

Artificial Intelligence – a Double-Edged Sword. Organized Crime's AI vs Law Enforcement's AI

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Abstract. *Organized crime has acquired new values in the context of the geopolitical, social and economic transformations that the states are currently facing, expanding their ramifications at the international level. Conflicts often create opportunities that lead to the increasing of the organized crime, amplifying the threat that criminal groups can pose to domestic security. The heightened dynamics of the international security environment and, in particular, the instability with the potential for contagion manifested in the Eastern neighborhood and in the Middle East, potentiates the risks posed by organized crime.*

With the increase in technological development, especially based on Artificial Intelligence, organized crime has become one of the world's most pressing issues, with a large number of countries having been affected. This research deals with the role of digital technologies implemented through cyberspace in prevention, detecting and combating organized crime. In addition, the research found that the rate of illegal activity has increased due to the global accessibility that the Internet has provided, especially AI, posing great risks to the public and increasing the rate of organised crimes. Combating organized crime has become an important political priority for many governments around the world, and any future success in eliminating criminal groups in its various forms will depend on the extent to which governments and relevant organizations are prepared to develop digital technologies based on artificial intelligence and use them to combat and prevent illegal activity.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, criminal groups, organized crime, law enforcement, security.

Introduction

If you ask Google what is Artificial Intelligence you will get this answers:

- a) The English Oxford Living Dictionary defines AI as such: The theory and development of computer systems able to perform tasks normally requiring human intelligence, such as visual perception, speech recognition, decision-making, and translation between languages. (Heuritech, 2020).
- b) Artificial intelligence (AI) refers to systems that display intelligent behaviour by analysing their environment and taking actions – with some degree of autonomy – to achieve specific goals. (European Commission, 2018, p. 1)
- c) Artificial intelligence is the science of making machines that can think like humans. It can do things that are considered "smart." An example might be when Siri tells you when it will rain in your city today (Linkedin, 2024).

It seems that the Artificial Intelligence has no shortage of founding fathers. Whether we are talking about Alan Turing, Frank Rosenblatt, John McCarthy, Marvin Minsky or Geoffrey Hinton, it should be noted that since ancient times mankind has been fascinated by the idea of creating a being that could think and act like a human. And later, with the advent of computers,

society realized that the idea of artificial intelligence would not appear as autonomous, independent entities, but as a set of interconnected tools and technologies that could be adapted to the needs of humans.

In the last decades Artificial Intelligence have had many definitions but I will mention only a few of them:

At a scientific conference at Dartmouth University in Hanover, New Hampshire in 1955, John McCarthy defined artificial intelligence as "the science and engineering of making intelligent machines, especially intelligent computer programs". (McCarthy, 2004)

Another definition of AI came from one of its founding fathers, Marvin Minsky, who described it as "the science of making machines do things that would require intelligence if done by men." (Dennis, 2024) While the core of this definition holds true today, modern computer scientists go a bit further and define AI as a system that is able to perceive its environment and take action to maximize the chance of successfully achieving its goals—and in plus, the ability of this system to interpret and analyze data in such a way that it learns and adapts as it goes. (SAP, 2024)

In the famous work "Artificial Intelligence: A Modern Approach", Stuart Russell and Peter Norvig consider that a system is truly intelligent when it has the ability to act in the real world as an independent entity with its own sets of values and reason. The term intelligence is, moreover, intimately related to the ability to explain the environment and act accordingly. To date, humans are considered the only universally intelligent beings. The software systems we call "intelligent" today do not come close to describing an intelligence capable of universal explanation, but are "intelligent" only in a narrow sense. (Singh, 2022)

However, years before this definition, Alan Turing, an english codebreaker and one of the fathers of AI, who presented "the Imitation Game, commonly known as the Turing test, which rests on whether a human can discern whether a set of written exchanges come from a human or a machine". (Sample, 2023)

Artificial intelligence is the ability of a machine to imitate human behavior by being programmed to think and act like a human. One of the special features of AI is continuous learning, based on the information gathered from the environment.

AI observes the surrounding reality and acts accordingly, without the need for human help or assistance. Although this definition is a current one, we must keep in mind that the standard we refer to to establish what AI is is in a continuous evolution, like technology. It is possible that in a few years these attributes will no longer characterize artificial intelligence, being only basic functions of the devices we will use every day.

Literature review

Use of AI by organized crime groups

"Artificial intelligence is more dangerous than nuclear weapons," says Elon Musk in a video published a year ago by the YouTube channel Elon Musk Zone, one of the largest online communities of the billionaire's fans. (RFI, 2023)

The question is, can the available AI tools be used to make drugs at home, or can they be used to make a program to help you trick people into giving you access to their financial resources? And the answer is YES. However, the models differ in their potential to help harm, not only in terms of verifying the availability of liability, but also in the quality of the response.

In the era of dynamic technology, AI offers a multitude of possible applications for both society and the business environment. Unfortunately, these technological developments come with a number of fraudulent schemes used by organized crime. For example, criminals can use AI technology to improve their activity and get more money without being caught by law enforcement. It is expected that, in the future, as the technology becomes more and more widespread, the possibilities of criminal groups will be reduced when it comes to the skills and expertise needed to use AI technology.

Criminal groups quickly integrated these new technologies into their activity and managed to create constant changes in the criminal environment around the world. At the same time, the use of AI has led to multiple challenges for law enforcement agencies and cyber security, of course. According to Europol "the Crime-as-a-Service (CaaS) business model, which allows non-technologically savvy criminals to procure technical tools and services in the digital underground that allow them to extend their attack capacity and sophistication, further increases the potential for new technologies such as AI to be abused by criminals and become a driver of crime." (Europol, 2017).

For example, in 2019, a criminal group "used artificial intelligence-based software to impersonate a chief executive's voice and demand a fraudulent transfer of €220,000". (Stupp, 2019)

According to ENACT Observer, in South Africa, impersonation crimes increased by 284% between 2021 and the first five months of 2022, according to the South African Fraud Prevention Service. (ENACT, 2023)

Another example, cited in the 2024 UNODC Casino Underground Banking Report, came from China, where an individual was convinced to wire transfer almost 500.000 USD to an individual posing as a close friend. According to Chinese law enforcement, a large portion of the money was put on hold before the transfer could be completed. Still, the scammer utilized commercial AI face-swapping and voice technology to put on a very convincing show. (UNODC, 2024)

Organised criminals use drones for intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance purposes, but drones also pose a potential threat to physical security. (ENACT, 2022) In addition to being used to transport drugs, AI-controlled drones are also used by Mexican cartels for physical attacks on supply chains or members of other cartels.

Drug cartels are using AI and other advanced technologies in order to expand their operations and evade law enforcement agencies. The emergence of advanced AI algorithms has allowed cartels to optimize their drug smuggling operations. Machine learning models can analyze vast amounts of data on drug routes, border patrols, and shipment methods to predict the best times and locations for smuggling attempts. This enables cartels to minimize the risk of detection while maximizing profits. Moreover, drug cartels have started using AI-powered facial recognition systems to identify undercover agents and informants, making it increasingly difficult for authorities to infiltrate their networks.

The rapid development of drone technology has provided cartels with an invaluable tool for smuggling drugs across borders. Drones can navigate challenging terrain and evade traditional border security measures, such as checkpoints and ground patrols, with relative ease. Autonomous drones, in particular, are increasingly being deployed by cartels to transport narcotics without the need for human pilots, reducing the risk of apprehension, that is why drones are called the new drug mules.

Artificial intelligence systems such as satellite imagery (eg Earth Observations, Google Earth, FarEarth, etc.) can help organized crime groups plan and manage smuggling routes. These systems provide real-time and highly accurate field data at the local level. Criminals can also attack AI systems to avoid detection (such as biometric screening processes), breach security systems (from banks, borders and airports) or find breaches in government networks, critical infrastructure or the private sector.

Technological developments help a lot in committing crimes and there is a risk that in the future it will be more and more difficult to tell the difference between fake and real. The recent emergence of these free-to-use AI applications (eg ChatGPT) raises concerns about the misuse of AI in our daily lives. Although AI is still rudimentary, it can be used for positive purposes like to prevent and fight organized crime, but also for negative purposes like to commit some crimes.

AI systems provide cross-border organized crime groups with the means and methods to commit a vast array of criminal activities that are far more complex, from a greater distance and with less risk of being caught. Analysis shows that criminal organisations can use AI in the same ways as legitimate companies, for 'supply chain management, risk assessment and mitigation, personnel vetting, social media data mining, and various types of analysis and problem-solving.' (ENACT, 2023)

AI can be involved in crime in a variety of ways. Artificial intelligence could be used to facilitate various illegal activities such as: predicting the behavior of people or institutional software/systems in order to identify and exploit vulnerabilities; the generation of false content for the purpose of use in blackmail activities or simply to damage the reputation of institutions or individuals; performing activities that cannot be performed by people normally, whether we are talking about the fact that they are unable, or that they do not want to do them, maybe for reasons of danger, speed or others. We talk about traditional crimes like extortion, terror, intimidation, etc. where only the methods are new. (Caldwell, M., Andrews, J.T.A., Tanay, T. *et al.*, 2020)

Also, AI systems used by criminals may target AI software used by law enforcement in order to: evading detection, bypassing protection systems that present obstacles to a crime, or not to be prosecuted for crimes already committed.

Another major area where there is a risk of abuse is the easier generation of malicious programs/software, which includes for example ransomware (programs that encrypt or steal data and demand a ransom for it). Artificial intelligence can also be used to identify security holes in the security systems in use and create tools that help organized cybercrime groups exploit these holes.

Of particular interest is the use of AI for the automatic creation of illegal content, such as child pornography, but also the automatic creation of content for social networks in order to promote/support the interests of organized crime groups (presenting the public opinion of the criminal activities of rival groups, forcing, through manipulation, the adoption by the legislature of some normative acts beneficial/useful to the interests of the group, etc.).

When OpenAI's chat was asked how AI is being used to help organized crime, here is what it came up with:

- a) AI can be used to facilitate various types of criminal activity, including drug trafficking. For example, AI could be used to analyze data on drug prices, supply and demand, and transportation routes to help traffickers optimize their operations and reduce the risk of being caught.
- b) AI could also be used to analyze social media and other online data to identify potential customers and to predict and monitor law enforcement activities.

- c) AI could also be used to automate various aspects of the drug trafficking process, such as the production and distribution of synthetic drugs. In addition, AI could potentially be used to develop new, more potent and harder-to-detect drugs.

There are several risks and dangers associated with the use of artificial intelligence. Some of the main ones include:

- a) Loss of jobs: As AI systems become more advanced, they may be able to perform tasks that are currently done by humans, potentially leading to job displacement.
- b) Security: AI systems may be vulnerable to cyber attacks, which could have serious consequences if the systems are being used in critical applications such as healthcare or transportation.
- c) Misuse: AI systems may be used to further nefarious goals, such as spreading misinformation or facilitating cybercrime.
- d) Lack of accountability: It may be difficult to determine who is responsible for the actions of an AI system, particularly if the system is operating autonomously.
- e) Lack of transparency: It may be difficult to understand how an AI system is making decisions, which could lead to a lack of trust in the system and its outputs.
- f) Mass destruction: AI could potentially be used to build or develop nuclear, biological or chemical weapons.
- g) Cyber attacks: AI could be used to launch highly sophisticated and targeted cyber attacks that could disrupt critical infrastructure, steal sensitive data, or cause widespread damage.
- h) Human rights abuses: AI could be used to facilitate human rights abuses, such as by identifying and targeting individuals for persecution or by automating propaganda campaigns. (Loron, 2022)

The use of AI in the activity of preventing and combating the criminal phenomenon

Technology can help make everyone's lives better. For the law enforcement community, technology, especially AI, can help make all the things police departments need to do better, more effective, and more efficient. The advent of new technologies has launched a new era of opportunities to help law enforcement effectively prevent crime. AI is increasingly being used successfully by law enforcement for high-impact crime prevention measures. To combat the threat of criminal AI effectively, a multifaceted approach is necessary. New technologies allow overworked law enforcement agencies to gather, process, analyze and highlight relevant data for investigators of any and all types of crime. This includes AI solutions for gathering and interpreting connections and patterns in financial records, geospatial imagery, surveillance camera footage, social media data, public records, news feeds, and many other open and proprietary sources.

Some crime syndicates have operations on all six civilized continents, and now AI is helping them to run those operations more efficiently than ever. Fortunately, law enforcement and private security professionals also have access to cutting edge AI technology, and they are developing new tools and techniques every year. One of the most useful applications of AI in crime fighting happens when AI is combined with link analysis chart, providing visual representations of organizational hierarchies and activities to clarify the nature of criminal networks. AI technology enables investigators and analysts to process massive amounts of data in seconds, revealing patterns and connections that would have eluded even the brightest of human observers. In some cases, AI algorithms follow the money to reveal shell corporations used by crime syndicates to launder money. (Voyager Labs, 2021)

Experts believe that smart technologies like AI can help reduce crime in cities by up to 40%. Artificial intelligence may also cut emergency service response rates by 20 to 35%. But there are concerns regarding citizens safety. Most of those concerns relate to predictive policing and surveillance, according to consultants Deloitte. (Deloitte, 2021)

Automatic License Plate Recognition (ALPR), an AI-based technology, has revolutionized traffic management and law enforcement. ALPR systems capture an image of a vehicle's license plate, which is then processed by AI-powered software to convert the image into alphanumeric characters. This information can be cross-referenced with databases to identify stolen vehicles, enforce parking regulations, or track vehicles associated with criminal investigations. Real-time processing and notifications allow for swift response by law enforcement agencies. (AIplusInfo, 2023)

Drones can provide remote monitoring and inspections done without human intervention on the area being monitored or patrolled. The drone's aerial capability allows it to inspect territories that are difficult to reach from the ground.

AI technology in the form of image recognition is already being used to help solve crimes. For example, more than 3,000 police departments around the world are already using image recognition technology to automatically recognize license plates, car makes and models, and even whether a vehicle has had any modifications such as after-market wheels or a ski rack installed. (Oyadele, 2023) Sharing images between different police departments as suspects move between multiple jurisdictions can help departments work together to solve crimes.

AI is used in all forms of technical surveillance, especially the interception, collection and analysis of data. But once you set up thoughtful policies, using the technology helps both lower crime by increasing the likelihood and the speed of apprehending criminals. (Chen, 2023) All forms of technical surveillance, especially the interception, collection and analysis of data (text, audio or video), are unthinkable without the use of AI. This is especially true for the initiation of technical surveillance measures, which are often triggered by AI systems reacting to a wide range of indicators, ranging from strange behavior to "trigger words" in a communication.

Other forms of AI are also in widespread use in communities around the world, including predictive analytics that help determine where crime is likely to take place, social media monitoring to monitor flash points in communities, and DNA analysis to establish whether particular people were in contact with specific pieces of evidence or at a particular place. (Oyadele, 2023)

Another tool in the AI arsenal is to identify and track victims and members of criminal groups through cellphones. Every phone lens has a unique identifier, and AI can look at the data and detect a match in rooms or locations, further providing information on where the action is taking place. (Laje & Taylor, 2023)

In other situations, AI mines data on the Dark Web to find communications related to criminal groups, identifies human trafficking rings by online purchase patterns, or tracks transportation details to chart the movements of contraband overseas. Furthermore, Open-source intelligence can leverage unstructured data to identify vulnerabilities for investigative and disruptive law enforcement measures.

At the lower levels of criminal organizations, social platforms are often used by dealers to advertise illegal wares and services in very cleverly disguised ways. Through AI, investigators can create algorithms that process millions of bits of data to find patterns in language, images, and user identities to uncover illegal activities. In optimal situations, machine learning allows AI

technology to adapt to patterns, trends, and even changes in criminal organizations' activities, targets, business strategies, and hierarchies. (Voyager Labs, 2021)

The use of predictive AI tools is part of so-called "preventive policing" and consists of identifying and analyzing crime trends in order to make predictions about the environments and locations where criminal acts are more likely to occur. Whether committed and where law enforcement agencies can intervene (either through increased police numbers or better video surveillance) can have a positive impact. These algorithms mostly analyze demographics, crime areas, likely locations of criminals, routes used by them, methods used, etc. By combining all these elements, overviews of crime probabilities are created by algorithms. For example, the Bavarian police have used a system called "GLADIS" (Geographisches Lage-, Analyse-, Darstellungs- und Informationssystem) since 2004. The system uses standard software for creating general images as a basis for strategic decisions. The overviews thus generated are designed as maps and include examinations of the types of crime that occur in certain areas, the exact spatial distribution of crime and its temporal distribution. (UNBR, 2020)

AI is used to analyze physical evidence such as DNA evidence and other evidence including witness statements, physical documents, crime patterns and tools used by the offender. These algorithms mainly compare data collected on physical evidence with data collected in various databases such as: DNA databases, firearms databases, bank account registers, etc. This technology is considered sufficient evidence in most jurisdictions and has been used to dismantle several organized crime networks.

Since cyber criminal activities are not possible without the use of (more or less sophisticated) AI, the police and law enforcement agencies use AI to detect cyber activities. Evidence gathering in cyberspace is done by AI. Mapping financial transactions would not work without AI and scanning the dark web would not be possible without the use of AI. There are different forms of algorithms used by police and law enforcement agencies to analyze data, analysis that could lead to solving computer crimes. These forms range from algorithms that apply scientific methods to the retrieval, analysis and interpretation of relevant digital materials. (UNBR, 2020)

Addressing the convergence of AI and organized crime demands a coordinated global response. The interconnected nature of the internet and the borderless reach of digital technologies need international collaboration among law enforcement agencies, policymakers, and tech companies. Only through shared intelligence, advanced cybercrime legislation, and the development of ethical AI can society hope to stop the influence of criminal organizations in the digital age. The role of the tech industry in combating the illicit use of AI cannot be understated. While AI has the potential to revolutionize society positively, its misuse in the hands of criminals raises ethical questions about the responsibility of tech companies. Striking a balance between innovation and accountability is crucial, as the unintended consequences of developing powerful AI tools can have severe repercussions. Tech giants must collaborate with law enforcement agencies to identify and mitigate potential risks associated with the misuse of AI. Implementing ethical guidelines, transparency measures, and safeguards against the illicit use of their technologies is not only a moral imperative but also a strategic move to protect the integrity of the tech industry. (Laje & Taylor, 2023)

According to Europol report called "Malicious Uses and Abuses of Artificial Intelligence" only by "building knowledge about the potential use of AI by criminals will improve the ability of the cybersecurity industry and law enforcement agencies to anticipate and to prevent possible

malicious and criminal activities and to respond or reduce the effects of such attacks.” (Europol, 2020)

And this is the key to adopt the best public policies. By training AI systems on vast datasets that encompass various criminal behaviours, social engineering processes, and attack patterns, these systems can learn to recognize and anticipate potential threats. Advanced monitoring and surveillance technologies, combined with real-time threat analysis, can help identify and neutralize criminal AI activities promptly.

It must be emphasised that AI and robotics are very much a double-edged sword, which can lead to great changes in the way in which law enforcement approaches policing or, just as easily, enhance the modus operandi of a criminal or terrorist group or even to create entire new classes of crime altogether. (Brundage et al., 2018)

Methodology

To explore the use of AI by criminal groups and by law enforcement agencies, this study used a mixed-methods approach. The literature review was conducted using a combination of online databases, as well as academic journals and conference papers.

An analysis and synthesis of the data contained in the documents and open source databases was carried out. Concretely, this study represent a review of 20 scientific papers from the last five years, in order to better understand the level of knowledge in the security filed related to artificial intelligence. While searching for the articles the following key words were used: artificial intelligence, artificial intelligence in organized crime, artificial intelligence in crime, artificial intelligence in law enforcement.

In addition to the classic methods (literary, historical analysis, etc.) we also used new techniques, able to allow a better division of the whole crime into units that are easier to measure, count, and rank. Among these new techniques are content analysis and statistical analysis of crime.

In order to conduct this analysis on the existing information I have used the qualitative analysis of the scientific and business literature related to AI impact on organized crime and law enforcement. This approach is motivated by the lack of a clear impact that AI has on crime, not to add to the limitations of disclosure that AI offers opportunities and challenges. The current study aims to understand the perceived impact of AI on criminal field, based upon the scientific and professional affiliations.

During the research, it was considered the conduct of a scientific activity guided by academic values such as professionalism, justice, equity, honesty, transparency and respect. I believe that these values represent a rule of daily behavior and the only way to achieve academic and scientific performance.

Results and discussions

Through the work done, I tried to provide clarifying answers for each of the questions below:

- a) What is artificial intelligence?
- b) Is AI a security threat?
- c) How do organized crime groups use AI?
- d) What are the risks, threats and vulnerabilities to state security that organized crime poses through the use of AI?

- e) What are the public policies regarding the use of AI in the field of preventing and fighting organized crime?
- f) What technological solutions do states and institutions have in order not to lose the fight against organized crime?

The paper aims, based on the presentation of AI-based mechanisms and technologies used by both organized crime and law enforcement agencies, as well as their comparative analysis, to contribute to determining the directions and ways of action in the fight against this negative phenomenon that causes threats, risks and vulnerabilities to national security. The importance of fighting organized crime in an international cooperation format is highlighted by the inclusion of specific issues in this field in various instruments of international law, both in main sources of law and in programmatic documents of this level.

This contemporary reality has determined and continues to determine the specialists from various fields of activity and research that are related to the study/analysis of the phenomenon of cross-border organized crime, to try to put on a scientific basis all the joint efforts to prevent and combat this phenomenon, in order to reduce as much as possible the effects it has on the economic life and the good coexistence of people.

Conclusion

AI technology is a very powerful tool that can be used for two purposes: to help humanity/society or to harm it. Criminal groups or organizations are increasingly flexible and in continuous adaptability when it comes to the methods, means and technologies used. The profits generated by the activity of certain organized crime groups are high and comparable to those obtained by multinational corporations. Many of the organized crime groups are investing huge sums of money in AI-based technologies in order to protect their businesses.

Given the revenue that organized crime generates it will be quite difficult for law enforcement around the world to keep up with organized crime technologically. There will be certain financially stronger states that will keep up and others that will not be able to and will have to rely on the help of the powerful states. AI technology must be improved so that it can identify and analyze the complex structures of crime.

We will also have ethical problems and here I am referring to the fact that the use of technology will lead to the violation of some civil rights and freedoms. And then my question is: How should we manage AI technology? From what point of view? Should we invest in AI in order not to lose the fight against organized crime or should we respect human rights when it comes to the development of AI?

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