

QUOTE OF THE DAY
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San Francisco Is Right: Facial Recognition Must Be Put On Hold



JONAH GOLDBERG

What are we going to do about all the cameras? The question keeps me up at night, in something like terror.

Cameras are the defining technological advance of our age. They are the keys to our smartphones, the eyes of tomorrow's autonomous drones and the FOMO engines that drive Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and Snapchat. Cheap, ubiquitous, viral photography has fed social movements like Black Lives Matter, but cameras are already prompting more problems than we know what to do with — revenge porn, live-streamed terrorism, YouTube reactionaries and other photographic ills.

And cameras aren't done. They keep getting cheaper and — in ways both



Facial recognition software is demonstrated at the Intel booth at CES 2019 show at the Las Vegas Convention Center in Las Vegas, Nevada

amazing and alarming — they are getting smarter. Advances in computer vision are giving machines the ability to distinguish and track faces, to make guesses about people's behaviours and intentions, and to comprehend and navigate threats in the physical environment. In China, smart cameras sit at the foundation of an all-encompassing surveillance totalitarianism unprecedented in human history. In the West, intelligent cameras are now being sold as cheap solutions to nearly every private and public woe, from catching cheating spouses and package thieves to preventing school shootings and immigration violations. I suspect these and more uses will take off, because in my years of covering tech, I've gleaned one ironclad axiom about society: If you put a camera in it, it will sell.

That's why I worry that we're stumbling dumbly into a surveillance state. And it's why I think the only reasonable thing to do about smart cameras now is to put a stop to them.

This week, San Francisco's board of supervisors voted to ban the use of facial-recognition technology by the city's police and other agencies. Oakland and Berkeley are also considering bans, as is the city of Somerville, Mass. I'm hoping for a cascade. States, cities and the federal government should impose an immediate moratorium on facial recog-

ognition, especially at a later time, to cameras ever jump into an all-understanding t

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A live demonstration of facial recognition technology at CES 2019 in Las Vegas

The technology is unregulated and rife with error. We shouldn't deploy it without strong privacy rules.



A display shows a facial recognition system for law enforcement during the NVIDIA GPU Technology Conference, which showcases artificial intelligence, deep learning, virtual reality and autonomous machines, in Washington

The 'new Malaysia' promised in last year's election

Prime minister Mahathir Mohamad has yet to deliver on the reforms promised when he ended Barisan Nasional's grip on power



SHOLTO BYRNES

This time last year, Malaysia was in a state of shock after the Barisan Nasional coalition — which had been in government since independence in 1957 — lost the May general election. There was euphoria, too, not only felt by the victors. That the first ever democratic transition took place peacefully, with no attempt by the previous administration, headed by Najib Tun Razak, to cling on, was a sign of political maturity not always found in developing countries. The new government promised much. It seemed as though there was something for almost everyone to cheer.

One year on, the celebrations have been distinctly muted. Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad marked the first anniversary of his return to power — he previously led the nation from 1981 to 2003 as the head of the

United Malays National Organisation, part of Barisan Nasional's coalition — with a speech in which he announced a new plan called Shared Prosperity, which aims to achieve sustainable and equitable growth and “harmony and stability among the people” by 2030. Just days before, however, he had given his own cabinet only five out of 10 for their work so far — hardly the most ringing of endorsements.

The Pakatan Harapan (PH) administration might have won a by-election in the state of Sabah last weekend but it was a seat it expected to retain. The previous three by-elections were all victories for the new Barisan Nasional opposition, in which Najib campaigned with a new motorbike-riding, man-of-the-people persona that appears to have gained some traction on social media. For an ex-prime minister facing an array of charges, mostly related to the 1MDB scandal, that could see him jailed for the rest of his life, he appears to be remarkably buoyant and relaxed.

The PH administration has some achievements to be proud of, such as



Malaysia's Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad speaks during a press conference in Putrajaya