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CALIBRATING PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY

*The Fragile Relationship between
Police Departments and Civilians in
an Age of Video Surveillance*

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Calibrating Public Accountability

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Abstract: Accountability is a staple of Public Administration scholarship, but scholars have been unsuccessful in developing a predictive model of accountable behavior. Large swaths of research about accountability still focus on scarcely read annual reports as video footage of police encounters are watched and discussed by citizens regularly. In this Element, we seek to further a predictive model of accountability by understanding the norms and expectations associated with the implementation of body-worn cameras. Specifically, this research examines when police departments release, or do not release, footage to the public and the expectations civilians have about the release of that footage. Indirectly, the norms and expectations associated with this technology have broad implications for societal values and the relationship between civilians and law enforcement. Our findings suggest the relationship between law enforcement and civilians is central to the implementation of this policy and, more broadly, accountability.

Keywords: accountability, body-worn cameras, experimental video vignette, law enforcement, surveillance, transparency, trust

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