TOBİDER

International Journal of Social Sciences

ISSN:2587-2591
DOI Number:http://dx.doi.org/10.30830/tobider.sayi. 22.12

Volume 9/2
2025 p. 212-223

PREDICTIVE POLICING: CASE OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA[1]

ÖNGÖRÜCÜ POLİSLİK: AMERİKA BİRLEŞİK DEVLETLERİ ÖRNEĞİ

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, predictive policing has emerged as a highly influential yet deeply controversial approach to crime prevention in the United States. By harnessing historical crime data and applying statistical and machine learning models, law enforcement agencies aim to forecast the location, time, and even individuals most likely to be involved in future criminal activity. While the underlying goal of these systems is to improve efficiency and reduce crime through proactive intervention, their implementation has raised complex questions about fairness, legality, and public accountability.

This article provides an in-depth examination of predictive policing from multiple dimensions: theoretical foundations, empirical applications, legal critiques, and ethical implications. It begins by situating predictive policing within broader criminological theories such as rational choice, routine activity theory, and broken windows policing, explaining how these frameworks inform algorithmic crime forecasting. The article then presents detailed case studies from three major U.S. cities–Los Angeles (PredPol and Operation LASER), Chicago (Strategic Subject List), and New York City (CompStat and Domain Awareness System)–to analyze how different models have been operationalized, evaluated, and contested.

[1] This article is derived from the master's thesis titled 'Predictive Policing as an Alternative Approach in Homeland Security Management'.

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Through a synthesis of academic research, governmental reports, and empirical evaluations, the article critically assesses whether predictive policing delivers on its promises. Findings suggest that while there may be limited improvements in crime detection or resource deployment in some contexts, these gains are often offset by disproportionate targeting of marginalized communities, lack of transparency in algorithmic design, and absence of independent oversight mechanisms.

The article concludes with a set of policy recommendations aimed at mitigating harm and enhancing accountability. These include mandating algorithmic transparency, implementing fairness-aware design principles, strengthening data governance, and embedding community oversight into all stages of system development and deployment. Ultimately, while predictive policing technologies may offer tactical benefits, their long-term value depends on the establishment of ethical, legal, and socially just frameworks that prioritize civil liberties and public trust.

Keywords: *Predictive Policing, Algorithmic Bias, Data-Driven Policing, Machine Learning In Law Enforcement, Public Safety Technology, Surveillance Ethics.*

ÖZ

Son yıllarda, öngörücü polislik (predictive policing), Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'nde suç önleme alanında etkili fakat oldukça tartışmalı bir yaklaşım olarak öne çıkmıştır. Geçmiş suç verilerinden yararlanarak istatistiksel ve makine öğrenmesi modelleri kullanan bu sistemler, kolluk kuvvetlerinin gelecekteki suçların yerini, zamanını ve hatta faillerini önceden tahmin etmelerini amaçlamaktadır. Ancak bu teknolojilerin temel hedefi, etkinlik ve suç oranlarını azaltma gibi amaçlara hizmet etse de, uygulamada adalet, hukukilik ve kamu denetimi gibi alanlarda ciddi tartışmalara neden olmuştur.

Bu makale, öngörücü polisliğe ilişkin kuramsal temelleri, ampirik uygulamaları, hukuki eleştirileri ve etik yansımaları çok boyutlu bir biçimde incelemektedir. İlk olarak, rasyonel seçim kuramı, rutin faaliyet teorisi ve kırık camlar kuramı gibi kriminolojik yaklaşımlarla bu uygulamalar arasındaki ilişki tartışılmakta, ardından öngörücü polislik modellerinin bilimsel arka planı açıklanmaktadır. Makalede, Los Angeles (PredPol ve LASER Operasyonu), Chicago (Stratejik Kişi Listesi) ve New York (CompStat ve Domain Awareness System) gibi büyük şehirlerdeki örnek olay incelemeleri üzerinden bu sistemlerin nasıl uygulandığı, değerlendirildiği ve kamuoyunda nasıl karşılandığı analiz edilmektedir.

Kapsamlı literatür taraması ve ampirik bulgular ışığında yapılan değerlendirmeler, bu sistemlerin bazı durumlarda suçun önlenmesinde veya kaynakların daha etkili kullanılmasında sınırlı başarılar sağladığını ortaya koymaktadır. Ancak bu kazanımlar, sıklıkla dezavantajlı toplulukların orantısız biçimde hedef alınması, algoritmaların şeffaf olmaması ve bağımsız denetim mekanizmalarının eksikliği gibi önemli sorunlarla gölgelenmektedir.

Makale, şeffaf algoritmalar, adil yapay zeka uygulamaları, güçlü veri yönetimi ve toplum temelli denetim gibi bir dizi politika önerisiyle son bulmaktadır. Sonuç olarak, öngörücü polislik teknolojileri taktik düzeyde fayda sağlama potansiyeline

sahip olsa da, uzun vadede meşruiyetini ve toplumsal kabulünü ancak etik, hukuki ve adalet odaklı çerçeveler içinde sürdürebilecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Öngörücü Polislik, Algoritmik Önyargı, Veri Temelli Kolluk Faaliyeti, Makine Öğrenmesi, Kamu Güvenliği Teknolojileri, Gözetim Etiği.*

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, predictive policing has emerged as one of the most transformative and controversial developments in modern law enforcement. Defined as the application of analytical techniques, particularly algorithms and statistical models, to anticipate and potentially prevent criminal activities before they occur, predictive policing represents a shift from reactive to proactive policing strategies (Perry, W. L., McInnis, B., Price, C. C., Smith, S. C., & Hollywood, J. S.,2013). This paradigm shift has attracted the interest of police departments across the United States, many of which have implemented or tested predictive tools with the aim of optimizing patrol resources, improving crime prevention, and enhancing public safety (Yang, 2019).

The term "predictive policing" encompasses a wide range of technologies and methods. Broadly speaking, it can be categorized into two main types: place-based predictions, which identify locations where crimes are likely to occur, and person-based predictions, which assess individuals who may be involved in criminal activity, either as suspects or victims (Brayne, S., Rosenblat, A., & boyd, d.,2015). Place-based models often utilize historical crime data to generate heatmaps or forecast future hotspots, while person-based models may analyze personal information, social networks, and behavioral patterns (Benbouzid, 2019).

The historical roots of predictive policing can be traced to earlier developments in crime mapping and data-driven policing strategies such as CompStat, introduced by the New York Police Department in the 1990s (Wilson, 2019). Over time, the growth of big data, advances in artificial intelligence, and the proliferation of surveillance technologies facilitated the evolution from traditional crime analysis to highly sophisticated predictive systems (Kutnowski, 2017). Tools like PredPol, HunchLab, and the Strategic Subject List in Chicago have been deployed in various jurisdictions, supported by infrastructure such as facial recognition, license plate readers, and social media monitoring (Yang, 2019).

However, while predictive policing has promised to make policing more efficient and targeted, its implementation has raised significant concerns. Empirical evidence on its effectiveness remains mixed. Some studies indicate modest reductions in crime or improved resource deployment, but others question the validity of predictive models due to limitations in data quality and methodological transparency (Mugari & Obioha, 2021). Furthermore, the overreliance on historical crime data–often collected through biased

policing practices–can result in feedback loops that reinforce systemic inequalities and disproportionately impact communities of color (Shapiro, 2017).

The ethical and legal implications of predictive policing are equally significant. Critics argue that these systems challenge fundamental democratic principles, such as due process and the presumption of innocence, by enabling preemptive interventions based on probabilistic risk rather than concrete evidence (Miller, 2021). Others have warned that predictive systems lack adequate oversight and accountability mechanisms, creating "black box" scenarios where decisions are made without transparency or public input (Ferguson, 2016).

Given these developments, this article aims to provide a comprehensive examination of predictive policing as practiced in the United States. The main objectives are to (1) trace the conceptual and technological evolution of predictive policing, (2) assess its practical applications and outcomes, (3) critically evaluate its ethical, legal, and social implications, and (4) offer recommendations for future policy and governance. Through an interdisciplinary lens that draws from criminology, data science, ethics, and public policy, the article seeks to contribute to the growing body of scholarship on algorithmic governance and the future of public safety.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Predictive policing is underpinned by a set of criminological theories that suggest crime is not random, but rather patterned and predictable based on observable social and spatial cues. Among the foundational theories often cited are rational choice theory, routine activity theory, broken windows theory, and concepts from environmental criminology.

Rational choice theory posits that individuals commit crimes based on a calculated assessment of risks and rewards, suggesting that criminal behavior can be anticipated through patterns of opportunity and deterrence (Yang, 2019). Predictive policing systems operationalize this logic by using historical crime data to infer where future opportunities for crime are likely to arise, enabling law enforcement to intervene proactively.

Routine activity theory, first proposed by Cohen and Felson, asserts that crimes occur when three elements converge in space and time: a motivated offender, a suitable target, and the absence of capable guardianship. This framework helps explain the spatial and temporal dynamics of crime and justifies the hotspot-based focus of predictive policing algorithms (Leng & Li, 2018). By mapping routine movements and activities, predictive systems aim to anticipate when and where these criminogenic conditions will align.

Broken windows theory, introduced by Wilson and Kelling (1982), argues that visible signs of disorder (e.g., vandalism, loitering) signal social neglect and invite more serious crime. This theory has directly informed policing strategies that emphasize low-level offense enforcement as a way to maintain public order and deter serious crime (Gau & Cameron, 2019). Predictive models, especially place-based ones, often rely on this

conceptual linkage by treating indicators of disorder as early warnings for future criminal activity.

Furthermore, environmental criminology and crime pattern theory contribute additional insights by focusing on the geographical and situational aspects of crime. These approaches emphasize the importance of analyzing spatial patterns and land-use structures to identify locations prone to criminal incidents (Leng & Li, 2018). Predictive policing tools like Risk Terrain Modeling (RTM) are grounded in this theoretical lineage, using environmental features (e.g., abandoned buildings, liquor stores) as predictors in crime forecasts.

APPLICATIONS OF PREDICTIVE POLICING IN THE UNITED STATES

Predictive policing has been adopted across several major U.S. cities in various forms, ranging from crime mapping tools to individual risk assessment algorithms. This section presents key case studies from Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York City, illustrating how different jurisdictions have implemented predictive systems and the mixed outcomes these systems have produced.

Los Angeles: PredPol and Operation LASER

The Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) was among the earliest adopters of predictive policing technology through its partnership with UCLA and the FBI to develop PredPol. This place-based software forecasts locations with a high probability of future crimes based on historical crime data (Yang, 2019). Concurrently, LAPD launched Operation LASER (Los Angeles Strategic Extraction and Restoration), a person-based program that used data points such as past arrests, gang affiliations, and field interviews to identify chronic offenders.

While PredPol was initially promoted for its ability to optimize patrol routes and reduce crime through hotspot mapping, its outcomes were less clear. Independent evaluations failed to show statistically significant crime reduction, and the program was criticized for reinforcing racial biases by sending officers repeatedly into over-policed neighborhoods (Ferguson, 2016; Benbouzid, 2019).

Chicago: Strategic Subject List (SSL)

The Chicago Police Department (CPD) implemented a person-based predictive policing initiative called the Strategic Subject List (SSL), which ranked individuals based on their perceived risk of being involved in gun violence. The list was generated through an algorithm incorporating variables like prior arrests, age, and known associations (Saunders, J., Hunt, P., & Hollywood, J. S. ,2016). Those identified were then subject to increased surveillance and preemptive intervention.

However, a quasi-experimental evaluation of the SSL program showed that individuals on the list were not significantly more likely to be victims of violence than those not on

the list. Instead, they were more likely to be arrested for a shooting, suggesting the list may have been used as an investigative shortcut rather than a preventive tool (Saunders et al., 2016). Civil liberties groups condemned the lack of transparency and potential for stigmatization without due process, leading the city to quietly end the program in 2020 (Sheehey, 2018).

New York City: CompStat and the Domain Awareness System

New York City has used predictive policing in more integrated and infrastructure-driven ways. CompStat, launched in the 1990s, is not predictive in the strictest algorithmic sense but laid the foundation for data-driven policing by emphasizing real-time crime statistics and accountability at the precinct level. Later, NYPD collaborated with Microsoft to develop the Domain Awareness System (DAS), a surveillance platform that integrates video feeds, license plate readers, and public data to assist predictive analytics (Yang, 2019).

Though these systems were praised for enabling faster police response and smarter resource deployment, they have been criticized for contributing to mass surveillance and expanding the scope of police monitoring. The program's integration with private sector databases and its potential for racial profiling raised significant concerns from privacy and civil rights advocates (Miller, 2021).

Broader Technological and Policy Implications

In addition to the specific cases above, many U.S. jurisdictions have experimented with tools such as HunchLab, Risk Terrain Modeling (RTM), and Beware. These tools often promise predictive precision but suffer from opaque methodologies and limited empirical validation (Perry et al., 2013). A recurring pattern across jurisdictions is the over-reliance on historical crime data, which embeds racial and spatial biases into the systems themselves, producing a feedback loop of over-policing in historically disadvantaged neighborhoods (Brayne et al., 2015).

Moreover, the lack of standardization and inconsistent auditing practices has made it difficult to compare effectiveness across different cities or systems. Without clear metrics, public oversight, and independent evaluation, predictive policing risks functioning more as a symbolic performance of technological modernity than as an evidence-based crime prevention tool (Benbouzid, 2019).

ETHICAL, LEGAL, AND SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The use of predictive policing technologies has raised significant ethical, legal, and social concerns across the United States. While the systems are often introduced as tools to improve efficiency and reduce crime, critics argue they may deepen existing injustices, threaten civil liberties, and erode public trust in law enforcement.

A primary ethical concern is the potential for predictive policing systems to reinforce and amplify existing social and racial biases. Because these algorithms rely heavily on historical crime data–often shaped by decades of over-policing in marginalized neighborhoods–they can reproduce systemic inequities by disproportionately targeting communities of color (Hadjimatheou & Nathan, 2022; Brayne, Rosenblat, & Boyd, 2015).

Multiple studies have shown that algorithmic decision-making can reflect the prejudices embedded in their training data, leading to a feedback loop in which already surveilled neighborhoods are continually flagged for increased police presence (Rahman Nabil et al., 2025; Gstrein, Bunnik, & Zwitter, 2019). This automated replication of bias raises serious concerns about due process and equal treatment under the law.

Predictive policing technologies often involve the integration of vast amounts of personal and public data, including location tracking, social media activity, and facial recognition. This level of surveillance can result in significant invasions of privacy, particularly when individuals are monitored without probable cause (Miller, 2021).

Such surveillance practices are frequently implemented without clear judicial oversight, raising questions about their constitutionality under the Fourth Amendment. The risk is that individuals are treated as potential threats based not on their actions, but on algorithmic projections of future behavior (Susser, 2021). This preemptive approach to law enforcement challenges long-standing legal norms that require individualized suspicion for state intervention.

Another ethical issue is the lack of transparency in predictive policing algorithms. Many of these systems are developed by private companies that consider their algorithms proprietary, limiting public access to the logic behind police decisions (Karppi, 2018). Without transparency, there is little room for independent auditing or community oversight.

Accountability becomes even more difficult when law enforcement agencies adopt predictive tools without evaluating their long-term effects or publishing audit results. This opacity can lead to unjust outcomes without mechanisms for redress, eroding trust in both the tools and the institutions that use them (Kutnowski, 2017).

From a legal standpoint, predictive policing raises questions about constitutionally protected rights. Scholars have debated whether preemptive surveillance and intervention violate the Fourth Amendment's protection against unreasonable searches and seizures (Ferguson, 2012; Arcila, 2014). Furthermore, the Fourteenth Amendment's Equal Protection Clause is at risk when minority communities are systematically over-policed due to biased predictions (Yang, 2019).

Current U.S. legal frameworks do not fully address the group-level harms predictive policing may produce. For example, while individuals may have the right to challenge

data held about them, there are few protections against algorithmic targeting of entire neighborhoods or demographic groups (Gstrein et al., 2019).

The societal implications of predictive policing are broad and complex. On one hand, proponents argue that these systems can help reduce crime and optimize resource allocation. On the other hand, critics highlight how algorithmic policing may damage police-community relations by promoting suspicion and fear rather than safety and cooperation (Shapiro, 2017).

Communities subjected to repeated surveillance may experience feelings of alienation and powerlessness. Over time, this undermines the legitimacy of law enforcement and hinders community engagement, both of which are critical for effective public safety strategies (Modise, 2024).

Evaluation of Effectiveness

Evaluating the effectiveness of predictive policing requires an assessment of its core objective: reducing crime through efficient resource allocation. In the U.S., jurisdictions have implemented various models–such as hot spots policing, risk forecasting tools like PredPol, and person-based systems like the Strategic Subject List (SSL)–with mixed empirical results. This section examines the available evidence on whether predictive policing lives up to its crime prevention promise, and under what conditions it may succeed or fail.

Evidence for the direct crime-reducing impact of predictive policing is inconsistent. In some U.S. cities, place-based strategies such as hot spot policing have demonstrated modest success. A comprehensive Campbell systematic review of 25 studies–17 conducted in the U.S.–found that hot spots policing significantly reduced crime in targeted areas, with minimal displacement effects and some diffusion of benefits to surrounding neighborhoods (Braga, Papachristos, & Hureau, 2012).

However, other forms of predictive policing, particularly algorithmic models like PredPol, have yielded less conclusive results. While some early pilot studies suggested positive outcomes, more recent and rigorous evaluations have questioned the overall effectiveness. For instance, a large-scale analysis in Chicago found that although predictive algorithms achieved high predictive accuracy (area under the curve ~90% for certain crimes), they also revealed enforcement bias favoring wealthier neighborhoods, potentially distorting crime data and undermining fairness (Rotaru, V., Huang, Y., Li, T., Evans, J., & Chattopadhyay, I.,2022).

Furthermore, an Oxford review concluded that despite widespread adoption, there is insufficient longitudinal evidence to demonstrate consistent reductions in crime attributable to predictive systems, particularly when confounding factors like changes in policing strategies or crime reporting behavior are considered (Yang, 2019).

One potential benefit of predictive policing lies in optimizing police deployment. Predictive mapping tools may help agencies allocate patrols more efficiently by forecasting when and where crimes are likely to occur. A review of predictive systems such as PredPol, CompStat, and HunchLab suggests they allow agencies to target high-risk areas, potentially conserving resources and enabling more focused interventions (Carvalho & Pedrosa, 2021).

Yet, efficiency gains are not always accompanied by crime reduction. In a randomized controlled trial in Uruguay–evaluating a U.S.-developed predictive software–no significant differences in crime outcomes were observed between districts using predictive tools and those using local human analysts (Galiani & Jaitman, 2022). While not a U.S. study, its relevance is instructive given the software's origin and design.

Additionally, when predictive policing is implemented without adequate training, data quality, or contextual adaptation, its value diminishes. This is echoed in pilot studies from Germany and elsewhere, which found only moderate or unclear effects on residential burglary rates, despite sophisticated predictive analytics (Gerstner, 2018).

Effectiveness also depends on public acceptance and perceived legitimacy. Predictive policing can undermine trust if perceived as overly intrusive or biased. A report from the RAND Corporation emphasized that predictive policing must be accompanied by transparency, community engagement, and clear performance metrics to maintain public confidence (Perry et al., 2013, as cited in Yang, 2019).

When communities feel targeted by automated systems–particularly communities of color–the result may be reduced cooperation with law enforcement and diminished overall effectiveness, regardless of actual crime reduction (Brayne, Rosenblat, & Boyd, 2015).

Conclusion

Predictive policing represents a significant transformation in law enforcement strategy, aiming to anticipate and prevent crime through data analytics and algorithmic forecasting. While these technologies offer the potential for more efficient policing and improved resource allocation, their actual effectiveness and societal impact remain hotly contested.

Empirical studies offer mixed findings regarding the efficacy of predictive policing. Some early implementations have reported modest reductions in crime, particularly in geographically targeted areas, but the results are often difficult to isolate from broader policing strategies or external variables (Yang, 2019); (Mugari & Obioha, 2021). Evaluative reviews also stress the lack of strong, consistent empirical support, noting that many programs rely on anecdotal success stories or small-scale pilots without independent assessment (Meijer & Wessels, 2019).

On the other hand, concerns about privacy, racial bias, and due process have been substantial. Tools like the Strategic Subject List (SSL) and PredPol have been shown to disproportionately target communities of color and reinforce existing inequalities within the criminal justice system (Kutnowski, 2017); (Ferguson, 2012). Moreover, scholars have raised fundamental legal and ethical questions about whether predictive technologies align with liberal democratic values, particularly the presumption of innocence and the right to privacy (Miller, 2021).

While predictive policing is often framed as an innovation, critical perspectives argue that it reproduces older paradigms of actuarial justice and reactive control, rather than enabling meaningful reform or prevention (Pais, 2019). Technological sophistication alone cannot guarantee just or effective policing. Instead, predictive policing must be embedded in transparent governance frameworks, continuously audited for fairness, and co-developed with the communities most affected by its deployment (Shapiro, 2017).

In summary, predictive policing is not a panacea. Its success depends not merely on technical accuracy but on the ethical, legal, and social infrastructures that guide its use. Future policies must emphasize democratic accountability, data integrity, and the protection of civil liberties to ensure that predictive policing serves as a tool for justice rather than a source of harm.

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