

Project on American Justice Fireside Chat Summary

The Future of Corrections: Community Involvement

Overview

The CNA Center for Justice Research and Innovation's Project on American Justice (PAJ) for 2024 focuses on the future of corrections 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 corrections field.

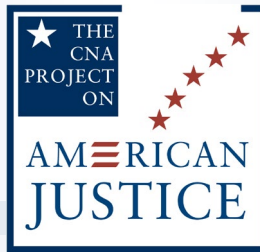
In April 2024, PAJ launched its second of several "fireside chats" with these experts to discuss the effects of community involvement. Specifically, PAJ used a futures analysis framework to examine the social, technological, economic, environmental, and political (STEEP) factors that may influence corrections and the criminal justice system in the future. With the framework, the PAJ team aims to identify opportunities to mitigate risks and promote success.

To support this analysis, the PAJ team identified several overarching STEEP factors based on research and current trends. **Social** factors include Generation Y and the aging population; urbanization through megacities, regions, and corridors; and expanding diversity. **Technological** factors include the growth in applied artificial intelligence (AI), use of robotics, and adoption of automated vehicles. **Economic** factors include increases in the US national debt and expansion of wealth inequality. **Environmental** factors include climate action failure and bursts in ecomigration and climate refugees. **Political** factors include balkanization and a shift in global superpowers. Using the STEEP factors, the PAJ team created the following 2040 future scenario:¹

In 2040, the number of adults outnumbers the number of children for the first time in US history, and urbanized megapolitan areas exist nationwide, including mega areas Phoenix-Tucson, Columbus-Cincinnati, Tampa-Orlando, and Washington-Baltimore-Richmond. Mega areas have adopted integrated justice systems with some jurisdictions covering multiple states. As a result of the rapid growth, cities are experiencing a housing crisis and access to jobs is a growing concern. In these areas and throughout the country, AI is commonplace. Automated vehicles traverse streets, and robots are replacing the workforce. Advanced technologies are aiding with the safety and security within public safety facilities. 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 between states, and there is no longer any faith in local and federal governments. 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 populace where no racial majority exists.

Using this future-state scenario as a starting point, the PAJ team identified potential risks and opportunities regarding community involvement in corrections, as well as steps to take now to mitigate those risks and promote successes. A summary of the discussion continues in the following sections.

¹ The PAJ team is using this scenario as a baseline for the conversations and does not assume that this outcome will occur. Rather, we are posing this scenario as one of many possible futures in 2040. In addition, this scenario grows and adapts after each fireside chat based on the findings from the discussion.



Risks and Opportunities

While discussing the 2040 future-state scenario, SMEs identified several **risks** to corrections and the criminal justice system:

- **Difficulty identifying communities:** As the US population continues to grow, community boundaries may blur with regionalization and diversification. Some experts noted that corrections programs and programs driving prison reform may find it difficult to ensure all communities are being engaged through their outreach efforts and represented through their stakeholders.
- **Placement farther from home:** Experts advised that the expected megapolitan regions may increase jurisdiction sizes for the criminal justice system, which means incarcerated people may be housed in facilities farther from their homes. This reality will strain community relations with residents and may negatively affect formerly incarcerated people's transitions into society.
- **Communities will continue to be underresourced:** Many programs driving change are grassroots, community-based organizations (CBOs) Some experts advised that these programs may lack resources to compete with programs that are equipped with AI to have wider outreach but lack the community-centric aspect that CBOs offer.

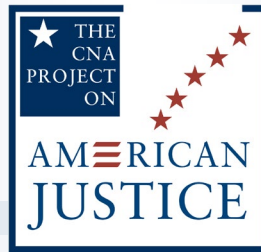
In addition, SMEs identified **opportunities** in relation to community involvement in 2040:

- **More interest in corrections:** Increased diversity nationwide may expand public interest regarding corrections, providing different perspectives and engagement.
- **Community at the global level:** Experts advised that some correctional institutions are examining other nations' correctional systems that have safe and secure facilities. There are continual opportunities for the US to learn and adopt best practices from other countries. Examples include the educational opportunities offered to carceral residents in order to broaden their perspectives in an institutional environment.
- **Accessibility of advanced technology:** Similar to comments made during the emerging technologies fireside chat, experts highlighted the opportunity for advanced technologies in correctional facilities to aid in connecting incarcerated individuals with their family and friends as well as with community and educational services that would normally be unavailable.

Ideas to Take Action On

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

- **Communicate and engage with the communities at large** to identify ways the criminal justice system can help prepare for increased financial burdens resulting from an impending housing crisis and difficult job market, particularly for those transitioning back into society.
- **Understand diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I)** at every level, such as race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality as well as their intersections. With the US population expected to lack a racial majority in 2040, it is imperative to promote and understand DE&I to ensure an identity group does not claim "dominance."



- **Develop universal or national correctional standards** that offer guidance to all facilities (i.e., jails, prisons, detention centers, federal level, state level, municipal level) to prevent harms that may occur within the facilities.
- **Include individuals who are directly affected (i.e., who have been in the system)** to provide perspective on what is going on in the facilities and with the systems. Experts recommended reviewing feedback forms from recently released individuals as a method of gaining insight.
- Transition some of the work of corrections professionals to **be proactive rather than reactive**. Some experts advised that a lot of the problems in the corrections field could be solved by identifying ways to prevent people from entering the criminal legal system. Further, if they are not already, corrections professionals should examine strategies in other countries and more closely examine global trends that may affect corrections.
- **Identify and understand who the community is** for corrections because diversity and boundaries change over time. Getting the community engaged in corrections is vital to effecting change that promotes safe institutions.

“Some good work can be done getting the community to see the jails and prisons as part of their community, but also for the jail and prison staff to see themselves as part of that community.”

—PAJ SME Panda Adkins

“You can’t incarcerate your way out of this.... How do we come together to utilize community that is being incarcerated to go back to support their own community as a collaborative with everybody?”

—PAJ SME Steven Kim

Overall, PAJ’s second fireside chat on community involvement resulted in fruitful discussion on potential risks and opportunities, as well as considerations of steps to take now to reduce the above-mentioned risks and promote successes. The next fireside chat will cover civilianization.

About CNA

CNA is a nonprofit research and analysis organization dedicated to the safety and security of the nation. It operates the Institute for Public Research—which serves civilian government agencies—and the Center for Naval Analyses, the Department of the Navy’s federally funded research and development center (FFRDC). CNA develops actionable solutions to complex problems of national importance. With nearly 700 scientists, analysts, and professional staff, CNA takes a real-world approach to gathering data, working side by side with operators and decision-makers around the world. CNA’s research portfolio includes global security and strategic competition, homeland security, emergency management, criminal justice, public health, data management, systems analysis, naval operations, and fleet and operational readiness.

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