

Project on American Justice Fireside Chat Summary

The Future of the Criminal Justice System: Role of Police, Prosecutors, and Corrections

Overview

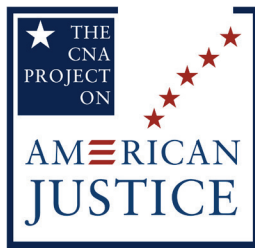
The CNA Center for Justice Research and Innovation's Project on American Justice (PAJ) for 2023 focuses on the future of the justice system based on current research and trends. To support this effort, CNA is working with several leading subject matter experts (SMEs) and senior advisors with research and practitioner experience in the justice field.

In July 2023, PAJ conducted its fifth "fireside chat" with these experts to discuss the role of police, prosecutors, and corrections using a futures analysis approach. Specifically, PAJ is using an analysis framework that examines the social, technological, economic, environmental, and political factors (STEEP) that may influence the justice system in the future to better identify opportunities to mitigate risks and promote success.

Based on research and current trends for these STEEP factors, our PAJ team is using the following 2040 future scenario:¹

In 2040, the number of adults outnumber the number of children for the first time in US history, and urbanized megapolitan areas exist nationwide. These mega areas are consolidating government services to better support increased community needs. In these areas and throughout the country, artificial intelligence is commonplace. Robots are replacing the workforce. It is common to have surveillance cameras in public spaces. The US national debt has reached historic highs, limiting our government's ability to invest in new priorities. Economic instability and climate action failure have increased tensions among states and there is no longer any faith in local and federal governments. Communities are pushing governments to enact more transparent processes by releasing information more often. Economic inequality has resulted in private policing for the wealthy. Communities have no trust in law enforcement. Due to increasing community demands, however, police departments are slowly changing their organizational structure. Law enforcement is more efficient and effective due to AI, and robots are being used to carry out police functions, such as search warrants and issue parking tickets. Agencies are using data and AI to be strategic on dispatching sworn or civilian responses, and they are working towards being proactive, rather than reactive, to crime. Police departments are also beginning to work with other local agencies to further address areas of community concern. Globally, the US has lost its place as the top superpower and has been surpassed by China, while the number of foreign-born individuals in the US is at a historic high and created a nationally diverse populous where no racial majority exists. However, rural America remains homogeneous and slow to adopt new technology.

¹ The PAJ team is using this scenario as a baseline for the conversations and does not assume that this will be the final outcome in the future. Rather, we are posing that this is one of many possible futures in 2040.



Using the future state scenario as a starting point, the group discussed potential risks and opportunities regarding the role of police, prosecutors, and corrections, as well as steps to take now to mitigate those risks and promote successes. A summary of the discussion continues below.

Risks and Opportunities

Upon discussing the 2040 future state scenario, SMEs identified several **risks** to the justice system, which include the following:

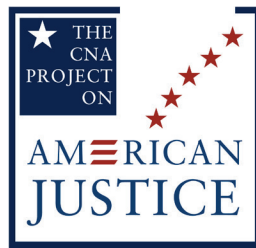
- **Proliferation of private security:** Due to a prioritization of violent crime, communities and businesses may have a stronger desire to invest in private security to protect their assets. Local police departments may find tension in having armed private security agencies engaging in law enforcement activities.
- **Supporting drug use, health, and trauma:** Stressors like economic instability and climate action failure, and a more diverse population, could lead to continued challenges with crime, trauma, and drug use. Further, with a growing aging population in the future, justice agencies, particularly correctional agencies, may have greater challenges with supporting the public and mental health of those individuals.
- **Short-term agendas:** Justice leaders and elected officials sometimes get into office and feel they need to act immediately because their time in office may only last one term. The risk posed is that these individuals are focused on a short-term agenda and create policies that seek immediate results that are not always sustainable in the long run. Therefore, long-term change is difficult to achieve.
- **Lack of community relations:** If the role of police becomes more specialized, there will be fewer opportunities for officers to engage in community relations activities (i.e., speaking with community members at events or on patrol).

In addition, **opportunities** were identified in relation to the role of police, prosecutors, and corrections in traditional justice functions in 2040.

- **Accountability for prosecutors:** Prosecutors being held accountable for their discretionary decisions allows for the justice system as a whole to become more efficient and policing to become more strategic.
- **Outsourcing jobs:** Less desirable aspects of policing, such as patrolling at unconventional hours and in poor weather, could be a role for artificial intelligence or robotics. Therefore, the job of a police officer may become more desirable for individuals and help reduce the nationwide police shortage.
- **Specialized focuses for police, prosecutors, and corrections:** The opportunity for justice agencies to focus on violent criminals, and prosecutors to defer individuals to treatment programs means less individuals entering the criminal justice system.

Ideas to Take Action On

The SMEs recommended several steps to take now to address the concerns and opportunities identified throughout the discussion. These steps include the following:



- The justice system should have **civilianized public safety directors** who may exhibit more control than law enforcement uniforms. How a supervisor runs operations is important for the cultural change in the organization and can positively effect change.
- Police departments and leaders should be thinking now about **how partnerships and approaches to those partnership can or need to be different in the future**. This may include policing policies and practices becoming more regional or community policing involving more virtual online interaction, resulting in less focus on individual neighborhoods. Or, it could involve becoming micro-centric in terms of community policing and individual relationships.
- There is currently an explosion of information in data, but there is still an unwillingness to share it across agencies, especially between federal and local agencies. Agencies tend to keep their information to themselves, or information sharing process are slowly down by policy or application-related barriers. **There must be better and more efficient information sharing practices between justice system stakeholders.**
- **Additional resources and for drug treatment and diversion programs would be beneficial to the justice system.** There is a need for more greater attention and focus on drug treatment, trauma-informed support, and diversion programs by justice leaders, in partnership with local communities.
- Mental health has been neglected and therefore not prioritize in the justice system. **Agencies should discuss and develop better solutions for incorporating mental healthcare within the justice system to help rehabilitate offenders with mental health issues more efficient and effectively.** Mental health training should also be commonplace since officers are frequently required to respond to such situations and need the appropriate skills to diffuse situations safely.
- Justice system practitioners, such as prosecutors and police, should improve information sharing with the public and their partners. Due to their firsthand understanding of challenges and needs, these **leaders and operators are well positioned to share data and solutions can inform both legislation and policy, which can also lead to more funding and resources for justice reform.**

“What does community policing and regional crime fighting become when we move towards a megalopolis in the future? My prediction is that the crime fighting strategies will become more regional, but the crime and community, the police and neighborhood relationships will become much more critical at the micro level.”

- PAJ SME Susan Manheimer

PAJ’s fireside chat on the role of police, prosecutors, and corrections resulted in fruitful discussion on potential risks and opportunities, as well as considerations on steps to take now to reduce the abovementioned risks and promote successes.