

## Project on American Justice Fireside Chat Summary

# The Future of Corrections: Leadership and Culture

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## Overview

The CNA Center for Justice Research and Innovation's 2024 Project on American Justice (PAJ) focuses on the future of corrections based on current research and trends. To support this effort, CNA is working with several leading subject matter experts (SMEs) and senior advisors with research and practitioner experience in the corrections field.

In June 2024, PAJ conducted its fourth of several "fireside chats" with these experts to discuss leadership and culture in corrections. Specifically, PAJ used a futures analysis framework to examine the social, technological, economic, environmental, and political (STEEP) factors that may influence corrections and the criminal justice system in the future. The PAJ team aims to use this framework to identify opportunities to mitigate risks and promote successes.

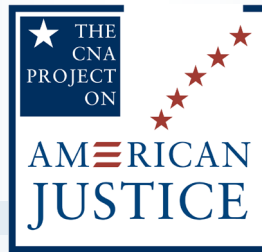
To support this analysis, the PAJ team identified several overarching STEEP factors based on research and current trends. **Social** factors include Generation Y and the aging population, expanding diversity, and urbanization throughout megacities, regions, and corridors. **Technological** factors include growth in applied artificial intelligence, use of robotics, and adoption of automated vehicles. **Economic** factors include the increasing US national debt and widening wealth inequality. **Environmental** factors include climate action failures and surges in emigration and climate refugees. **Political** factors include balkanization and a shift in global superpowers. Using the STEEP factors, the PAJ team created the following 2040 future scenario:<sup>1</sup>

*In 2040, the number of adults outnumbers the number of children for the first time in US history, and urbanized megapolitan areas exist nationwide, including mega areas Phoenix-Tucson, the Texas Triangle, Columbus-Cincinnati, Tampa-Orlando, and Washington-Baltimore-Richmond. Mega areas have adopted integrated justice systems with some jurisdictions covering multiple states. As a result of the rapid growth, cities are experiencing a housing crisis and access to jobs is a growing concern. In these areas and throughout the country, artificial intelligence is commonplace. Automated vehicles traverse streets, and robots are replacing the workforce. Advanced technologies are helping maintain safety and security within public safety facilities as well as providing training and educational services through increased global and community connections. The US national debt has reached historic highs, limiting our government's ability to invest in new priorities. Communities remain underresourced. Economic instability and climate action failure have increased tensions between states, and there is no longer any faith in local and federal governments. **Despite limited resources, correctional facilities are adopting multidisciplinary approaches in their rehabilitative processes.** Globally, the US has lost its place as the top superpower and has been surpassed by China, while the number of foreign-born individuals in the US is at a historic high and has created a nationally diverse populace where no racial majority exists.*

Using this future-state scenario as a starting point, the PAJ team identified potential risks and opportunities regarding leadership and culture in corrections, as well as steps to take now to mitigate those risks and promote successes. A summary of the discussion continues in the following sections.

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<sup>1</sup> The PAJ team is using this scenario as a baseline for the conversations and does not assume that this outcome will occur. Rather, we are posing this scenario as one of many possible futures in 2040. In addition, this scenario grows and adapts after each fireside chat based on the findings from the discussion.



## Leadership and Culture

Before entering the futures discussion, we engaged in a formative discussion with SMEs to help define leadership and culture in the corrections space based on their experiences as practitioners and researchers. The SMEs reported that currently some correctional facilities conduct external hires for leadership positions and have transitioned to multidisciplinary leadership teams. However, the SMEs agreed that agencies and facilities could better cultivate leaders within their staffs. For example, agencies and facilities could identify potential leaders early in their careers and based on their skills, rather than selecting leaders based on their years with the agency.

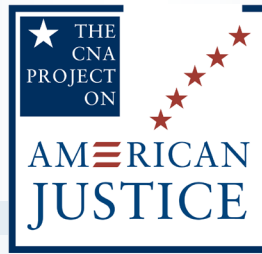
## Risks and Opportunities

While discussing the 2040 future-state scenario, the SMEs identified several risks related to leadership and culture in corrections and the criminal justice system:

- **Differing views of corrections as well as safety and security risks and opportunities:** Disagreement remains on whether the purpose of incarceration should be incapacitation or rehabilitation. A lack of support for rehabilitation challenges leadership efforts to implement or continue programs (e.g., education, vocation, substance abuse treatment). Similarly, with the integration of technology and civilian roles comes safety and security risks and opportunities that are new and challenging for staff to operationalize and for leadership to manage.
- **A limited number of available leaders:** Because the hiring crisis is expected to worsen by 2040, correctional facilities may remove some hiring requirements (e.g., education and skills) to make positions more accessible. However, the SMEs advised that doing so could result in fewer internal staff with knowledge and skills (e.g., leadership, management, finance) to help them develop into future leaders.
- **Increase in unions:** As discussed in prior fireside chats, because megapolitan regions and their respective jurisdictions are growing, more correctional facilities may be required. The SMEs noted that if such growth occurs, they would expect to see a corresponding increase in unions across the corrections field. They considered this outcome a risk because of the barriers unions can raise when correctional leadership implements change across facilities.
- **Reduced budgets for leadership:** An increased US national debt could exacerbate the difficulties correctional facilities and agencies already face with low budgets for investment in their staffs. The SMEs advised that investments in leadership training and development are vital for strong, sustainable leaders.

In addition, SMEs identified opportunities regarding leadership and culture in 2040:

- **Civilianized leadership:** As discussed previously in the civilianization fireside chat, the SMEs expect to see an increase in civilianized roles by 2040, including leadership. They viewed this shift as an opportunity for the corrections field to leverage multidisciplinary teams and emphasize their work on rehabilitation.
- **Improved community relations:** The SMEs predict that faith in local and federal governments will deteriorate by 2040; as a result, they recommended that civilianized leadership help strengthen community relationships so that community members recognize the facility as part of their community and staff members also see themselves as community members.



- **Improved culture:** Despite the challenges present in 2040, changes in leadership and the use of multidisciplinary teams will provide opportunities for correctional facilities and agencies to implement staff-related changes that promote positive workplace culture and community.

## Ideas to Take Action On

The SMEs recommended several steps to take now to address the concerns and opportunities identified throughout the discussion:

- Including staff in conversations about changes in leadership and practices is crucial. Experts highlighted the need for **improved transparency** between leadership and staff on topics such as leadership changes (e.g., civilianized roles, external hires, multidisciplinary teams). Such transparency would indirectly improve the relationship between leadership and staff and create a workplace culture that increases retention.
- Similarly, correctional agencies should create opportunities for current staff that promote career growth. **Implementing leadership tracks** (e.g., vertical promotions and trainings) early in employee careers would increase retention and help build up leaders with the desired experience and skills.
- The SMEs noted that many educational and vocational programs are readily available for residents and suggested **offering educational support to staff**.
- Some sheriffs bring vast knowledge of law enforcement but lack expertise in the field of jails and corrections. SMEs recommended providing **training in corrections, both policy and practice, to newly elected sheriffs**. This training would be particularly beneficial in 2040, when sheriffs' jurisdictions may expand with the growth of megapolitan regions—resulting in a subsequent increase in the number of correctional facilities, staff members, and residents they oversee.

Overall, PAJ's fourth fireside chat on leadership and culture resulted in fruitful discussions about its potential risks and opportunities, as well as considerations of steps to take now to reduce these risks and promote successes.

## About CNA

CNA is a nonprofit research and analysis organization dedicated to the safety and security of the nation. It operates the Institute for Public Research—which serves civilian government agencies—and the Center for Naval Analyses, the Department of the Navy's federally funded research and development center (FFRDC). CNA develops actionable solutions to complex problems of national importance. With nearly 700 scientists, analysts, and professional staff, CNA takes a real-world approach to gathering data, working side by side with operators and decision-makers around the world. CNA's research portfolio includes global security and strategic competition, homeland security, emergency management, criminal justice, public health, data management, systems analysis, naval operations, and fleet and operational readiness.

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