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How policing surveillance technology impacts your rights

PREDICTIVE POLICING

WHAT ARE PREDICTIVE POLICING PROGRAMS?

Predictive policing programs are used by the police to estimate where and when crimes are likely to be committed – or who is likely to commit them.

These programs work by feeding historic policing data through computer algorithms.

For example, a program might evaluate data about past crimes to predict where future crimes will happen – identifying "hot spots" or "boxes" on a map. But the data these programs use is incomplete and biased, leading to a "feedback loop" – sending officers to communities that are already unfairly over-policed.

Other predictive policing programs may suggest how people will behave. These programs are fed information about a person, and then they decide whether that person is likely to commit an offence.



WHO USES PREDICTIVE POLICING PROGRAMS?

Police forces across the UK use or have used predictive policing programs.

For example, Kent police hit headlines with its use of PredPol, a program developed in the United States, which directs officers where to patrol based on predictive mapping software. They used the software for five years, and are now looking to create their own version of it.

Durham Constabulary is renowned for its Harm Assessment Risk Tool (HART), which assesses whether someone is likely to reoffend using crude profiling from data about a person's family, housing and financial status.

Other police forces using predictive policing programs include Avon and Somerset Police and West Midlands Police.

WHAT DOES THE LAW SAY?

The use of predictive policing programs is not covered by any law or regulation.

This makes it incredibly difficult to understand how these programs are used, how they come to decisions about us or our communities, and how we can challenge those decisions.

WHAT ABOUT MY RIGHTS?

Predictive policing programs pose a significant threat to our rights.

Discrimination

While we might assume that computer programs and algorithms are neutral, this is not the case. The data that is fed into these systems is incomplete or based on human biases, leading to decisions that perpetuate pre-existing social inequalities.

For example, mapping programs often send officers back to monitor the same over-policed communities again and again.

And the HART program considers information such as where a person lives and how much they earn in their assessment of how likely they are to reoffend.

Freedom of expression and assembly

Knowing that our data is being collected and used to make decisions about us may ultimately lead to us censoring our own behaviour. For example, if our local community is a "hot spot" for policing activity, we may change where we go and what we do in our local area and even who we spend time with.

Privacy

Predictive policing programs may involve collecting our personal data, such as our social media activity. They can therefore collaterally impact our right to privacy.

HAVE YOUR SAY ABOUT PREDICTIVE POLICING

Each police force across England and Wales has an elected Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC). PCCs should be a vital way for the local community to hold their local police force to account. Your PCC should listen to and represent your views about how the police work in your area.

Find out who your local PCC is and how to contact them here. In Scotland, you can contact the Scottish Police Authority.



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