

US tax agency drops facial recognition plan after criticism

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The US tax authority has backed away from its plan to use facial recognition software to confirm taxpayers' identities.

The US national tax authority announced Monday that it will stop using facial recognition software to verify taxpayers' identities when they

create online accounts, following a chorus of privacy concerns.

Internal Revenue Service officials had put forth the authentication system as a security measure following years of growing fears over online scams and [identity theft](#), but the program ended up also prompting worries.

The initiative involved identity verification company ID.me, which won a nearly \$90 million contract to make taxpayers' accounts more secure.

The IRS said "it will transition away from using a third-party service for [facial recognition](#) to help authenticate people creating new [online accounts](#)."

"The IRS will quickly develop and bring online an additional authentication process that does not involve facial recognition," it said, as the agency faces staffing shortages and significant backlogs.

ID.me referred all questions on the matter to IRS and offered no other comment.

Criticism has built of the program since it was announced last year, with [privacy watchdogs](#) and lawmakers both raising questions.

"While the IRS had the best of intentions—to prevent criminals from accessing Americans' tax records...—it is simply unacceptable to force Americans to submit to scans," Senator Ron Wyden wrote.

"It is also alarming that IRS and so many government agencies have outsourced their core technology infrastructure to the [private sector](#)," he added.

Facial recognition software has been criticized on several fronts,

including that it was developed on predominantly white populations and thus makes more errors on people of color.

Rights watchdogs have accused the technology of reproducing the human biases already present in society, such as racism.

Under pressure from watchdogs, major firms such as Amazon, Microsoft, IBM and Google have stopped, at least temporarily, selling their [facial recognition software](#) to police forces.

Social media giant Facebook announced in November the shutting down of its long-criticized facial recognition system and deleting scan data on a billion people.

Facebook facial identification launched in 2010, went through changes to tighten privacy, but still was central to a significant lawsuit and regulatory scrutiny.

The social network agreed in 2020 to a \$650 million payout after failing to win dismissal of a case alleging it illegally collected biometric information for "face tagging" in violation of a 2008 Illinois privacy law.

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