



Are Police Jobs AI-Proof?

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In recent months, employees, job applicants, and students in various fields across the United States have expressed increasing anxiety about the future of their occupations due to developments in Artificial Intelligence (AI). In what some have referred to as the early stages of a “white collar recession”, jobs that have traditionally required high levels of post-secondary education—and the substantial student loan debt that typically goes with it—are the very jobs that seem most vulnerable to elimination due to AI. ¹

The jobs that appear to be most susceptible to AI replacement are those that are repetitive in nature, and those that can be completed without hands-on, face-to-face interaction. ² But police work is *not* repetitive in the sense that officers are not responding to calls for service in a rigid “copy and paste” manner. Rather, officers are required to consider the totality of circumstances with which they are presented in human interactions and respond accordingly. As for police work requiring hands-on, face-to-face interaction, it is hard to imagine many occupations in which members of the public would be less likely to willingly accept remote, automated assistance than the kinds of incidents that lead them to call 911 and ask for police assistance. AI technology will undoubtedly *assist* law enforcement officers in doing their work in the years to come, but that is not the same thing as *replacing* large numbers of beat cops in the way that corporate layoffs demonstrate the replacement of their employees.

Given the apparent job security of police work at a time when so many well-paid, white-collar occupations seem to be at serious risk of substantial job loss, should law enforcement leaders and recruiters tout the profession as a vital public service that also appears to be immune to massive layoffs already underway due to developments in AI?

The Shift Away from College for Generation Z

Across the United States, a quiet but significant shift is underway in how young people think about education and work after high school. For decades, attending college immediately after high school was widely viewed as the default path to a successful career. Today, however, there appears to be a growing skepticism about the undoubtedly high financial cost and potentially limited value of a four-year degree.³ This skepticism may be prompting many young Americans to consider alternative routes that do not include immediate entry into college. The increasingly frequent headlines describing layoffs in white-collar jobs once considered to be safe and desirable may well add to this skepticism.

While this trend raises broader questions for universities and policymakers, it also **presents a unique opportunity for law enforcement agencies. Many of the young men and women who would have traditionally bypassed careers, including law enforcement, that do *not* require a college education, now appear much more open to pursuing them.** For the police departments and sheriff's offices across the country that are struggling to recruit new officers, this should inspire a new focus on creating a bridge between high school graduation and work as a sworn law enforcement officer.

In recent years, many law enforcement agencies have dropped college requirements in the face of a shrinking pool of qualified applicants and a recognition that college credit hours or a college degree do not necessarily correlate with a successful career in law enforcement.⁴ Even before this recent development, most law enforcement agencies did not require a college education for employment, as revealed by a 2018 Police Executive Research Forum survey which found roughly 1 in 4 law enforcement agencies required some measure of college credit hours for applicants.⁵

This has coincided with a broader movement away from college as the default, post-high school step for academically successful graduates. In September of 2025, *Gallup* reported an all-time low in the percentage of Americans who considered a college degree to be “very important.”⁶ More specifically, the polling found that among young Americans aged 18 to 34, the percentage who reported a belief that a college degree was “very important” had dropped from 74% in 2013, to just 35% in 2025.⁷ In March of 2026, *Fortune* reported that the unemployment rate gap between young men with college degrees versus those without had closed completely.⁸ In other words, having a bachelor’s degree did not offer young men much of an advantage in the general job market.

At the same time, awareness of the economic and social costs of long-term student debt seems to be increasing.⁹ As the cost of a college education has risen dramatically in recent decades, the likelihood that a college education will result in a high-paying professional job has plummeted. This has resulted in lower homeownership rates and increasing levels of depression and alcoholism among persons with high student loan debt.¹⁰ The movement of young people into skilled trades, instead of college, has been widely reported in recent months.¹¹

In addition to concerns about the time and financial costs associated with a four-year college degree, there are also serious concerns about Artificial Intelligence disproportionately impacting white-collar, college educated careers in the years ahead.¹² **The primary capabilities of AI, such as finding and processing information, scheduling, generating reports, and making simple decisions, overlap directly with the tasks performed in many entry-level white-collar jobs.**¹³

But, as stated above, one of the jobs that seems *least* likely to be made largely obsolete by AI is that of a sworn law enforcement officer. AI does not replace the human problem-solving skills required on a daily basis in police work. In an uncertain labor environment, law enforcement leaders have an opportunity to reach a population of young people who are increasingly skeptical of college and the prospect of white-collar employment.

So, with increasing numbers of high school graduates choosing to enter the workforce directly, pursue technical training, or explore other forms of career development outside a traditional college education, law enforcement leaders are presented with an opportunity: to recruit from an increasingly larger group of young adults seeking stable, meaningful employment without

committing to the debt of a four-year degree or risking their skills rendered obsolete by developments in AI technology.

Bridging the Gap Between High School and Field Training

For law enforcement agencies seeking the next generation of officers, this shift presents an opportunity. By adapting recruitment strategies, expanding outreach beyond traditional college pathways, and emphasizing the meaningful career opportunities policing can offer, departments may be able to connect with a new wave of applicants who are ready to serve their communities.

First, outreach should begin earlier. Instead of focusing primarily on college job fairs, departments should build relationships with high schools, vocational programs, and youth organizations. Career presentations, ride-along opportunities, and summer programs can introduce students to policing before they make post-graduation decisions.

Second, agencies should communicate the long-term value of a career in policing. Many young people may be unfamiliar with the financial benefits, stability, and long-term professional prospects associated with a career in law enforcement—particularly in the face of AI development.

Third, law enforcement agencies should consider engaging in vocational apprenticeship programs such as police explorer or police cadet programs. Police explorer or cadet programs offer young adults (typically individuals aged 14–20) the chance for a hands-on introduction to law enforcement careers. Explorers or cadets gain a "real world" look at policing through assisting clerical, dispatcher, and front desk personnel, and observing patrol officers and detectives in the field. In some school districts, participants can earn community service hours required by their high schools for graduation. These programs show youths how interesting, exciting, and noble the law enforcement profession is, and guide qualified individuals towards a law enforcement career track as soon as they are eligible.

Many high-paying jobs that were seen as “safe” just a few years or even a few months ago are now at risk. In light of this reality, in all their recruiting efforts, it may be time for law

enforcement agencies to emphasize the job security of a career in law enforcement in the face of the job losses that AI is poised to cause in the coming years.

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Matt Dolan is a licensed attorney who specializes in training and advising public safety agencies in matters of legal liability, risk management, and ethical leadership. His training focuses on helping agency leaders create ethically and legally sound policies, procedures, and practices as a proactive means of minimizing liability and maximizing agency effectiveness.

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