

# Chapter 1

## Introduction: Policing, Public Trust, AI, and the Promise of Reform

### ABSTRACT

*Law enforcement has long been a focal point of contention and concern with leaders and citizens frequently challenging whether the power and authority granted to law enforcement professionals has been humanistically practiced. Throughout history, the performance of members of law enforcement has been scrutinized by public officials, the media, and the public to ensure that fair and equal justice is applied to all citizens. Unfortunately, there have been historical incidents that have illuminated manifest issues of law enforcement personnel abusing their power and authority while simultaneously espousing corruption. These instances have been self-inflicted wounds that tarnished the reputation of the loyally competent law enforcement professionals. Most law enforcement professionals are dedicated, compassionate, and responsible public servants who take great pride in their duty to serve and protect society.*

### INTRODUCTION

This general belief of police officers among members of society inhibits objective discernment to distinguish between the good and the bad police officers especially when engaged in controversial conduct. Thus, the police officers uniform stimulates a collective stigma of all officers as they are seen as one entity, one group, and one threat. Unfortunately, the actions of a few “bad apples” have tainted the profession, leading citizens to lose trust in and respect for all law enforcement officers. This contamination has prompted federal oversight, Supreme Court rulings, and intense public pressure endorsing the need for comprehensive reforms within police depart-

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ments and agencies. These reforms have led to progressive training, revised rules and regulations, more rigorous vetting processes, and the integration of advanced technologies, including artificial intelligence and social media tools. However, the COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated the decline in public trust, compounding the challenges law enforcement faces in rebuilding relationships with the community.

During the pandemic, law enforcement professionals were tasked with enforcing a range of COVID-19 restrictions, including limitations on public gatherings, such as in places of worship, businesses, schools, and outdoor venues. The inherent contradiction in these mandates exasperated and already tense and fragile relationship between police officers and the public. On one hand, the public viewed the enforcement of these mandates as an infringement on their rights, leading to increased criticism, blame, and challenges to police authority. On the other hand, officers found themselves caught in a difficult position, striving to empathize with the public while also enforcing measures that they may not have agreed with. This caused significant stress not only between law enforcement and the public but also between police management and officers themselves.

A particularly contentious issue arose with the requirement for police officers to be vaccinated. Officers who refused to comply faced the threat of disciplinary action, including potential job loss. This situation mirrored the challenges faced by the wider population, as no one was exempt from the mandates imposed to control the spread of the virus. The conflict between public health measures, individual freedoms, and the role of law enforcement in enforcing these mandates further strained the already fragile trust between police and the communities they serve.

The George Floyd incident was a pivotal incendiary event that ignited widespread social unrest, leading to protests. Dubbed the “Summer of Love,” this period caused irreparable divisions in society, significantly eroding trust and respect for law enforcement officers, both in the U.S. and globally. The protests, fueled by intense social and political divides, brought to light deep moral and ethical issues, especially regarding the role of government officials in responding to the destruction and violence that unfolded. These opposing views exacerbated tensions, causing immense harm to communities, citizens, and law enforcement alike. Furthermore, the incident spurred harsh criticism of police officers and fueled calls for drastic measures such as defunding or abolishing police departments further polarizing public opinion on the role and function of law enforcement in society.

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