



# The Use of Alternative Recording Devices during Police Operations in Bontoc, Mountain Province

Parline Angyap Tafaleng-Ullalim

College of Criminal Justice Education, University of the Cordilleras, Baguio, Philippines

Email: parlineullalim727@gmail.com

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## Abstract

This qualitative study assessed twelve Bontoc police personnel's attitudes towards integrating the Alternative Recording Devices (ARDs) during police operations in Bontoc, Mountain Province. The study also investigated the effects of these ARDs on police operations. The findings revealed that participants had shown positive attitudes among some officers who viewed ARDs as tools to enhance capabilities, improve safety, and facilitate documentation. However, certain officers also have shown resistance to change and privacy concerns. As for the effects of integrating ARDs during police operations, improved documentation, reduced complaints against police personnel, accuracy issues due to ARD limitations, added protection for all, and trust issues due to privacy infringement were the identified themes. The study emphasizes the importance of addressing officers' attitudes toward ARDs, providing adequate training and ensuring the secure and effective use of recording devices in police operations.

## Subject Areas

Sociology

## Keywords

Alternative Recording Devices, Police Attitudes, Police Operation, Transparency

## 1. Introduction

Technology has been a significant driver of law enforcement strategies and tactics throughout history. Early innovations such as the telegraph and telephone revolutionized police communication, enabling faster response times and better

coordination [1]. The introduction of two-way radios in police cars during the 1930s further enhanced real-time communication and response capabilities [2]. [3] also detailed the advent of computers allowed for the creation of databases for criminal records, significantly improving information retrieval efficiency. More recently, the adoption of the body-worn camera (BWC), an electronic camera system designated to law enforcement units for creating, generating, sending, receiving, storing, displaying, and processing audio-visual recordings that may be worn during law enforcement activities which aimed to enhance accountability and transparency in policing, and community relations [4].

According to Gardiner and Molinari [5], England was the first country to implement police body cameras on a national level, starting in 2006 with the Domestic Violence Enforcement Unit equipping officers with head cameras. This initiative led to the preservation of high-quality first-disclosure evidence from victims, proving particularly valuable in prosecutions when victims hesitated to press charges.

In the United States of America, [6] suggested that the use of police body cameras in the U.S. became prominent after the fatal shooting of Michael Brown, an unarmed black teenager, by a white police officer in Ferguson, Missouri, in 2014. The incident, marked by conflicting witness reports, sparked a national discussion on police accountability and the relationship between officers and minorities. The ensuing controversy highlighted the need for police body cameras to address concerns about police conduct.

[7] wrote about the death of Eric Garner in Staten Island, New York after a police officer placed him in a chokehold during an arrest for allegedly selling untaxed cigarettes. Garner's repeated pleas of "I cannot breathe" were captured on video by a bystander. The incident sparked national outrage, particularly after a grand jury declined to indict the officer involved. A year later, there was an incident involving police conduct. The death of Freddie Gray occurred in Baltimore, Maryland, in April 2015 following his arrest by police. He suffered a severe spinal cord injury while being transported in a police van. According to [8], the lack of proper restraints and the officers' neglect in providing timely medical assistance led to widespread protests and civil unrest. These controversies led to the proposal by then-President Obama to reimburse communities for the cost of body cameras to address the "simmering distrust" between police departments and minority communities, improve transparency, and enhance accountability in law enforcement [9].

Similarly, in the Philippines, the death of Kian delos Santos in August 2017 during an anti-drug operation cast a stark light on the conduct of the Philippine National Police (PNP). The 17-year-old student was killed in what police described as a shootout, but eyewitness accounts and CCTV footage suggested otherwise, leading to public outrage and calls for accountability. This incident, among others, contributed to the Supreme Court of the Philippines mandating the use of BWCs by the PNP in June 2021, particularly during the execution of warrants, to ensure transparency and uphold human rights. Members of the PNP were also mandated to use at least two recording devices to ensure that the

police operation did not violate any rights of the persons involved [10].

The PNP, however, is often restricted by insufficient financial resources [11]. It has been disclosed that the Philippine National Police (PNP) has been able to allocate a scant total of 2696 units, constituting a paltry 8.42% of the 32,000-strong force. The Chief of the PNP, General Guillermo Eleazar, has acknowledged that the distribution of these devices has been limited to urban police precincts, leaving more than 1,500 municipal police stations bereft of this critical equipment, as reported by CNN in 2021.

This data indicates a significant shortfall in the distribution of body-worn cameras (BWC), with a particularly serious scarcity in municipal police stations. This shortage necessitates using alternative recording methods during police operations in these areas as mandated by the DOJ. In a statement by PNP Chief Gen. Guillermo Eleazar during a press conference held on August 2, 2021, he announced that despite the limited number of BWCs, PNP operatives must use alternative recording devices during police operations.

An Alternative Recording Device (ARD) refers to any electronic equipment capable of capturing audio-visual data during law enforcement activities, excluding body-worn cameras. ARDs can include handheld video cameras, dashboard cameras, mobile phones, and other portable recording devices. These tools serve to maintain the integrity and transparency of police operations, ensuring that accurate records are kept even when body-worn cameras are unavailable.

With only a limited number of body-worn cameras available, personnel from the Bontoc Municipal Police Station (BMPS) in Mountain Province have started to utilize two ARDs during their operations. These devices were first utilized in September 2021 during search warrants concerning violations of the Comprehensive Dangerous Drug Act of 2002. The limited availability of body-worn cameras and the use of two ARDs during police operations present a straightforward issue, highlighting the necessity to understand the perspectives of police officers assigned in these areas regarding the use and efficacy of such devices.

By gaining insights into their viewpoints, the outcome of this study would then be used to address a gap in the literature concerning the attitudes of police officers using alternative recording device technology; their operational effectiveness may be assessed, understand the challenges they face, and identify any potential limitations associated with the use of ARDs. Additionally, the results of this study may be used in implementing targeted training programs that will help ensure that the BMPS police personnel's operational needs and challenges are adequately addressed. Lastly, a policy brief may be crafted and adopted by the Philippine National Police in Bontoc, Mountain Province to enhance the integration of ARDs, address challenges, and optimize the benefits of using alternative recording devices in police operations.

## 2. Objectives of the Study

This study explored the overall perception of the BMPS personnel regarding in-

tegrating ARDs instead of the BWCs during police operations. Specifically, this aimed:

- 1) to examine the BMPS police officers' attitude towards the integration of the ARDs during police operations; and
- 2) to determine the effects of integrating ARDs during police operations.

### 3. Design and Method

This study utilized a qualitative research design with a descriptive research method. The locale of the study is Bontoc, Mountain Province. Using the purposive sampling, twelve identified participants included five police investigators from the Investigation Section, two personnel from the Women's Desk Section, and five personnel from the Patrol Section of Bontoc Municipal Police Station (BMPS). They were recommended by the BMPS Chief of Police because, according to him, they were the personnel who had already used the alternative recording devices during their police operations.

The purpose of the study was explained to all participants and were asked for their verbal consent to participate in the interview. Upon agreeing, written consent was given to each participant, who was interviewed individually using the approved interview guide questions. To avoid confusion, the researcher gave the eight police personnel codenames P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11 and P12.

The collected data were transcribed and translated into the English language. The researcher had these translations checked by the participants to ensure that all participants' perceptions were portrayed as voiced during interviews. The data's trustworthiness was done to guarantee its credibility, dependability, conformability, and transferability [12].

No misleading material or accusations were used in the final manuscript. With no corrections, the researcher coded the participants' typical responses to the researcher's question. According to [13], the essence of code is to ensure that connection is made using the reiterative process, which involves multiple readings in order to gain a more in-depth interpretation of the meanings of the verbatim narrative from the participants. After the data were coded, it was categorized and synthesized for the emergence of principal themes. Thematic Analysis (T.A.) was used to analyze the themes.

### 4. Results and Discussions

#### **BMPS Police Officers' Attitude Towards the Integration of Alternative Recording Devices During Police Operations**

**Acceptance is a form of Obedience to Superiors.** Obedience is the tendency of individuals to comply with authority figures, even when it contradicts their moral or ethical beliefs [14]. During the interview with P1, he mentioned that since it is an order from the DOJ and the Chief PNP, all police officers, including himself, must comply. He further stated, *"There is this mantra in the police or-*

ganization which we all adhere to, which is to obey orders and never complain for so long as the order is valid and within the bounds of law, we must comply.” P3 had the same sentiment when he said, “We have orders to follow, so if you do not wish to receive a memo demanding an explanation. There is nothing wrong with the order, and it is, in fact, beneficial towards our organization.” These statements suggest that the participants have a strong culture of obedience and compliance to orders given to them by their supervisors and, hence, accept the use of ARDs during police operations.

P4 mentioned that she would do as mandated because she trusted the decision of the Chief PNP. She further said, “The decision was wise, and I believe that was his way of protecting not only the community from possible police abuse but also protecting the members of the PNP organization from possible doubts in the validity and legality of police operations.” This can coincide with the finding that officers are more likely to comply with supervisors and adhere to the policies of the police organization when they perceive that supervisors’ actions and directives are motivated by good intentions and kindness [15].

**Acceptance Due to the Benefits of Technological Change.** Four participants embraced the integration of ARDs into their policing activities, viewing them as technological tools that can enhance their capabilities and improve their safety. According to P2, he said that using the technology through video recordings made their jobs more manageable as they did not need to keep on explaining themselves. He further said, “The use of these devices had been used worldwide; it is about time that these are used, especially with civilian interactions when police officers are also vulnerable to public scrutiny and criticisms. Through these devices, we can invalidate malicious gossip and comments thrown at us.” Police officers are vested with the authority to enforce the law and, to some extent, use force; hence, their actions and behaviors are constantly under public scrutiny. [16] explained in their findings that the manner in which police officers behaved while in the conduct of their duty had always caught the interest of everyone, and with the rise of technology, citizens may make false accusations, and officers have a perceived sense of protection through these cameras.

P7 mentioned, “Technology is indispensable in our work as police officers. The body-worn cameras and the smartphones make our tasks easier, assisting us in our police reports by replaying what had truly happened rather than doing the traditional note taking.” These statements imply that they have a positive attitude towards using the ARD because of the benefits these devices provide during police operations.

**Resistance to Change.** A phenomenon known as resistance to change pertains to the negative attitudes that the employees reflect during organizational change. Not all police officers are receptive to the use of ARDs. P5, P6, and P12 have shown negative views and exhibit adverse reactions toward these changes.

According to P5,

“These gadgets prove our organization does not trust us. I do not under-

stand why we need to take videos of our activities because these are just a waste of time on our part. Can you imagine taking a video of arrest operations? How will a police officer do his job like running after the suspect and protecting himself if he has to carry a phone to ensure the operation is being recorded?”

This explains that police officers tend to get distracted by these technological gadgets as they may pay more attention to them than to situations around them.

P6 had the same sentiment, saying that,

“I am near my retirement, and these new processes are complicated for an old-school student like me. The first time we used the body camera and the phone of one junior when we arrested suspects of marijuana transportation, I asked my juniors to take charge of the documentation because the young ones are better at technology. Indeed, you cannot teach old dogs new tricks.”

The statement of P6 implies that he is resistant to adopting new technologies and processes, such as ARDs, due to being more comfortable with traditional methods. The officer acknowledges that the younger generation may be more adept at using technology and have more familiarity with modern tools. However, he believes that older individuals like himself may need help adapting to these new technologies. [17] support this finding by stating that older persons use their age as a reason not to utilize technology.

As for P12, he said, “*In policing, decisions are made within seconds, not only for our safety but for the safety of the community members. With these recording devices, our discretion as police is being taken away from us, creating this notion that our decisions are not good enough.*” This statement agrees with the findings of [18] that police agencies have difficulties introducing and implementing new technology to older police officers as these are viewed as suspicious by the management.

This finding highlights the need for training programs that may be implemented to address officers’ resistance to change which may include familiarization workshops that educate officers on the benefits of ARDs, such as improved accountability, transparency, and enhanced evidence collection.

**Resistance Due to Privacy.** Some police officers may share concerns about privacy implications related to the use of ARDs. P9 and P10 expressed their hesitancy in using their phones during police operations.

P9 said that,

“From the moment the operation begins, we have to turn on the assigned phone, which is usually our phone, to record the operation. The phone used will be turned over to the proper unit so they can take the necessary action to save the recorded video. With this process, I need to put my phone on airplane mode so there will be no distractions. It makes me uncomfortable because I cannot access my messages or receive calls.”

In another interview, P10 mentioned, *“The memo is good because of the transparency benefits it provides, but what bothers me is that when both personal and work data is put in one gadget because we use our phones in our operations, anybody who has access to the phone may be able to see its contents.”* The statements imply that the police officers support the order of the Chief PNP. However, their discomfort comes from the Privacy and security of their data when using their phones for work-related tasks, which creates anxiety in using the ARD. This is supported by the findings of [19], who mention that officers voiced their fear for their reputations with the use of cameras, which causes anxiety and changes how they conduct their duties.

P11, who is part of the Women and Child Police Desk, was also uncomfortable with the ARD’s inclusion in their operation because of the sensitivity of the cases they are handling. She maintained that if police officers are uncomfortable using the ARD, it goes the same to the person being applied to. According to her (P11), *“Legally speaking, taking videos of persons being arrested is not a breach of Privacy. However, with children and women as our main clients, and more often than not, we attend to domestic issues, having the camera makes it uncomfortable for the clients and for us who are responding to such cases.”*

These interviews imply that the police officers understand the importance of protecting sensitive or personal data captured by the ARD but acknowledge that these gadgets must be carefully managed to avoid privacy breaches which can be attained by establishing clear data management policies, such as defining specific timeframes for data retention and criteria for data deletion, and implementing strict access control mechanisms will ensure that only authorized individuals can access recorded data.

### **Effects of Integrating the Alternative Recording Devices During BMPS Operations**

**Improved Documentation.** ARDs help substantiate memory and record direct evidence of interactions between police officers and the community they serve [20]. P7 mentioned that since the integration of ARDs, particularly during arrest operations, their police reports were easily written because police officers are able to review the videos, which provided an objective account of events. Additionally, P2 said that he is more confident with the submitted report, which can be used as evidence in legal proceedings because of the presence of these recordings. As expressed by [21], law enforcement has had to adapt to the fact that citizens and officers have an increased ability to record events due to technological development easily. These alternative recording devices, such as cell phones, can capture audio, video, and still images, which is beneficial in police work, especially for documentation purposes.

**Lower Complaints against Police Personnel.** The use of ARDs by the Bontoc police personnel can positively impact reducing citizen complaints against them. According to P1, *“There had been a reduction in citizen complaints against us, and what is good is the increased cooperation between the Bontoc community and the Bontoc police maybe because since everyone is aware that*

*our actions are being recorded, we all try to keep our heads cool and try our best to observe maximum tolerance avoiding altercations when interacting with the community.*” One positive effect of using recording devices, as [22] posited, is less use of force and citizen complaints, thereby improving citizen relationships.

**Accuracy Issues Due to ARD Limitations.** Although these devices are often advanced, they may still have limitations. P12 said in the interview that some officers’ phones struggle to function during rainy days and dark areas, making the persons in the recording unrecognizable and affecting the officers’ ability to review and analyze the recording. He continued, *“Because of the poor quality of the recorded videos, we had to ask for a copy of the CCTV footage from the nearby stores to prove that I did not hit the arrested person.”* High-quality video recordings are crucial in ensuring transparency, accountability, and the protection of civilians and law enforcement officers during police operations. Technological limitations that compromise the quality or reliability of recordings can affect the ability to review and analyze incidents accurately, potentially impacting officer safety and accountability.

**Added Protection for All.** According to [23], people tend to be more self-conscious about what they say and try not to show aggression while videotaping. P3 described how the ARDs they used during their night patrol helped prevent aggressive confrontations with community members. He said, *“It works both ways; we, police officers, tend to be more composed, and the persons we are dealing with are also aware that they are being videotaped and become more cautious of their actions.”*

P4 and P7 have the same observation. P4 cannot help but laugh while recounting his experience, saying that while they were conducting their night patrol, five male teenagers were shouting because they were drunk. When P4 and his buddy told them not to shout as they were creating a disturbance, two teenagers shouted back. At the same time, another picked up a rock and was about to throw it at the police officers, but one of their companions noticed that P4 was holding a phone while his buddy was wearing a body camera. He informed his companions, and they started walking away quietly. This implies that the presence of phones and body cameras had a deterrent effect on the teenagers who were causing a disturbance, which highlights the benefits of using technology such as phones to help de-escalate conflicts. This is further explained by [24], positing that alternative recording devices provide deterrence benefits, encouraging both police and the crowd to act civilly as they are aware that they are being recorded.

**Trust Issues Due to Infringement on Privacy.** Three participants maintained that because they had been using their phones to record police operations, violation infringement on Privacy happened. P9, P10, and P11 had the same observation regarding the ARDs and Privacy.

P9 mentioned that,

*“Because the police station had only three body cameras, officers had to use their phones for recording. Some officers were reluctant to use their phones*

due to privacy concerns. In one incident, when an officer used their phone to transfer an arrest video to the station's computer, two other officers snooped on the phone owner's incoming messages and made fun of the content. The phone owner was angry because those officers were supposed to transfer the file, not look through personal messages. After that incident, no one at the station wanted to use their phones to document police activities except for the Investigation Section personnel.”

This suggests that when officers are forced to use their devices due to a lack of proper equipment, it can result in unauthorized access to personal information and misuse of data, as seen in the case where officers invaded the Privacy of a colleague by reading their messages. The incident described by P9 highlights the importance of having dedicated and secure equipment for recording police operations to ensure the integrity and confidentiality of the captured data.

P10 shared the same outcome when they integrated ARDs into their police operations. He said that after using ARDs in police operations, he sometimes forgets to delete recorded videos from his phone. When P10 gets home, his wife sees these videos, revealing work-related matters that should have remained confidential. This implies that unintentional retention of recorded videos can lead to privacy issues, as sensitive information captured during police operations may be exposed to unintended individuals, such as family members.

P11 admitted that sometimes, when she makes an arrest, the family of the person being arrested asks not to record the event because they feel it is invading their privacy. They may cry and express strong emotions. Even though recording arrests is required, P11 sometimes chooses not to record the arrest but still follows other procedures like taking mugshots at the police station. This implies that there is inconsistency in recording arrests during police operations, despite the mandated use of recording devices, leading to a lack of accountability and transparency in law enforcement actions.

The privacy issues that arise with improper data management, respect for one's privacy, and inconsistency of recording practices erode trust within the police force and raise concerns about the integrity of police operations, hindering efforts to build positive community-police relationships and ensure justice and fairness in the criminal justice system. This finding highlights the importance of creating and implementing a set of policies that can effectively address privacy and trust issues associated with the use of ARDs, ensuring effective and ethical deployment in police operations.

## 5. Conclusion

The study explored the attitudes of BMPS police officers towards integrating ARDs during police operations and identified factors influencing their acceptance of this technology. Positive attitudes were noted among some officers who viewed ARDs as tools to enhance capabilities, improve safety, and facilitate documentation. However, certain officers also observed resistance to change and

privacy concerns. The effects of integrating ARDs into police operations were examined, revealing benefits such as improved documentation, reduced complaints against police personnel, and increased protection for both officers and the community. However, challenges such as technological limitations impacting accuracy and privacy infringements due to using personal phones for recording were identified. In conclusion, the study emphasizes the importance of addressing officers' attitudes toward ARDs, providing adequate training, and ensuring the secure and effective use of recording devices in police operations.

## **6. Recommendations**

The study's findings lead to three recommendations.

First, the PNP should develop a training program that offers concrete and practical steps to address the identified challenges and capitalize on the opportunities presented by integrating ARDs during police operations. This program may include familiarization workshops that educate officers on the benefits of ARDs, such as improved accountability, transparency, and enhanced evidence collection. Additionally, the training should cover privacy considerations, outlining the legal frameworks and ethical guidelines for using ARDs and ensuring officers understand the importance of respecting citizens' privacy.

Second, the researcher recommends implementing robust data security measures, such as encryption and secure storage solutions, to safeguard sensitive information. Hence, crafting a policy brief can effectively address privacy and trust issues regarding the integration of ARDs in police operations. This policy brief aims to provide actionable recommendations to address privacy and trust issues associated with the use of ARDs, ensuring effective and ethical deployment in police operations. This may include establishing clear data management policies, such as defining specific timeframes for data retention and criteria for data deletion and implementing strict access control mechanisms to ensure that only authorized individuals can access recorded data. The policy brief may also include mandatory training sessions for officers on privacy best practices and the importance of safeguarding citizens' rights.

Lastly, more research is required to understand how police officers' use of body cameras and ADRs affects citizens' privacy.

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## **Conflicts of Interest**

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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