Facial recognition program to be rolled out at 16 major U.S. airports, increasing biometric surveillance of Americans

Description

The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) is rolling out a new facial recognition program at 16 airports across the United States, increasing the government's biometric surveillance of Americans. These airports include the Baltimore-Washington International Thurgood Marshall and Reagan National and the following destinations: Washington, Atlanta, Boston, Dallas, Denver, Detroit, Gulfport-Biloxi, Jackson (MS) Las Vegas, Los Angeles, Miami, Orlando, Phoenix, Salt Lake City, and San Jose.

TSA launches controversial biometric surveillance program

The new biometric surveillance program includes newly-installed kiosks, equipped with cameras. When a passenger approaches the kiosk, he/she must insert their government-issued ID (driver's license, passport) into the designated slot. Then, the passenger must hold their face still and look into a camera while facial recognition technology scans their face to match their biometrics with their ID. After the person's face is scanned and approved, a TSA agent signs off on the screening, without having to manually check a person's ID. According to the TSA, the program is intended to speed up the check-in process for 2.4 million people daily, and verify people's identity with utmost accuracy.

"What we are trying to do with this is aid the officers to actually determine that you are who you say who you are," said Jason Lim, identity management capabilities manager, who spoke to reporters during a demonstration of the technology at Baltimore Washington International.

Privacy rights and civil liberties threatened by TSA's new biometric surveillance

The pilot program is voluntary, and passengers may opt out of the biometric screening. However, the TSA could discriminate against individuals who prioritize their privacy. Individual TSA agents could retaliate against passengers who want to opt out of the intrusive facial recognition procedure. These passengers could be viewed as "suspicious." Jeramie Scott of the Electronic Privacy Information

Center, says it's only a matter of time before the facial recognition becomes a more permanent fixture at checkpoints, with increasing pressure to participate.

The TSA is trying to get broad public acceptance for the new pilot program and says that the government is not using the program to store people's biometric data. However, that could change in the future, as more facial recognition scanners are installed, as the demand for public "safety" overrides individual privacy rights. The TSA did say that the data could be shared with the Department of Homeland Security's Science and Technology Directorate, where it could be stored for 24 months.

Back in February, five Senators wrote a letter to the TSA, requesting that the pilot program be halted immediately. The Senators, which include Jeffrey Merkley, Cory Booker, Bernard Sanders, Edward Markey, and Elizabeth Warren, wrote: "Increasing biometric surveillance of Americans by the government represents a risk to civil liberties and privacy rights."

"We are concerned about the safety and security of Americans' biometric data in the hands of authorized private corporations or unauthorized bad actors," they wrote. "As government agencies grow their database of identifying images, increasingly large databases will prove more and more enticing targets for hackers and cyber-criminals."

Questions to ask: Who has access to this private information? Will other government agencies use the biometric data to surveil Americans? Is the biometric data subject to the government's warrant-less searches? What happens if the data gets hacked and used for other purposes? Will it be used by Big Tech, considering that the government and Big Tech have an illustrious relationship? How involved will the World Economic Forum be, for they desire facial recognition, digital IDs, social credit scores and vaccine passports, which are all made easier through facial recognition programs? Will these systems be rolled out across other industries, as biometric data and personal IDs are put in a central database to track Americans?

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