

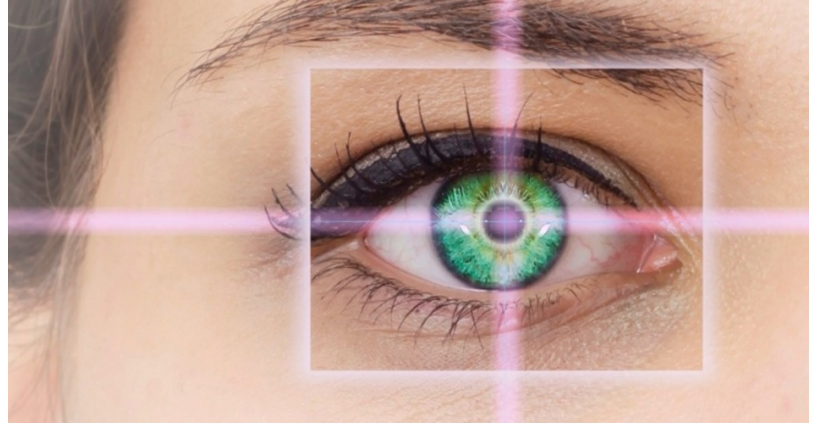


Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on July 16, 2016

Local Law Enforcement Collecting Thousands of Iris Scans for FBI, Pentagon

Details of a new FBI program to collect iris scans reveals how state and local police are assisting the federal law enforcement agency to spread the dragnet of national government surveillance wider and wider.

As part of its “pilot program” — which was floated by the FBI as a simple test of technology — the bureau has quietly collected over 434,000 iris scans since the program started three years ago.



The worst part of the story: Most of the scans are being sent to the Feds from state and local police departments. Here’s one example of the unconstitutional collusion as published by *The Verge*:

As a modestly sized department — policing 2 million citizens with just over 1,800 sworn officers — the San Bernardino Sheriff’s Department doesn’t seem like it would be on the cutting edge of surveillance technology. But the department has quietly become one of the most productive nodes in a nationwide iris-scanning project, collecting iris data from at least 200,000 arrestees over the last two and a half years, according to documents obtained by *The Verge*. In the early months of 2016, the department was collecting an average of 189 iris scans each day.

Read that again: a local police department of a mid-sized city is sending an average of 189 iris scans to the FBI *every day*. These scans are then added to the bureau’s database.

But, the FBI is a law enforcement branch so having this catalog of critical biometric data is key to their ability to keep us safe from crime, right?

For an answer, consider that the FBI has an agreement in place that the entire database will be shared with the Department of Defense.

Again, perhaps the most pernicious aspect of this “pilot program” is that it was sold to Congress as an attempt to work the kinks out of some software, not as a plan to create a national database of irises collected by state and local police and controlled by the FBI and the Pentagon.

But that’s what it is.

“The fact these systems have gone forward without any public debate or oversight that we’ve been able to find is very troubling,” said Nicole Ozer, Technology and Civil Liberties Policy director at the ACLU of California, as quoted in *The Verge*.

Ozer goes on to liken the iris database to the facial recognition program currently being carried out by local law enforcement with money and technology obtained from their federal overlords.

The Verge’s investigation revealed the origin of the scheme:

A 2013 memo signed by representatives from the FBI and California Department of Justice summarizes responsibilities. At that time, according to the memo, the FBI had more than 30,000 images but did not have a way to search through them. Working with a handful of local and



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national partners, the FBI planned to test the feasibility of a searchable database, one that would steadily grow as iris data was submitted by law enforcement around the country. The length of the California program was to be kept at one year, and reassessed after, but the documents show the partnership has been renewed every year since.

In other words, the people's "representatives" gave the green light to the program and then abandoned all oversight.

Swiftly and surreptitiously, the federal government is doling out billions to local police departments and sheriff's offices who in turn become indebted to the feds and are contractually bound to execute the orders handed down from their D.C. benefactors.

Irises aren't the only physical feature being gathered by local law enforcement and passed along to the bosses on the Potomac. Here again is a revelation from *The Verge*:

It's not the first time the FBI has dragged its heels on creating privacy reports for a biometric database. In June, [a report from the Government Accountability Office](#) found hundreds of millions of facial scans were made under an out-of-date privacy assessment, including tens of millions from driver's license photos that were not linked to any crime. Like the iris pilot, the result was a nominally experimental program that nonetheless ingested vast quantities of personally identifiable data from US citizens.

Both programs were developed as part of the [FBI's Next Generation Identification database](#), an ongoing project that includes federal databases for finger and palm prints collected from crime scenes, as well as employment-based background checks. NGI also includes enhanced searches for identifying unknown corpses.

Look at the many sources of surveillance data. The watching eye of government never blinks and some of our own elected and appointed local officials are helping hold its eyelids open.

It is programs like the iris collection database and the others being carried out cooperatively by the FBI, the Pentagon, and police that prompted me to posit the idea that [the federalization of the police is being used to create the "standing army"](#) that our Founders considered the bane of self-government and "inconsistent with liberty."

In commenting on Blackstone's Commentaries, founding era jurist St. George Tucker [speaks as if he foresaw our day](#) and the fatal combination of an increasingly militarized police force and the disarmament of civilians: "Wherever standing armies are kept up, and the right of the people to keep and bear arms is, under any color or pretext whatsoever, prohibited, liberty, if not already annihilated, is on the brink of destruction."

As I wrote in [my article](#):

Steadily and speedily, the forces of the militarized police are denying citizens the protections of fundamental civil liberties afforded us by the Bill of Rights. While there remain legions of law-enforcement officers devoted to protecting and serving their fellow citizens, the federal government's proffer of powerful, free (or almost free), weapons, vehicles, gear, and tactical training is making the allure of becoming an unofficial branch of the armed forces irresistible.

When they are patrolling the streets of their cities, cops these days look more like soldiers or Darth Vader-esque Imperial Storm Troopers than police, thanks again to the buckets of cash dumped into coffers by Homeland Security. Self-serving bureaucrats inside the U.S. government are tirelessly



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trying to obliterate local police forces answerable to local citizens and promote the consolidation movement as a step toward nationalization of all law enforcement.

These proponents of regional and national police forces desire nothing less than the eradication of all local police departments and sheriffs' offices, the surrender of state and municipal sovereignty, and the conversion of cops into federal security agents sworn not to protect and to serve their neighbors, but to protect the prerogatives of politicians, precisely the type of tyrannical symbiosis that our Founders feared would one day obliterate the liberty they sacrificed so much to preserve.

There is not a single syllable in the Constitution that authorizes any agency of the federal government to collect and catalog biometric data from citizens.

Furthermore, there is not a single syllable in the Constitution that authorizes any agency of the federal government to pay billions in what amounts to little more than a bribe to the country's state and local police to assure their cooperation in the construction of the surveillance state.

The police must be kept local. They must be kept accountable. And that restoration begins by cutting off the flow of money from feds to local law enforcement and the flow of biometric data from local law enforcement to the feds.



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