

# **Public Perceptions Of The Use Of 'AI' Technologies In Policing**

Martina Feilzer and Bethan Loftus, Bangor University  
WCCSJ, Gregynog 2024

Research Team: Bethan Loftus, Alex Laffer, Vian Bakir, Martina  
Feilzer and Andy McStay

## Aims And Methodology

*What ethical issues are raised through the police use of Live and Retrospective Facial Recognition and other predictive technologies, and what are the views of the public, police and stakeholders with respect to the deployment of these?*

- North Wales citizen focus group discussions (n=23, stratified)
- National demographically representative survey (n=2,155, plus a NW sample)
- Interviews with expert stakeholders from regulatory/civic organisations (n=4)
- Interviews with serving officers and staff with North Wales Police (n=5)

Citizen Group Discussions, n=23

# Privacy Versus Security

- Participants **less concerned** about potential erosion of privacy
- Personal and societal safety was an overriding factor but nuanced views

*“I was just thinking how if something did happen to, say, me or my loved ones in a crowd, and my first instinct would also be to see if there is, I mean, reach out to police and understand if there's any like, do we have a recording of this? Do we have a record of people who came in? And I feel like though it is again infringing on human liberty and freedom, I think that there is still a sort of security that I would also fall back to if something happened. And I suppose in a society, we are asked to trust the police, and probably would.”*  
(Alisha, FGX)

*‘I wouldn't know what the right solution is. I think it's good when it comes to, you know, if it means that we get more crime off the street, then I'm all for it. But then, at the same time... the more technology you use, the less freedom that you have.’* (Barry FGA)

## PERSONAL AWARENESS AND PROXIMITY

- People are more comfortable with the technology if it does not impact them directly
  - A little inconvenience is tolerated if it supports safety and security
  - Many participants would prefer technologies to be discrete/invisible
  - Many participants seemed **more** comfortable with the *mass surveillance* potential of RFR and LFR
  - And were put off by the targeted and personal interaction of officer-instigated FR
- When surveillance is unobtrusive and not targeted, citizens feel better about it

## Risk Scoring

- The most disliked technology was the risk scoring, with participants concerned with the predictive elements - in terms of **accuracy** and framing people as suspicious ('pre-crime')
- This was viewed as a means of **targeting specific groups** and steering them into a path of criminality (via labelling)

*"It's supposed to be, 'you're innocent until you're proven guilty'. And it's straight in with a "I'm looking for stuff to try and find to, just to, not so much to verify what you've said, but to try and connect you to something that might have occurred down the line, or something in the past." (Ben FGC)*

# Trust And Police Culture

- There was concern that those who are involved both in designing and using technologies may **contaminate the systems with their own biases and prejudices** impacting on accuracy and effectiveness
- Participants discussed the culture of policing
- Other participants believed that AI and associated technologies **are neutral and the positive assistance** it can provide police officers working in challenging contexts to keep the public safe

I wouldn't trust them at all. ... you've only got to see what's been on the news over the last few weeks with the police. ... This data, I mean, like, ... one of the other guys said, you know, once it's out there you don't know who's got access to it. (Oliver FGB)

'I've got nothing to hide... in theory, I don't have a problem with the police having information on me. What I do have a problem is, is who runs the police, and they might not feel the same way now as they do in 5 years, when they've still got access to my data. But, the circumstances which they can treat and use it has changed.'

## Human-in-the-Loop

- Caution about succumbing to discourses around techno-solutionism (desire to think about and use technology as *the* solution)
- Majority of participants felt that there needs to be a human-in-the-loop and that these humans should be experts and well trained on the technology

*The technology is shown to be less accurate if, for example, depending on your gender, depending on your ethnicity. So do you think people should be more worried if they're from particular communities? [...] you could be innocent, but if your face is recognized on them, you know, you've got a hell of a fight to win, haven't you? So it's a case of potentially people just sort of accepting what the machine says without using their own discretion. (Rachel FG3)*



National Public Opinion Survey, (n=2,155)

## Retrospective Facial Recognition

- A general level of concern about privacy - with 39% of respondents agreeing that privacy could be a problem in the context of AI in policing
- **Ethnicity was biggest indicator of difference here** - 38% of white respondents expressed concern about privacy, 51% of non-white respondents agreed that the use of RFR was a potential invasion of privacy
- More respondents agreed that **scope/mission creep was a concern (51%)**
- Ethnicity was key marker of difference with greater levels of concern, minority ethnic participants, 65%; 50% of white participants
- Particularly high for Black or Black British participants (70%) but lower for Asian or Asian British respondents (55%)

Survey Questions N=2155	Proportion Agree (Strongly and Tend to)	Proportion Disagree (Strongly and Tend to)	Neither Agree or Disagree
Retrospective Facial Recognition Technology			
Use of retrospective FR technology is an invasion of privacy	39%	31%	30%
Comfortable with the use of retrospective FR in rural context	58%	14%	28%
Police officer should make the decision on identification	70%	7%	23%
Concern about the use of retrospective FR beyond identification of suspects for active cases	51%	16%	34%
Concern that FR could lead to discrimination	51%	15%	34%
Use of AI and FR is necessary for the police to be effective	46%	15%	39%

## Live Facial Recognition

- LFR elicited higher levels of concern around privacy than RFR – white respondents 48% and minority ethnic groups at 62%
- Welsh people are more concerned about LFR use
- Wales is one of the UK regions with higher levels of concern
- Concern about mission creep is higher in terms of concern than privacy
- 70% of the total sample believed that LFR was most useful in densely populated areas

Live Facial Recognition Technology			
Use of live FR technology would be an invasion of my privacy	50%	25%	25%
Live FR is most useful in densely populated areas.	66%	8%	27%
Live FR needs to be checked and verified by a person before officers are allowed to act	66%	6%	28%
If I saw live FR in use, I would be more self-conscious of my behaviour even if not doing anything illegal	50%	21%	29%
I would be comfortable entering an area in which live FR is used	47%	21%	32%

## Other Highlights

- Members of the public **do see the utility of AI technologies** if it will help with police resourcing
- There was broad agreement that FR and machine-learning can benefit **some** investigations – e.g., used in an emergency to identify a lost/vulnerable person, speeding up investigations, and promptly identifying a ‘wanted’ suspect
- Ethnicity not a straightforward indicator of perspective on the use of AI technologies, reinforcing the need not to homogenise groups
- In relation to age, there was an almost universal trend upwards in approval of AI technologies from younger people to older people

Operator Instigated Facial Recognition			
Traffic stop: I would not want a police officer to make photo and use FR - this would be an invasion of privacy	45%	27%	27%
Ability to check identity is most useful in rural areas	52%	12%	36%
Concern that police officers rely on FR technology rather than their experience, training,... when identifying people	56%	14%	30%
Concern that a photo taken and processed by FR would be used for other policing activities	52%	19%	29%
I would feel able to tell a police officer that I did not consent to them taking my photo and using FR to check my identity	41%	24%	35%
If I had not done anything wrong I would have no concern allowing an officer to take a photo to in FR	48%	21%	30%

## Conclusion

- Views on the use of 'AI' technologies in policing are **nuanced**
- Members of the public are aware of the privacy concerns in relation to 'AI' technologies as well as the potential for mission creep and discriminatory use
- There is greater concern around targeted surveillance/risk scoring than mass surveillance
- A significant proportion of survey respondents are 'undecided' on the implications of 'AI' technologies