

Is There Empirical Evidence that Surveillance Cameras Reduce Crime?

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In summary, based on the papers, articles and reports reviewed, here it seems that CCTV is most effective when combined with other crime reducing/detering methods such as improved lighting, security guards and defensible space. On its own, cameras have been shown to reduce vehicle crimes especially in parking garages. However, some studies showed an increase in crime after the installation of CCTV. And CCTV has not been shown to reduce violent crime.

Researchers consistently report that efforts to reduce or deter crime are complex (as are the causes of crime) and that pointing to one method of reducing crime is an erroneous path.

Some researchers mention the social costs of cameras but then state that most citizens in study areas report feeling safer with cameras installed.

Overall, more research is need to understand the real effect of cameras on crime but there is a clear message that CCTV is most effective when combined with other methods.

Downloaded Articles and Papers

1. **“Effects of Closed-Circuit Television on Crime.”** Brandon Welsh and David P. Farrington. Annual of the Academy of Political and Social Science. Vol. 587. May 2003, pp. 110-135.

A meta-analytic study looking at data from previous research on the effect of CCTV on crime in public spaces in the UK and North America. In summary, CCTV has the most effect of reducing crime to property in parking garages. Researchers recommend more rigorous study is needed.

2. Martin Gill and Angela Spriggs, **“Assessing the Impact of CCTV,”** Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate, February 2005. (Home Office Research Study 292)

Researchers conclude that CCTV is best used in conjunction with other deterrent methods. In 2005 when this article was written, it was too soon to draw definite conclusions about the effectiveness across the board. Summary conclusions:

- “CCTV works in small enclosed areas”
- The more cameras in an area, the more chance of reducing crimes.
- CCTV was more effective in reducing car thefts and other “acquisitive crimes”
- Special projects crime reduction more successful—especially when police are directly involved
- Police involvement in the camera control room led to more success
- CCTV more successful when working in conjunction with other crime deterrent methods
- Lighting around cameras is important to consider

3. **“Preliminary Findings of the Statistical Evaluation of the Crime-Deterrent Effects of the San Francisco Crime Camera Program.”** Jennifer King, Deirdre Mulligan, Steve Raphael, Travis Richardson, Jasjeet Sekhon. University of California, Berkley. Center for Information Technology Research in the Interest of Society. March 17, 2008.

This group of students presented results of a study of 19 camera sites around the city of San Francisco. Student report that the results are still too preliminary to be significant and they intend to do more testing. An effort to find a follow-up report or study to this one have yielded no results so far.

4. **“Measuring the Effect of Video Surveillance on Crime in Los Angeles. Prepared for the California Research Bureau.”** Aundrea Cameron, Elke Kolodinski, Heather May, Nicolas Williams. University of Southern California. School of Policy, Planning, and Development. May 5, 2008. CRB-08-007

This is an extensive study with an excellent listing of all studies completed through 2008 and the results of those studies. Summary “lessons” include: CCTV is less effective in open areas or high traffic areas. May be helpful in solving crime if caught on camera. Cameras should be used conjunction with other methods. “...not a strategy in-and of themselves.” (p.54)

Other lessons mentioned are:

“Public-private partnerships save costs, but raise new policy questions”; “Sustainability can be difficult”; “Need for universal guidance on use storage and utility of video surveillance” ; “Deterrence and enforcement are strongly intertwined” ; Need for further research into detection, apprehension and prosecution.”

5. **“Expert Findings on Surveillance Cameras: What Criminologists and Others Studying Cameras Have Found.”** Noam Biale. ACLU. [2008]

https://www.aclu.org/files/images/asset_upload_file708_35775.pdf

A study that looks at several studies conducted between 2000 and 2008. This paper summarizes its findings to say that cameras in the UK have no statistically significant impact on crime and studies in the US are preliminary but “show little to no positive impact on crime.” One interesting observation is that cameras in the UK find that their cameras are installed along with other crime fighting techniques such as improved lighting and increased foot patrols whereas in the US this is not the case at the time of this study.

6. Martin Gill, et al. **“The Impact of CCTV: Fourteen Case Studies,”** Home Office Online Report (U.K.), May 2015.

In several of the 14 cases studies crime actually increases after the cameras were installed. An area that focused on parking garages saw a marked decrease in crimes and cameras on vehicles outside garages also saw a decrease in vehicle crimes. Where cameras recorded crimes in garages, the recordings aided in the solving of the crimes. Some displacement of crimes were also noted in a couple of the case studies. Report includes an easy to read table with a summary of findings in each of the 14 case studies. (p.34)

7. **“Effectiveness and Social Costs of Public Area Surveillance for Crime Prevention.”** Brandon Welsh and David P. Farrington, and Sema A. Taheri. *Annual Review of Law and Social Science*. Vol. 11. 2015. pp. 111-130.

Researchers draw attention to other methods of crime reduction that can serve as more effective deterrents to crime. These methods have a lower “social cost” to society. Again they tout cameras combined with other tools as the most effective way to deter and reduce crime.

Major conclusions:

- CCTV is effective in “car parks”
- Improved lighting is effective in residential areas and city centers
- “Defensible space” method is effective in “inner-city” areas
- Some evidence of the effectiveness of combining methods
- CCTV and improved street lighting better for reducing property crime vs violent crime
- Security guards in “car parks” effective in reducing vehicle crimes

8. **“Hot Spot Policing with Actively Monitored CCTV Cameras: Does it Reduce Assaults in Public Places?”** Manne Gerell. *International Criminal Justice Review*. Vol. 26 (2) 2016. pp. 187-201.

This study focuses on cameras in the town of Malmo, Sweden. Cameras were police operated CCTV and were placed in higher crime areas. Results show non-significant effects on the number of assaults after the installation of the cameras. Conversely, there was an increase in the number of reported assaults in the areas.

The study showed that CCTV cameras are effective in preventing crime in public places such as parking garages. Street lighting is shown to decrease crime rates against property in town centers. Street closures and barricading (defensible space) can reduce crime in public places in inner-city neighborhoods. Combinations of these methods seem to have success in reducing crime in public places.

CCTV and improved street lighting combined are shown to reduce crime to property but do not have an effect on the number of violent crimes.

Links to Materials on Web

9. Brandon Welsh and David Farrington, **“Is CCTV Effective in Preventing Crime in Public Places?”** *Cahier Politiestudies*, Vol. 17, no.4, 2010, pp. 265-378.
<https://books.google.com/books?id=hN6imoZJMAQC&lpg=PA263&ots=hORTEDd-33&lr&pg=PA263#v=onepage&q&f=false>

This link refers to a preview of the full journal volume which was located in Google books. Several pages are not provided in the preview version therefore a summary is not provided here for this source. A full version or the article can be obtained if needed.

10. **Making Smart Decisions about Surveillance: A Guide for Community Transparency, Accountability & Oversight.** ACLU Northern California.

https://www.aclunc.org/publications/making-smart-decisions-about-surveillance-guide-community-transparency-accountability?utm_source=aclunc&utm_medium=highlight&utm_campaign=download

This is included as pointer to a type of material that could be help in creating a local policy for surveillance programs.