

USE OF FACIAL RECOGNITION TECH SPARKS PRIVACY FEARS

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The government has to create strict regulations before it allows cops to use FRT for policing, experts said

The Lucknow police's decision to use [facial recognition](#) technology (FRT) to monitor women's expressions to prevent street harassment has spurred privacy concerns among Indians. The government needs to create strict and clear regulations before it allows law enforcement agencies to use facial recognition for policing, privacy advocates said.

"Considering the explicit and expansive findings on privacy by the Supreme Court, one of the first set of laws or regulations ought to have been on CCTV camera usage and FRT," said N.S. Nappinai, cyber-law expert and SC lawyer. "My concern is that intrusive technologies are being used in the name of protection of women and children but without checks and balances."

The accuracy of FRT is also a problem and authorities are reluctant to admit that it is error-prone, said Anushka Jain, associate counsel, transparency and RTI, at the Internet Freedom Foundation.

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"In the case of the Telangana state election commission, which is using FRT for voter verification, the information they gave us through RTI was that their system is accurate only up to 78%. With people wearing masks because of the new normal, the accuracy is going to get impacted further," she said.

A study by the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) in the US in 2020 found that pre-covid algorithms "give increased false non-match rates" when used for images with people wearing masks. The study tested 89 one-to-one [facial recognition](#) algorithms made before the pandemic and found that some of the algorithms failed 30-50% of the time.

The goal of startups building facial recognition technologies is solely to make their algorithm as good as it can be to sell their products, Jain said. "Privacy often takes a backseat," she said. Privacy experts said citizens won't know who can access the data when it goes to private companies, which is even more worrying given the absence of data protection laws.

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