

FACIAL RECOGNITION TECHNOLOGY IS GOING TO BE BANNED IN SOME UNITED STATES RELEVANT CITIES

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In a famous city that in many ways has come to symbolize the power of technology – San Francisco, California, United States of America - an important step has been taken to curb part of that power. A few days ago, the city’s Board of Supervisors voted in the vast majority to approve a wide-ranging ordinance that regulates surveillance technology and bans outright the use of facial recognition technology (FRT) by the local government for surveillance.

The ordinance will not become law until the Board of Supervisors ratifies the vote, a move that is widely expected. The “Stop Secret Surveillance” will also prevent city agencies from adopting any other type of surveillance tech (e. g, automatic license plate readers) until the public has been given notice and the board has had a chance to vote on it.

Experts explained that the passage of such a measure, even in a city considered to be largely progressive in the popular consciousness, means that, within the national conversation about potential damage associated with facial recognition technology, other local and state governments, such as Oakland, California, Washington state and Massachusetts, may soon follow the same way and carefully consider the role of F.R.T. in their communities.

The San Francisco ban on facial recognition technology is not happening in a vacuum, but rather as several governments around the world have been persuaded by the obscure promise of technology to track down people participating in a protest, gather outside a place of worship or simply live their life.

In reality, such a use of technology immediately presents at least two kinds of problems: it not only infringes on people's privacy but also severely discriminates against certain groups of people.

Not surprisingly, a New York Times report in April shows that the Chinese government is using a vast, secret system of advanced facial recognition technology to locate and control an ethnic minority. Facial recognition technology, which is integrated into China's rapidly expanding surveillance camera

networks, looks exclusively at people who appear to be part of that particular ethnicity based on their appearance and keeps track of their movements.

Also other countries, like Ecuador for instance, installed a network of Chinese surveillance cameras around entire counties. And often companies that provide facial recognition technology are based in the United States.

Although the people of San Francisco do not need to personally fear a Chinese-style surveillance state, the use of facial recognition technologies by law enforcement is a demonstrable threat to civil liberties.

Moreover, this technology has higher error rates, due to the well-documented fact that human bias can creep into Artificial Intelligence (AI). Often, this manifests as a problem with the training data that goes into AIs: if designers mostly feed the systems examples of white male faces, and don't think to diversify their data, the systems won't learn to properly recognize women and people of color.

Finally, if such a global leader in technology like San Francisco understands face surveillance's dangers and acts to prevent its deployment, this can show the world what real tech leadership means. This is a huge win for those who argue that the tech which can identify an individual by analyzing their facial features in images, in videos, or in real time carries risks so serious that they far outweigh any benefits.

Source: BBC NEWS -Technology, San Francisco is first US city to ban facial recognition. By Dave Lee, 15 May 2019.

Link: <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-48276660>