

UN AI moratorium request mirrors growing global unease over the technology

Article

The news: The United Nations human rights commissioner is **calling** for a worldwide moratorium on public facial recognition and other AI tech the agency claims violates human

rights.

- Those calls were part of a larger UN report that argues countries and businesses have advanced AI technology too quickly without first laying down appropriate guardrails to prevent discrimination and other harms.
- The proposed moratorium would apply to real-time facial recognition used in public spaces, and government social scoring systems (like those used in **China**) that use AI tools to assign behavioral scores to individuals.

How we got here: A **report** released earlier this year from the **US Government Accountability Office (GAO)** revealed that six US federal agencies used facial recognition tech on images of protestors from the 2020 George Floyd protests to verify their identities., ultimately **inspiring** a bipartisan group of US house lawmakers to reignite calls for comprehensive AI regulation.

- Federal law enforcement also reportedly used **Clearview AI** and other facial recognition services to track and arrest participants in the January 6 Capitol Hill riots, per Bloomberg.
- Meanwhile, in China, advocates have **accused** China of using its social credit algorithm—in tandem with facial recognition and other AI tools—to persecute minority groups.

Who's taking action? The UN's call for a total moratorium comes on the heels of growing facial recognition bans in some US cities and self-imposed moratoriums from some of Big Tech's most influential companies.

- At least **14 US cities** and **two states** have issued **city-wide bans** of facial recognition with varying degrees of severity.
- Earlier this year, **Amazon** announced it would indefinitely continue its moratorium on police use of its Rekognition facial recognition service.
- Amazon's original announcement paved the way for similar moratoriums at **Microsoft** and **IBM**.

And it's not just the US making moves: The **European Union** is **reportedly** considering new rules that would effectively outlaw AI used for mass surveillance or for ranking social behavior.

- Over 40% of adults in the US, Australia, France, India, and six other countries surveyed in a 2020 Norton LifeLock report all said they thought facial recognition, in particular, will do more harm than good.

What's next? Some degree of large-scale AI regulation in the US and EU appears not a matter of if, but when.

Though civil liberty and privacy advocates will welcome such changes, emerging AI companies like Clearview AI will likely argue such restrictions would hamstring US AI innovation at a time out of increased competition in the space globally.

Attitudes Toward Facial Recognition Technology Among Adults in Select Countries, Dec 2019

% of respondents

- Businesses should be required to inform/report when they're using facial recognition
- The government should be required to inform/report where they're using facial recognition
- Facial recognition will likely be abused or misused in the next year
- Facial recognition will improve products and services
- Facial recognition will do more harm than good

	1	2	3	4	5
New Zealand	93%	92%	66%	46%	42%
Germany	90%	89%	60%	40%	43%
Australia	90%	87%	65%	52%	48%
France	89%	87%	66%	57%	45%
Netherlands	89%	86%	60%	52%	44%
UK	88%	88%	65%	58%	42%
Italy	87%	87%	58%	64%	46%
US	85%	85%	68%	59%	47%
India	83%	83%	58%	72%	48%
Japan	79%	77%	54%	52%	41%

Source: NortonLifeLock, "2019 Cyber Safety Insights Report Global Results" conducted by The Harris Poll, March 31, 2020

254988

www.eMarketer.com