

# Predictors of Body-Worn Camera Diffusion amidst the Push for Greater Transparency in 21st Century Policing in the United States

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# BWCs: What the Research Tells Us

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CRIMINOLOGY  
& Public Policy

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

RESEARCH ON BODY-WORN CAMERAS

## Research on body-worn cameras

What we know, what we need to know

Cynthia Lum | Megan Stoltz | Christopher S. Koper | J. Amber Scherer

George Mason University

- ▶ ~70 studies examine the impact of BWCs on:
  - ▶ Officer attitudes, behaviors
  - ▶ Community attitudes, behaviors
  - ▶ Investigations
  - ▶ Organizational outcomes

# Motivation for Acquiring BWCs



- ▶ Roughly 47% of general-purpose agencies using them as of 2016 \*
  - ▶ Improve officer safety (82%)
  - ▶ Reduce/resolve complaints (81%)
  - ▶ Improve evidence quality (79%)
  - ▶ Reduce agency liability (78%)
  - ▶ **Improve accountability (74%)**
  - ▶ **Improve community perceptions (57%)**

# Diffusion of Innovations\*

- ▶ **The Innovation:** Body-worn cameras
  - ▶ Part of a push for greater transparency
- ▶ **The Innovator:** Thousands of local police departments
  - ▶ Ranging in size from 1 to 1,000+ sworn officers
- ▶ **The Environment:** Thousands of municipalities
  - ▶ Various *institutional sovereigns* and their accompanying expectations/demands\*\*

\* Wejnert, B. (2002). Integrating models of diffusion of innovations: A conceptual framework. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 28(1), 297–326.

\*\* Crank, J. P., & Langworthy, R. (1992). An institutional perspective of policing. *The Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, 83(2), 338–363.

# Research Questions

1. What factors are associated with the **use of BWCs**?
2. What factors are associated with executives' broader **commitment to transparency**?

# Our Data

Mail/online survey of 2,496  
municipal police chiefs

Winter of 2018

Stratified random sample

- # sworn: 0-24, 25-49, 50-99, 100+

N = 675 (27% RR)

# Outcomes

- ▶ **Agency currently uses BWCs** (1 = yes, 0 = no)
- ▶ **Importance of providing info to the public** ( $\alpha = .73$ )
  - ▶ Ongoing police investigations
  - ▶ Changes in policing style or tactics
  - ▶ Situations where officers use non-deadly force
  - ▶ Situations where officers use deadly force
  - ▶ Credible allegations of officer misconduct

# Covariates

- ▶ Population
- ▶ OIS rate (state level)
- ▶ Violent crime rate
- ▶ %Black
- ▶ %Hispanic
- ▶ %Trump voters
- ▶ Support from Sovereigns
- ▶ Northeast (ref.)
- ▶ South
- ▶ Midwest
- ▶ West
- ▶ Using BWCs\*

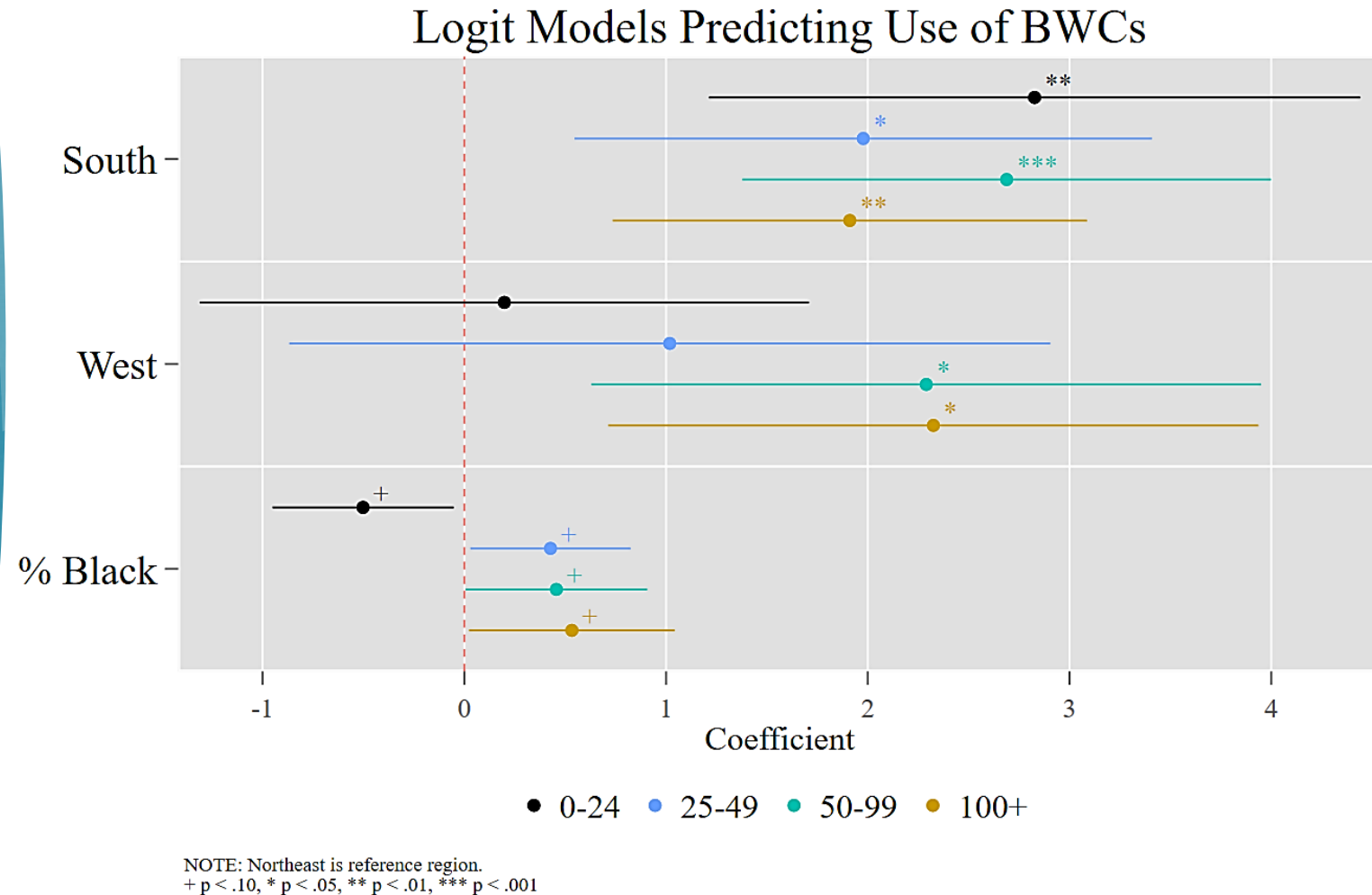


## Results (RQ1)

Regional differences  
across all strata

%Black operates  
differently in the smallest  
stratum

Other covariates NS

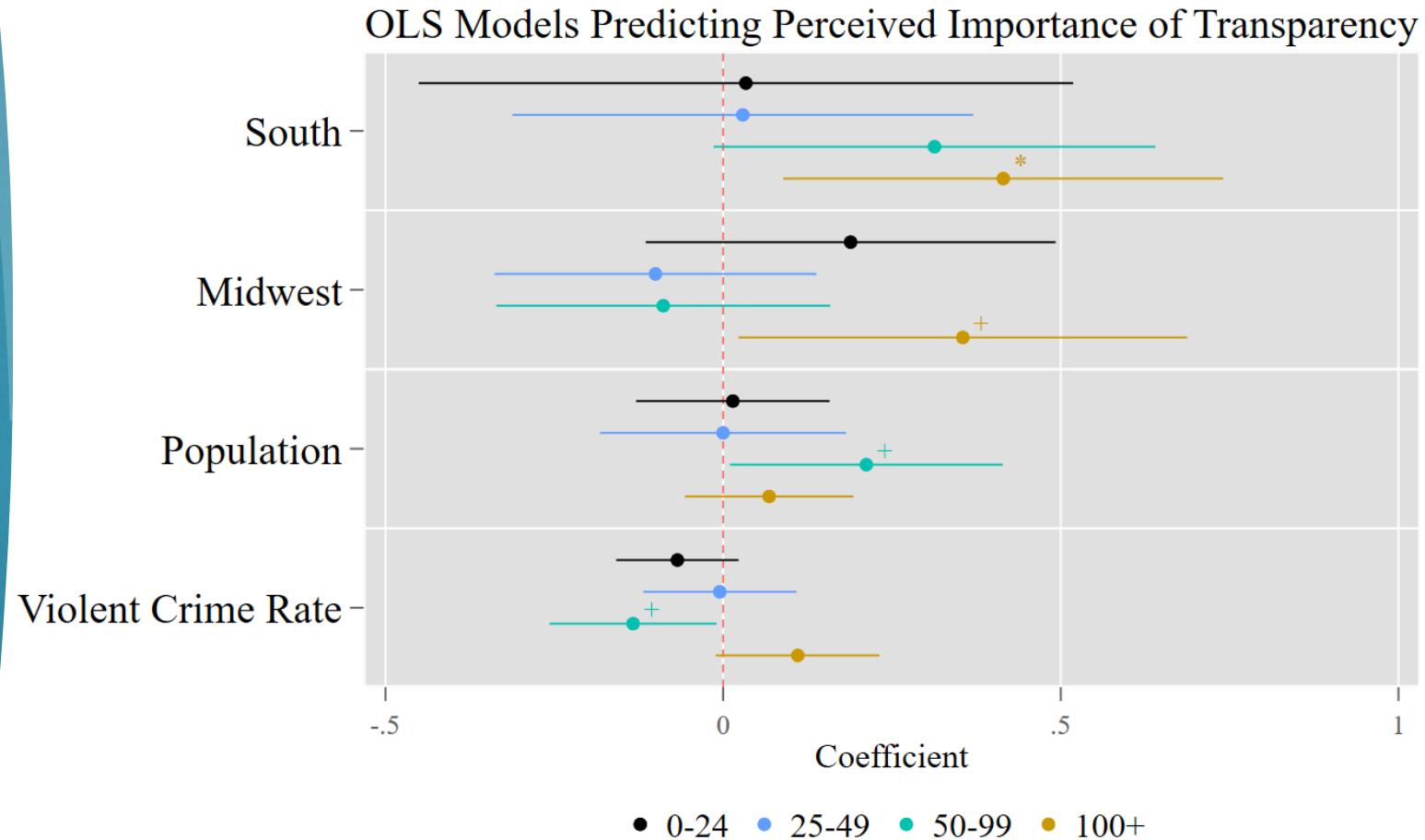


## Results (RQ2)

More regional differences

Population, violent crime

Other covariates NS



NOTE: Northeast is reference region.  
+ p < .10, \* p < .05, \*\* p < .01, \*\*\* p < .001

# Limitations

- ▶ Small sample sizes, limited power
- ▶ No sheriff's departments
- ▶ Can't determine when BWCs were adopted or how they're being used

# Looking Ahead

- ▶ Need to continue asking why agencies adopt BWCs
- ▶ Transparency following a critical incident
  - ▶ How willing to release footage or other information?
  - ▶ How willing to meet with the suspect's family?
- ▶ Is willingness affected by optics of the video?

# Thank you!

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