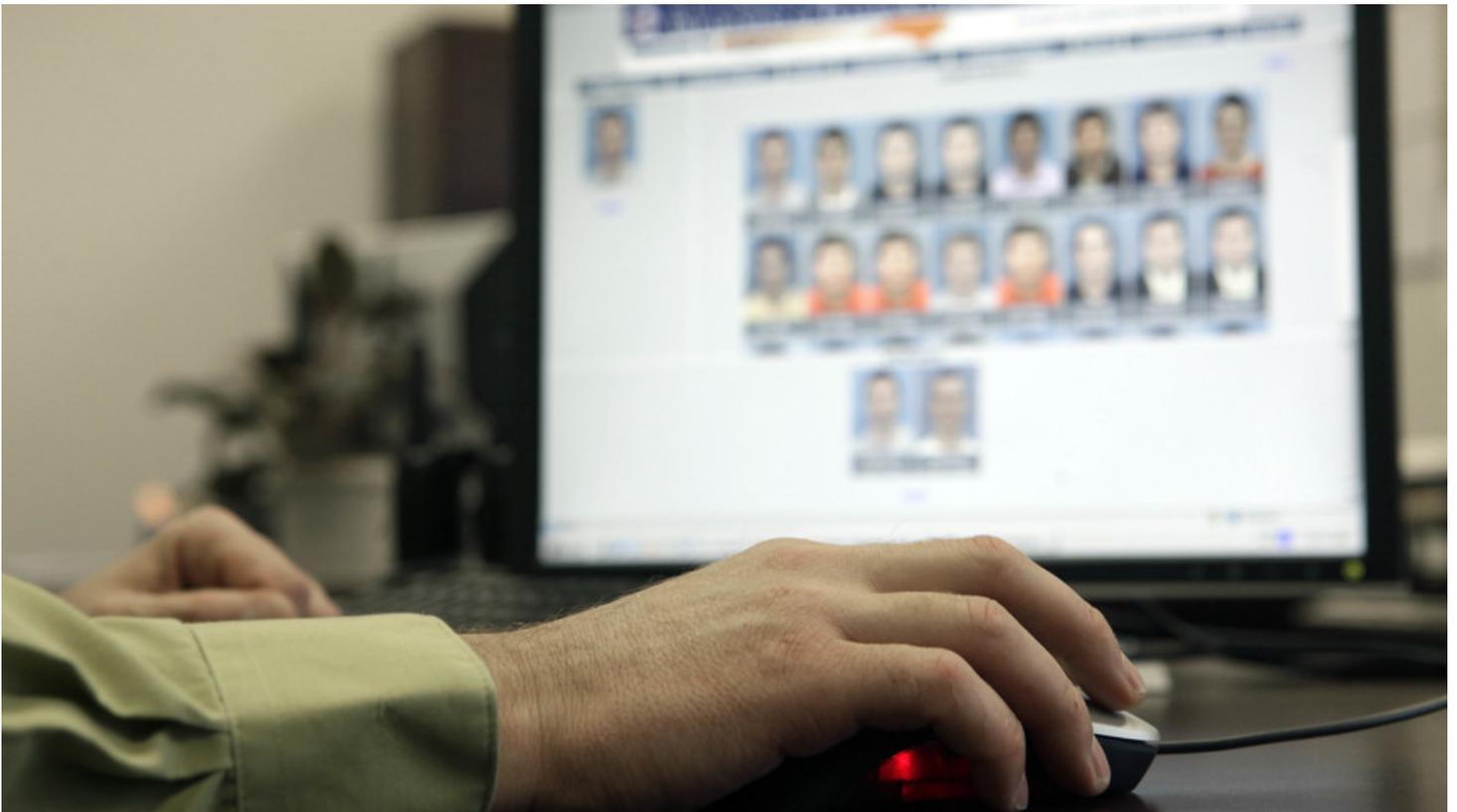


# Photo databases that police use might ignore people's right to privacy

By Sam Levin, The Guardian, adapted by Newsela staff on 10.24.16

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Stephen Lamm, a supervisor with the ID Fraud Unit of the North Carolina Department of Motor Vehicles, looks through photos in the facial recognition system, September 24, 2009, Raleigh, North Carolina. AP Photo/Gerry Broome

Half of all American adults are included in photo databases used by police, a new study said. These databases are like an online police lineup. They store pictures of the faces of more than 117 million adults, according to the study.

The study was done by Georgetown Law's Center on Privacy and Technology. This group studies how the police use technology to watch and track citizens. They do research to decide whether that technology is fair to use.

The new report raises some big concerns. Some are worried that the photo databases are ignoring people's right to privacy. The study also raises questions about whether the police should use monitoring technology at all. These tools allow them to take photos of a person in the real world and try to match it to photos on the computer. They can do this even if the person hasn't broken a law.

Many police departments use face-recognition technology, the report said. This technology allows cameras to scan people on the street. Then it quickly matches faces to photos in the police files.

### **Americans Shouldn't Have To Worry About Being Secretly Identified**

The report suggests that the technology may take away the rights of Americans. It also suggests that these tools unfairly impact African-Americans and Latinos.

Face-recognition technology changes how we feel in public spaces, said Alvaro Bedoya. He works for Georgetown's privacy and technology center. "It can change the basic freedom we have to go about our lives without people identifying us from afar and in secret," he said.

The center's study was based on many police records. It has produced the biggest survey ever of face-matching databases.

It is not unusual for the police to keep information about arrests and investigations. They have been doing so for a long time. However, now the FBI is storing a different type of information. According to the report, the FBI's face-recognition database is mostly made up of people who have not broken any law.

The FBI photos come from driver's licenses and travel papers. This makes it is easy for police to track people who haven't had any trouble with the law.

### **"This Technology Makes Mistakes"**

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) is a group that fights for people's rights. It found that police in Baltimore may have used face-recognition technology during protests last year. The protests took place because some think the police in Baltimore target African-Americans and treat them unfairly.

The ACLU says that the Baltimore police used face-recognition technology to find and arrest some protestors. They were trying to find protestors who may have committed other crimes, even if they didn't break any laws during the protest.

On Tuesday, the ACLU urged the U.S. Department of Justice to examine face-recognition technology.

Other studies have found that these tools can be inaccurate.

"This technology makes mistakes," said Bedoya.

### **African-Americans Are Wrongly Targeted, Some Say**

One study found that face-recognition matches were wrong for African-Americans more often than for white people, the ACLU said.

The computer mistakes can also lead to an unfair amount of arrests for African-Americans and Latinos.

For example, in Baltimore, some police plans have led to thousands of arrests for very small offenses. The cases were later dropped.

However, many of the people who were arrested could still be in the photo database, said David Rocah. He is a lawyer with the ACLU. He said the majority of those who were arrested were people of color. They can stay in the database even if they didn't commit a crime, he said. That means they may be more likely to be tracked by police in the future.

Many of them never should have been arrested and are innocent, he said.

Stephen Moyer works for Maryland's department of public safety. This branch runs the face-recognition database. He defended the technology. Maryland police use all of the technology they have to fight crime, he said.