P103 / From Data to Decisions on Emerging Public Security Problems in the Global South

Topic : Knowledge, Science and Expertise in Policy Process

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GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Public security agencies increasingly face problems that evolve faster than the evidence available to address them. Digital fraud, violence against older persons, cybercrime, technology-facilitated gender-based violence, mobile phone theft and its illicit markets, money laundering and missing persons are emerging problems, with little accumulated evidence on what works. Many are wicked problems in Rittel and Webber's (1973) sense, as they lack a definitive formulation, are symptoms of other problems and have no stopping rule (Head, 2022), while depending on data held by private actors such as banks and digital platforms. Violence against older persons is illustrative, as it is conceptually contested and heavily underreported (WHO, 2002; Goergen & Beaulieu, 2013; Anetzberger, 2023) and urgent as Latin America ages rapidly (IDB, 2022). Problem-oriented and evidence-based policing (Goldstein, 1979, 1990; Sherman, 1998), built largely on street crime in the Global North, offer limited guidance for such phenomena.

Data analytics has expanded the toolkit of governments, which now includes geospatial and network analysis, machine learning, natural language processing of police reports and large language models. Yet most applications remain exploratory, few assess whether analytics changes decisions or outcomes, and even robust causal analyses of administrative data (Piquero & Sherman, 2025) come from high-income countries. The gap between research and practice persists (Goldstein, 2003; Nutley, Walter & Davies, 2007), amounting to a "dialogue of the deaf" between police and academia (Bradley & Nixon, 2009). Bridging it requires professionalising evidence use (Sherman & Murray, 2015), analytical capacity (Keay & Kirby, 2018), "pracademics" (Braga, 2016) and a shift from research on the police to research with the police (Goode & Lumsden, 2018). In the Global South, unequal state capacities compound these challenges (Eiró & Lotta, 2023), although embedded research units can mediate this relationship (Uwada, Becker & Alvarenga, 2026).

This panel asks how data analytics can help public security agencies detect, understand and respond to emerging problems for which established evidence is still scarce. It examines analytics across diagnosis, decision-making and evaluation, and explores four hypotheses.

H1. Analytics applied to administrative and unstructured data can reveal underreported and rapidly changing patterns earlier than traditional statistics, enabling informed action where experimental evidence is not yet available.

H2. The contribution of analytics to decision-making depends more on institutional infrastructure, such as data integration, data sharing with private actors and internal analytical capacity, than on model sophistication.

H3. Partnerships between researchers and practitioners and embedded analytical units increase the likelihood that analytical outputs are used in operational and policy decisions.

H4. International evidence and practices can effectively inform Global South policies only when adapted to local institutional, legal and data conditions.

Theoretically, the panel connects policy analytics and evidence-based policing with debates on wicked problems and research use. Empirically, it brings evidence from Global South agencies, still underrepresented. Normatively, it asks how analytics can be used accountably, without reproducing ageism and other biases embedded in data systems (WHO, 2021; Rosales, Svensson & Fernández-Ardèvol, 2023) or eroding fundamental rights.

CALL FOR PAPERS

This panel invites papers on the use of data analytics to address emerging public security problems, for which there is still little accumulated evidence on effective responses. Relevant cases include, but are not

limited to, digital fraud and financial scams, violence against older persons, cybercrime, technology-facilitated gender-based violence, mobile phone theft and related illicit markets, money laundering and missing persons. Many of these problems are digitally mediated, underreported and dependent on data held by multiple public and private actors, which challenges conventional approaches to policing and policy evaluation.

We welcome theoretical, methodological and empirical contributions using a broad range of approaches, from descriptive and geospatial analysis to predictive modelling, machine learning, network analysis, natural language processing of police reports and other unstructured records, and applications of large language models. Studies based on administrative data, victimisation surveys, financial or telecommunication records, and mixed-methods designs are equally welcome. Papers may address one or more of the following themes:

Diagnosis: identifying, measuring and characterising emerging problems, including underreporting, hidden victimisation, offender networks and the interconnections between related problems;
Decision-making: how analytical outputs are (or are not) used to prioritise investigations, allocate resources, target prevention or support frontline work;
Evaluation: assessing the effects of policies and interventions, particularly when experimental designs are not feasible and quasi-experimental or observational strategies are required;
Infrastructure, rights and accountability: data integration and interoperability, data sharing between public agencies and private actors, analytical capacity within security agencies, algorithmic bias, privacy and legal safeguards.
We seek a deliberate balance between academic research and practitioner experience. Papers co-authored by researchers and practitioners are particularly encouraged, as are contributions discussing how findings were, or could be, translated into concrete policy responses. Comparative studies are welcome when they discuss the transferability of international evidence and practices to Global South contexts, including the institutional, legal and data conditions that shape such transfer. Both completed studies and advanced work in progress will be considered.