Long-Term Risks of AI-Powered Surveillance in Public Spaces

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(1) Issue + Position

AI-powered surveillance is becoming a routine part of public life, from facial recognition cameras in city streets to automated systems used by federal agencies. While these tools promise efficiency and security, their long-term consequences are far less understood. My concern is not only how these systems operate today, but how they may shape our society decades from now if they continue to expand without meaningful supervision. Using the **Short Arm of Predictive Knowledge** as a lens, I argue that the widespread use of AI-driven surveillance creates a future in which constant monitoring becomes normalized, self-determination weakens, and the balance of power shifts toward those who control these technologies.

The Short Arm of Predictive Knowledge reminds us that even if we cannot perceive every outcome, we can still identify patterns that point toward future risk. In the case of AI surveillance, the pattern is already visible: rapid deployment, minimal regulation, and growing databases of personal information. Reports from *The Perpetual Line-Up* show that half of American adults are already included in law-enforcement facial recognition systems, often without their knowledge or consent. When combined with the federal agencies' documented lack of risk assessments, these trends suggest that the long-term trajectory of AI surveillance is one of expansion rather than restraint. My position is that if we do not address these issues now, we risk creating a society where surveillance becomes a permanent infrastructure, shaping behavior and limiting freedom in ways that are difficult to reverse.

(2) Evidence from *The Perpetual Line-Up*

When I looked at *The Perpetual Line-Up* report, I realized how far AI-powered surveillance has already spread in the United States. The report explains that almost half of American adults are included in a facial recognition database used by law enforcement, even if they have never been involved in a crime. When I learned this, it made me think about how quickly these systems have grown without people knowing. If this much data is already collected today, I can only imagine how much more will be added in the future. This is one of the reasons I believe AI surveillance is becoming a long-term part of our society, not just a temporary tool.

I also noticed that the report describes how many police departments use facial recognition with very little public discussion. To me, this is important because once a technology becomes part of everyday policing, it usually stays there. It becomes normal, even if it started as something unusual or controversial. If I apply the Short Arm of Predictive Knowledge to this, we can see a pattern, which, if we keep adding more cameras and more databases without clear rules, we might end up living in a society where being constantly scanned is simply expected. Even if the technology is meant to help with safety, the long-term effect could be a world where people assume they are always being watched.

Another part of the report that stood out to me is the issue of accuracy. The system already makes mistakes, especially for certain groups of people. If these errors are happening now, I worry about what will happen as the technology becomes even more common. Over time, mistakes could affect more people, and the consequences could become harder to fix. This is

why I think *The Perpetual Line-Up* is such an important source for understanding the future of AI surveillance. It shows that the foundation for long-term monitoring is already in place, and it is growing faster than most of us realize.

(3) Evidence from the U.S. Government Accountability Office

When I looked at the Government Accountability Office (GAO) report on federal agencies and facial recognition, I realized that the problems I saw in *The Perpetual Line-Up* are not limited to local police departments. The GAO found that many federal agencies used facial recognition technology thousands of times, but most of them never completed proper risk assessments. To me, this shows a bigger issue: the technology is spreading faster than the rules meant to control it. If the federal government is using these systems without fully understanding the risks, it makes me question how prepared we are for the long-term consequences.

What stood out to me the most was that the GAO report wasn't just pointing out small mistakes. It showed a pattern of agencies adopting facial recognition because it is convenient, not because it is safe or well-regulated. When I think about this through the Short Arm of Predictive Knowledge, it makes me worry about where this trend leads. If agencies are already skipping important steps like privacy reviews, then in the future, these systems could become even more widespread without anyone stopping to ask whether they should be. This kind of growth can create long-term problems that are hard to undo, especially once the technology becomes part of everyday government operations.

I also think the GAO report matters because it shows how easy it is for surveillance tools to expand quietly. If federal agencies are not required to check for bias, accuracy, or privacy risks, then the public has no way of knowing how these systems affect them. Over time, this lack of transparency could lead to a future where people are constantly monitored by systems they never agreed to and don't fully understand. This is why I believe the GAO report supports my argument: it shows that the long-term risks of AI surveillance are not just theoretical. They are already forming in the decisions agencies make today.

(4) Connecting the Evidence to my Argument

When I look at both *The Perpetual Line-Up* and the GAO report together, I see a clear pattern that supports my main argument about the long-term risks of AI-powered surveillance. The Georgetown report shows how huge facial recognition databases already are, and how they were built quietly without most people realizing it. The GAO report adds another layer by showing that federal agencies are using the same technology without completing basic risk checks. When I combine these two findings, it becomes clear to me that AI surveillance is expanding in ways that are not fully controlled or understood.

These sources also help me understand why the future could be even more concerning. If local police departments and federal agencies are both using facial recognition with little oversight, then the technology is becoming part of our national infrastructure. Once something becomes infrastructure, it usually grows, not shrinks. This is where the Short Arm of Predictive Knowledge matters. Even though I cannot predict every outcome, I can see the direction things

are heading. If these systems continue to expand without strict rules, we could end up in a society where constant monitoring feels normal, and people adjust their behavior because they expect to be watched.

At the same time, I know there are other perspectives worth considering. Some people believe that AI surveillance can help solve crimes faster or make public spaces safer. I understand why that argument exists, and I don't think it should be ignored. But even if these tools have benefits, I still believe the long-term risks are more serious. The evidence from both reports shows that the technology is growing faster than the protections around it. To me, that imbalance is what makes the future uncertain and potentially harmful.

(5) Conclusion

Looking back at my analysis, I still believe that AI-powered surveillance has long-term risks that we are not fully prepared for. Both *The Perpetual Line-Up* and the GAO report show that these systems are already growing faster than the rules meant to control them. When I think about the future through the Short Arm of Predictive Knowledge, I see a pattern that could lead to a society where constant monitoring becomes normal and hard to challenge. My position is that we need stronger oversight now, before these systems become too large and too embedded to change.

At the same time, I know there are reasonable arguments on the other side. Some people believe that AI surveillance can help prevent crime, make investigations faster, or improve public safety. I understand why those points matter, and I don't think they should be ignored. Even I can admit

that these technologies might have benefits that are hard to replace. This is where my own uncertainty comes in. I cannot say for sure what the perfect balance is between safety and privacy, and I don't think anyone can predict exactly how these systems will shape society in the long run.

Still, the evidence I looked at makes me believe that the risks deserve more attention than they are currently getting. The lack of oversight in federal agencies and the huge databases already built by law enforcement show that the foundation for long-term surveillance is already here. Even if we cannot predict every outcome, we can see enough to know that the future could become more controlled and less private if we do nothing. My overall conclusion is that we should take these concerns seriously now, while we still have the chance to shape how AI surveillance fits into our society.

References

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