

Technological changes: both threat and opportunity to policing

The changing face of policing

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Globally, digitalization and related emerging technologies are transforming every aspect of modern societies. For law enforcement, these developments will bring both novel challenges and opportunities.

Threat of online transformation

From the negative side, criminals have taken advantage of this online transformation to expand their reach across borders. The rapid rate of innovation will likely contribute to the increasing threat of cybercrime. Specifically, all devices which can connect to the Internet – collectively called the ‘Internet of Things’ or IoT – are potentially at risk of a cyberattack. Likewise, the rise of 5G could also exacerbate the problem, potentially allowing cybercriminals to target victims in their own homes.

As technological advances continue to expand the front lines of policing from offline to online, this also raises fundamental questions for the future of policing. For instance, what does the use of force – the police’s prerogative in the physical world mean in the digital realm?

On the one hand, the protection of life and property may remain the essential mission of policing. On the other hand, though, policing will probably take on different forms.

For instance, the rise of cyber-enabled crimes and ‘deepfakes’ raises an important question, specifically, what capabilities will law enforcement need

to acquire to guarantee the trustworthiness and admissibility of e-evidence in court?

Emerging technologies – opportunities for policing

While digitalization and emerging technologies bring their share of challenges, INTERPOL believes that they also offer opportunities for policing to reinvent itself. 5G for instance, together with other emerging technologies like cloud computing and artificial intelligence create opportunities for supporting new modes of policing operations including improving the operational effectiveness of autonomous vehicles, drones and robots. Of course, harnessing such opportunities may require rethinking existing organizational structures, skills and mindsets. For example, given their demand on labor markets, are law enforcement organizations willing to pay a chief data scientist more than a police commissioner?

In an increasingly digital age, police organizations will also have to realize that they can no longer go it alone. Collaborating across disciplines and jurisdictions has therefore become essential to solve complex, transnational crimes. Faced with this hyperconnected world of new technologies and synthetic media, global law enforcement will have to develop new strategies and tools to build and maintain digital trust.

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