

# Federal Law Enforcement

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# Artificial Intelligence for Saving Lives

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Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a defining technology of our time. Admittedly, there is also a considerable amount of excessive attention around AI. Prominent technol-

ogists and scientists such as Elon Musk and Stephen Hawking have warned us about the eminent danger of a robot apocalypse. Over-excited AI researchers have compared an AI system's victory over humans in a board game to landing on the moon. These exaggerations have been multiplied and exacerbated by a media hungry for catchy click baits.

This concern might lead one to dismiss the trend altogether and underappreciate the great potential of AI technology.

It is, however, increasingly hard to argue against the real promise of AI to revolutionize many aspects of our lives. The recent advances in AI are so powerful that even if the state-of-the-art in AI research stopped progressing today, we would still have years to fully harvest its potential<sup>1</sup>. The current state of AI can transform industries spanning from health care to agriculture to education.

I believe the potential benefits of AI in law enforcement are no different. I challenge every senior leader in government and public safety to ask: can the indispensable service

that law enforcement provides be improved and can officers be empowered by AI technology?

The concerns about the risks of AI, especially for law enforcement, are emphasized so much that some of the game-changing potential benefits are often overlooked. Imagine a world where every law enforcement officer is equipped with intelligent algorithms which augment their own intelligence to provide better services to our communities - an extension of their natural abilities, if you will, which is something technology has always done for us. The same way that

eyeglasses can make officers see better or cars can make them move faster, AI can enhance their cognitive abilities. Today, officers are manually typing license plate numbers into mobile data terminals, going over video frames to redact personally identifiable information and tediously sifting through hours of video to find the relevant information

to solve a crime. With AI being integrated into body-worn cameras and cloud services, officers can get that time back by automating most of the report generation process.

In short, just like any well-designed technology, AI will empower the officers to be more human. It will enable them to spend most of their time on what they have signed up to do: be involved with their communities and interact with citizens. Today, officers spend more than a third of their time filling out forms and pushing papers. The indirect consequence of freeing officers from bureaucracy is going to be truly transformational. The more officers can spend time

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<sup>1</sup> This position is well articulated by Andrew Ng of Stanford University

working among their communities, the faster crimes will be solved and the more lives will be saved.

AI can also increase officer safety by providing law enforcement with tools to make them more connected, aware and vigilant. Examples of these AI-enabled tools that we are currently working on at Axon include automatically reporting the occurrence of critical events such as gunshots, officer man-down, or foot chases in real time.

While there are many benefits to integrating AI into public safety, it is more important than ever to consider how to develop and implement these technologies responsibly. Responsible AI, including being mindful of ethics and civil rights, privacy, algorithmic bias and cyber security, is of the utmost importance if we aim to make the optimistic picture above a reality. For this reason, Axon is leading the industry in forming the first-of-its-kind AI and Policing Technology Ethics Board. The board, consisting of experts and thought leaders from a broad range of backgrounds, advises Axon in the responsible development of AI into our products and services.

The story of the Human Genome Project and innovations following its completion is a thought provoking model for successful development of controversial science and technology. When the US Federal government launched the project in the 1990s, there was a wide range of reactions from the public. This ranged from hysteria to legitimate concerns about the risk of DNA-based discrimination. Eventually a healthy debate, including both the public and a government sponsored ethics program with the goal of mitigating the risks, resulted in extremely

promising outcomes. The nightmare scenarios did not unfold and genome sequencing is currently one of the most important tools for healthcare professionals with extraordinary potentials for improving the human condition.

Similar to how a responsible approach to developing the human genome sequencing technology has helped humanity save many

lives today, I believe that a thoughtful and responsible-minded approach to AI development can lead us to a world where both citizens and public safety officers are safer, operations are more efficient, costs are saved and eventually more lives are saved. A methodical approach

that focuses on maximizing the benefit while mitigating the risks should be our guiding principle. Neither inaction due to fear of misuse nor full-speed implementation without due diligence is the appropriate approach if we are to harness the benefits of this new technology to its fullest.

As we move into the third and fourth decades of the 21st century, keeping our communities safe will continue to be a challenge. Criminals will continue to get more sophisticated and almost every citizen will have a constant presence in the virtual/digital world which exposes a multitude of safety risks. Ensuring public safety will require more advanced tools and technologies. For the sake of our collective security and economic prosperity, I would argue that AI technology should be considered a prioritized area of strategic investment for public safety.

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