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In recent years, the prevalence of facial recognition technology (being able to identify by running their photo through a database of images) has grown exponentially, with companies offering quality products to governments and law agencies around the world. In “The End of Privacy as We Know It?” on *The Daily* podcast, host Michael Barbaro introduces an interview of reporter Kashmir Hill regarding Clearview AI’s facial recognition technology. Hill argues that though Clearview’s technology is beneficial for law enforcement, the lack of transparency and federal regulation risks society’s privacy. Hill begins with background information on facial recognition, noting that Clearview’s technology is unique due to their massive database containing billions of photos scraped from the web. She warns that public access to the technology would be privacy nightmare, illustrating how the technology can identify suspects even if their face is covered, helping agencies solve tough cases. However, Hill claims that Clearview is manipulating search results, banning accounts that search for flagged people. She summarizes that though Clearview’s technology is beneficial for law enforcement, there is a lack of company transparency. Hill then discusses her interview with Ton-That. Regarding the selling of Clearview’s technology, Ton-That reveals that he only wants to sell to law enforcement, refuting his investors’ wishes to expand to the general market. Hill, however, raises the concern that due to the lack of federal regulation, Clearview could sell to anyone to wish to and have power over society’s privacy. **The points raised by Hill in the podcast can go beyond companies such as Clearview AI and apply to governments around the world. Specifically, the application of the technology can vary wildly from government to government based on the ideologies the countries are based upon.**

Hill raises the point that there is a lack of transparency regarding facial recognition technology. More restrictive governments could take advantage of this and be more invasive in their citizens’ privacy. Though most companies probably are somewhere in line with Hoan Ton-That’s perspective on avoiding “bad” governments, Hill’s argument of the technology being uncontrollable after a point is valid. Even if these companies somehow manage to avoid having their technology get into the hands of more restrictive governments, these countries could buy the technology from a company willing to sell to them or end up developing their own version. In general, authoritarian governments are more likely to use facial recognition technology as a tool to monitor their citizens for any unwanted activities (such as protests). For example, in “The era of digital surveillance: Authoritarianism vs. democracy?” on *Oxford Global Society*, Jufang Wang and her team highlight the abuse of Covid-tracking technologies by local Chinese officials to monitor citizens and minority groups living in the country (Wang et al.).

According to Wang and her team, western countries are more likely to be cautious about state surveillance. They note for some, it may be due to historical periods of hyper-surveillance (take Nazi Germany for example). For others, it may be due to an increased emphasis on personal privacy, which may even be protected in the nation’s constitution. (Wang et al.). Some countries (such as Belgium and Luxembourg) may even outright ban the use of facial recognition technology to protect these rights. There is the possibility, however, that the increased power democratic governments get from being able to constantly monitor their citizens may (slightly) turn them more authoritarian, whether it may be more monitoring/censoring or even the limitation of rights that had previously been defended. For example, Jufang Wang and her team refer to Professor Daniel Smilov’s argument that facial recognition technology increases tension between the protection of personal data and the technological competitiveness of nations, gives democracies the ability to manipulate public opinion, and could result in the loss of individual agency (Wang et al.). This “loss of democracy” can be seen in the increased surveillance the United States engaged following the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The power that can be gained from using facial recognition technology can lead to a sharp divide on the stance countries take on the technology due to their different ideologies. Using facial recognition technology could boost the competitiveness of the country (as seen with China) but it requires the sacrifice of constitutional democracy for efficiency.

Even in authoritarian countries, the use of facial recognition as a form of surveillance may not be frowned upon as it is in more liberal countries such as the United States, whose citizens value privacy more. In countries such as China (who is known for its extensive use of facial recognition surveillance), citizens may view the government as a “protective being” saving them from dangers such as crime and disease. This could lead to a discussion on whether western biases cloud judgement over authoritarian governments using facial recognition technology to monitor citizens. Wang and her team argue that “there is a tendency of seeing surveillance practices in authoritarian states only from the lens of social control, depicting an Orwellian society where the state exerts pervasive control. Western democracies are then presented as the saviour [sic]” (Wang et al.). They back Professor Zeng’s argument that China deserves special attention due to it going much further regarding facial recognition technology than other countries and having encountered many problems that could teach the rest of the world valuable lessons. They are quick to highlight that despite the concerns involving the abuse of personal privacy, facial recognition has brought “public good” to Chinese society, using its use in fighting child trafficking as an example (Wang et al.).

Overall, however, the rise of facial recognition technology gives countries the opportunity to have more power in monitoring and/or controlling their citizens. This is to the advantage of authoritarian governments who can use the technology to invade their citizens’ privacy and have a more restrictive approach to how they run their country. For example, China has been known to use facial recognition technology to publicly shame its citizens, silence protesters, and oppress minority groups living in the country. Democratic countries, however, may lean away from this technology to protect citizens’ rights to privacy, possibly even going as far as banning the technology. This may be because, on average, citizens in more liberal countries value their privacy more than people living under restrictive governments, though this always isn’t the case. There is the distinct possibility, too, that facial recognition technology may make democratic governments slightly more authoritarian in some respects, allowing them to experience the competitive edge authoritarian governments get due to its usage. This showcases the power of the technology to shift governmental ideologies and actions over time.

[1094 Words]

Works Cited:

Wang, Jufang, et al. “The Era of Digital Surveillance: Authoritarianism Vs. Democracy?” *Oxford Global Society*, 18 Oct. 2022, [oxgs.org/2022/10/18/the-era-digital-surveillance-authoritarianism-vs-democracy.](http://oxgs.org/2022/10/18/the-era-digital-surveillance-authoritarianism-vs-democracy.)