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HOW THE LAPD USES DATA TO PREDICT CRIME

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IF YOU'VE EVER been incarcerated, it's never easy to escape your past. In Los Angeles, it may be even harder.

The Los Angeles Police Department is one of dozens of cities across the country that's trying to predict where crime will happen—and who those future criminals

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points, and scores individuals based on their rap sheets. If you've ever been in a gang, that's five points. If you're on parole or probation? Another five. Every time you're stopped by police, every time they come knocking on your door, that could land you more points. The higher the points, the more likely you are to end up on something called the Chronic Offender Bulletin, a list of people the data says are most at risk of reoffending and ought to be kept on close watch.

The city says this so-called "predictive policing" approach can help the department efficiently target resources and help reduce crime. But civil rights advocates worry that all this fancy technology is just a glossy veneer on old-school racial profiling.

"The algorithm is always going to augment the system it's in, and if the system is biased, is unjust, then the algorithm is going to replicate that," says Jamie Garcia, a volunteer with the advocacy group Stop LAPD Spying Coalition. The group recently published never-before-seen documents about how the LASER program works, after filing a lawsuit against the LAPD. That suit is still ongoing as the group pushes for even more transparency.

Just as algorithms have pushed their way into other aspects of the criminal justice system—from bail and sentencing decisions to diverting people from jail to mental health services—they're now creeping their way into everyday police work.

In addition to LASER, the LAPD is also using a piece of software called PredPol to predict property crimes. It looks at the types of crimes that were committed in a given area, the time, and the location, and determines whether and when another

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patrol.

“When you see more police officers, you see the lights, you hear the sirens, the high visibility of officers does deter crime in certain areas,” says Officer Steve Núñez, who has been with the LAPD’s Foothill division for 16 years. He argues that just circling the block in some of these hotspots can serve as a deterrent in high-crime areas.

For residents of those areas, however, the constant police presence can make them feel targeted. “People in the community, they speak about it,” Garcia says of the homeless community in Skid Row, where Stop LAPD Spying is based. “They say the officer came up to me and said to me I see you. I know your brother. I got your brother, I’m going to get you.”

WIRED went inside the LAPD’s predictive policing program to talk to the officers implementing these new tools and visited community members who are trying to bring these programs to an end.

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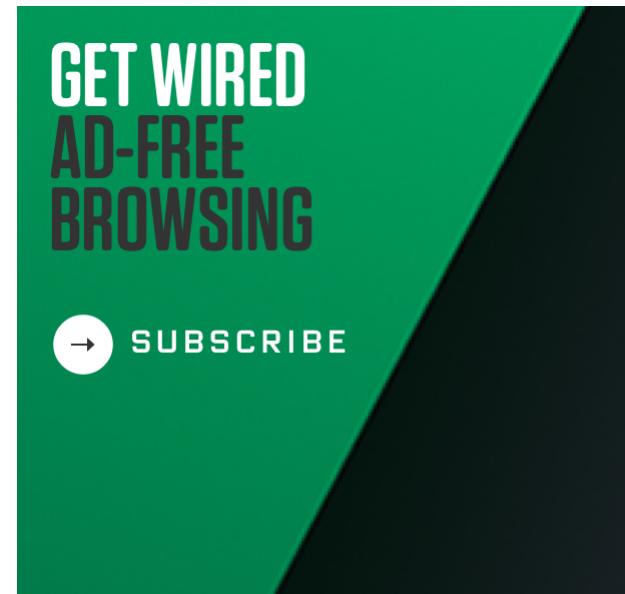
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