

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE:

A Primer for Police Leaders
on Futures Thinking



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Forward

Thinking ahead about the future and understanding the impacts of possible or likely developments in our society is an important leadership role and responsibility. While we may be tempted to focus on today's challenges alone, we must continue to position the organizations we lead to succeed as conditions and requirements change, otherwise we face the peril of being unprepared to respond to the needs of our stakeholders – our communities and our staff.

With the release of this publication, we are launching a new collaboration between the National Police Foundation, the Society of Police Futurists International (PFI) and the Futures Working Group (FWG), an entity previously developed and supported by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). This collaboration will allow us to contemplate together how our communities, our society, and the world are changing. It will also provide us with the opportunity to provide guidance to public safety leaders on the potential impact of those changes and how to appropriately apply futures thinking to these scenarios. We intend to continue to develop support for futures thinking generally while highlighting key scenarios that cannot be overlooked.

We are excited about this new collaboration, the publication series we are planning and the release of this first publication to introduce the concept of futures thinking. I would be remiss to not recognize the leadership of former Police Foundation President Jim Bueermann, who elevated the concept and supported the importance of futures thinking in policing. His dedication and leadership has led to this new collaboration and partnership.

In closing, we encourage readers to consider futures thinking as a way of doing business strategically and one that requires a leadership commitment. Doing so will reap significant benefits to the organization and to the communities served, today and tomorrow.

Jim Burch, President, National Police Foundation

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Introduction

Contemporary law enforcement leaders work in dynamic and challenging organizations and contexts. Police leaders are expected to masterfully guide their agencies and personnel as they work to control crime and confront other complex social problems, yet all-too-often they struggle to do so with finite time and resources, limited information, sub-standard and outdated equipment, and inadequate skills and training. Agency funding is often limited, while mandated tasks, actions, reporting, and compliance can prove daunting. Leaders might be constrained by labor agreements and demands for greater transparency in operations and decision making. Personnel challenges are growing as agencies struggle to recruit and retain sufficiently qualified personnel. The rapidly emerging ubiquity of mobile phones equipped with video cameras and connected to various media sharing platforms have placed tremendous scrutiny on the police, their work environments, and their actions.

To meet these challenges, leaders need a well-equipped toolkit of skills, abilities, and resources. If provided this toolkit and accompanied by consistent values, leaders can effectively guide their personnel and their agencies, while serving the public and preserving their own well-being as an individual. Too often, the police leadership toolkit is limited to skills that assist with reactively dealing with the challenges of today. Futures thinking, however, is proactive and can be a powerful addition to the police leader's toolkit; this tool is rarely discussed and often misunderstood though.

Importantly, in a profession that tends to be reactive and responsive, futures thinking encourages police leaders and organizations to identify the future they prefer and to work to bring that future into reality.

Futures thinking is not about crystal balls, palm reading, or seeing "the" future with clarity and certainty. Rather, it is a tool that helps leaders (and those around them) anticipate a range of future challenges so they can be avoided or mitigated. Additionally, it can help leaders identify emerging and future opportunities so they can be realized and maximized. With practice, futures thinking builds a leader's capacity to manage uncertainty by developing foresight – a blend of forecasting with insight. Importantly, in a profession that tends to be reactive and responsive, futures thinking encourages police leaders and organizations to identify the future they prefer and to work to bring that future into reality.

This essay introduces futures thinking and discusses how it can be a valuable tool for contemporary police leaders. It starts with an overview of the emergence of futures thinking and a description of how one long-term police chief was able to effectively use this tool during his career. The essay next

explains what futures thinking entails and how it can be integrated into strategic planning and decision making.¹ A key tenet of futures perspectives for policing is to identify possible futures, examine the most probable futures, and then provide leadership that moves toward the most preferred future that will provide and maintain optimal police services in a community. Finally, several prominent trends of relevance to policing are considered. The intent of the document is to orient the reader to what futures thinking entails and how it can be integrated into the work habits and routines of a police leader to increase her or his efficacy. While futures thinking might initially seem an abstract and complex process, in reality it is an accessible and understandable way a police leader can improve their effect and influence.

The Value of Futures Thinking for Police Leaders

Leaders in policing are responsible for a range of important decisions, including fiscal and personnel resource allocation; recruiting and hiring; training, personnel development, and promotions; agency priorities and operational objectives; policies, procedures, and practices; and, leading changes in the culture of a police organization. The exact responsibilities and authorities vary by rank, organization, and assignment; however, leaders are expected to influence and control many aspects of both the formal and informal ways their organizations function. All leaders likely pursue activities they believe will produce the most desirable outcomes. Without a systematic approach to broadly survey the range of possible outcomes, leaders are likely choosing from a limited set of options.

Futures thinking is a powerful tool that can help police leaders anticipate emerging challenges and opportunities. By identifying and understanding such challenges and opportunities as early as possible, police leaders maximize the range of options they have to achieve the best possible outcome. For example, in the 1990s police futurists offered a number of forecasts. One police futurist suggested policing should anticipate a growing difficulty recruiting qualified candidates. Another anticipated the integrity and veracity of forensic science would come under public, scientific, and legal scrutiny. If a police leader had accepted these two forecasts as valid, how might it have changed their actions and decisions during the past two decades?

Futures thinking is a powerful tool that can help police leaders anticipate emerging challenges and opportunities.

¹ In the early 1980s, the FBI National Academy began to teach a graduate course on police futures. One of the authors is a graduate of that class and another a former instructor for this course. All of the authors have been involved in the application of futures thinking in policing for decades. The goal of our efforts is to introduce the policing profession to futures research methods. This can be as simple as helping police leaders learn how environmental scanning and networking with other futurists can expand the planning horizon of police leaders and can enable those leaders to guide their organizations to better futures. Police leaders often have limited time available to engage in serious, evidence-based futures research; however, access to the research of others and reflecting on the potential implications with other futures thinkers can yield a more informed decision-making process.

Likewise, what forecasts being made now should contemporary police leaders understand and integrate into their strategic plans? Many of the forecasts offered by police futurists do not require immediate attention; however, when leaders fail to respond to those forecasts, they might lose the ability to control the trajectory of that issue.

Autonomous motor vehicles represent an example of an on-going forecasted future that has significant relevance on the future of policing. Futurists have long discussed the emergence of this technology and its implications for society, yet these forecasts only gained public attention in recent years. While that future has not fully arrived, it is now evident that we almost certainly will see a time when cars operate using technology rather than by the actions and directions of a human operator. This raises a wide range of questions for the police, among other professions and segments of society. How should police leaders and the profession as a whole be engaging with industry and government regulators to ensure the safest possible integration of this technology into society?² Futures thinking provides a framework to help guide the questions and conversations the policing profession should be having to bring about the best possible future outcome.

The value of futures thinking is that it creates processes that improve the efficacy of police leaders and organizations. As with any leadership tool, futures thinking is not perfect. Forecasts and anticipated events do not materialize, take longer to develop, or manifest themselves in different ways than expected. Wildcard events occur, radically changing circumstances in ways that could not have been easily anticipated.³ When applied to policing, futures thinking can help leaders make better decisions today to prepare for tomorrow by helping leaders understand the good and bad that future might hold.⁴ Weather forecasts are not perfect; sometimes we are told it will rain tomorrow, when in reality that day is clear and sunny. Sometimes we are told to expect a pleasant day, when in reality we wish we had a jacket. In the aggregate, however, we are better prepared for tomorrow by listening to weather forecasts today. The application of futures thinking in policing works analogously; while forecasts are not always right, they may be helpful more often than not.

2 Cowper, T.J., & Levin, B.H. (2018). Autonomous vehicles: How will they challenge law enforcement? FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin. <https://leb.fbi.gov/articles/featured-articles/autonomous-vehicles-how-will-they-challenge-law-enforcement>

3 The 9/11 terror attacks are a prime example of a wildcard event. Few could have anticipated an event on that scale and with such a profound impact on US society, international relations, and domestic public safety. Futures thinking does not create perfect outcomes, but in the aggregate, it can lead to greater successes and efficacy.

4 See Schafer, J.A., Buerger, M.E., Myers, R.W., Jensen, C.J., & Levin, B.H. (2012). *The future of policing: A practical guide for police managers and leaders*. Boca Raton, FL: CRC/Taylor-Francis.

Richard W. Myers is a retired chief of police who led seven agencies in six states during his career. In the following testimonial, Myers reflects on how learning about police futures in the 1980s shaped the trajectory of his own leadership style and successful career of service.

I attended the FBI National Academy in 1989, where I completed the graduate course on police futures. In 1991, I returned to the Academy for a week-long conference on police futures, the outgrowth of which was the creation of the Society of Police Futurists International (PFI), a non-profit dedicated to developing and advancing futures thinking among public safety professions. Over the last thirty years, I have served a term as President of PFI, have been a charter member of the Futures Working Group¹, and have written about police futures in essays, articles, and a book.

I have watched, listened, and had spirited dialogue with a peer group of police futurists from the forming of PFI in 1991. Futures thinking has helped shape planning and decision making over much of the responsibilities of my role as a chief. Below I offer examples of ways in which I have used futures thinking as a chief executive. My intent is not to say “look what I got right,” but rather to provide tangible illustrations of how I believe applying futures thinking allowed me to lead agencies toward more effective, efficient, and equitable policing outcomes. Most of these examples are not unique to the agencies I led; in fact, many are now staples of US police technology and practices. However, due to insights afforded through involvement with the police futures community, the timing of their implementation was almost always earlier than the mainstream.

1 The Futures Working Group (FWG) was originally a collaboration between the FBI and the Society of Police Futurists International. Formed in 2002, it consisted of a small group of FBI agents, police officers, police executives, industry leaders, and academics who would meet periodically to discuss futures issues, consider the impacts on policing, and strategize on potential courses of action. Their work was published by the FBI and made freely available online. In recent years, the FWG has continued its work as an independent entity affiliated with PFI. It can be found online at www.futuresworkinggroup.com.

- In the early 1990's, we fully equipped the police fleet with dash-video cameras. We were early adopters of this emerging technology, which benefited us through a reduction in court time expenses, fewer citizen complaints, and improvements to the agency culture. Later, moving to a larger agency with a 'take home' fleet required a longer implementation timeline. Recognizing the need for managing the anticipated rise in video management, the agency I was leading turned to citizen volunteers to assist in the process.
- To both increase citizen engagement, as well as mitigate insufficient fiscal and human resources, we significantly grew volunteer programs in multiple agencies. Two of those efforts subsequently earned those agencies IACP's top recognition award for citizen involvement. As would be expected, there were varying degrees of resistance to using citizen volunteers to support or take responsibility for what had traditionally been the duties of sworn police personnel.
- Starting in the early 1990's, we began to transform agencies to develop a hybrid model of centralizing "back room" functions like communication centers, data systems, and specialized units (e.g. SWAT). These centralization efforts were often undertaken in cooperation with other regional partners to maximize efficiency. Simultaneously, we emphasized the decentralization of "front line" functions, such as patrol. Individual officers were encouraged to develop a sense of "beat ownership" for the area they patrolled to foster greater police-community relations and to create accountability for localized community problems.
- In the late 1990's, recognizing the increasing tensions between police and minority groups, including new immigrants, in one agency we formed an "intercultural relations coordinator" position. The external focus was to better connect police with minority members of their community and to create relationships focused on communication, understanding, and trust. The internal focus was to identify training needs, agency practices, and operational tactics that could be improved to enhance community relations. It was also hoped the position could increase minority recruiting. In later agencies, we formed minority advisory groups to meet regularly, solicit insights, and translate that input into decision making and policy development. In all cases, the resulting improvements in community trust and partnerships reduced community-police conflict often seen in diverse communities.
- Due to networking with police futurists, planning for Y2K challenges was initiated well in advance, with little impact by the time 1/1/2000 arrived.
- Early communications with other police futurists took place on an electronic bulletin board

(BBS) in 1991. This led me to obtain a personal email account around that time. Connectivity to, and communication with, this futures community took place through a dial-up modem. This led to insight into the power and efficiency of electronic communication. As web-based technologies have evolved, several agencies became early adopters for agency web pages, social media outreach, etc. Seeing the use of the Internet by the police futurist community and learning about its evolution from that same pathway lead to an appreciation for the power of the Internet and social media tools for police-community relations and communication to improve efficiency, while making agencies more transparent and accessible.

- Recognizing that traditional police “stove piping” limited effectiveness, in every agency we have worked to strengthen relationships with other public safety agencies (e.g. Fire/EMS) as well as regional local, state, federal and military partners. One agency received a national award for the collaboration model we developed to facilitate communication and partnership with our counterparts in local military agencies. The time to build partnerships is not in the face of a critical incident; it must be built in advance, so it is strong and functional when emergencies occur.
- Mindful of forecasts of declining public trust of the police, we implemented multiple programs and strengthened others to bring community and police closer together. Some examples include expanding civilian volunteer programs; increasing citizen exposure to police work through “ride-alongs,” and citizens academies (including foreign language academies, senior academies, and youth academies); establishing citizen advisory committees; and, emphasizing “beat ownership” by patrol officers.
- Recognizing that police officers of the future cannot merely be chosen by selection processes of the past, in every agency, we overhauled hiring processes to increase assessment of critical thinking skills, interpersonal communication skills, integrity, and problem solving. We de-emphasized aggression, de-prioritized extreme physical prowess, and removed expectations for prior knowledge of police policies, tactics, and law. We worked to change personnel practices to maintain or increase education requirements for both entry and promotional processes. Importantly, we worked to shift traditional recruitment efforts from the assumption that, “they will come to us” to the belief that, “we must go where the applicants are and tell them our story.”
- Beginning in the 1990’s, we worked to increase coordination and collaboration between police and the private sector, both in the security arena as well as general corporate

residents of the community. These engagements provide a two-fold benefit. First, agencies were able to establish better information sharing with private security. Second, these partnerships increased corporate support for agencies, such as corporate donations to local police foundations.

It is challenging to be on the concluding end of a long career as a police chief and retrospectively identify decisions and programs strongly influenced by a futures orientation. The above list is not exhaustive or exclusive. It is impossible to discern how many, if not all, of these decisions may have been reached absent any futures orientation. It is likely, however, that a futures orientation accelerated my learning curve as a leader, and expanded the vision needed to successfully lead a police organization. It is equally likely that many other highly visible, highly effective police chiefs apply some degree of future visioning whether they know it or not!

One of the greatest benefits of police leadership is the absence of proprietary information and the eagerness of everyone to share what seems to be working. As such, the more police leadership can tap into the police futures community, the stronger the evidence-base can advance, the farther out problems can be identified, and the sooner solutions can be applied.

What Is Futures Thinking?

For decades experts have preached to leaders the virtues of thinking about the future, both in the public and private sectors. In the context of policing, the Society of Police Futurists International (PFI) and the Futures Working Group (FWG) have extolled 'futures thinking' as helpful in developing effective police leaders. Some versions of futures thinking – including forecasting, foresight, scenario planning, or design thinking – have oft been featured in general business literature. Yet, when we look at policing in general, we see surprisingly little written about why futures thinking matters, what it can tell us, and how leaders can integrate it into their leadership toolkit. That is not to say we do not see innovation or the dissemination of good practices; however, it often seems these things happen to us rather than because of us.

Why the overall dearth of foresight?

There are a number of reasons why futures thinking (also known as 'foresight') remains elusive in policing. Police leaders too often operate under short time horizons set by others; much of their focus is on responding to the crisis of the day. As public sector agencies, the police lack substantial competitive pressure. Policing remains a reactive profession, complete with shifting public demands on police leadership. As a result, police organizations and leaders typically operate under appreciable resource constraints in terms of money, equipment, and personnel. Perhaps more impactful than any of these limitations, police leaders have not been provided with a proper model of what foresight practice is and how it benefits them.

Most police leaders have experienced foresight through guest speakers at conferences or meetings of professional organizations. In this context, the futurist is a performer, entertaining the audience with a spattering of 'gee whiz' pictures and videos. When professionals like lawyers, psychologists, or accountants address a broad audience, the applicability to individual situations is inherently limited. So too is the case with futurists and foresight.

In practice, foresight is much broader than gee-whiz shows. Like the practices of psychologists, lawyers, or accountants, the higher value tools are applied to the specific circumstances of the client. When engaged in its full capacity, foresight transforms decision-making and creates a sense of agency – that the organization has power over its future. Although many firms will stand-up in-house foresight functions, most futurists practice as consultants and project-based contractors. Their successes are very often obscured by proprietary information and non-disclosure agreements.

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If an organization wants to become more future oriented, how does it do so?

First, it helps to think of foresight competency as both an individual and an organizational characteristic. At the individual level, foresight includes a range of cognitive, social, and research skills. The experienced futurist:

1. Looks for broader sources of change;
2. Develops industry-specific sources of expertise;
3. Incorporates scanning for change into daily routines;
4. Employs creative techniques to escape 'tunnel vision';

5. Questions assumptions as a way to seek hidden vulnerabilities;
6. Facilitates discussions about trends, uncertainty, opportunities, values, preferences, strategies and implementation; and,
7. Communicates information about the future.

Over time, the practice of foresight develops an individual's sensitivity to the direction of change and integrates these changes into a maturing mental model of the world. Through the purposefully broad sourcing of data and the use of scenarios, foresight promotes exploration of possible futures, which creates vicarious learning that creates agility – fast, adaptive responses to changing conditions. Important for police leaders, while formal training and study are helpful for individuals seeking to develop greater foresight skills, competency can be improved for anyone through self-study and intentionality.

Second, aspiring organizations integrate foresight practices into periodic routines. As individuals within an organization become more familiar with foresight techniques, the organization becomes more competent and integrates into organizational mental models. While it is useful to have a specialist futurist available, a competent organization will promote diffusion of skills among its leaders and key specialists. In an organization new to foresight, the assistance of a specialist futurist with training in foresight techniques

is helpful, on at least a part-time basis. In a foresight mature organization, the specialist futurist transitions into a guide/facilitator role, equipped with techniques for helping groups of people uncover their own knowledge of the future. The foresight research burden is integrated into the routine practices of foresight adapted members of the organization. In its application, foresight becomes an iterative process that becomes easier with each cycle. With time and experience, the organization will adopt foresight frames into its culture and problem solving.

There are several ways to help develop futures thinking and foresight in an organization.

1. **Engage a foresight specialist for the organization.** Depending on resources, this person can be a contracted consultant, a full-time employee, or a full-time employee with part-time foresight duties. If designating an employee with part-time duties, care should be taken to ensure the daily demands of the other duties do not crowd out the foresight duties. There are certification courses that train students how to

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understand and apply basics of foresight, such as the program offered by The University of Houston.⁵ A foresight specialist should be familiar with conceptual frameworks that might help guide their efforts.⁶ Due to the key facilitation role, the specialist will ideally be trained in facilitation techniques.

2. **Designate research responsibility for key areas to appropriate organizational components.**

Futurists typically use a rubric to ensure scanning is comprehensive; the rubric *STEEP*, meaning *social, technological, economic, environmental, and political* is the most used. A common variant distinguishes demographics from other forms of social change. As an example, the chief would delegate responsibility for social change to the recruiting and/or public affairs functions. In this way, scanning research can be accomplished through STEEP teams. This practice extends forecasting beyond the executive level and serves to develop greater sensitivity for change and its implications among the department's leaders at all levels of the agency.

3. **Hold periodic scanning meetings** where each delegated group provides a five to ten-minute presentation on changes observed in their STEEP category. Doing so quarterly is a good starting point.

4. In the first year, **hold a launch retreat** to make strategic and programming decisions about the coming year. This retreat should *not* be a departmental show-and-tell of divisional performance and is not the same as traditional strategic planning. Rather, the retreat should be focused entirely on developing and maintaining a shared mental model of the operating environment, the organization's vision, and its intended actions to create its preferred future. The products of this meeting should provide strategic direction to the organization in the coming years.

5. **Hold a retreat annually** to assess:

- emergent and relevant changes impacting the organization;
- the continuing validity of the envisioned future;
- progress towards previously established goals;
- the need to revise or modify strategies, goals and initiatives; and
- reallocate attention as necessary to achieve modified outcomes.

Once again, this is more than a traditional strategic planning process.

6. **Communicate the products of foresight** – the vision, strategies, goals, and initiatives – throughout the organization and beyond to higher levels of government and the public. Use all media to get the message out, tailored appropriately to specific audiences, including face-to-face speeches, videos, social media, graphic posters, emails, etc.

5 <https://www.uh.edu/technology/departments/hdcs/certificates/fore/>

6 Information on three recommended frameworks can be found online at <http://training.itcilo.org/delta/Foresight/3-Horizons.pdf>, <http://www.jfs.tku.edu.tw/13-4/AE05.pdf>, and <https://www.andyhinesight.com/?s=foresight+framework>

As Nobel Laureate Daniel Kahneman showed in *Thinking Fast and Slow*, the default mode for human thinking is automatic, rapid, and persistent. Fast-mode thinking takes little cognitive effort; it happens without volition. While awake, the human mind receives, processes and reacts to information nearly instantly. The downside of this autonomic mode of thinking is it sometimes leads people astray; it makes mistakes. It holds biases, that left unquestioned produce erroneous, injurious or otherwise counterproductive responses. Policing, like many professions, implicitly favors fast mode thinking. Officers become skilled at making rapid assessments as they deal with the varied calls and problems they are assigned in a given shift. Unfortunately, as officers promote through the organization, they may not be given the awareness or skills to modify their thinking process away from the rapid, reactive fast thinking methods good front line officers demonstrate.

Fortunately, there is another mode of thinking capable of reasoning through problems, slow mode thinking. With focus and effort, people can think through problems intentionally. Although this mode of thinking is subject to its own biases, a person can, with discipline and care, reduce the risk of error. Through discussion, debate, and peer review, a group of people can refine and hone ideas, enabling group members to learn from the process. Slow-mode thinking is deliberate and takes substantial cognitive effort. The majority of decisions police leaders confront can be handled with slow mode thinking, if only leaders are aware of, and see value in, retooling these cognitive processes.

Foresight is a framework for organizations to slow-think its decision-making about the future, to ensure it is not making assumptions about the future that will leave it vulnerable to disruption. It is also a means to engage the future with purpose and direction. As with anything, competence comes from practice.

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Trends that Will Affect Policing in the Near Future

Given the importance of futures thinking and foresight for effective police leadership, what are some key trends the future-minded police leader should be aware of and monitoring? The authors would offer the following trends as a starting point for the types of future issues that contemporary police leaders should understand. Tracking the trajectory of these trends and considering their implications for a given agency can help leaders mitigate emerging/future challenges and maximize emerging/future opportunities.

Importantly, many of these issues are seemingly unrelated to policing. Recalling the STEEP framework, the effective application of futures thinking in policing is not simply about considering trends in law and crime. Rather, it is necessary to contemplate and understand the *social, technological, economic, environmental, and political* trends and tendencies that will influence the environment in which police organizations and personnel operate.

Trust in the Police

According to a 2017 Gallup poll, public confidence in the police hovers at about 57%.⁷ Notably, however, those who identified as Hispanic, liberal, and younger than 35 have become less confident over time. This is not surprising given the allegations and concerns centered on police treatment of poor and minority communities. For example, in the wake of the Michael Brown shooting in Ferguson, Missouri, a 2015 Department of Justice report concluded that “many [Ferguson] officers appear to see some residents, especially those who live in Ferguson’s predominantly African-American neighborhoods, less as constituents to be protected than as potential offenders and sources of revenue.”⁸

If the political fracturing of the country continues, major fault lines can be expected to become even more pronounced, with the police caught somewhere in the middle. In addition, as society becomes more transparent through the near ubiquitous presence of social media, ‘bad acts’ on the part of the police will receive even

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7 Jim Norman, “Confidence in Police Back at Historical Average,” Gallup (2017). <https://news.gallup.com/poll/213869/confidence-police-back-historical-average.aspx>

8 Department of Justice, “Investigation of the Ferguson Police Department,” (2015). https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/opa/press-releases/attachments/2015/03/04/ferguson_police_department_report.pdf

greater public scrutiny, along with the issuing of more rapid public assessment of fault.

Community Oriented Policing (COP) emerged in the latter part of the 20th century as an attempt to better community-police relations and restore trust in the police. However, most departments saw COP as an 'add on' rather than a philosophy to be embraced by the entire agency, thus diminishing its effectiveness. Additionally, management tools such as COMPSTAT emerged, promising widespread reductions in crime through analysis and strict accountability.

It seems reasonable to question whether traditional policing approaches, which have contributed to strained police-community relations, struggles to sustain police legitimacy, and distrust in the police, are capable of correcting these problems. More revolutionary and non-traditional policing approaches might be needed. In the future, novel approaches will likely be required to bridge the gap between effective community relations and citizen safety. For example, Levin and Myers "Neighborhood Driven Policing" model,⁹ once considered revolutionary, may become the preferred norm.

Aging Population, Health and Healthcare

The number of Americans age 65 and older is growing. By 2060, the number of senior citizens is expected to reach almost 100 million, more than double from 46 million in 2015. An estimated 20 million will be 85 or older and 600,000 will be living past their 100th birthday.¹⁰

Older individuals in communities have greater need for various kinds of social and governmental services, including police services. While baby boomers are healthier than their parents' generation, they still require assistance and support, are susceptible to illness, and are vulnerable to become the targets of criminal acts. Police departments will have to work more closely with healthcare professionals and the social services sector to mitigate the impacts created by the burgeoning elderly population.

The impact on the health care system will be enormous, creating severe burdens on hospitals and urgent care facilities. This will be particularly true in low-income areas where the older poor will increasingly rely on public services for routine medical conditions and doctor visits. While advances in medical technologies may offset some of the more debilitating maladies suffered by so many people today, an increase in the need to treat more minor chronic illnesses in the aging cohort is likely.

9 Levin, B.H., & Myers, R.W. (2005). A proposal for an enlarged range of policing: Neighborhood-Driven Policing (NDP). *Neighborhood-driven policing. Volume 1 of the proceedings of the Futures Working Group* (pp. 4-9). Quantico, VA: Federal Bureau of Investigation. Available at <http://futuresworkinggroup.com>.

10 Mather, M., Jacobsen, L.A., & Pollard, K.M. (2015). Aging in the United States. *Population Bulletin*, 70(2). <https://www.prb.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/aging-us-population-bulletin-1.pdf>

The Wealth Gap

Ideally, proper enforcement of the law is a straightforward application of patrol and investigative techniques applied equally throughout society by fair-minded professionals, blind to outside influences such as race, income, social status, or celebrity. History demonstrates, however, that those very outside influences play a significant role in how the police do their job. As we contemplate and strive to improve the future of policing, we need to consider those external forces that foster citizen-police interaction and drive police decision making.

It is well documented that those citizens with higher social status and larger bank accounts are far less likely to encounter police scrutiny in their everyday lives compared with those of more modest means. When they do stray onto the police radar, citizens with greater social status and economic power suffer arrest and incarceration at rates far lower than those of the lower economic and social strata.¹¹ This would be concerning enough if those strata were static. Recent studies show that the gap between the rich and the poor is widening at an ever-increasing rate.¹²

Unequal treatment of the public by the police, perceived or real, has a negative impact on the ability of officers to do their job. Even if one believes unequal police treatment is not real, it is clear that an appreciable segment of society perceives it to be the case, making it real in its consequences. One of the fundamental underpinnings of American democracy is the 'American Dream,' the belief that hard working individuals, regardless of upbringing or environment, can attain higher levels of personal success through sheer grit and determination. Research suggests, however, that for those not born into society's higher echelons of income or wealth it is increasingly difficult to attain higher status. For those locked into poverty and its fringes, or stagnating in a decreasing middle class, feelings of resentment and anger may hold serious implications for society and its police departments.

Obviously, discussions of inequality and disparities in wealth and income in America are politically charged topics, helping to fuel the growing polarization between the right and the left. Political beliefs aside, the financial divide between America's richest and the poor is accelerating, and the divide serves as another

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11 Looney & Turner's 2018 report at https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/es_20180314_looneyincarceration_final.pdf

12 See the 2018 report by Alvaredo, Chancel, Piketty, Saez, & Zucman at <https://wir2018.wid.world/files/download/wir2018-full-report-english.pdf>

Impacts along racial lines are linked closely with Wealth Gap issues and could likewise complicate and hamper community relations in areas where racial tensions are already strained.

force separating Americans by race and ethnicity, another lightning rod for police controversy. That divide will have impacts on the way police services are delivered and perceived. Impacts along racial lines are linked closely with Wealth Gap issues and could likewise complicate and hamper community relations in areas where racial tensions are already strained.

Artificial Intelligence and All Things Autonomous

Artificial Intelligence (AI), long cited throughout science fiction, has now emerged as science reality. While artificial general intelligence (e.g., computers capable of successfully performing any intellectual task) is still estimated to be years away, narrow AI (artificial intelligence that is very good at a narrowly defined purpose) is taking on more and larger tasks within everyday life. Public notions about AI frequently seem to center on computers replacing or directing humans. It is possible AI systems, at least in the mid-term future, will be used to augment and assist human decision making, rather than replacing it altogether.

Of special interest to law enforcement, AI systems are being developed by the military to coordinate operational resources and assist decision makers on the battlefield. America's intelligence agencies are using AI to find patterns within large data sets, along with camera and sensor data obtained by aircraft and satellites. Indeed, the Pentagon, CIA, FBI and other agencies are convinced that AI will play a huge role in the future of national security. For police, AI could be used to assist in coordinating fast-moving multi-agency response to terrorist events, active shooters

and natural disasters. Crisis commanders, equipped with AI assistants could better visualize potential strategies and tactics, implementing them in less time. They might be able to better understand local community dynamics and help police personnel and leaders make decisions that achieve more favorable results with greater community support.¹³

Routine service delivery, 911 center operations, and criminal investigations could also benefit from AI systems designed to sift and organize large volumes of data and information. In the same way UPS uses AI systems to route deliveries around hazardous weather and Amazon uses AI to streamline package delivery, police could use similar systems to more efficiently route patrols responding to calls for service. AI could help agencies and police personnel to 'connect the dots' and speed the identification of criminals and their motives.

13 Cerri, T., et al. (2018) Using AI to Assist Commanders with Complex Decision-making. I/ITSEC Paper 18072. https://community.apan.org/cfs-file/__key/docpreview-s/00-00-10-50-31/ITSEC_5F00_Paper_5F00_18702_2D00_Using-AI-for-Decision_2D00_making_2D00_07142018.pdf

The growth and maturity of AI is spurring advances in other technical fields, most notably the domain of autonomous robots, cars, trucks, boats, and aircraft. The increasing sophistication of AI and its ability to process, analyze and make decisions based upon real time data from cameras, sensors, and external databases is changing the way people and products are moving through our world. Any device that has mobility in society is increasingly capable of moving about and accomplishing the tasks they were designed for without direct human control.

Autonomous vehicles, for example, are expected to follow traffic laws more closely than human drivers, changing the way law enforcement is conducted while greatly reducing, and eventually eliminating, the need for traffic enforcement. At this point it is unclear just how a human police officer would go about stopping a car that is under the control of a computer. It is also unclear under what circumstances a driverless vehicle would require a police traffic stop, aside from the identification of an occupant or a malfunction that was creating a hazard.

Autonomous taxis and ride sharing services, both automobiles and aircraft, are expected to eventually reduce traffic congestion and increase commuter productivity. But they will have broader impacts on policing and society that are difficult to see today. Autonomous vehicles will make the illegal transportation of contraband and people more difficult to investigate and regulate. Accidents, though perhaps greatly reduced, will still occur but will require new and unique methods of investigation and adjudication. Offenses such as drunk driving might disappear as a public safety concern and the licensing of drivers might become obsolete.¹⁴

Truth Decay

The growth of the Internet was supposed to make us more connected and better informed. In fact, just the opposite appears to be occurring. In 2018, RAND Corporation social scientists Jennifer Kavanagh and Michael Rich coined the term “Truth Decay,” which they define as increasing disagreement about facts and data and a blurring of the line between opinion and fact.¹⁵ An obvious example familiar to those in policing is that Americans believe crime is up

14 Cowper, T.J., & Levin, B.H. (2018). Autonomous vehicles: How will they challenge law enforcement? FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin. <https://leb.fbi.gov/articles/featured-articles/autonomous-vehicles-how-will-they-challenge-law-enforcement>

15 For a complete definition of the term, see Kavanagh, J., & Rich, M.A. (2018). Truth decay: An initial exploration of the diminishing role of facts and analysis in American public life. RAND Corporation. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2314.html

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nationally, even when the data show it is down.¹⁶

This situation will become increasingly complicated as technology blurs the line between perceived and actual reality. The term ‘deep fakes’ has been applied to technology that modifies audio and video files. For example, actors can be made to appear in a scene they did not originally shoot. Politicians can be made to utter words or engage in actions they did not say or do. And anyone can be made to appear to ‘star’ in an embarrassing video. It is possible to create deep fakes that are increasingly realistic and convincing in their appearance, and to do so with less raw data of the intended target. Truth decay will not only be a matter of the blurring line between opinion and fact; with increasing ease and frequency, citizens across all social and political spectrums will see ‘realities’ that reinforce their belief systems, encourage “tribalism,” and further polarization, even if those ‘realities’ are far afield from objective truth.

Conclusion

American policing remains a highly reactive profession. This is understandable given the important role the police play in protecting life and property. In today’s rapidly changing, politically polarized society, foresight and planning will be more important than ever to maintaining safe and peaceful communities. Although futures thinking is not a new feature of policing in the US, it remains an underutilized tool that has the potential to be of great value to

contemporary leaders. Emerging and future trends create both challenges and opportunities for police organizations. By recognizing those trends as early as possible, leaders can make better decisions and position their agencies in the most favorable way possible. In some circumstances, foresight allows the police to help create the future that is most preferable for the profession, their agencies, and the communities they serve. While responding effectively to crisis events and everyday emergencies will remain a high priority for the nation’s police, keeping one eye on the future will help to ensure that police departments have the necessary organizational agility to be successful in the coming decades.

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¹⁶ <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/03/5-facts-about-crime-in-the-u-s/>

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