and Training Center. In addition, the deployment units are the ones who regularly analyse and evaluate their body and head camera recordings, for educational purposes. In addition to the fact that police officers learn from each other's mistakes, they also use the video as a tool to reflect on their own actions. Several body camera recordings show how the policeman becomes a victim, so the person under the measure attacks him. Analysing such footage is a very good opportunity for the police to confront their wrong decisions and get answers on how they could have avoided or prevented the attack.

For educational purposes, it is also very important to analyse recordings of the kind that show incidents, violations or crimes committed by the police. However, it should be noted here that the scope of the question of holding policemen accountable may differ significantly in Hungary and in other countries. Chan

(1999) has shown that police organisations find it difficult to deal with situations and videos involving guilty police officers. The police and police measures must also be transparent. Therefore, video recordings can be suitable as a means of accountability and for learning purposes. For example, Dutch trainers present young police officers with video recordings of their colleagues using unjustified violence. After that, together with the trainees, they discuss what, in their opinion, would have been the correct police behaviour and correct police action. The video helps police officers think about the legal framework for the use of force and how to deal with the strong emotions that arise during an action, such as anger or fear. Virtual reality is therefore already being used at Dutch police academies, thereby socialising new police officers. They strengthen their sense of belonging and organisational culture, but also show what is good and what is not in police work.

## Summary

The presentation of video footage is an essential part of police life. Police officers show, watch, share and discuss with each other videos of police actions, victimisation or police violence. These recordings and the effect they cause shape the organisational culture of the police (Keesman, 2023). Primarily, the presentation of these recordings serves a social and educational function. Secondly, videos are used as a tool to analyse police actions and to improve them. Similar to the storytelling of previous measures, videos are used by police officers to make sense of their work environment and thereby shape organisational identity (Van Hulst, 2013). Empirical research by Laura D. Keesman revealed that during the period of inactivity, police officers show each other videos, fill the time, and use this to conduct organisational cultural activities (Fassin, 2017). On the other hand, presentability can transform traditional police culture, as it opens a dialogue about offenses and lawful and proportionate police action, stimulates reflexive thinking and encourages accountability (Keesman, 2023). This is relevant given that police officers have extraordinary powers to use coercive force, are perceived as legitimate by the public, and are increasingly under pressure to account for their work due to increased visibility (Deuchar, Crichlow, & Fallik, 2020). Therefore, this analysis is also useful for understanding how the police legitimise inappropriate behavior, such as excessive violence (Skolnick & Fyfe, 1993), and how they build trusting public-police relations (Goldsmith, 2005).

The concept of presentability offers a theoretical change. It rethinks previous research on the ‘new visibility’ and emphasises the ability to act with videos.

Police around the world are experimenting with online platforms (Instagram, TikTok) in order to increase transparency and create a kind of connection with citizens. So they strive for a kind of two-way communication when, for example, they ask civilians for information about a crime or its perpetrator. However, this is only one part of visibility. The police are not only being watched, but they are also watching themselves and their actions. Visibility is therefore a form of internal visibility. The concept of visibility is useful for a broader socio-political understanding of contemporary policing, and, like visibility, it is a full-fledged sociological category (Brighenti, 2007).

However, visibility also raises many ethical and data protection issues. On the one hand, it puts the police officers in the recordings in a vulnerable position if they did not consent to their presentation and transmission. There are many people who don't like to look back, because then they relive the emotions experienced at the moment of making. The lack of regulation and supervision of the production and distribution of videos entails the risk that they will not be used for the permitted purpose. All over the world, several photographs or video recordings of suspects are already being published, which scandals are tarnishing the reputation of the police. On the other hand, it also raises ethical questions from the researchers' side, the issue of footage showing illegal police violence.

The police of our country must draw enough attention from foreign research and the police practice of other nations, even before the introduction of body cameras. A technical and legal environment must be provided that guarantees presentation in accordance with data protection principles.

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## Laws and regulations

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Act XXXIV of 1994 on the Police

Act CXX of 2012 on the activities of certain persons performing law enforcement duties and amending certain acts to ensure action against truancy

Instruction 31/2015 (17 XII) of the National Chief of Police on certain rules for the use of image, image and sound recording devices in service vehicles

## Online links in the article

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URL1: ORFK – bevezetjük a testkamerák használatát [ORFK – We Are Introducing the Use of Body Cameras]. <https://index.hu/belfold/2023/10/06/orfk-brfk-rendorseg-testkamera-rendorok-major-robert/>

URL2: ORFK – Tesztüzem [ORFK – Test Operation]. <https://www.police.hu/hu/hirek-es-informaciok/legfrissebb-hireink/kozrendvedelem/tesztuzem>

URL3: ORFK – Tesztüzemben a testkamera [ORFK – Body Camera in Test Operation]. <https://www.police.hu/hirek-es-informaciok/legfrissebb-hireink/kozlekedesrendeszeti-tesztuzemben-a-testkamera>

URL4: Országgyűlési Őrség – Adatvédelmi tájékoztató [Parliamentary Guard – Data Protection Information]. [https://www.orszaggyulesiorseg.hu/documents/126480/1724451/testkamera\\_tajekoztato\\_2019.pdf/aeb5bfcc-7c19-5568-7cf1-0317fc05e543](https://www.orszaggyulesiorseg.hu/documents/126480/1724451/testkamera_tajekoztato_2019.pdf/aeb5bfcc-7c19-5568-7cf1-0317fc05e543)

## Reference of the article according to APA regulation

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No dataset is associated with this article.

### **Open access**

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