International Journal of
Power Electronics Controllers and Converters

ISSN: 2456-1614
Volume 11, Issue 2, 2025
July–December
DOI (Journal): 10.37628/IJPECC

https://journalspub.com/journal/ijpecc/

Research IJPECC

Solar Powered Motion-Activated Camera-Based Surveillance System

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Abstract

This project report presents the design and installation of a solar-powered motion-activated camera aimed at enhancing security while promoting energy efficiency and sustainability. Using a passive infrared sensor sensor, the system activates only upon detecting motion, reducing unnecessary power usage and data storage. It operates using solar energy, making it suitable for remote areas. With the help of a photovoltaic panel and a rechargeable battery, the system runs only on solar energy, ensuring continuous operation even in isolated or off-grid areas without access to conventional power sources. A microcontroller platform, such as the Raspberry Pi or Arduino, is essential to the design because it controls power distribution, enables communication between the different hardware parts, and synchronizes sensor and camera functions. Together with the camera module, these parts create a cohesive system that can be scaled and adjusted for various uses. The setup integrates components like a microcontroller (Raspberry Pi/Arduino), solar panel, battery, and camera. The architecture of the system, including hardware design, power management, and workflow procedures, is thoroughly covered in this report. It also discusses how each component contributes to the system's overall performance. While addressing real-world applications ranging from residential and commercial security to deployment in remote rural or industrial sites, it also emphasizes the system's practical advantages such as lower maintenance costs, autonomous operation, and sustainable energy usage. The results demonstrate how ecologically conscious engineering solutions may successfully address contemporary security concerns and highlight the significance of integrating intelligent, renewable energy-based technology in the creation of next-generation surveillance systems.

Keywords: Solar-powered, motion-activated camera security, energy efficiency, sustainability, PIR sensor, microcontroller

INTRODUCTION

This report outlines the development of a solar-powered motion-activated camera system designed for efficient, autonomous surveillance in remote areas. Traditional systems rely heavily on manual monitoring and constant power, making them costly and unsuitable for isolated locations [1, 2]. By integrating solar energy and motion sensors, this project enhances energy and storage efficiency. A microcontroller (Arduino or Raspberry Pi) manages inputs and camera control. The system is ideal for farms, wildlife reserves, and construction sites. The report covers the system's design, implementation, benefits, limitations, and future improvement possibilities, highlighting a sustainable approach to modern security challenges [3–5].

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Received Date: September 02, 2025
Accepted Date: September 17, 2025
Published Date: December 26, 2025

Citation: Shreya Dwivedi, Kamlesh Kumar Singh. Solar Powered Motion-Activated Camera-Based Surveillance System. International Journal of Power Electronics Controllers & Converters. 2025; 11(2): 12–19p.

OBJECTIVES

The primary aim of this project is to develop and design an independent, solar-powered, motion-activated surveillance system. The overall goals of the Solar Powered Motion-Activated Camera are enumerated here under.

- To create an off-grid security camera system powered by solar – ensure smooth functioning whether standalone from conventional electrical grids [6].
- To integrate motion detection to maximize usage of energy and storage of data – switch the camera only when motion is detected in the observation region to reduce unnecessary recording.
- To integrate a microcontroller or embedded system for intelligent control – use a programmable device (e.g., Raspberry Pi or Arduino) to process sensor data and trigger the camera.
- To encourage the use of clean and sustainable energy in smart security systems and lessen dependence on traditional electricity [7].
- To create a security that is affordable, portable, and simple to implement, and is suitable for a range of practical uses.
- To reduce maintenance and system downtime by using energy-efficient design and automated activation.

COMPONENTS USED

- *Solar Panel:* A panel of 6V or 12V, polycrystalline or monocrystalline, with a power rating of 5–10W is preferred. It converts sunlight into electrical energy using the photovoltaic effect and uses this power to power a battery that powers the system. It also provides off-grid electricity to remote rural communities that are not connected to traditional power. Solar energy is clean, renewable, and cost-effective in the long run. The size and wattage of the solar panel will be a function of the combined load of the controller and camera system.
- *Rechargeable Battery:* Lithium-ion (Li-ion), Lithium Polymer (Li-Po), or sealed Lead-Acid battery is used, which can range between 3.7V and 12V based on the design, typically with the ability of 2200 mAh to 10,000 mAh or more. Its purpose is to hold energy from the solar panel and provide power at nighttime or when the sun is shaded and solar radiation is weak. A battery is useful in offering dependable energy standby for uninterrupted system use.
- *Solar Charge Controller:* PWM (Pulse Width Modulation) or MPPT (Maximum Power Point Tracking) are used to control the voltage and current from the solar panel to the battery to charge the battery. Avoids overcharging, over-discharging, and battery damage. It provides extended battery life and effective energy usage.
- *PIR Motion Sensor (Passive Infrared Sensor):* The model we prefer is HC-SR501 or similar. Ranges between 3 to 7 meters; variable sensitivity and delay. The Main Function is to detect movement by sensing infrared (IR) radiation from passing warm bodies (e.g., humans or animals). It is used to toggle the camera on only when it detects movement, conserving power consumption and storage space [8–10].
- *Camera Module Type:* USB Webcam or Pi Camera (e.g., Raspberry Pi Camera Module v2) with resolution 720p or 1080p has a function to capture video or photos when it is activated by the motion sensor. It can have night vision if IR LEDs are supplied to it. It is used as a primary surveillance device to monitor activity. High-resolution modules improve image clarity [11].
- *Single Board Computer or Microcontroller:* Arduino Uno, ESP32, or Raspberry Pi ¾ are the microcontrollers that are preferred. They serve as the master controller that takes information from the PIR sensor and triggers the camera. In most configurations, it might also process the video, save it, and send it wirelessly. Arduino/ESP32 is ideal for basic motion detection and control systems. Raspberry Pi is ideal for users demanding image processing, video streaming, and cloud integration.
- *Voltage Regulator (e.g., 7805 or Buck Converter):* Provides a stable 5V or 3.3V to loads, like the microcontroller, PIR sensor, and camera, which shields delicate electronics from voltage spikes or overvoltage from the battery [12].
- *Storage Device:* MicroSD card, USB flash drive, or cloud storage (e.g., Google Drive, Firebase, etc.) can be preferred. It will save the video recorded by the camera. It is capable of uploading in

real-time on high-end computers through Wi-Fi or GSM modules. It facilitates easy access and recovery of surveillance information.
- *Power Management and Switching Circuit:* The components are MOSFETs, relays, or solid-state switches. It is used to toggle power to the camera only when motion is present to minimize standby power consumption. It improves system performance and extends battery life.
- *Enclosure and Mounting Hardware:* Types used are weatherproof (IP-rated) plastic or metal cases. It protects everything from rain, dust, and mechanical shock. Suits the system for use in outdoor and hostile environments [13, 14].

WORKING PRINCIPLE

Basic Operation Flow

- *Power Supply from Solar Panel:* During the day, the solar panel turns sunlight into electrical energy. Electrical energy is utilized to charge a rechargeable battery in the form of safe charging condition by a charge controller [15].
- *Standby Monitoring with PIR Sensor:* The PIR motion detector continuously monitors the environment for the IR radiation from moving objects (humans or animals). It has extremely low active standby power consumption.
- *Motion Detection and Signal Triggering:* Upon sensing motion within its field of view, the PIR module sends a signal (typically HIGH output) to the microcontroller or Raspberry Pi [16, 17].
- *Camera Activation:* When the signal is received, the controller switches on the camera module. The camera captures a snapshot or a video of the action, depending on what has been instructed to it through the programming.
- *Data Storage or Transmission:* The video captured can either be stored on a local storage device, like a flash drive or SD card or uploaded to the cloud via a wireless module (e.g., Wi-Fi or GSM), if necessary, as shown in Figure 1.
- *Go to Idle State:* It returns to its idle (low power) state after a predetermined time or upon stopping the movement. Battery is conserved, and extended autonomous operation is made possible [18].

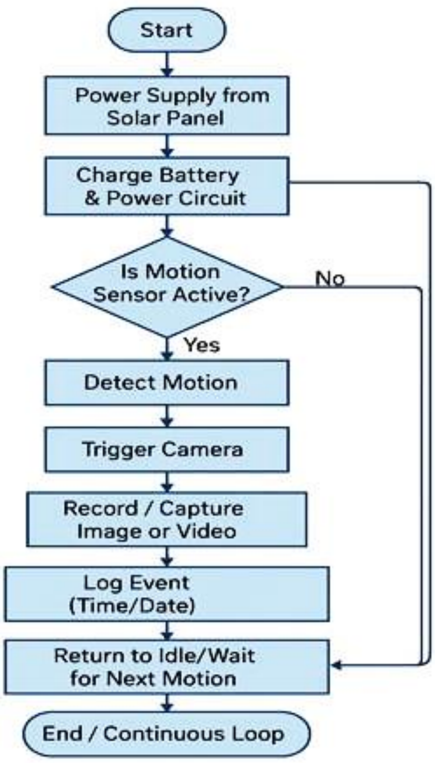

Figure 1. Smart power management.

The system is powered by stored solar energy and, therefore, must be power-efficient by:

- Minimizing the employment of sensors and microcontrollers during inactivity,
- Using high-power equipment (like the camera) only when really needed,
- By using regulators to provide the optimum voltage to each component [19, 20].

METHODOLOGY AND IMPLEMENTATION

Step 1: Identifying the Problem and Research

Compared the disadvantages of traditional surveillance systems – most notably power consumption and continuous surveillance. Investigated alternative sustainable options, including solar power and motion activation. Searched for related research studies and papers to get information regarding component compatibility and energy efficiency measures, as shown in Figure 2.

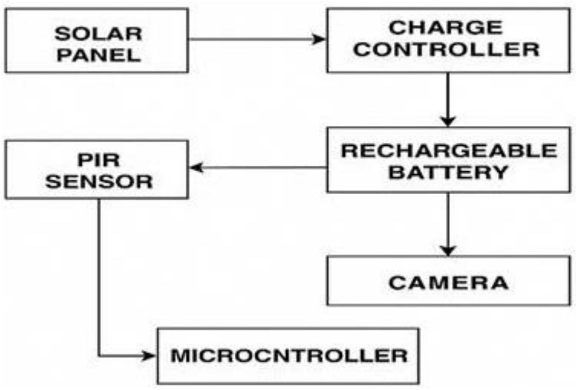

Figure 2. Solar camera system block diagram.

Step 2: System Design

Designed a modular framework with the following subsystems: Power system (solar panel, battery, charge controller), Control system (Raspberry Pi or Microcontroller), Sensing unit (PIR sensor), Imaging subsystem (camera module), Storage/output (cloud or SD card).

Step 3: Component Selection

Choose the correct components from factors like power, price, and compatibility:

- Choose a 6V–12V solar panel of suitable capacity battery.
- Utilized Arduino Uno for basic control, or Raspberry Pi for advanced features like image processing and cloud storage.
- Added an adjustable range and delay PIR motion sensor (HC-SR501).
- Attached the controller to a Pi Camera or USB webcam to take a snapshot.

Step 4: Circuit Assembly and Wiring

- Connect the solar panel to a charge controller and then to a rechargeable battery.
- Connect the battery power to a voltage regulator to supply a steady voltage to the microcontroller and other components (Figure 3).
- Attached the PIR sensor to the digital input of the microcontroller. Connect the camera to the controller and connect storage devices (SD card/cloud).

Step 5: Programming and Development of Logic

Written code (Arduino sketch or Python program) to

- Leave the system in standby.
- Stay constantly aware of PIR motion detection.
- Turn on the camera when detecting movement.
- Record and retain video or image information.

- Set the system in standby mode after a wait.

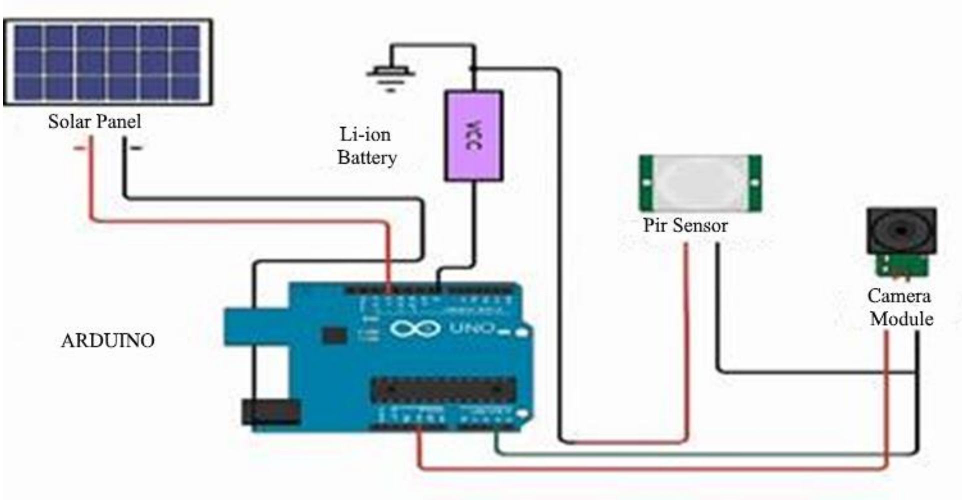

Figure 3. Circuit diagram of solar-powered motion-activated camera system.

Step 6: Testing and Calibration
Performed several tests to
- Modify PIR sensor delay and range.
- Verify camera start time.
- Assess solar charging efficiency.
- Night operation of tests on stored battery power.

Step 7: Enclosure and Final Integration
Should Seal all the components in a weather-proof casing to keep them safe from environmental stresses. Install the system in an open environment to test in the field and monitor performance.

ADVANTAGES
Energy Sustainability
A solar panel is the main source of energy, which provides the system with the ability to function independently of the traditional power infrastructure. It is best suited for application in off-grid, rural, and disaster-afflicted regions where access to electricity is nonexistent.

Low Power Consumption
It is different from common CCTV systems that operate around the clock, this camera operates only when there is movement, lowering the consumption of power. This operation assists in optimizing the scarce energy stored in the battery, which enhances system availability.

Eco-Friendly Surveillance
The system is green technology-friendly by virtue of eschewing the use of fossil fuels. Utilizing solar power assists in minimizing carbon footprint as well as advancing sustainable development goals (SDGs).

Economic
Although the solar devices' initial cost may be higher, as there is no monthly electricity bill required for the system, that translates into long-term savings. The maintenance factor is low compared to conventional surveillance systems.

Suitable for Remote and Isolated Areas
The system does not rely on wired power or network connectivity, making it suitable for use in fields, forests, construction sites, wildlife monitoring, and border patrol areas.

LIMITATIONS

Dependence on Sunlight and Weather

The performance of the solar panel relies on sunlight availability. Prolonged periods of cloudy or rainy weather can lower solar charging, affecting system operation, particularly in areas with limited sunlight.

Reduced Battery Capacity and Backup Time

If the battery capacity is not properly computed, then the system will not be able to save up enough energy to function during the night or during several cloudy days. This can impact the camera's reliability during decisive points.

Elementary Motion Detection Issues

The PIR sensor, though inexpensive, might not catch slow or minor movements effectively. It can also be triggered by non-human movement (e.g., wildlife or swaying trees), causing false positives.

Storage and Data Access Constraints

Lacking real-time data transfer functionality, the camera relies on local storage (SD card/USB), which gets filled soon in case of high-frequency motion events. Wireless/cloud connectivity or periodic manual retrieval and formatting may be necessary unless added.

APPLICATIONS

Surveillance in Agriculture and Farm Monitoring

Detecting intrusion by animals or humans into farms and preventing loss or destruction of crops. Also, monitor livestock movement in open grazing pastures. Farmlands tend to cover extensive distances and do not have access to constant grid electricity. This solar-powered system guarantees steady monitoring without electricity expense or continuous manual attendance.

Wildlife Research and Anti-Poaching Operations

Take photographs or videos of wildlife for behavioral research. Capture images or footage of unauthorized human movement in protected forest areas. Woodland regions are delicate habitats for which grid-powered equipment is not practical or environmentally friendly. This solution provides quiet, non-intrusive monitoring powered only by solar energy and is, therefore, the perfect solution for extended deployments in conservation initiatives.

Site Construction Surveillance

Monitor after-hours unauthorized access. Aid safety inspections by documenting site activity. Construction sites are usually temporary and changing, rendering wired surveillance installations impractical. A solar-powered camera with mobility facilitates flexibility, mobility, and effective utilization of resources without needing reinstallation each time the site arrangement changes.

Remote Border and Coastal Monitoring

Surveillance of unmanned checkpoints or key border crossing points. Monitor movement in sensitive coastal or desert regions. Without any infrastructure, these areas depend on independent, low-maintenance systems. Sun-powered motion cameras provide continuous surveillance with minimal manual intervention.

Smart City Integration

Surveil underpasses, public parks, lonely footpaths, and city corners that are crime hotspots. Provide public safety without adding power loads to the city grid. Part of smart city projects, the system can be rolled out as a green surveillance solution, utilizing IoT infrastructure for real-time alerts with reduced energy consumption.

Disaster Relief and Emergency Zones

Offer temporary surveillance in areas affected by floods, earthquakes, or war zones. Facilitate rescue efforts by tracking movements or survivors in remote locations. In case of emergencies with fallen power lines, this system offers an essential communication and surveillance tool that operates independently on solar power.

FUTURE SCOPE

IoT and Remote Access

Fitting the system with Wi-Fi, GSM, and LoRa modules to transmit real-time alerts, images, or video streams to a smartphone or similar devices allows users to receive live alerts when motion is detected and view footage remotely through mobile apps.

Image Processing using AI/ML

Incorporate artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) algorithms for object identification, facial recognition, and activity recognition. Eliminates false alarms by separating humans, animals, or non-hostile movement (e.g., wind-blown objects), enhancing security accuracy.

Night Vision Optimization

Employ IR LEDs or low-light image sensors to facilitate effective monitoring in dark or nighttime environments. Enhances production in 24×7 monitoring in wildlife, border, and rural environments.

Cloud-Based Storage and Backup

Integrate the system with cloud platforms, like Google Drive, Dropbox, or AWS IoT, for automatic backup of videos. Removes the restriction of local storage such that data is not lost even if the unit is stolen or damaged.

Solar Efficiency Optimization

Implement MPPT charge controllers for improved solar energy conversion. Enhances system availability and charging efficiency in less sunlight or fluctuating weather conditions.

Multi-Camera Expansion Networks

Create a networked architecture where several camera units can be installed and managed by a single base station. Provides coverage of extended areas (e.g., farms, warehouses, campuses) and allows multi-zone monitoring from a central interface.

CONCLUSIONS

The Solar Powered Motion Activated Camera project explores the integration of solar energy, embedded systems, and motion sensing to create a smart, self-sustaining surveillance solution. Addressing issues, like constant power needs and inefficient data storage, the system is designed to be cost-effective, eco-friendly, and suitable for remote areas. Though full hardware implementation is pending, the research and design phase lays a strong foundation for future development. With potential upgrades, like IoT, night vision, and AI-based detection, it promises to evolve into a highly intelligent security system while promoting sustainable engineering and innovation.

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