San Francisco to vote on banning face recognition technology

May 14 2019, by Janie Har

In this Oct. 31, 2018, file photo, a man, who declined to be identified, has his face painted to represent efforts to defeat facial recognition during a protest at Amazon headquarters over the company's facial recognition system, "Rekognition," in Seattle. San Francisco is on track to become the first U.S. city to ban the use of facial recognition by police and other city agencies as the technology creeps increasingly into daily life. Studies have shown error rates in facial-analysis systems built by Amazon, IBM and Microsoft were far higher for darker-skinned women than lighter-skinned men. (AP Photo/Elaine Thompson,

File)

San Francisco supervisors will vote on surveillance oversight legislation Tuesday that includes a ban on the use of facial recognition technology by police and other city departments.

If approved by the full board, San Francisco would become the first U.S. city to outlaw the tech at a time when it is becoming a part of daily life, from international airports to home security cameras. Privacy advocates have squared off with public safety proponents at several heated hearings in San Francisco, a city teeming with tech innovation and the home of Twitter, Airbnb and Uber.

Those who support the ban say the technology is not only flawed, but a serious threat to civil rights, especially in a city that cherishes public protest and privacy. They worry people will one day not be able to go to a mall, the park or a school without being identified and tracked.

"Good policing does not mean living in a police state," said Supervisor Aaron Peskin, who introduced the measure, at a hearing last week. "Living in a safe and secure community does not mean living in a surveillance state."

But critics say police need all the help they can get, especially in a city with high-profile events and high rates of property crime. That people expect privacy in public space is unreasonable given the proliferation of cell phones and surveillance cameras, said Meredith Serra, a member of a resident public safety group Stop Crime SF.

In this Oct. 31, 2018, file photo, demonstrators hold images of Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos near their faces during a Halloween-themed protest at Amazon headquarters over the company's facial recognition system, "Rekognition," in Seattle. San Francisco is on track to become the first U.S. city to ban the use of facial recognition by police and other city agencies as the technology creeps increasingly into daily life. Studies have shown error rates in facial-analysis systems built by Amazon, IBM and Microsoft were far higher for darker-skinned women than lighter-skinned men. (AP Photo/Elaine Thompson, File)

"To me, the ordinance seems to be a costly additional layer of bureaucracy that really does nothing to improve the safety of our citizens," she said at the same hearing.

The legislation would require city departments to get board approval to acquire or continue using surveillance services or technology, specifying

how the surveillance would be used and for what purposes. It would ban the use of face ID technology by city departments, but it would not affect business, private or federal government use.

Critics say they worry a politicized board might lag on approving technology policy submitted by the police department.

This photo taken Tuesday, May 7, 2019, shows a security camera in the Financial District of San Francisco. San Francisco is on track to become the first U.S. city to ban the use of facial recognition by police and other city agencies as the technology creeps increasingly into daily life. (AP Photo/Eric Risberg)

San Francisco's police department stopped testing the technology in

2017.

The [city](#) of Oakland is considering similar legislation.

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