

San Francisco Bans Facial Recognition Technology

Topline: As facial recognition technology raises concerns about how it could lead to privacy and civil rights violations—especially for people of color—San Francisco became the first city to ban its use. But some worry a blanket ban hinders the ability of the police to find missing people and crime suspects.

- The ban covers city agencies and the police department.
- Critics of facial recognition say the technology isn't reliable enough to be in the hands of law enforcement. Those inaccuracies could result in innocent people with darker skin becoming "entangled with the police and put in life threatening situations," Matt Cagle, a civil liberties attorney at the ACLU of Northern California, said.
- As a middle ground, neighborhood [groups](#) are calling for a moratorium instead of an outright ban. They want to revisit the issue when the technology improves because, they say, it can be instrumental in finding missing people or victims of human trafficking and identifying the suspects of terrorist attacks.
- But even if facial recognition were 100% accurate, civil rights groups worry it can easily be abused by police departments to target protesters or certain communities, such as Muslims who attend mosques. "The government has no business tracking when we leave our homes, when we go to a park or place of worship," Cagle [told](#) NPR.
- While San Francisco is the first city to enact such a ban, proposals are being considered in Oakland, California and Somerville, Massachusetts

Big asterisk: The ban doesn't apply to the San Francisco International Airport and the Port of San Francisco, because they are under the jurisdiction of the federal government. The ban also doesn't apply to private businesses or individuals.

Key finding: A 2018 [study](#) by the M.I.T. Media Lab found that facial recognition programs have a higher error rate for women of color.

- A San Francisco Police Department spokesperson said it currently doesn't use facial

recognition, saying it looks forward to “addressing privacy concerns of technology while balancing public safety concerns.”

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