

# A Debate on the Laws and Ethics of Facial Recognition Technology being used in Law Enforcement

FOR Opening (1 minute):

- Arguing the position FOR law enforcement to be able to use facial recognition technology and it being used in criminal investigations, scanning suspects in real time, and identifying people from footage (for example body cams on police officers)
- In the context of FRT being used in law enforcement, it's not just a surveillance tool but a tool of safety, accuracy, and efficiency
- Main arguments to support are **enhance public safety**, **approve accuracy when identifying suspects**, and **efficiency the of investigations**

FOR Main (5 Minutes):

- Facial recognition technology **enhances public safety** because of its ability to **rapidly identify anyone from a crowd**, which would be helpful to see if someone who's wanted/enderangering society is walking in public
- something the human simply cannot do at the same rate of a computer, can be utilized **with traffic cameras**, large gatherings can have **surveillance cameras set up to monitor**, better safe than sorry in the case of a terrorist event
- **Increase of accuracy in criminal trials**, allowing for a way to **verify a suspect's identity** and ensure the person in custody is who they actually are, **one-to-one verification between a suspect and footage of a crime**
- **More efficient criminal investigations**, can use **Face ID to unlock phones a part of an investigation, verify presence of a person at a crime scene**
- **EXAMPLE**: cold cases are being solved. FRT lead to the arrest of John Miller in Indiana, who was convicted of the murder of an 8 year old girl he killed in 1988. By combining DNA evidence from the crime scene, FRT was used to narrow down the pool of suspects and FRT helped match surveillance footage and a public photo of Miller, leading to his confession of the crime
- Since **2011, NYPD** has used this technology comparing **lawfully obtained photos** in their dataset, ensuring **no arrest is made solely based off of a facial recognition search**, just as **an addition to verify human analysis of a scene and investigators trained to use this technology assess the reliability of the match and investigate further. NOT grounds for an arrest**
- **2019, NYPD** had **68 murders**, **66 rapes**, **277 felony assaults**, **386 robberies**, **525 grand larcenies** utilizing this technology to verify and compare suspects to images of crime scenes, none of these cases resulting in a false arrest
- FBI, DEA, DHS, Secret Service, TSA, and more agencies (local, federal, and overseas) use this technology

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- **Overall makes things run more smooth, safe, and efficient.** A real case we all may have seen is at the airports now with **TSA** and **verifying traveler identity**, rather than a TSA agent comparing your face to **your ID photo facial recognition technology is used, proving to be 97.5% accurate according to TSA.gov**, more reliable than manually checking

FOR Rebuttal (2 Minutes):

Opponents often point towards issues of bias or wrongful arrests, but these are not reasons to reject the technology it is reasons to improve it.

- The NIST Face Recognition Vendor Test shows that modern FRT algorithms are significantly more accurate than earlier version (trained on diverse datasets)

Critics often ignore that: Law Enforcement Agencies **aren't using FRT alone** – it is part of a larger investigative process.

- No one is being convicted based off of facial recognition alone (Trained investigators review matches; verify evidence; assess accuracy before acting)

“Agencies like the NYPD have internal processes to ensure FRT is just a starting point – not a conviction”

**Instead of banning Facial Recognition, we should be calling for more oversight, better training, and clear regulation in order to ensure public safety and protecting their civil rights.**

FOR Closing (1 Minute):

In closing, facial recognition is already helping to solve crimes, locate missing persons, and safeguard our communities. It's not a threat — it's a tool. And like any tool, it must be used ethically, transparently, and responsibly. Halting this technology out of fear ignores the real potential it has to save lives and deliver justice. With oversight and education, facial recognition doesn't undermine our democracy — it **enhances** it. Using it **wisely** will build us a future that is safer, smarter, and more just for everyone.

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AGAINST Opening (1 Minute):

I stand in opposition to the widespread use of Facial Recognition Technology (FRT) and its integration into law enforcement and governance. While FRT does offer law enforcement some convenience and can give our society more security, its unregulated use poses a greater threat to our civil liberties.

Without properly regulating FRT, we may witness an increase in...

- Mass surveillance
- Misidentification
- Racial bias (and)
- Unchecked data collection.

This can lead to **undermining public trust and civil liberties**. The question is not whether FRT can be useful, it should be as a society – **will we sacrifice privacy, equality and justice for the illusion of safety.**

## Main Points

- While FRT promises efficiency and security it presents greater threats to
  - Fundamental rights
  - Public trust
  - Social equality
- Unregulated use of FRT can lead to
  - Mass Surveillance
  - Racial Bias
  - Unchecked data collection
- Core Question?
  - Are we willing to sacrifice privacy, equality, and justice for the illusion of safety?

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## AGAINST Rebuttal:

- **Speed and efficiency** of a criminal investigation is **nothing compared** to proving to be **accurate, wrongful arrests outweigh getting cases closed faster**
- A model that is **97.5% accurate seems very high**, but at the end this flaw and **misidentification** messes with a **person's freedom and reputation**, 97.5% is one of the **more accurate facial recognition models** too
- Just because many agencies use it doesn't justify its use, according to the **Government Accountability Office**, agents in the **FBI, DHS, and secret service** are **not trained** on how to use this technology, learn about its **accuracy limitations, be aware of possible biases, and possibly lead to an abuse of power**

## AGAINST Main:

### 1. FRT Enables Mass Surveillance Without Consent

- Facial recognition allows law enforcement to **track individuals** in real time across public spaces **without their knowledge or consent**.
  - **Violates 4<sup>th</sup> amendment rights** that protects us from unlawful search and seizure
  - Unlike traditional investigation tools, FRT can be deployed without anyone even knowing.
- This can create an environment where people are constantly monitored. This level of surveillance poses a serious risk, especially as it continues to grow, become more advanced, and get more and more invasive.
  - **Violates 2<sup>nd</sup> amendment rights** by deterring people from expressing themselves if they're constantly being watched
- Unlike other investigative tools, FRT does not require probable cause leading to dangerous outcomes.
  - We can't support the use of FRT if we have no laws or regulations to limit when and how it can be used. Without strict oversight it's easy to let this powerful technology

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become abused. When law enforcement does abuse this technology who would be held accountable if they get to freely use it?

## 2. FRT has shown to Prove Bias and Misidentification

Studies by the National Institute of Standards of Technology (NIST) found that FRT systems are significantly **less accurate when identifying people of color** (particularly Black, Asian and Indigenous individuals). When attempting to identify black women specifically, error rates were as high as 35%.

- These disparities have led to wrongful arrests and misidentification. Take for example the case of Robert Williams. Robert Williams, a black man in Detroit was wrongfully arrested in 2020 after facial recognition software falsely matched him to surveillance footage of a watch store theft. This led to his arrest and detainment for 30 hours – leading him to be questioned about a crime he did not commit. The match was later proven inaccurate.

This highlights the dangers of relying solely on flawed facial recognition systems. This isn't just a random one time case either, Christopher Galtin, Jason Vernau and 6 others were all arrested and held in jail, and these are the only ones who went public. All of these individuals were black, showing how bias this technology can really be.

## 3. There currently is a lack of Oversight and Training

Despite growing adoption, many government agencies – including the FBI and DHS have no formal training for agents on limitations, biases, or ethical use of FRT.

According to the Government Accountability Office, this lack of guidance puts citizens at risk and opens door to the possibility of abuse of power.

As technology advances faster than our policies, we must provide a solution to this imbalance and offer transparency and guidelines for those implementing and using FRT.

## 4. Companies can exploit private data to third parties

Companies like Clearview AI have scraped billions of images from social media to build facial databases – this is all without consent.

This data is later sold or licensed to law enforcement, creating a surveillance ecosystem with no transparency or accountability.

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Individuals may never know if their face has been scanned, stored, or sold.

### **AGAINST Closing:**

Facial Recognition Technology should not be normalized as another policing tool within law enforcement or governmental processes. Unlike other biometric data tracking like fingerprint scanning – FRT has a personal tie to one's unique physical attributes. This can lead to individuals being tracked across cities or even states all without their consent. And unlike many existing tools – FRT is prone to bias, vulnerable to misuse, and operates without clear federal oversight. Cases like Robert Williams will become ever more prominent if we do not create policies that institute ethical use of these systems leading to life changing consequences for day-to-day consumers and individuals. When we hand over such a powerful tool to our government without transparency or accountability - we open the door to a future where our identities can be scanned, stored, and judged. Until our rights can be fully protected, and the technology can be proven accurate, unbiased, and ethically implemented – we must resist the presence of FRT in governance and be careful about its expansion into our day-to-day systems.