Pre-Crime, Coming to a City Near You!

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Predicting crime before it happens, is it possible? If the possibility exists, then how is it accomplished?

"Pre-crime" and "predictive policing", monikers for forecasting criminal behavior and future crimes, are growing techniques being used more frequently by cities, states and national law enforcement agencies.

Advanced technologies are being enlisted in the predictive policing law enforcement arena, with the purpose being "to identify people who are a risk to the state down the road based on the information we know about the individual."

Consider the following advances in the "pre-crime" arena: A new program in the state of Louisiana, the Comprehensive Person Profile, has been assembled to compile details on all residents to identify any "individual who is going to be at risk of incarceration down the road," or in other ways be a problem.

The state envisions a time when according the Louisiana Rep. Chris Broadwater," we can take all the information we have and create that comprehensive person profile that makes the lives of our citizens better."

According to Broadwater, the program would allow the state to "intervene" in the lives of persons, (based on the comprehensive database), who might pose a threat to the state. The program, originally begun to combat fraudulent use of state entitlement programs, has ballooned into a system designed to mine the data of every Louisiana citizen and share the data throughout every state agency.

Surprisingly, Twitter posts, may be used to predict crimes before they are committed.

A study conducted by the University of Virginia, funded by the US Army, and reported in the scientific journal Decision Support Systems revealed that the analysis of geo-tagged tweets can be useful in predicting 19 to 25 kinds of crimes, especially for offences such as stalking, thefts and certain kinds of assault.

Although people rarely tweet about crimes directly, tweets about routine activities and environments may supply information directly linked to future crimes, according to lead researcher Matthew Gerber of the University's Predictive Technology Lab.

For the study, Gerber and his associates analyzed tweets from the City of Chicago that were tagged to certain neighborhoods and the city's crime database.

Based on the information obtained, the researchers were able to predict areas where crimes might be committed.

"This approach allows the analyst to visualize and identify areas with historically high crime rates." states Gerber. According to researchers, Twitter is fairly easy to use because tweets are publically available and often tagged with the location.

Additionally, researchers do not need to go to the area of the crime. Algorithms are sent to a computer which learns the pattern and predicts the crimes. "Future crimes often occur in the vicinity of past crimes; making hot-spot maps a valuable crime prediction tool." Direct observation is also taking on a predictive" pre-crime" approach.

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