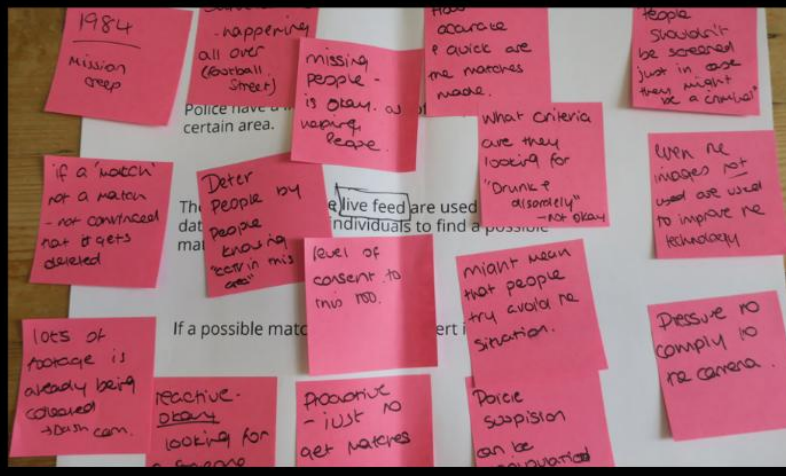
ICO: Understanding the UK public's views and experiences of biometric technologies

Revealing Reality

May 2025



REVEALING REALITY

ico. Information Commissioner's Office

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About Revealing Reality

Revealing Reality is an independent social research agency. We enjoy working on challenging projects with social purpose to inform policy, design, and behaviour change. This includes working with regulators, government, and charities to provide rigorous insight into how systems, services, and technologies affect people's lives.

We have particular expertise in understanding how people interact with technology in their everyday lives. Our work often explores public attitudes toward emerging technologies, especially where these raise ethical, social, or regulatory concerns.

To learn more about our work, visit www.revealingreality.co.uk.

Executive summary

This research was commissioned by the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) to update understanding of public attitudes towards biometric technologies, with a particular focus on facial recognition technology (FRT) and its use by police. As biometric data is classified as special category data subject to strict data protection requirements, understanding public perceptions is vital for ensuring that future regulatory approaches take into account societal expectations.

The research had four main objectives:

- Explore public awareness and understanding of different biometric technologies
- Understand views on the use of facial recognition technology in various situations
- Explore acceptable trade-offs regarding facial recognition technology in different contexts
- Examine attitudes toward police use of facial recognition technology

The study employed a mixed-methods approach, beginning with qualitative focus groups across all four UK nations, including both remote sessions in each nation and in-person groups with Muslim women, individuals with experience of the criminal justice system, and digitally excluded people. This was followed by a quantitative survey with 3,216 respondents, including boost samples in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland to enable nation-level analysis.

Awareness and comfort with biometric technology

Awareness of biometric technologies was high: more than 90% of respondents reported being familiar with fingerprint, facial, and voice recognition. Comfort levels generally mirrored familiarity, with 73% comfortable with fingerprint recognition and 65% with facial recognition. Participants were most comfortable with familiar technologies being used to verify identities, particularly those used on personal devices like smartphones or for security purposes like airport checks.

In the focus groups, many participants linked their comfort to everyday use cases like unlocking phones or accessing online banking. As one participant from a remote focus group in Northern Ireland explained: *"You need to use fingerprint recognition quite a lot now, with your phone to get into online banking"*.

When compared to the Ada Lovelace Institute's 2019 research, awareness appears to have increased, although direct comparisons should be interpreted cautiously due to methodological differences.

Attitudes towards police use of FRT

84% of respondents had heard of FRT being used by police, with 76% believing it to be used to identify suspects after incidents using CCTV footage. Almost two-thirds of respondents (63%) felt comfortable with police using FRT, with comfort levels relatively consistent across UK nations and demographic groups.

Comfort was highest when FRT was used for specific purposes such as finding missing people (78%) or identifying suspects after an incident (77%). Those who believed the technology benefits society, thought that it

was accurate, or held positive views of the police, were statistically significantly more likely to be comfortable with its use.

This finding was echoed in the focus groups where participants commonly linked FRT use to crime prevention and public safety. For example, one participant said: *"If it helps the police to catch people who aren't law abiding, then that's great"*.

Concerns about civil liberties, privacy, and police over-reliance on the technology were the strongest predictors of discomfort. Nearly half (49%) of respondents believed facial recognition technology may work less effectively with certain demographic groups, potentially leading to bias. Concerns about bias and accuracy were also raised in focus groups, with some participants questioning whether the technology would be equally reliable for all ethnic groups.

Retrospective, Live, and Operator Initiated

Both survey and focus group respondents were provided with specific explanations of three types of FRT:

- Retrospective FRT (analysing footage or images after incidents)
- Live FRT (real-time monitoring in specific areas)
- Operator-initiated FRT (using mobile devices to identify individuals)

Comfort was high with retrospective FRT, with 77% of survey respondents comfortable with its use to identify suspects using CCTV or social media footage, and 78% comfortable with its use to locate missing people. In focus groups, participants often viewed retrospective FRT as an enhancement to existing CCTV review processes. Focus group participants frequently said that retrospective use "felt no different" from what they assumed police already did with CCTV footage. While Live FRT saw relatively high comfort in contexts like locating suspects at large events (72%), comfort decreased when used in less defined situations, like monitoring protests (63%).

Comfort was lowest with operator-initiated FRT (61%), as many felt it placed too much responsibility on individual police officers, raising concerns relating to individual officer trustworthiness rather than the technology itself. This was reflected in focus groups where some participants raised concerns about *"bad apples"* in the police force, and trust in an individual officer's use of the technology. However, comfort levels improved when respondents were provided with additional information about the specific legal grounds for using this technology.

Regulation and oversight

Nearly half (48%) of respondents felt that current regulation of police use of FRT is appropriate, although a sizeable 38% remained neutral, suggesting limited awareness of existing regulatory frameworks. While 91% believed all UK police forces should follow the same rules regarding FRT use, only 42% thought this was currently happening.

When asked about priorities for regulation, ensuring technological accuracy emerged as the clear priority (53%), followed by proper police training (35%) and ensuring the technology is unbiased (33%). There was strong support for human oversight, with 81% agreeing that matches should be manually reviewed by police officers.

Focus group participants often mentioned accuracy as critical to maintaining public trust, with one participant commenting*: "If you're going to use something like facial recognition, I would rather it be like 100% accurate".*

Most respondents (61%) prioritised effectiveness over transparency, willing to accept that the public might not always be informed when FRT is in use if this improves public safety. However, concerns about data storage and retention were common, with many wanting clear rules on how long images are kept and who can access them. Focus groups highlighted particular unease about what happens to images of people who are not matched to any suspect.

Overall, this research demonstrates that while the public generally accepts police use of FRT, this acceptance is contextual and conditional on appropriate safeguards, accuracy, and responsible use. These findings provide important insights for the ICO's ongoing work to ensure that biometric data is collected and used in ways that maintain public trust and meet data protection requirements.

Introduction and methodology

Introduction to the research

The use of biometric technologies in everyday life is expanding in the UK. Biometric tools–such as fingerprint, facial, and voice recognition–are now widely used in everyday life, from unlocking smartphones and accessing digital banking to passing through e-Passport gates at airports. Alongside these more mainstream applications, biometric technologies are also being trialled and adopted by law enforcement, where facial recognition technology (FRT) is increasingly used to support investigations and identify individuals in public spaces.

Biometric data refers to:

"Personal data resulting from specific technical processing relating to the physical, physiological, or behavioural characteristics of a natural person, which allow or confirm someone's unique identification of that natural person, such as facial images or dactyloscopic [fingerprint] data.[1]"

Because biometric data is classified as special category data when it is used to identify individuals, it is subject to strict data protection requirements. Ensuring that this type of data is collected and used lawfully, fairly, and transparently is a key priority for the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), particularly as biometric technologies continue to evolve and become more embedded in everyday life.

With UK police forces now moving beyond pilots and actively deploying facial recognition technology, it is more important than ever to understand how the public perceives these developments. As the use of biometrics expands, so too does the need to clarify what the public expects in terms of safeguards, oversight, and proportionality. Capturing up-to-date attitudes and levels of understanding will help ensure that future use of biometric data remains aligned with societal expectations and maintains public trust.

This research also sets out to update the most recent publicly available studies on UK public attitudes toward biometric technologies, including those conducted by the Ada Lovelace Institute (2019) and the ICO's own 2019 study with Harris Interactive. While these earlier studies offered valuable insights, much has changed in terms of how biometric technologies are used and the contexts in which they are deployed.

Objectives of the research

The ICO commissioned this research to:

- Explore public awareness and understanding of different biometric technologies
- Understand views on the use of facial recognition technology in a range of situations

[1] ICO, https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/uk-gdpr-guidance-and-resources/lawful-basis/biometric-data-guidance-biometric-recognition/key-data-protection-concepts/?utm_source=chatgpt.com#whatisbiometric)

- Explore trade-offs that the public are more or less open to making in different situations regarding facial recognition technology
- Explore views on the use of facial recognition technology in law enforcement

Given that law enforcement practices vary across the UK, the research needed to be able to compare the attitudes held by the populations within each of the four nations.

Currently, all UK police forces have access to retrospective facial recognition technology (RFR) through the Police National Database. A small number of forces also use live facial recognition technology (LFR) in specific situations, and operator-initiated facial recognition technology (OIFR) is currently in a limited pilot phase.

Mixed methods approach

This research project involved qualitative and quantitative fieldwork with respondents living within all four nations of the UK.

Phase 1: Qualitative fieldwork (focus groups)

The qualitative phase, conducted between December 2024 and February 2025, involved a mix of remote and in-person focus groups. Remote sessions were conducted in each nation, with two in England (with one specifically held in London). Each focus group had 4-6 respondents and was conducted via Zoom lasting 2 hours. The sample for these groups focused on a spread of demographic criteria (such as age, gender, ethnicity, and working status). In addition to this, the groups had representation of people experiencing vulnerability, different degrees of technological literacy, and some included a mix of attitudes and levels of comfort with biometric technology to ensure there could be valuable discussion about the pros and cons of different scenarios.

In addition to the remote groups, 3 in-person sessions were held with community groups representing audiences who might be less likely or able to participate in the main remote groups. These involved meeting with pre-existing groups of individuals who already knew one another. These groups included: Muslim women, people with experience of the criminal justice system, and those that are digitally excluded. Holding the discussions in familiar settings with people who already knew each other and shared similarities helped to increase comfort and support more in-depth conversation around complex or sensitive topics.

Phase 2: Quantitative fieldwork (nationally representative survey)

Following the qualitative stage, an online survey was developed to capture awareness, perceptions, and attitudes among the general population. The survey, which was live in February 2025, was directly informed by insights from the focus groups, helping to ensure that the questions reflected the language, themes, and nuances raised during qualitative discussions.

To ensure clarity and accessibility, the survey underwent cognitive testing. This process was used to assess whether participants interpreted questions as intended, and helped to identify and address any confusion or ambiguity in wording. This ensured that a broad range of respondents were able to engage with the survey accurately and consistently.

The survey was completed by a nationally representative sample of 2,000 adults, which was designed to align with nationally representative quotas for key demographics (e.g., age, gender, SEG, and region) across the UK. To ensure robust analysis could be carried out at the national level, boost samples were applied in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, ensuring a minimum of 500 responses from each UK nation. In total, **3,216** survey responses were received.

Note: throughout this report, an asterisk (*) is used to denote statistically significant findings. Additionally, when we refer to something as 'significant,' this denotes that this finding is statistically significant at the 95% confidence interval.

Research design considerations

Participant recruitment and framing

Participants were given limited prior information before taking part to reduce potential bias.

- **Survey respondents** were invited via email to complete a general research survey, without being told in advance that the topic would relate specifically to biometrics or facial recognition.
- **Focus group participants** were informed that the session would explore attitudes toward the use of technology and data by the police, rather than biometric technologies specifically. This framing helped avoid leading expectations and allowed for a more open exploration of understanding and assumptions.
- Focus group respondents were **asked an attitudinal question at screening** about their comfort with different types of biometric technology (e.g. using facial recognition on their phone), but these statements were asked about alongside other technological practices (such as transport apps remembering your common routes) to hide the focus on biometrics.

Survey and discussion guide design

The survey and focus group discussion guide were carefully structured to minimise order effects. Questions began with general perceptions and understanding of biometric technologies before introducing more specific use cases – particularly those involving law enforcement.

Nation-level reporting and weighting

As part of the design, the survey included boosted sample sizes in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. This allowed us to explore potential regional differences in attitudes across the four UK nations. This oversampling approach allowed for more meaningful comparisons between nations, which would not have been possible using a purely proportionate sample (e.g. given the smaller populations of Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland relative to England).

Once data collection was complete, weighting was applied to bring the overall sample back in line with the UK population profile. This means the national findings remain representative of the UK public as a whole, while still enabling statistically valid subgroup analysis across the four nations. The total sample size remained consistent before and after weighting, with both the unweighted and weighted base at n=3,216.

Caveats

Survey representativeness: While the survey sample was weighted to be nationally representative, participation in online panels may skew slightly toward individuals who are more digitally literate or more engaged with technology-related topics. While the exact impact of this is unknown, it should be kept in mind when interpreting the findings.

Timing of the research: Public perceptions of facial recognition and biometrics may evolve rapidly in response to technological developments or high-profile media coverage. This report reflects attitudes at the time of fieldwork.

Comparability relies on weighting assumptions: Weighting was applied to correct for disproportionality in the sample and align the data with nationally representative demographics. While this improves the accuracy of population-level estimates, it relies on assumptions about the representativeness of respondents and population benchmarks. Due to these adjustments, the effective base size (which reflects the statistical precision of the weighted data) was reduced from the raw total of n = 3,216 to approximately n = 2,211. While weighting reduces the effective base size of the overall sample, the boosted samples in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland mean that nation-level comparisons are more robust than in standard nationally representative surveys, allowing for stronger interpretation of differences between the four UK nations.

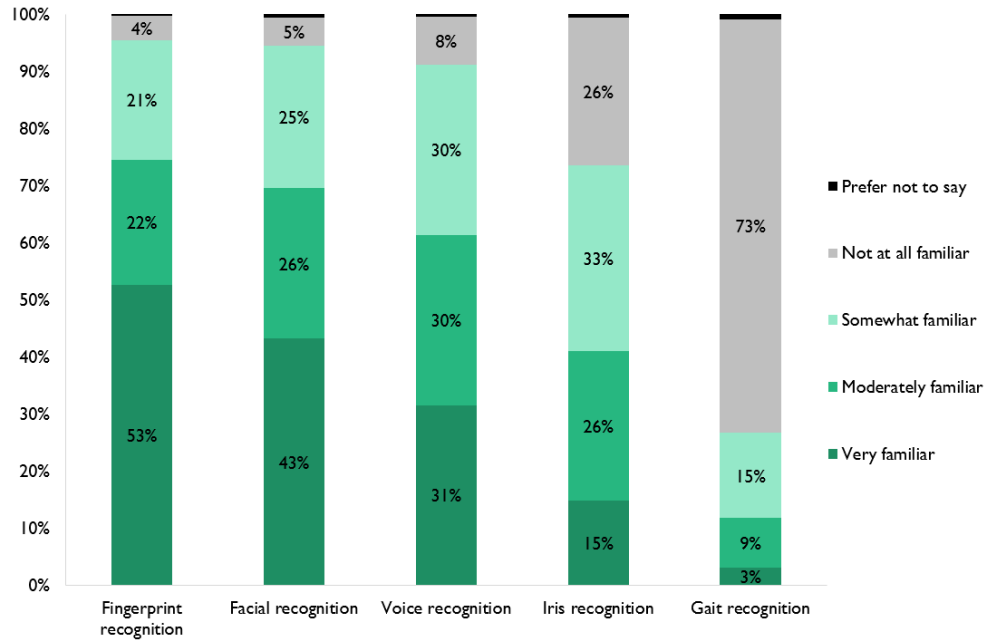
Comparison with previous studies: This report includes comparisons with earlier research on public perceptions of biometric technologies. However, due to differences in survey question wording and response options, the findings should be seen as indicative rather than directly comparable. These comparisons are included for context but should be interpreted with caution. Throughout, we have noted any differences in question framing.

Awareness and comfort with biometric technology and FRT

General awareness of biometric technology was high, and most were comfortable with it being used

Survey participants were asked about their awareness of different types of biometric technology,[2] and more than 9 in 10 reported being familiar with fingerprint (95%), facial (95%), and voice recognition (91%). In contrast, awareness of less commonly used technologies was notably lower – 74% were familiar with iris recognition, while only around 1 in 4 (27%) had heard of gait recognition.

Chart 1: Familiarity with different types of biometric technology [3]



In the focus groups, while participants were not always familiar with the term 'biometric', most demonstrated a clear understanding of the underlying concept or specific technologies.

"I think it's maybe something to do with fingerprints or facial recognition"

[2] At the start of the survey, participants were shown the following general definition of biometric data, developed using existing definitions and informed by the ICO: "Biometric data is personal data collected through technologies that process a person's biological or behavioural characteristics. It is typically used for the purposes of identification or verification." Respondents were then asked whether they were familiar with five types of biometric technologies (fingerprint, facial, iris, gait, and voice recognition).

[3] Survey question: *'How familiar are you with the following types of biometric technologies?'*, weighted base n=3,216

Northern Ireland, remote focus group

"To my mind, all that comes to my mind is like face ID or like when you've got to use your finger to unlock your phone or your iPad.

Wales, remote focus group

"Yeah, yeah, I didn't know it were called that, but yeah, I know what you're on about now, when you say face recognition and that."

Non-London England, remote focus group

Overall awareness of different types of biometric technologies was consistent across all four UK nations, with the exception of familiarity with iris recognition, where awareness differed across the nations. A significantly lower proportion of respondents in Wales (67%) were familiar with iris recognition compared to those in England and Scotland (both 74%), with a similar trend observed when comparing Northern Ireland (68%) to England[4].

Awareness did, however, vary by age. Nearly two-thirds (62%) of respondents aged 56 and over reported low familiarity across the five biometric forms of biometric technology[5], reporting that they were 'not at all' or 'somewhat familiar' for most options. This compared to only 32% of respondents aged 55 and below reporting being unfamiliar with them.

Participants were most comfortable with familiar technologies being used to verify identity

Survey respondents who were familiar with each type of biometric technology[6] were asked how comfortable they were with it being used for identity verification. 73% of the sample reported being comfortable to some extent with fingerprint recognition, 65% with facial recognition, and 60% with iris recognition. In the focus groups, most people spoke about using facial and fingerprint recognition on their own devices, to unlock their phone or for online banking.

"You need to use fingerprint recognition, quite a lot of things now with your phone to get into your online banking."

NI, remote focus group

"I understand how it can be used to verify someone, like at the airport when they scan your passport and then your face."

Wales, remote focus group

Comfort levels tended to mirror familiarity. Survey respondents were generally more comfortable with technologies that had higher familiarity levels. An exception to this was the familiarity and comfort with voice recognition and iris recognition. Although familiarity with voice recognition was higher than iris recognition (91% vs. 74% respectively), comfort levels were similar for both, with slightly greater comfort reported for iris recognition (60%) than voice recognition (58%).

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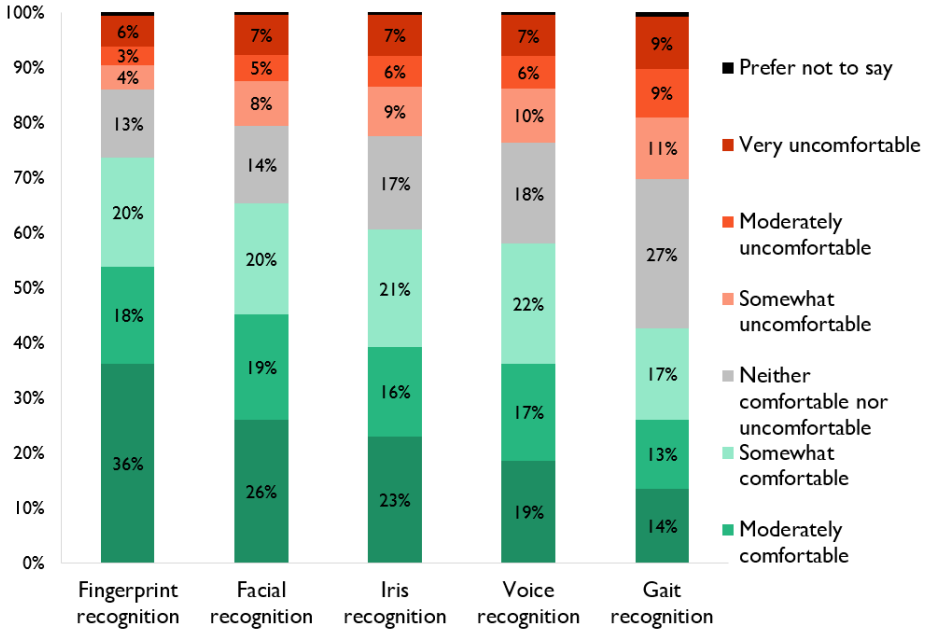
[4] Survey question: *'How familiar are you with the following types of biometric technologies – Iris recognition?*', by nation. weighted base n=89-2,708

[5] Respondents were categorised as having **low**, **mid**, or **high familiarity** with biometric technologies based on their self-reported familiarity with five types: fingerprint, facial, iris, voice, and gait recognition. Each response was assigned a numeric score: '*Not at all familiar'* = 0, '*Somewhat familiar'* = 1, '*Moderately familiar'* = 2, and '*Very familiar'* = 3. A score was calculated for each respondent by taking the average across all five technologies. Respondents who selected *'prefer not to say'* for any technology were excluded from this analysis. Familiarity was then categorised as follows: **Low familiarity:** average score between 0.00–0.99, **Mid familiarity:** average score between 1.00–1.99, and **High familiarity:** average score between 2.00–3.00

[6] Those who reported being 'somewhat familiar', 'moderately familiar' or 'very familiar'.

Chart 2: Comfort with different types of biometric technology[7]



[7] Survey question: '*And how comfortable would you feel with each of the following technologies being used to verify your identity?', weighted base n=857-3,068. [follow-up for options where a respondent had selected they were 'somewhat familiar', 'moderately familiar', or 'very familiar'].*

Ada Lovelace comparison:

The table below compares data from this study with data from the Ada Lovelace Institute's 2019 research.[8]

Please note that the figures are not directly comparable due to differences in question wording.

Awareness/familiarity

The table below includes the proportion of individuals in the Ada Lovelace study that reported being '**aware'** or '**familiar'** with the following technologies[9]. Overall, it appears that general awareness/familiarity has increased.

Technology	**Ada Lovelace (2019)** *Weighted base n=4,109*	**ICO (2025)** *Weighted base n=3,216*
Fingerprint	87%	95%
Facial	74%	95%
Iris	67%	74%
Voice	68%	91%

In the Ada Lovelace study, respondents were asked: *'Which of the following methods of identity verification are you aware of? Please select all that apply'.*

In contrast, this study asked respondents '*how familiar are you with the following types of biometric technologies',* and includes the proportion that selected *'very familiar', 'moderately familiar', or 'somewhat familiar'.*

Comfort

The table below shows the proportion of individuals who reported being comfortable with different types of biometric technology, as captured in the Ada Lovelace study (2019) and in this research (ICO, 2025).

While both studies explore comfort with biometric technologies, the questions were framed differently and focused on slightly different contexts.

Technology	**Ada Lovelace (2019)[10]**	**ICO (2025)[11]**
Fingerprint	83%	73%
Facial	61%	65%
Iris	66%	60%
Voice recognition	55%	58%

In the Ada Lovelace study, respondents that were already aware of each technology were asked: *'And which of the following do you personally use/would you be comfortable using to identify yourself on a mobile or other device?',* and includes the proportion that selected *'I personally use this method' or 'I don't use it currently but would be comfortable doing so'.*

This study asked respondents that were familiar with each technology, '*And how comfortable would you feel with each of the following technologies being used to verify your identity?',* and includes the proportion that selected *'very comfortable, 'moderately comfortable, or 'somewhat comfortable.*

[8] https://www.adalovelaceinstitute.org/report/citizens-biometrics-council/

[9] Both studies provided an explanation/definition of what biometric data/identify verification was before asking each question

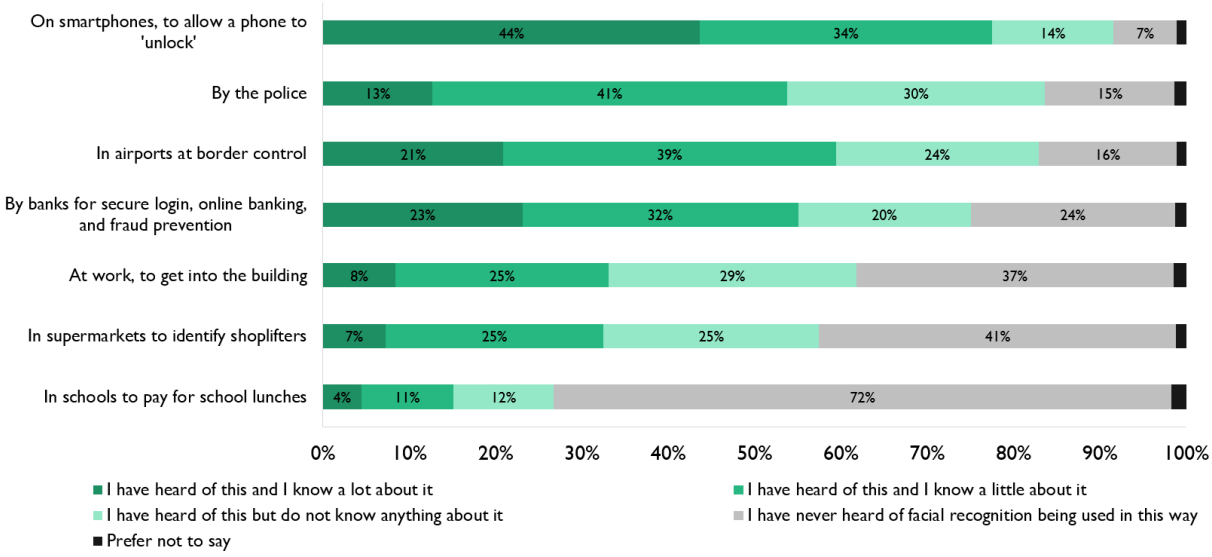
[10] *Weighted base n=2,768-3,584*

[11] *Weighted base n=2,366-3,068*

Respondents were most aware of facial recognition technology being used on smartphones, in airports, and by the police

92% of survey respondents were aware of facial recognition technology (FRT)[12] being used to unlock a smartphone, the use case with the highest level of awareness. Following this in terms of awareness levels, 84% of respondents had heard of it being used by the police and 83% had heard of it being used in airports at border control.

Chart 3: Proportion of respondents that have heard of facial recognition technology being used in different scenarios[13]



Ada Lovelace comparison:

There are some differences in awareness and understanding in comparison to the Ada Lovelace report of 2019, but these should be read with caution.

The following table shows the proportion of respondents who are aware of three use cases across both the Ada Lovelace research and this work for the ICO. Overall, it seems that overall awareness of uses has increased.

	Ada Lovelace (2019)	ICO (2025)
Police	By police in their day-to-day policing: 39% By police in criminal investigations: 63%	By the police: 84%
Airports	In airports in place of a passport: 45%	In airports at border control: 83%
Smartphones	On smartphones, to allow a phone to 'unlock' in response to the owner's face: 55%	On smartphones, to allow a phone to 'unlock': 92%

[12] Before being asked this question, respondents in the survey were provided with the following explanation of FRT: *"Facial recognition technology examines key features of a face and compares them to faces stored in a database to find possible matches".*

[13] Survey question: *"Which of the following ways have you heard of facial recognition technology being used in the UK? For those which you have heard of, please select the statement which best describes your level of knowledge", weighted base n=3,216*

However, it's important to note that these figures are not directly comparable due to differences in question wording.[14] These three use cases have been selected because the statements tested were, while not identical, similar enough to each other to draw some degree of comparison.

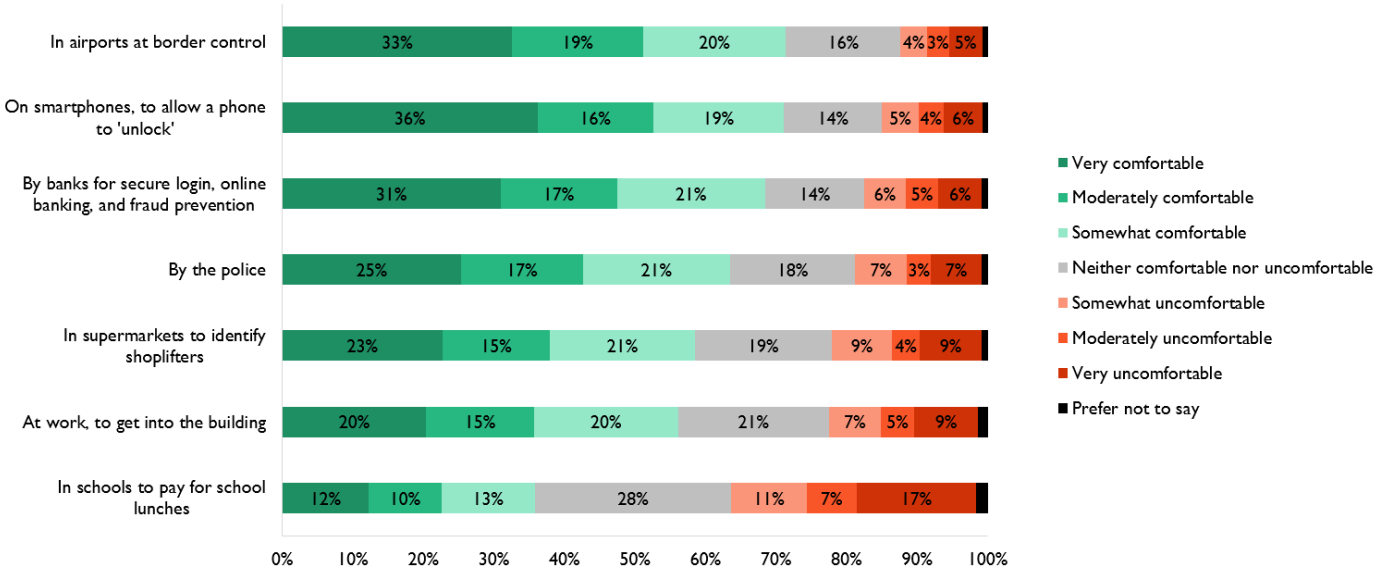
Respondents were most comfortable with facial recognition technology being used for security and practical everyday purposes

The survey showed that people were most comfortable with facial recognition technology (FRT) being used at border control in airports (71%), to unlock a smartphone (71%), and by banks for secure login, online banking, and fraud prevention (68%). Focus group participants explained they felt more comfortable when they could see a clear benefit, either for themselves or society more widely.

"*For security I can see there's a benefit. Like police security, or personal security I think it's good.*"

Wales, remote focus group

Chart 4: Comfort with different use cases of facial recognition technology[15]



However, survey respondents were less comfortable with facial recognition in schools, with over a third (35%) indicating discomfort with its use for paying for lunches. In the focus groups, there was general discomfort with FRT being used with children, particularly for monitoring attention.

"Like even monitoring attention in schools, I suppose that's a good thing in a way, but kids, that's a bit creepy to me.

Scotland, remote focus group

"I would be uncomfortable with monitoring attention levels in schools. I think that's really turning into a nanny state"

NI, remote focus group

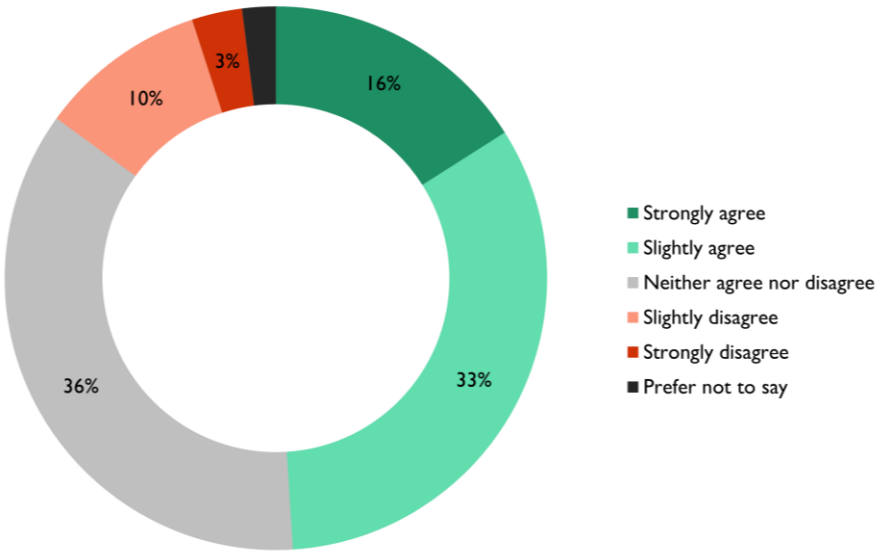
[14] In the Ada Lovelace study, participants who were aware of each technology were asked to select the ways that they thought facial recognition was currently being used in the UK. As such, the percentages show the proportion of the sample that thought that each use case was being used. In contrast, this study asked participants which of the following ways had they heard of facial recognition technology being used in the UK. The percentages show the proportion of the sample that selected 'I have heard of this and I know a lot about it', or 'I have heard of this and I know a little about it', or 'I have heard of this but do not know anything about it'.

[15] Survey question: *"How comfortable would you be with facial recognition technology being used in these ways?", weighted base n=3,216*

Just under half of respondents thought facial recognition technology was accurate

49% of survey respondents agreed with the statement that 'facial recognition is accurate'. However, over a third of the survey respondents remained neutral (36%) on this,[16] and a small minority disagreed that it was accurate (13%).

Chart 5: Proportion of respondents that agreed or disagreed that facial recognition technology is accurate[17]



Perceptions of facial recognition accuracy were generally consistent across the four UK nations, with one exception: a significantly higher proportion of respondents in Northern Ireland "strongly agreed" that the technology is accurate (20%), compared to 13% in Wales.[18]

Awareness and understanding of the technology seemed to have been shaped by popular culture

In the focus groups, it became clear that many people's understanding of FRT and other biometric technologies may be shaped by how these tools are portrayed in TV dramas and films. Participants referenced a range of shows and movies that had influenced their ideas about how photographs, cameras, and tracking are used in practice.

"I've seen the one about the gait analysis on a police show on the tv, they say, we know that's the person because of the way he walks."

Wales, remote focus group

[16] Quality checks were carried out to ensure that the high proportion of neutral responses to some of our survey questions are due to people being genuinely indifferent rather than just not paying attention to the survey questions / clicking through quickly.

[17] Survey question: *"To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements on facial recognition technology – Facial recognition technology is accurate",* weighted base n=3,216

[18] Survey question: *"To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements on facial recognition technology – Facial recognition technology is accurate", by Nation,* weighted base n=89-2,708

"I just seen it in the movies. James Bond, Mission Impossible"

Muslim women, focus group

"I've watched way too much Silent Witness. That's how I know all this."

Wales, remote focus group

"I've heard of iris recognition. All the best spy movies."

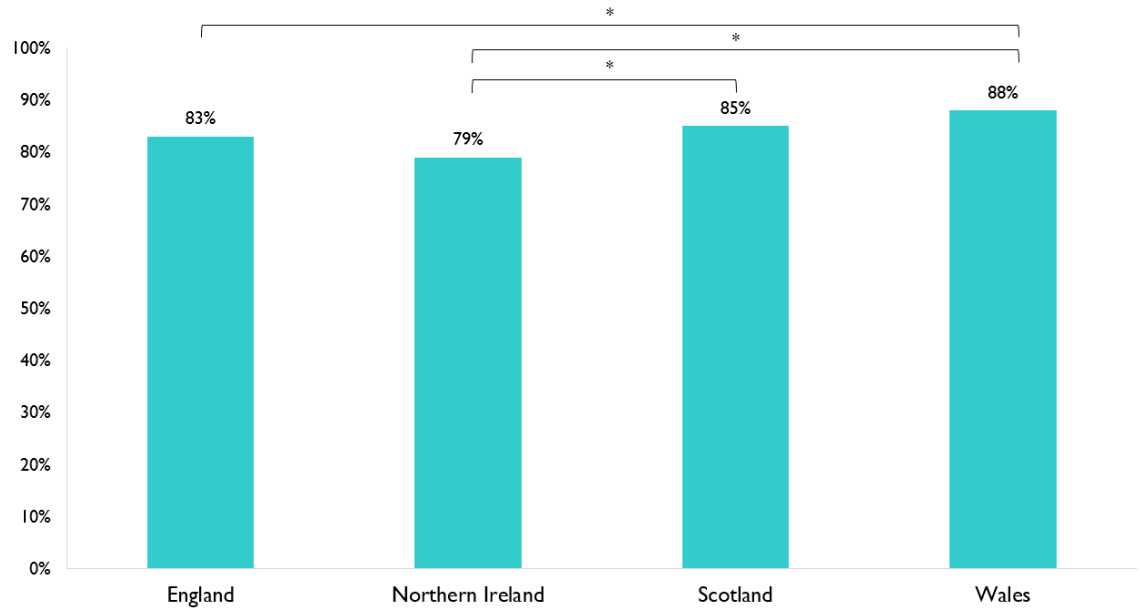
Ex-offenders, focus group

Attitudes towards police use of FRT

84% of respondents had heard of FRT being used by the police

The survey found that the majority of the sample (84%) had heard of FRT being used by the police (see chart 4). Those in Wales were significantly more likely to have heard about the police using FRT compared to England and Northen Ireland. Those in Scotland were also significantly more likely to report this compared to respondents from Northern Ireland.

Chart 6: Proportion of respondents that had heard about FRT being used by the police, by nation[19]



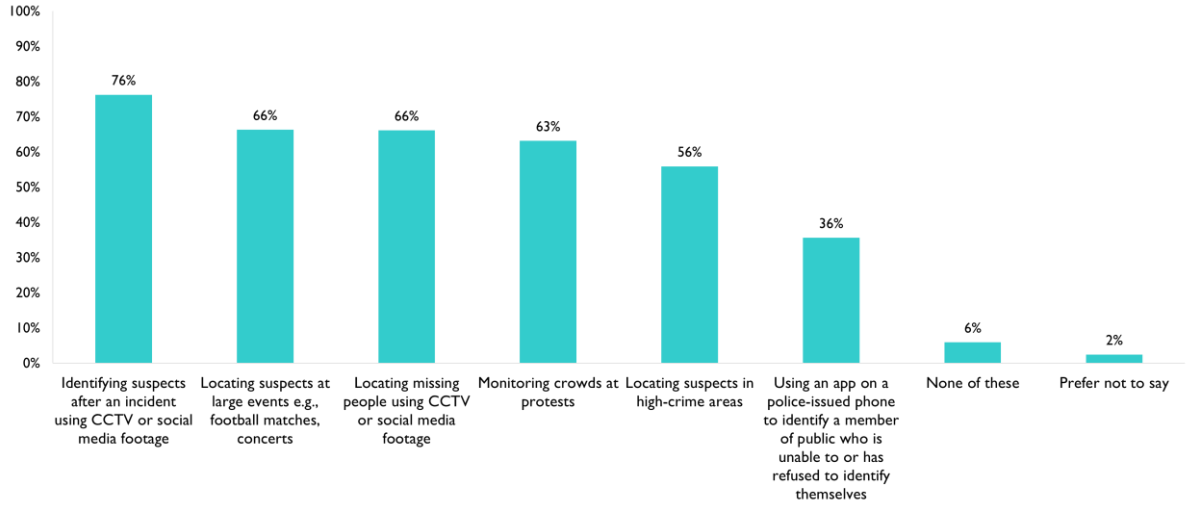
Most respondents believed FRT was already being used by police across the UK

In the survey, the majority of respondents believed that facial recognition technology (FRT) is already being used by UK law enforcement in a variety of scenarios. The most widely believed use was identifying suspects

[19] Survey question: *"Which of the following ways have you heard of facial recognition technology being used in the UK? – By the police"*, weighted base n=89-2,798. This graph includes the proportion of respondents in each nation that responded 'I have heard of this but do know anything about it', 'I have heard of this and I know a little about it', and 'I have heard of this and I know a lot about it'. Note: An asterisk (*) indicates a statistically significant difference.

after an incident using CCTV or social media footage (76%), followed by locating suspects at large events (66%), locating missing people (66%), and monitoring crowds at protests (63%).

Chart 7: Proportion of respondents who believed that FRT was being used by the police in a range of ways[20]



Only 6% believed that facial recognition was not being used in any of the six scenarios asked about, indicating a broad public perception that FRT is already embedded in UK policing practices.

In London and South Wales, where LFR has been actively deployed by police forces, there were no significant differences compared to other parts of the UK in terms of perceptions of how facial recognition is currently used by law enforcement. However, respondents in Wales were significantly more likely than those in Northern Ireland to believe that live facial recognition is used to locate suspects at large events (71% in Wales compared to 62% in Northern Ireland) and for monitoring crowds at protests (67% in Wales compared to 57% in Northern Ireland).[21] This may reflect higher public exposure to the technology in areas where it has been in use.

This perception was also evident in the focus groups, where participants discussed the assumption that FRT was already being deployed in shops, transport hubs, and in the street. This was particularly true in Wales, where some people had seen or read about the technology being used, for example at Welsh football games.

> "*I assume this is actually already being used and the police already have all this information.*"
>
> **Wales, remote focus group**

> "*A lot of these things are in use already and you don't really know much about it… it is used a lot by governments throughout the world.*"
>
> **Scotland, remote focus group**

> "*I suppose they're using some kind of facial recognition, maybe searching the database, searching all these cameras and things like that to try and track down people, get hold of criminals, things like that. I'm sure it is pretty high level from the inside.*"
>
> **Non-London England, remote focus group**

> "*Yeah, the police use biometrics for facial recognition.*"
>
> **Digitally excluded focus group, based in Wales**

[20] Survey question: *"In which of the following situations do you think facial recognition technology is currently being used by UK law enforcement?"*, weighted base n=3,216

[21] Survey question: *"In which of the following situations do you think facial recognition technology is currently being used by UK law enforcement?", by Nation,* weighted base n of Scotland n=269, weighted base n of Northern Ireland n=89

This played into a wider perception that society is already a place where we are being watched wherever we go in public, with high levels of CCTV across the UK.

"Well, here we are with Big Brother watching you."

Non-London England, remote focus group

"We have CCTV footage of us almost 24/7 now."

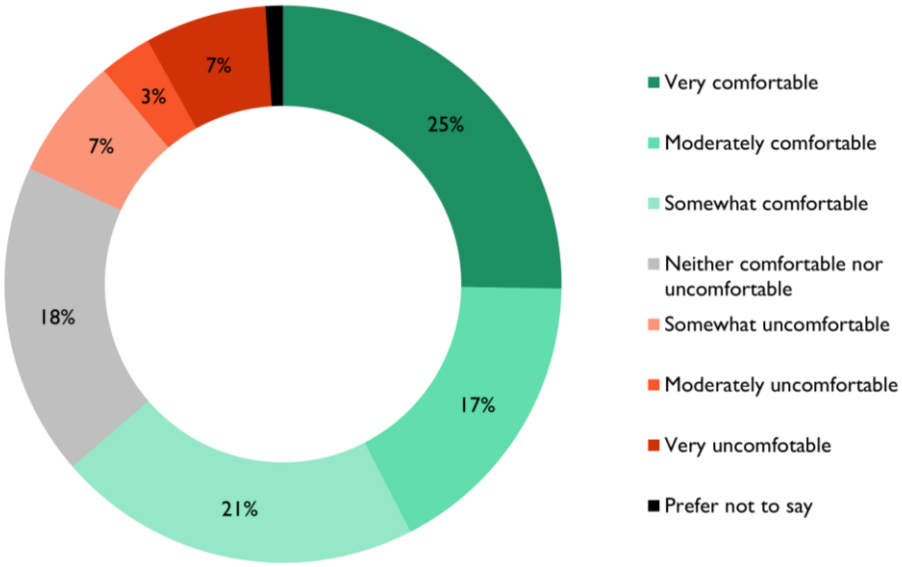
London, remote focus group

"You go into a town centre, you're on CCTV, at least 3,000 photos a day on average. Everybody that goes into town."

Non-London England, remote focus group

Almost two-thirds of respondents were comfortable with the police using facial recognition technology

Chart 8: Level of comfort with police use of FRT[22]



As shown in chart 8, 63% of survey respondents were comfortable with the police using facial recognition technology. This was mirrored in the focus groups, where the majority across the eight groups were happy with police use of this technology in theory.

"If it protects people… I don't have any problems."

Muslim women, focus group

"I think it's probably a good thing in general because anything that can make their lives easier and their work more efficient is helpful."

Scotland, remote focus group

18% of survey respondents reported being uncomfortable with the police using FRT, with 7% of the sample indicating that they were 'very uncomfortable'. The following section explores some of the key perceived benefits and concerns that individuals shared towards police use of FRT.

[22] Survey question: *"How comfortable would you be with facial recognition technology being used in these ways" – "By the police"*, weighted base n=3,216

Ada Lovelace comparison

In the 2019 Ada Lovelace study, 67% of respondents[23] were reported as being comfortable with the police using facial recognition technology to analyse CCTV footage during investigations–specifically to identify unknown suspects or witnesses by comparing footage to the national police database.

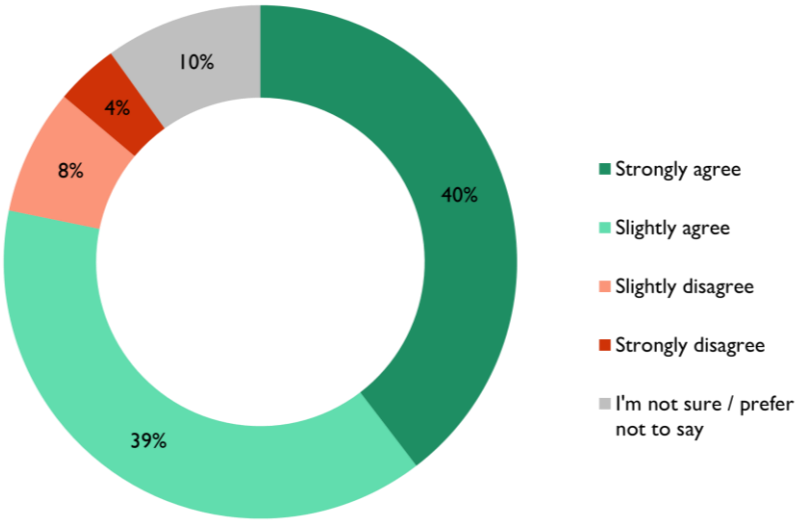
In this study, 63% of respondents said they were comfortable with the police using facial recognition technology more generally.

While these figures are broadly similar, they should not be directly compared due to differences in question wording and response scales. The Ada Lovelace study used a 10-point scale, with scores of 5–10 categorised as 'comfortable.' In contrast, this study used a 7-point scale, ranging from *very uncomfortable* to *very comfortable*. Additionally, the contextual information provided to respondents in each study differed.

Respondents saw various benefits to the police use of the technology

78% of survey respondents agreed that 'facial recognition is a helpful and necessary tool to improve public safety'.

Chart 9: Proportion of respondents who agreed or disagreed with the statement 'facial recognition technology is a helpful and necessary tool to improve public safety'[24]



Many of the focus group respondents, across all eight groups, felt that FRT might help the police to tackle more crime. This was often recognised as a challenge in the current policing landscape, with a perceived lack

[23] Survey question: *"In the past five years, some UK police forces have begun using facial recognition technology. Sometimes it is being used in investigations, to analyse CCTV footage from crime scenes and try to identify whether any of the unknown suspects or witnesses are present in the national police database. This database holds 19.6 million facial photos of people, of which 10 million are reportedly used for facial recognition search. On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is not at all comfortable and 10 is very comfortable, how comfortable are you with the police using facial recognition in this way?"*, weighted base n=4,109

[24] Survey question: *"To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about facial recognition technology being used by the police – It is a helpful and necessary tool to improve public safety"*, weighted base n=3,216

of capacity in the police force to tackle the breadth of issues they are charged with overseeing. FRT was seen as a potentially useful additional tool to help police address crimes that currently go unchallenged due to limited resources.

"If someone's going out with the intent to hurt someone, then they shouldn't get away with it. It's justice."

Muslim women, focus group

"Great if they're catching criminals"

Scotland, remote focus group

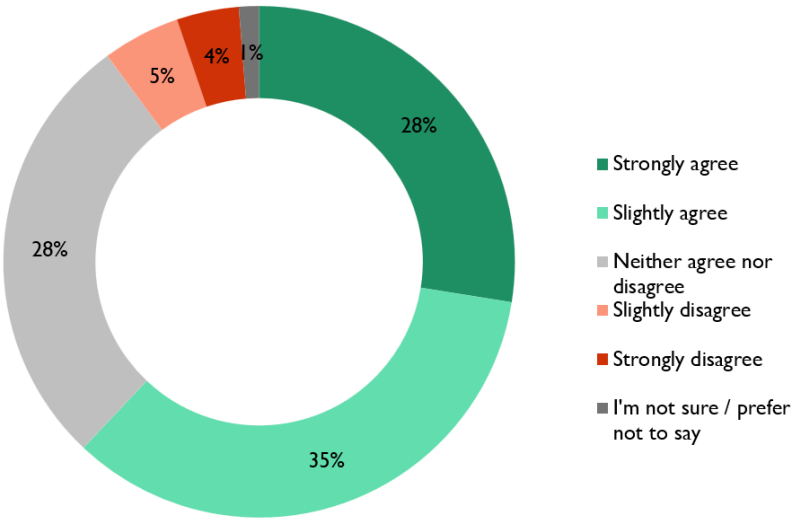
"I see people in my local Tesco stealing stuff every day and there's no punishment, there's no stopping them… They come in every day and there's no enforcement. "

London, remote focus group

Over 6 in 10 respondents agreed that society benefits from police use of FRT

The majority of respondents (62%) agreed that society benefits from police use of facial recognition technology. A further 28% gave a neutral response, while only a minority (9%) disagreed; so most people held either positive or neutral views overall.

Chart 10: Proportion of respondents that agreed or disagreed with the statement 'Society benefits from the police using FRT[25]



"If it helps the police to catch people who aren't law abiding, then that's great."

Non-London, remote focus group

[25] Survey question: *"To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following – Society benefits from the police using facial recognition technology"*, weighted base n=3,216

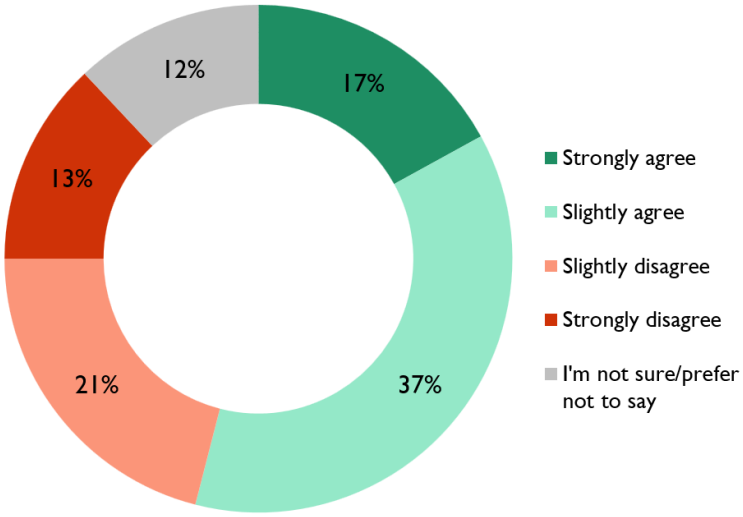
Who believes that society benefits from FRT?

- **Older people:** A significantly higher proportion of those aged 66–75 (67%) and 76+ (72%) agreed that society benefits from FRT compared to younger age groups. Specifically, both groups were more likely to agree than those aged 18-25 and 26-35 (both 56%), with the 76+ group also showing higher agreement than those aged 36-45 (60%).[26]
- **City dwellers:** A significantly higher proportion of respondents living in urban areas disagreed (11%) compared to those in suburban areas (7%).[27]
- **Working and retired groups:** Those in full-time employment (61%), part-time employment (62%), retired individuals (71%), and house people/wives/husbands (66%) were significantly more likely to agree that society benefits from police use of facial recognition compared to respondents who reported being unemployed or not working due to long-term sickness/disability (47%).[28]

However, individuals had some concerns about the technology

Over half of the sample agreed that police use of FRT would impact their civil liberties and infringe on people's right to privacy

Chart 11: Proportion of respondents that agreed or disagreed that police use of FRT impacts on civil liberties and infringes on people's right to privacy[29]



Some focus group participants described the police use of FRT as a potential "*slippery slope*" toward greater government control, with particular discomfort around its use at political protests. This was echoed in the

[26] Survey question: *"To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following – Society benefits from the police using facial recognition technology", by 'What is your age',* weighted base n=305-543

[27] Survey question: *"To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following – Society benefits from the police using facial recognition technology", by 'How would you describe where you live',* weighted base n=1,199-1,272

[28] Survey question: *"To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following – Society benefits from the police using facial recognition technology", by 'What is your current employment status? Please select all that apply"* weighted base n=143-1,376

[29] Survey question: *"To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following – It impacts on civil liberties and infringes on peoples' right to privacy',* weighted base n=3,216

survey, where 19% of respondents reported they were uncomfortable with facial recognition being used to monitor crowds at protests.[30]

"I think we're slowly heading towards a police-controlled state."

Non-London, remote focus group

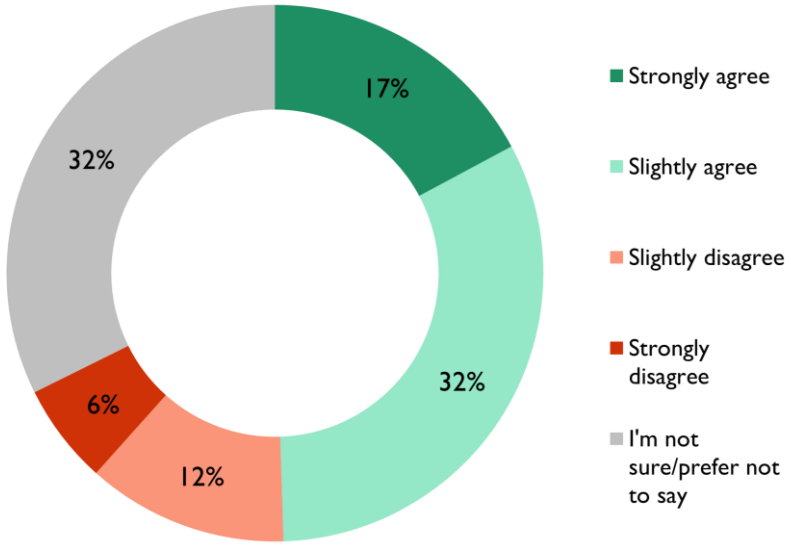
"They probably do collect pictures of faces who've just been involved in political protests. I don't like the idea of that."

Scotland, remote focus group

There were concerns about bias in how the technology works

49% of survey respondents felt that facial recognition technology does not work as well with certain groups of people, such as certain genders or ethnic groups.

Chart 12: Proportion of respondents who agreed or disagreed with the statement 'It does not work as well with certain groups (e.g., certain genders or ethnicities) and may lead to false matches for people from these group report'.[31]



In the focus groups, people had mixed views on whether the technology was biased or not, and there was some confusion about how it worked in practice. For some, there was a sense that the technology itself was less accurate in processing the faces of some groups, like certain ethnicities.

"*Any technology will have baked-in biases; I think facial recognition software is something like 60% less accurate on Black and ethnic minority people.*"

Ex-offenders, focus group

"With all the biometrics and that...it always points a finger at Muslims being terrorists; there's a lot more checks on that Muslim than any other person."

Muslim women, focus group

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[30] Survey question: *"How comfortable would you be with facial recognition technology being used in these contexts – Monitoring crowds at protests"*, weighted base n=3,216

[31] Survey question: *"To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about facial recognition technology being used by the police: "It does not work as well with certain groups (e.g. certain genders or ethnicities) and may lead to false matches for people from these groups"*, weighted base n=3216

Some thought that this could be related to how the systems are programmed and deployed.

"The problem I would see would be if it has been trained on predominantly white rather than interracial or different coloured faces."

NI, remote focus group

However, others thought the technology might actually display less inherent bias than a human being, as data and decisions would be used and made with objective 'facts' rather than human emotion.

"There could be possibilities for it doing an unbiased job compared to people making decisions."

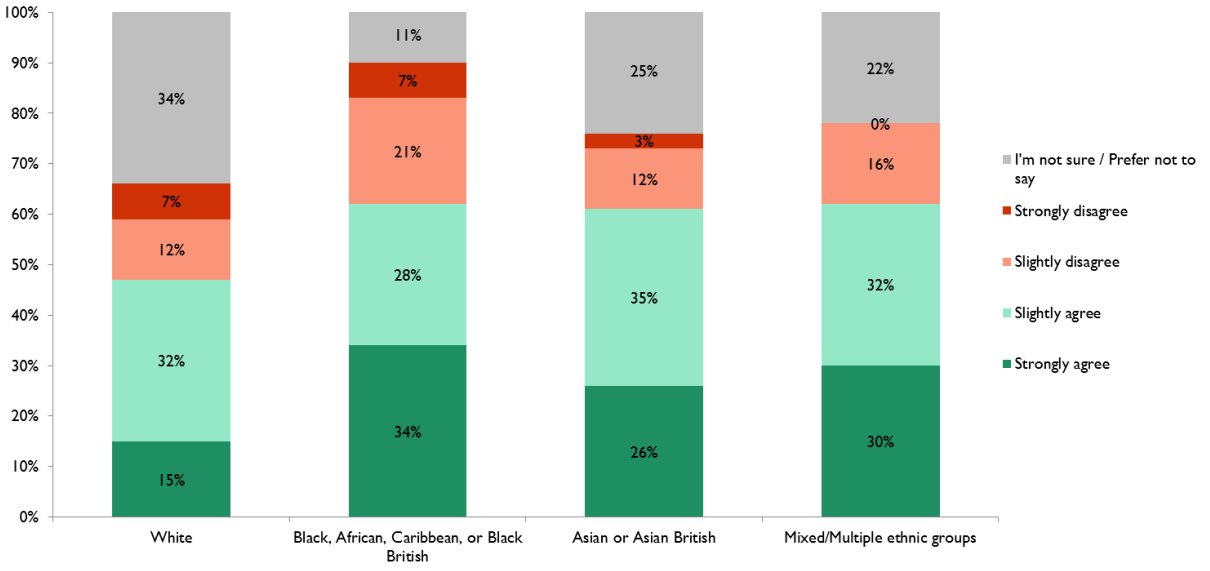
Northern Ireland, remote focus group

"I think technology doesn't work like humans at all. It's very precise, and it's accurate."

Muslim women, natural focus group

Survey respondents from minority ethnic backgrounds generally agreed that facial recognition technology may show bias. A significantly higher proportion of Black respondents (34%) and Asian respondents (26%) *strongly agreed* that the technology works poorly for certain groups and could result in false positives, compared to 15% of White respondents. Additionally, White respondents were significantly more likely to answer 'I'm not sure / prefer not to say' (34%), compared to the proportion of Black respondents (11%).

Chart13: Proportion of respondents who agreed or disagreed with the statement 'It does not work as well with certain groups (e.g., certain genders or ethnicities) and may lead to false matches for people from these groups', by ethnicity.[32]



Various factors influenced levels of comfort

Respondents were more likely to feel comfortable with police use of FRT if they **believed it benefitted society**, saw it as **accurate and necessary report for public safety**, had **positive views of the police**, and **did *not* believe it infringed on their civil liberties**.

Certain beliefs had higher levels of association with greater comfort around police use of FRT. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the biggest difference was observed when comparing those who agreed versus those who disagreed that society benefits from police use of FRT. 82% of respondents who believed police use of FRT

[32] Survey question: *"To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about facial recognition technology being used by the police: "It does not work as well with certain groups (e.g. certain genders or ethnicities) and may lead to false matches for people from these groups", by 'How would you describe your ethnicity?',* weighted base n=62-2,709

would benefit society were comfortable with it. In contrast, only 11% of those who *didn't* think society would benefit were comfortable with its use.[33]

Similarly, 83% of those that agreed that the technology is accurate expressed comfort, compared to only 30% of those who disagreed that FRT was accurate. Belief in FRT as a helpful and necessary tool for public safety was also linked to higher comfort levels (74% of those that agreed were comfortable, compared to only 22% of those that disagreed).

This was reflected in the focus groups. For example, a few who believed that FRT was more accurate than an eyewitness felt that the police using FRT would make them feel safer, and those who were trusting of the police being more likely to feel comfortable with the police using FRT:

> *"I think now with technology, it has helped catch criminals and I guess being more sure that it is that person rather than through an eyewitness. I guess it would make me feel a bit more secure."*
>
> **London, remote focus group**

> *"I would still want to give the police the benefit of the doubt. So I would still put my trust in them, and I would trust them to mostly use it correctly."*
>
> **Scotland, remote focus group**

Interestingly, some concerns that might be expected to drive discomfort appeared had a more limited impact. For example, over half (56%) of those who agreed that FRT infringes on civil liberties still reported feeling comfortable with police using the technology (compared to 80% of those that disagreed it impacted civil liberties). Similarly, over a third (34%) of those that were categorised as having a negative perception of the police also reported feeling comfortable. While comfort was notably higher among those with a positive view of the police (81%), these findings suggest that concerns did not always translate into discomfort, particularly when weighed against perceived benefits such as accuracy, necessity, and public safety.

Comfort did not vary significantly by key demographics

There were no significant differences in comfort with the police use of FRT by age, nation / region, or contact with the criminal justice system – whether a suspect, witness or victim.

Respondents aged 18 to 25 reported slightly lower levels of comfort with police use of FRT (59%) compared to those aged 26+, where comfort ranged from 62% to 66%.[34] However, none of these differences were significant.

Similarly, across all four UK nations, between 60% and 64%[35] of respondents said they were comfortable with the police using facial recognition.

Interestingly, comfort with police use of facial recognition did not vary significantly based on an individual's contact with the criminal justice system. Levels of comfort were similar among those who had reported a crime, those who had been arrested or convicted, and even those with no experience at all.

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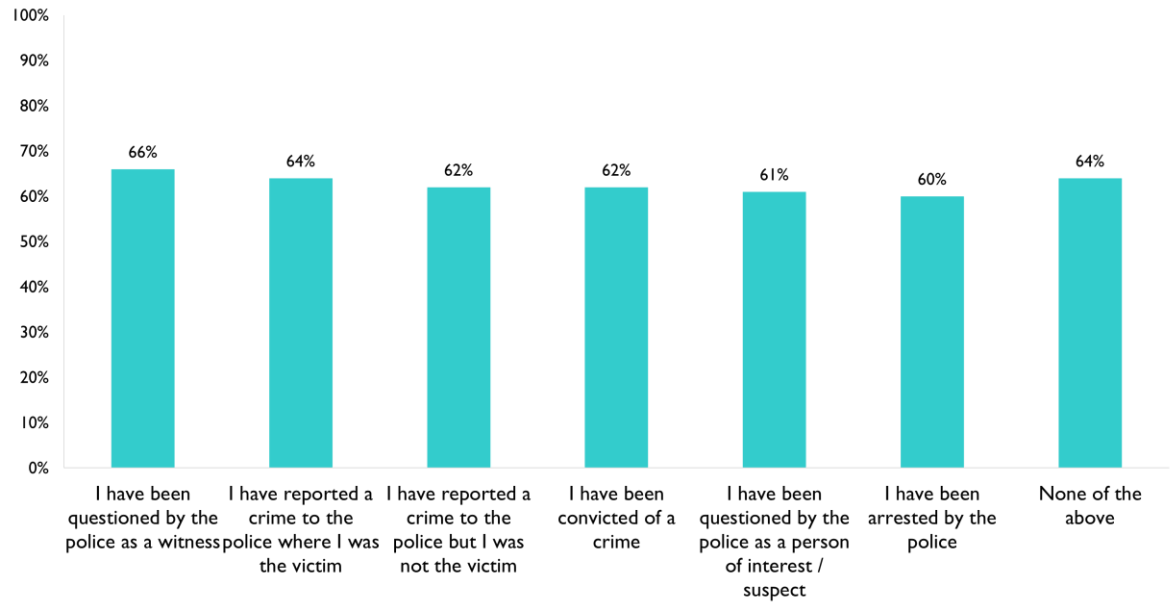
33 Weighted base of those that responded 'slightly agree' or 'strongly agree' to the statement 'Society benefits from the police using facial recognition technology' n=1,995. Weighted base of those that disagreed to this statement n=284

34 Survey question: *"How comfortable would you be with facial recognition technology being used in these ways" – "By the police"*, by *"What is your age'*, weighted base n=305-543. This chart shows the proportion of each group that selected 'Somewhat comfortable', 'Moderately comfortable' or 'Very comfortable'

35 Survey question: *"How comfortable would you be with facial recognition technology being used in these ways" – "By the police"*, by *"Where do you live" [Coded for nation],,* weighted base n=89-2,708. This chart shows the proportion of each group that selected 'Somewhat comfortable', 'Moderately comfortable' or 'Very comfortable'

Chart 14: Proportion of respondents who felt comfortable with police use of FRT, by contact with the criminal justice system.[36]



When looking at comfort by gender and ethnicity, some differences emerged, notably that Black women had the lowest proportion of individuals who felt comfortable with police use of FRT. The figures below outline the proportion of each group that reported feeling to some extent comfortable with police use of FRT:

- Men: White (65%), Black, African, Caribbean, or Black British (70%), Asian or Asian British (53%)[37]
- Women: White (64%), Black, African, Caribbean, or Black British (40%), Asian or Asian British (60%), Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups (61%)[38]

While most differences between genders within each ethnicity were not statistically significant, there was one significant finding: Black men were significantly more likely to feel comfortable (70%) than Black women (40%).

Additionally, comfort with police use of facial recognition technology was higher among people who felt 'very' or 'quite' confident using technology, compared to those with lower levels of tech confidence. However, these differences were not significant, and only 78[39] respondents in the sample reported low confidence–so comparisons should be interpreted with caution.

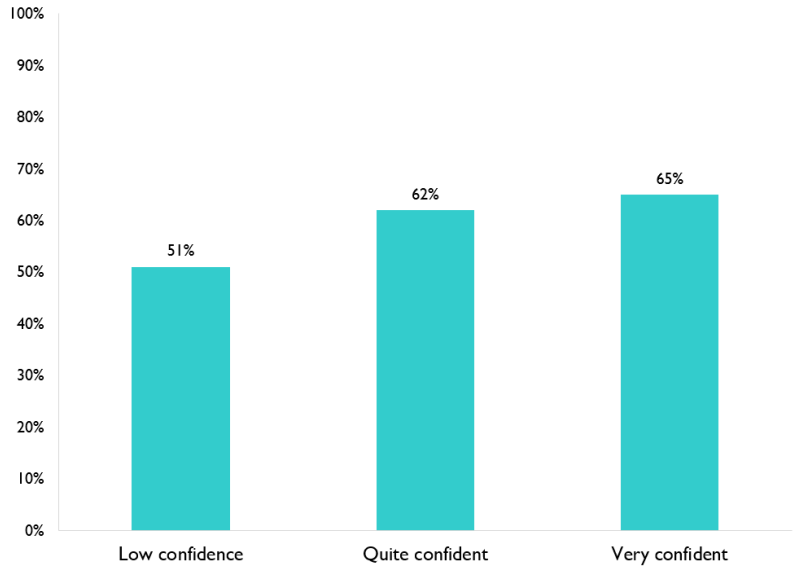
[36] Survey question: *"How comfortable would you be with facial recognition technology being used in these ways" – "By the police"*, by *"Which of the following apply to you",* weighted base n=86-1,649. This chart shows the proportion of each group that selected 'Somewhat comfortable', 'Moderately comfortable' or 'Very comfortable'

[37] Weighted base of men by ethnicity, n=68-1,292. *Please note that we have not included a breakdown of male Mixed/Multiple ethnic group due to insufficient base size (n=29)*

[38] Weighted base of women by ethnicity, n=33-1,399

[39] Please note this is the weighted base size. Unweighted base n=76

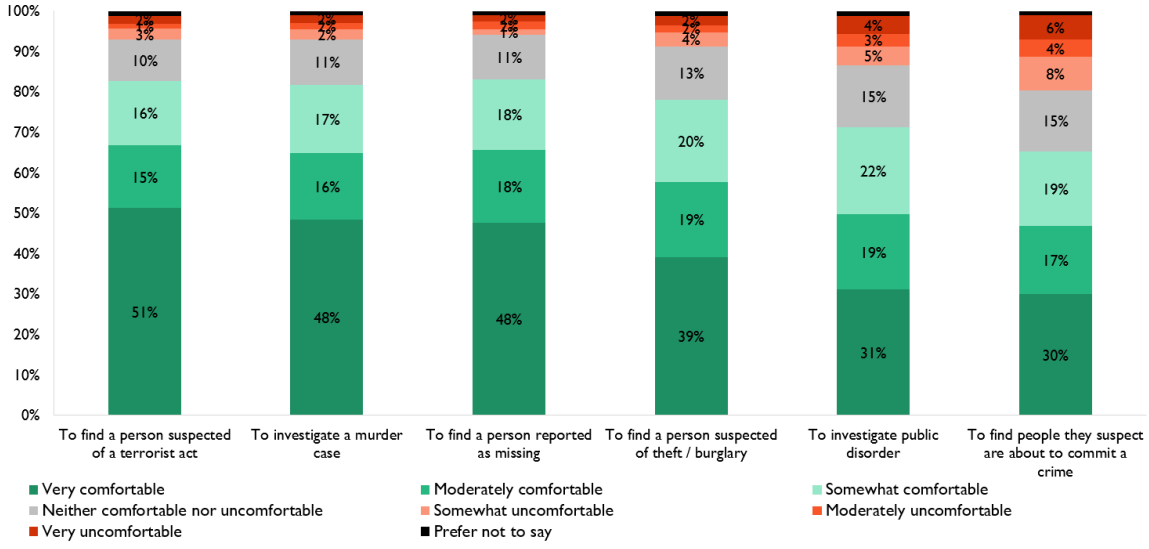
Chart 15: Proportion of respondents who felt comfortable with police use of FRT, by confidence using technology[40]



People were more comfortable with FRT being used after an incident had taken place, and for crimes they saw as more 'extreme'

Comfort was highest when FRT was understood to be used to locate individuals suspected of a terrorist act (83% comfortable). Levels of comfort were also high for finding a person reported as missing (83% comfortable) and murder investigations (82%), as well as for suspected theft or burglary cases (78%).

Chart 16: Level of comfort with police using FRT for different reasons[41]



[40] Survey question: *"How comfortable would you be with facial recognition technology being used in these ways" – "By the police"*, by *"How confident do you feel using digital devices and the internet independently?"* weighted base n=78-1,845. This chart shows the proportion of each group that selected 'Somewhat comfortable', 'Moderately comfortable' or 'Very comfortable'

[41] Survey question: *"How comfortable are you with the police using facial recognition technology for each of the following reasons?"*, weighted base n=3,216

However, comfort levels were slightly lower for types of investigation that might be perceived as less 'extreme' or more 'open-ended'. Only 71% felt comfortable with its use to investigate public disorder, and just 65% felt comfortable with using FRT to find people whom the police suspected were about to commit a crime. The survey didn't provide definitions for types of policing activity, so some of these attitudes could have been based on perceptions of what is involved in these particular activities, and how they play out in practice. As noted before, the focus groups brought to light the fact that some people's opinions and reflections are shaped by what they see on TV, potentially more so than by their understanding of the reality of police practice.

Retrospective, Live and Operator Initiated FRT

Respondents were initially most comfortable with Retrospective FRT

Before being introduced to definitions of retrospective, live, and operator-initiated facial recognition, survey respondents were asked how comfortable they felt with facial recognition being used across a range of contexts. Each statement reflected a context that specifically aligned with one of these three types.

Comfort was highest for uses aligned with retrospective facial recognition (RFR), including locating missing people (78%) and identifying suspects after an incident (77%). In focus groups, several participants expressed familiarity with police reviewing CCTV footage after crimes, and they viewed RFR as simply adding an automated identification capability to this existing practice. This perception of RFR as an enhancement to established CCTV use, rather than something entirely new, contributed to higher comfort levels, with some participants assuming this technology was already widely deployed. Some participants also felt RFR was fairer because it doesn't involve real-time decision-making. Their comfort stemmed from the timing–they liked that the analysis happens after an incident and can help identify a perpetrator.

> *"I don't have a problem… with the reactionary type of facial recognition… using it after an event… that's a lot different for me than when they put them up in the street."*
>
> **Ex-offenders, natural focus group**

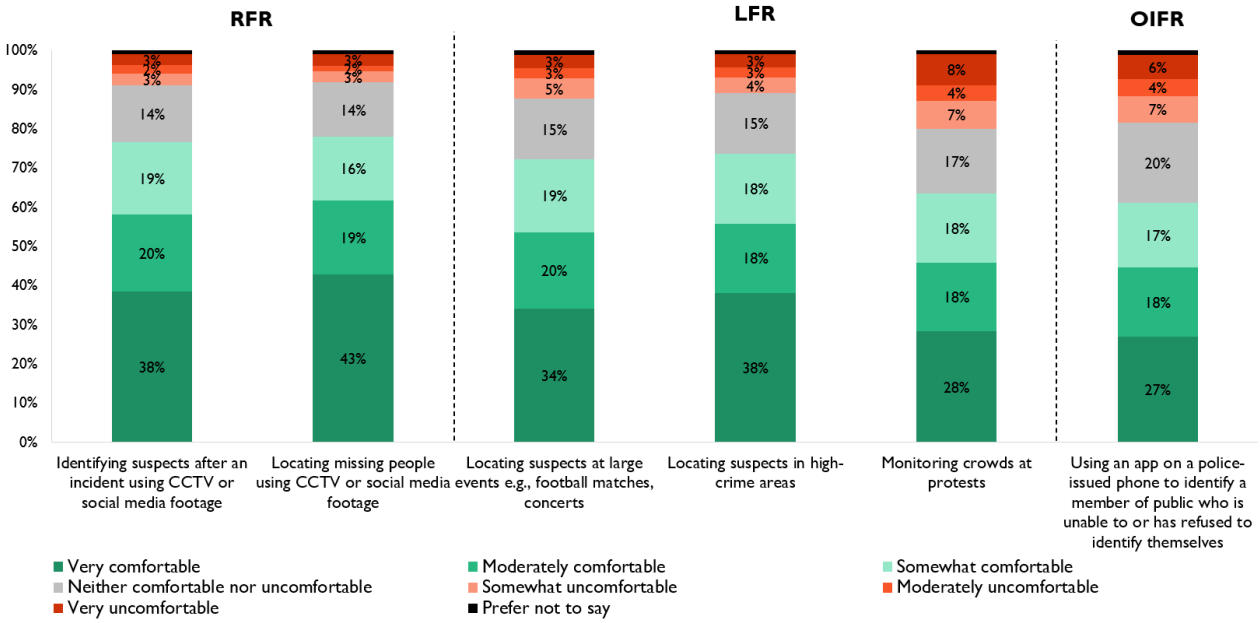
> *"If it gives the police a fair chance of finding somebody quicker, then we should. Yeah, just say, go ahead, use it."*
>
> **Non-London England, remote focus group**

> *"Have you all seen CCTV footage? The cameras are outside pubs and stuff… the system compares the still images from CCTV… to identify suspects who were present."*
>
> **Wales, remote focus group**

Live facial recognition LFR scenarios also saw relatively high comfort in some contexts, especially for locating suspects in high-crime areas (74%) or at large events (72%). However, comfort was relatively lower for LFR when used to monitor crowds at protests, with only 63% expressing comfort in this context.

Comfort was lowest for operator-initiated facial recognition (OIFR) - 61% of respondents reported feeling comfortable with police using a mobile device to identify someone who could not, or refused to, identify themselves.

Chart 17: Proportion of respondents who were comfortable with FRT being used by police in the following contexts[42]



Although overall no consistent trend was observed, a few significant differences emerged across nations. A significantly higher proportion of respondents in Wales reported being *very comfortable* with the use of FRT by police to locate suspects at large events (40%), compared to 34% in England and 33% in Scotland.[43] As this is a use of live facial recognition which is already in use in certain parts of Wales, this suggests that police use of the technology may increase overall comfort levels. In Northern Ireland, a significantly larger proportion remained neutral (neither comfortable nor uncomfortable) about police use of FRT to monitor crowds at protests (22%) compared to 15% in Scotland.

After being asked their comfort levels across different contexts, respondents were then given explicit descriptions of these three types of FRT

To explore public attitudes toward different types of facial recognition technology (FRT) used by police, respondents were provided with specific explanations for each application. The three types of FRT were presented to respondents using the following descriptions:

- **Retrospective FRT**: "After an event or incident, police can use footage from sources like CCTV, mobile device, dashcams, doorbell footage, or social media to identify suspects, using retrospective facial recognition technology. This system compares the footage against a database of images of individuals the police are interested in to check for any matches."
- **Live FRT**: "Live facial recognition is used in real-time to help police officers to locate people on a 'watchlist'. Live facial recognition cameras are focused on a specific area, and as people pass through that area, their images are processed and compared to the watchlist. If a match is found, an alert is sent to officers at the scene."
- **Operator-initiated FRT**: "Operator initiated facial recognition is a potential new use of facial recognition technology which has not been rolled out in the UK yet. It involves using facial recognition technology on a police-issued mobile phone. A police officer could upload a photograph

[42] Survey question: "*How comfortable would you be with facial recognition technology being used in these contexts?*", weighted base n=3216. This chart shows the proportion of the sample that selected 'Somewhat comfortable', 'Moderately comfortable', or 'Very comfortable'

[43] Survey question: "*How comfortable would you be with facial recognition technology being used in these contexts?, by Nation*", weighted base n=89-2,708.

of a person's face into an app, where it would be compared to a predetermined watchlist to help officers identify the person."

To prevent bias in responses, the presentation order of these three FRT types was randomised for both survey respondents and focus group participants, ensuring more reliable interpretation of the findings regarding attitudes towards each type of police FRT.

Around 1 in 4 expressed discomfort with the police using publicly accessible images as references for retrospective facial recognition

As outlined above, the following description was provided to survey and focus group respondents to describe **retrospective facial recognition technology** (RFR):

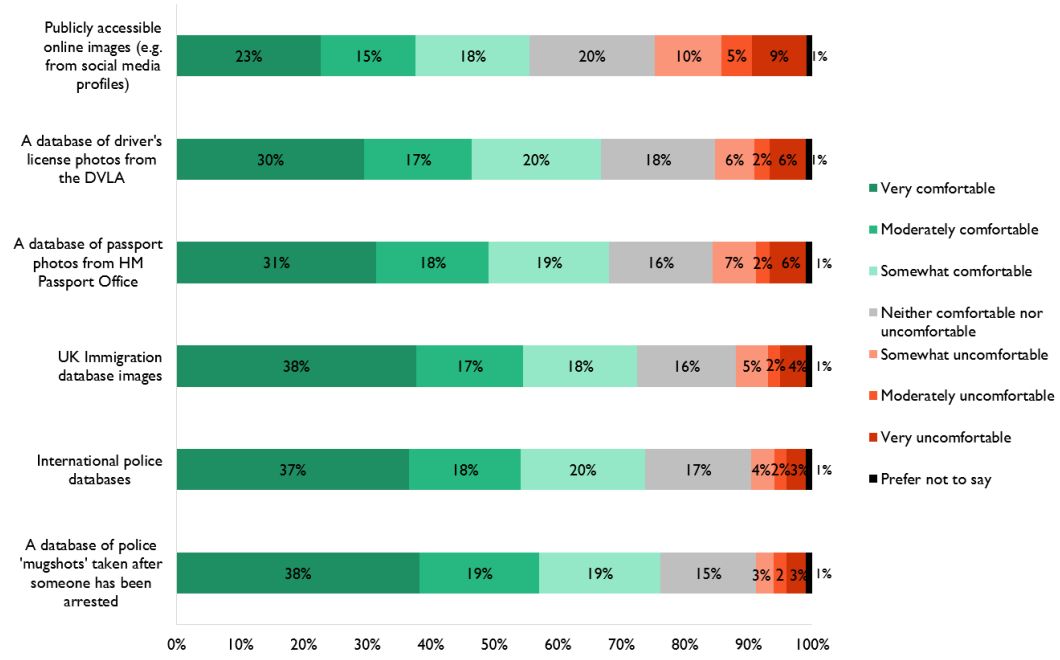
"After an event or incident, police can use footage from sources like CCTV, mobile devices, dashcams, doorbell footage, or social media to identify suspects, using retrospective facial recognition technology.

This system compares the footage against a database of images of individuals the police are interested in to check for any matches".

Respondents were then asked how comfortable they felt with police comparing facial recognition footage against images from different sources. This was to explore whether certain sources of reference images – thought to be a potential driver of discomfort with RFR – raised more concern than others.

It was found that comfort varied slightly for different potential sources of images used for facial recognition. Respondents were most comfortable with the use of police 'mugshot' databases (76% comfortable), international police databases (74%) and UK immigration database images (72%).

Chart 18: Proportion of respondents who are comfortable with police comparing footage with images taken from different sources.[44]



[44] Survey question: *"How comfortable would you be with the police comparing the footage with images taken from the following sources"*, weighted base n=3216,

In the focus groups, participants generally assumed that government departments and the police were already sharing information. Many believed that comparisons with mugshots and even passport photos were already occurring as part of facial recognition technology use.

For some participants, this perceived data sharing wasn't a major concern and was viewed as necessary for security purposes. However, others expressed resignation rather than actual support – they were aware that such information sharing probably happened even if they weren't fully comfortable with it.

> *"And I think that anybody that's got a passport, a new blue one because they are all electronic, I genuinely think that there must be an Argos catalogue of everybody's face somewhere used for these things."*
>
> **Wales remote focus group**

However, comfort was lowest for publicly accessible online images such as those from social media, with 24% of survey respondents expressing some level of discomfort. This concern was evident in the focus groups, where people were particularly troubled by police access to social media images. Many felt it represented an invasion of privacy, even if those images were technically publicly available.

> *"Unless you specifically signed an agreement that allows them to do that, that's an infringement of your civil liberties."*
>
> **Non-London England, remote focus group**

> *"It's too pervasive [sic] on my personal life."*
>
> **London, remote focus group**

Comfort with LFR varied depending on the context

49% of survey respondents thought that live facial recognition was already being used by the police across *all* of the following contexts[45] – in areas where a suspect is expected, high-crime locations, large events, protests, and public spaces such as high streets, parks, and shops.[46] Overall, 95% expected that it was being used in at least one of these contexts.

When looking at expectations of where police might currently be using live facial recognition by nation, a significantly higher proportion of respondents in Wales (80%) expected LFR was being used at large events, compared to respondents from England (73%) and Northern Ireland (72%).[47] This might be explained by the fact that this use of LFR is already in use in parts of Wales.

Policing crowds, major events, and specific threat scenarios were seen as acceptable uses of LFR

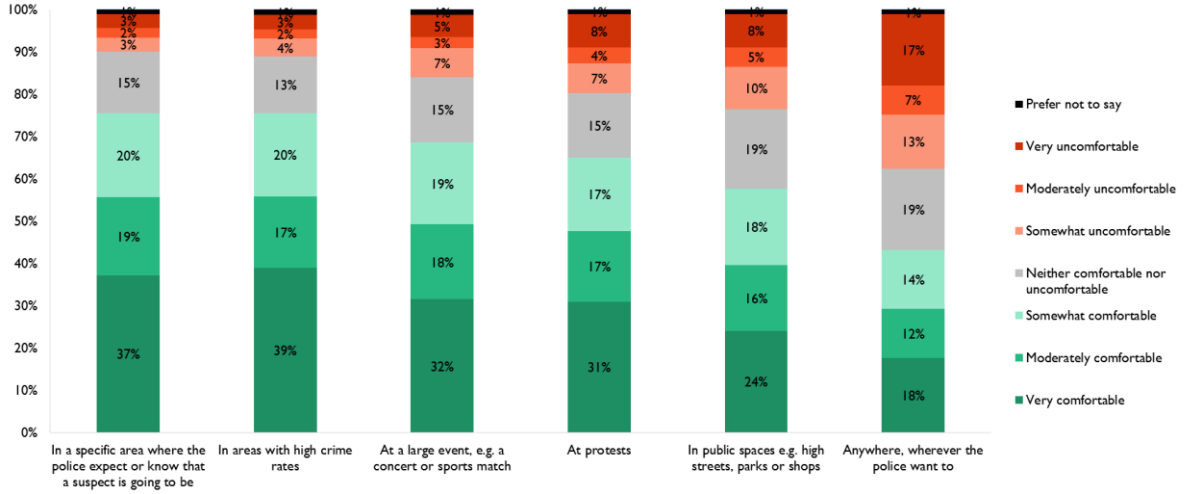
In the survey, respondents expressed varying levels of comfort with live facial recognition technology (LFR) used by police, depending on the specific context. They were most comfortable with LFR being deployed in areas where they know or expect a suspect to be (37% very comfortable), or in high-crime areas (39%).

[45] Survey question: "*In which of the following areas do you expect that the police might currently use live facial recognition",* weighted base n=3,216

[46] In the survey and focus groups, respondents were given the following description of live facial recognition (LFR): "Live facial recognition is used in real-time to help police officers to locate people on a 'watchlist'. Live facial recognition cameras are focused on a specific area, and as people pass through that area, their images are processed and compared to the watchlist. If a match is found, an alert is sent to officers at the scene." Respondents were then asked in which situations they believed LFR is already being used.

[47] Survey question: "*In which of the following areas do you expect that the police might currently use live facial recognition", by Nation,* weighted base n=89-2,708

Chart 19: Proportion of respondents who are comfortable or uncomfortable with different ways the police can use LFR.[48]



Harris, ICO comparison[49]:

A 2019 survey conducted by the ICO found that 72% of respondents agreed that live facial recognition (LFR) should be used on a permanent basis in areas of high crime. While not directly comparable due to differences in question wording, the current research found that 76% of respondents reported feeling comfortable with LFR being used in the same context.

Focus group participants could see the logic behind these specific deployments and understood why the police might use the technology in this targeted manner. Many also described having seen LFR already in place at stadiums and events, and generally considered such use reasonable and expected.

> *"Having it in select spots where there's potentially people you're looking for… that makes sense."*
>
> **London, remote focus group**

> *"I've experienced this myself… when you go to some football stadiums, they'll have a police van parked up… it happened to me… I got pulled aside but it was a very minor inconvenience… I think having it in select spots like airports, sports centres, or concert halls makes sense."*
>
> **London, remote focus group**

While comfort with different police uses of LFR was broadly consistent across the UK nations, one significant difference emerged: respondents in Wales were more likely to report feeling comfortable with its use at large events (73%), compared to those in Northern Ireland (64%). This may reflect the fact that respondents from Wales were more likely to expect that the police were already using LFR in this way. Additionally, there was a significantly higher proportion that responded being neutral in Northern Ireland (21%) compared to both England (16%) and Scotland (13%).

However, there was notable discomfort with LFR being deployed anywhere the police choose, without explicit reasoning (such as in public spaces), with survey respondents reporting the lowest comfort levels for these broader contexts.

[48] Survey question: *"And how comfortable are you with the police using live facial recognition in the following areas?,* weighted base n=3,216

[49] Please see: https://ico.org.uk/media/about-the-ico/documents/2616185/live-frt-law-enforcement-report-20191031.pdf

In the focus groups, some participants raised concerns about how LFR would be deployed and the implications for civil liberties. These concerns often stemmed from some misunderstandings about how the technology would work in practice in these less well-defined moments.

> "*It's like, George Orwell's wildest imaginings. You know, if somebody wanted to set up a 1984 state.*"
>
> **Northern Ireland, remote focus group**

> "*It is a lot of power, the police, with what they can use with that, like having a live camera feed of everybody. So I don't know how comfortable I feel with that overall.*"
>
> **London, remote focus group**

> "*It's like the pre-crime division from the Minority Report and I don't like it. The pre-crime division you know, like you're, you're stopping somebody on the basis that maybe they might be up to something wrong.*"
>
> **Ex-offenders, natural focus group**

Some participants questioned how decisions are made about where to deploy live facial recognition and what criteria are used for these deployments. Some participants clearly believed the technology would be constantly running, and scanning everyone in sight, which raised significant concerns about privacy and potential abuse of power. There were particular worries about the technology being used to target specific groups or protests that authorities might disapprove of.

> "*It just depends on who's using it and for what reason… If it's just random or wherever they feel like it, then that doesn't feel fair.*"
>
> **London, remote focus group**

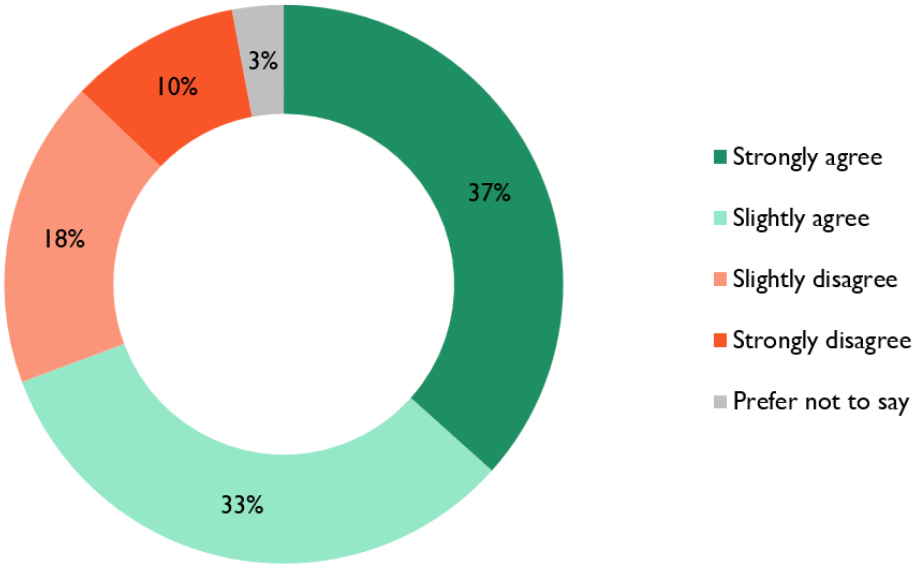
> "*If the government don't like some particular protest… you can see how it could be misused.*"
>
> **Northern Ireland, remote focus group**

> "*If people are using the technology to try and pre-empt an incident taking place, that's where there's plenty of opportunity for abuse of power.* "
>
> **Scotland, remote focus group**

Respondents felt that the police should have to make people aware of *when* and *where* they were using LFR

When asked whether the police should be required to make people aware of when and where LFR is being used, the majority of respondents agreed. 7 in 10 (70%) supported this requirement, suggesting public demand for proactive transparency.

Chart 20: Extent to which respondents agreed/disagreed that police should make people aware of when/where they are going to use LFR.[50]



In the focus groups, there was lots of discussion about whether the public should always be told when LFR is in use. Initially, participants tended to support the idea of being informed. However, as discussions progressed and people considered practical implications, such as the risk of suspects avoiding areas where LFR was deployed, many came to recognise why, in certain situations, it might be necessary for police not to inform the public in advance.

> *"If you let people know, then they'll just avoid the area."*
>
> **Wales, remote focus group**

Indeed, when respondents were asked about a trade-off between transparency and effectiveness, 61% said they would prioritise effectiveness over transparency.[51]

There were no notable differences in responses by nation or gender. However, age and perceptions of the police showed significant differences. Older respondents were significantly more likely to disagree with the statement *"The police should make people aware of when and where they are going to use LFR"*: 39% of those aged 56 and over disagreed, compared to just 20% of those under 55.[52] Perceptions of the police also appeared to influence views. Just over a third (36%) of those with a positive perception of the police disagreed with the statement, which was significantly higher compared to only 16% of those with a negative perception and 23% of those with a neutral perception.[53]

---

[50] Survey question: '*To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: The police should make people aware of when and where they are going to use live facial recognition?*,' weighted base n=3,216

[51] Survey question: "*If facial recognition technology is transparent, meaning people are made aware that their facial data is being processed (e.g. with visible signage), this may impact on its effectiveness, because people could cover their faces or avoid the area if they do not want their facial data to be processed. Please select the statement which you agree with most*", weighted base n=3,216

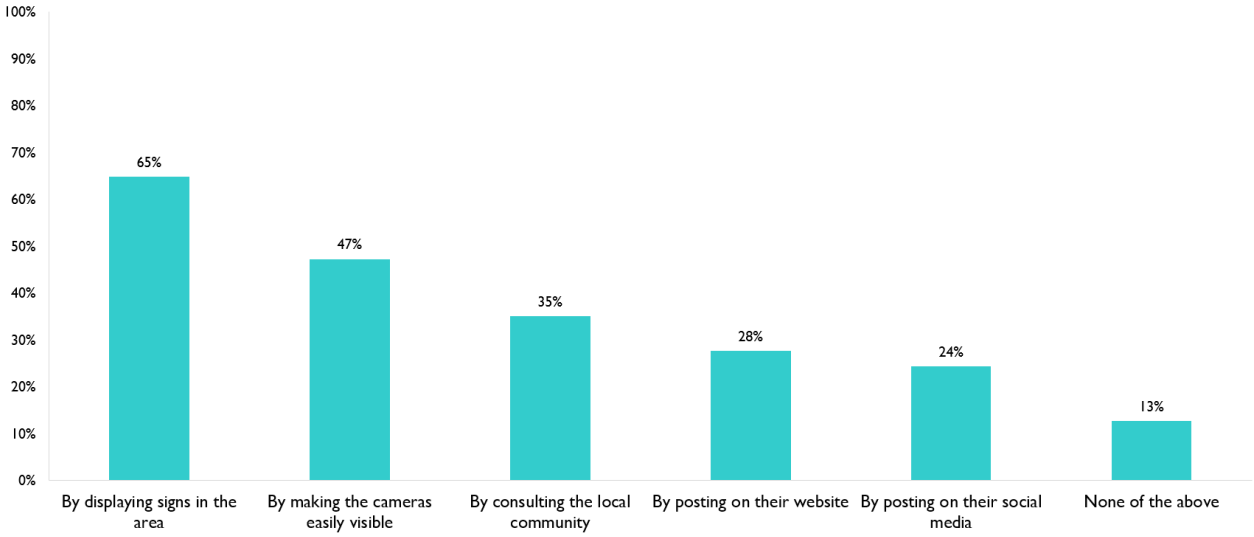
[52] Survey question: '*To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: The police should make people aware of when and where they are going to use live facial recognition?', by 'What is your age?,'* weighted base n of those aged 56 and over n=1,225, weighted base n of those under 55 n=1,991

[53] Survey question: '*To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: The police should make people aware of when and where they are going to use live facial recognition?', by 'Categorised perception of police'*, weighted base n=520-1,156

Of those who did think the police should make people aware, many thought this should be done by displaying signs in the area and making the cameras visible

Among those who felt the police should make people aware of when and where LFR is being used, the most preferred methods focused on visibility and signage. Nearly two-thirds (65%) of respondents said awareness should be raised by displaying signs in the area, and almost half (47%) supported making the cameras themselves easily visible. A small minority (13%) selected "none of the above," suggesting that some respondents may prefer alternative forms of communication.

Chart 21: Preferred methods for public awareness of LFR use, reported by those that agree that the police should make people aware of when and when they are going to use the technology.[54]

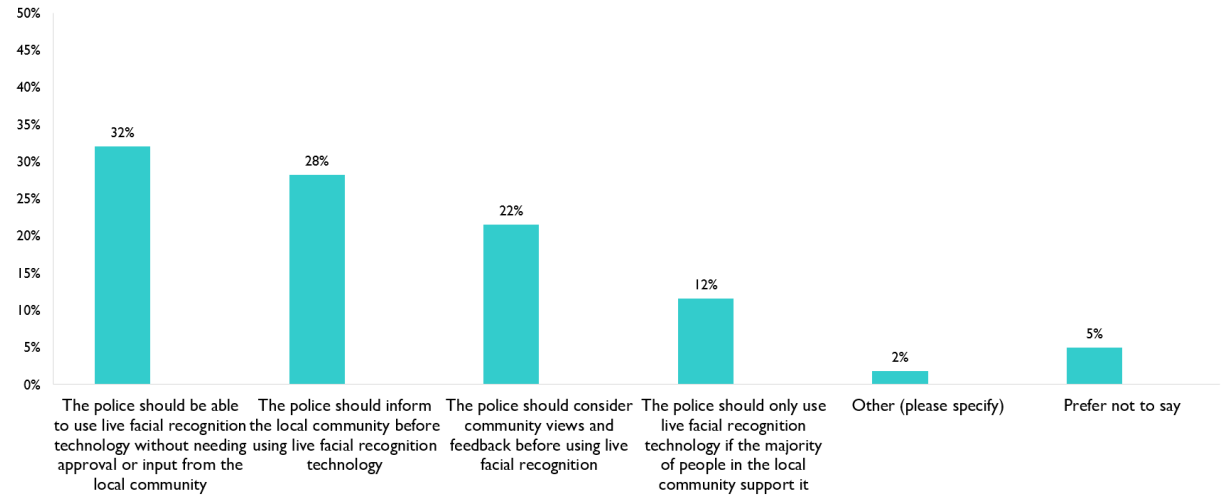


However, views were mixed on the role of community input in police use of LFR

Respondents were divided in their views on how much input the local community should have before police use live facial recognition (LFR) in their area. The most commonly selected response (32%) was that the police should be able to use LFR without needing approval or input from the local community. However, nearly two-thirds of the sample (61%), expressed a desire for at least some form of engagement prior to deployment.

[54] Survey question: *'In which of the following ways do you think the police should make people aware? Please select all that apply', Of those that agreed or strongly agreed to the statement 'The police should make people aware of when and where they are going to use live facial recognition',* weighted base n=2,802

Chart 22: Degree to which respondents think the police should involve the local community before using LFR in the local area.[55]



Respondents' comfort with OIFR was lower than RFR and LFR, but it increased once they were provided with the circumstances in which it could be used

Before they fully understood how OIFR could be deployed, respondents were relatively uncomfortable with the technology

Prior to being given detailed information about operator-initiated facial recognition technology (OIFR), as shown in Chart 17 18, 61% of respondents expressed overall comfort with the technology, while 17% reported feeling uncomfortable. This discomfort level was higher than that expressed for other police uses of facial recognition, such as locating missing people (7%), identifying suspects after an incident using CCTV (8%), locating suspects in high-crime areas (10%), or at large events (11%). Only the use of facial recognition for monitoring crowds at protests generated greater discomfort (19%).

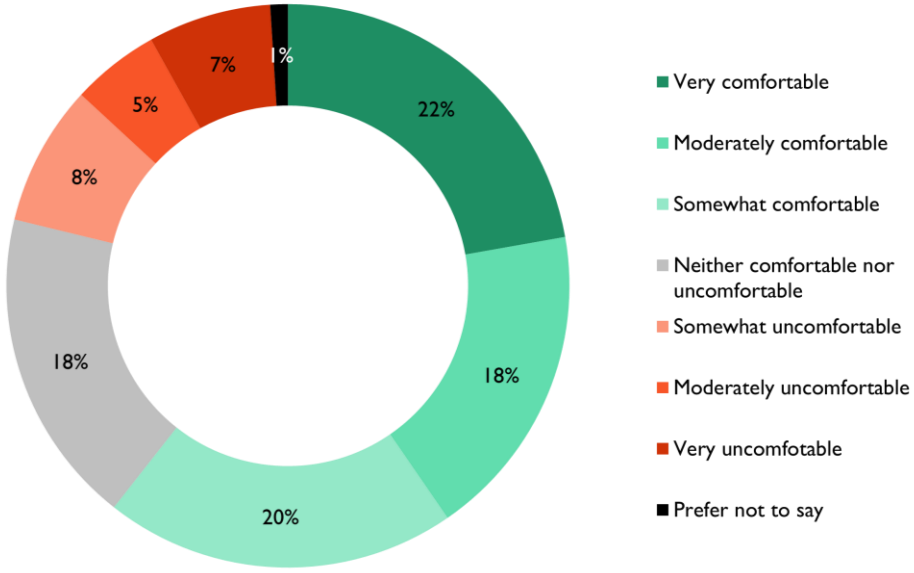
However, after being provided with a comprehensive description of OIFR[56] - explaining how it involves police-issued mobile phones, along with procedural safeguards - discomfort slightly *increased* from 17% to 20%.

[55] Survey question: *'To what degree do you feel that the police should involve the local community before using live facial recognition (LFR) in their local area?*

[56] "Operator initiated facial recognition is a potential new use of facial recognition technology which has not been rolled out in the UK yet. It involves using facial recognition technology on a police-issued mobile phone. A police officer could upload a photograph of a person's face into an app, where it would be compared to a predetermined watchlist to help officers identify the person. When using the technology, police officers would be expected to provide the following information:

- Reason for use
- Officer's details
- Grounds for use
- The image will not be saved
- Where further information may be found online
- Data will not be shared with third parties"

Chart 23: Level of comfort with OIFR, after being provided a description.[57]



Based on focus group discussions, this discomfort appeared to stem from concerns about OIFR placing too much responsibility on individual officers, and concern about 'bad apples', rather than the technology itself. There was a widespread sense that the technology's impact would depend heavily on the judgement and intentions of the person operating it.

> *"I would feel more comfortable with more than one police officer rather than the police working on their own. I wouldn't, like, solely leave it to one person."*
>
> **Muslim women, focus group**

> *"The technology will create a match and then it's up to the individual officer to review it… I can't imagine the officer will be the person saying, 'nah, it's not them'… they'll say, 'we'll just arrest them to be sure'… that's eight hours they're not going to get back."*
>
> **Ex-offenders, focus group**

Some respondents were particularly distrusting of individual officers and worried that this technology gave them too much power. This led to unease around the potential for bias, profiling, and misuse.

> *"I just don't trust some of the things that I've heard about images being shared by police officers. Now this is a small minority but nevertheless."*
>
> **Northern Ireland, remote focus group**

> *"There's a lot of genuine police officers, but there's also a lot of corrupt police officers."*
>
> **Non-London England, remote focus group**

> *"You don't know what they're going to do with their phone in their spare time. You don't know where that photo is going to end up… I just think you can't trust anyone these days."*
>
> **Non-London England, remote focus group**

[57] Survey question: *"How comfortable would you be with the police using operator initiated facial recognition technology in this way?"*, weighted base n=3,216.

Some felt that OIFR would also amplify existing power imbalances between police officers and the people they stop and search – particularly ethnic minority communities.

> *"If you look at the bias of people getting pulled over by the police, the likelihood of it being a teenage group of males who tend to be Black or Asians compared to middle-aged white women, there's a massive contrast that's not then going to change because they're using facial recognition. If anything, you're basically going to be going up to a load of people again in that category and going, 'I'm going to take your photo.'"*
>
> **Ex-offenders, focus group**

A higher proportion of those in older age groups and those living in suburban areas felt more comfortable with OIFR after being provided with a description. A significantly higher proportion of respondents in nearly all age groups reported feeling comfortable with OIFR after being provided a description, compared to younger adults. Comfort ranged between 60-66% for those aged 36 and over[58], compared to only 49% of those aged 18–25 reported feeling comfortable. A higher proportion of respondents living in suburban areas also reported feeling comfortable with OIFR after being given a description (64%), compared to those in urban (59%) and rural areas (58%).[59]

After being told the circumstances for its use, 52% of respondents felt *more* comfortable with OIFR

Survey respondents were provided with additional information partway through the survey regarding the specific circumstances under which operator-initiated facial recognition would be used by police.[60] This included an explanation that the technology would only be deployed in specific situations - such as when someone is missing or is suspected of committing an offence - and only if the individual is unable or unwilling to provide their identity, or is suspected of giving false details.[61]

Following this additional contextual information, over half of respondents (52%) reported feeling more comfortable with the technology. Only 7% said they felt *less* comfortable after receiving this information, while 36% indicated that the additional details did not change how comfortable they felt with OIFR.

---

[58] The proportion of 66–75-year-olds who felt comfortable was also significantly higher than that of respondents aged 26–35 (56%).

[59] Survey question: *"How comfortable would you be with the police using operator initiated facial recognition technology in this way?", by 'How would you describe where you live?',* weighted base n=656-1,272

[60] The conditions for use of OIFR presented to respondents were based on information from the South Wales and Gwent Police pilot. These conditions may vary if the technology is adopted by other forces. Full details of the pilot can be found on the South Wales Police and Gwent Police websites: https://www.south-wales.police.uk/police-forces/south-wales-police/areas/about-us/about-us/facial-recognition-technology/operator-initiated-facial-recognition-documents/

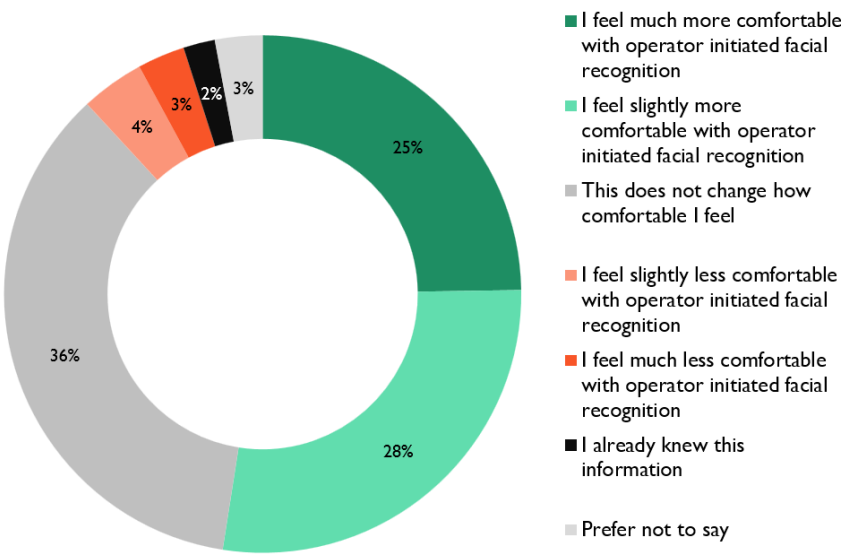
[61] Survey respondents were provided with the following information: *Operator initiated facial recognition can only be used by a police officer when one of the following grounds apply. When the person is:*

- Reported as missing
- Suspected to have committed an offence, wanted by the courts, or subject to bail conditions or a court order
- Presenting an immediate threat to life or immediate risk of serious harm to themselves or others

AND when one of the following reasons also applies:

- The person is unable to provide their details because they are deceased, unconscious, have mental health or age barriers or are incapable due to drink or drugs.
- The person has refused to provide their details.
- It is reasonably suspected that the person has provided false details.

Chart 24: Impact on comfort of additional grounds being shared[62]



No significant differences were observed across UK nations in how respondents' comfort levels changed after being presented with the additional legal grounds for using live facial recognition. Similarly, there were no significant differences by gender or ethnicity, besides a higher proportion of Black respondents responding that they knew this information (10%), compared to 2% of white respondents[63].

However, some variation emerged by age, urban/suburban, and social grade.

Following higher levels of comfort *before* the additional grounds were shared, respondents aged 46 and over were also more likely to feel *"much more comfortable"* following additional grounds being shared. Among those aged 46 and above, between 27% and 32% reported increased comfort, compared to 21% of those aged 36–45, 19% of those aged 26–35, and just 16% of those aged 18–25☐.

There were also notable differences by location. While suburban respondents were generally more comfortable with OIFR prior to receiving the additional grounds, those living in urban areas were significantly more likely to feel "much less comfortable" after the conditions were explained (5%, compared to just 1% in suburban areas)[64].

Social grade also influenced responses: 38% of respondents in grade C2 and 40% in grade DE said the additional grounds did not change how they felt, compared to 31% of those in grade AB[65], who were more likely to report feeling 'slightly more comfortable' following receiving the information about legal grounds for use.

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[62] Survey question: "*Knowing this information, how, if at all, does it affect your level of comfort with the police using facial recognition technology in this way?",* weighted base n=3,216

[63] Survey question: "*Knowing this information, how, if at all, does it affect your level of comfort with the police using facial recognition technology in this way?", by 'What is your ethnhicity?',* Weighted base n of white respondents n=2,709, weighted base n of Black, African Caribbean, or Black British respondents n=111

[64] Survey question: "*Knowing this information, how, if at all, does it affect your level of comfort with the police using facial recognition technology in this way?", by 'How would you describe where you live?',* weighted base n=656-1,272

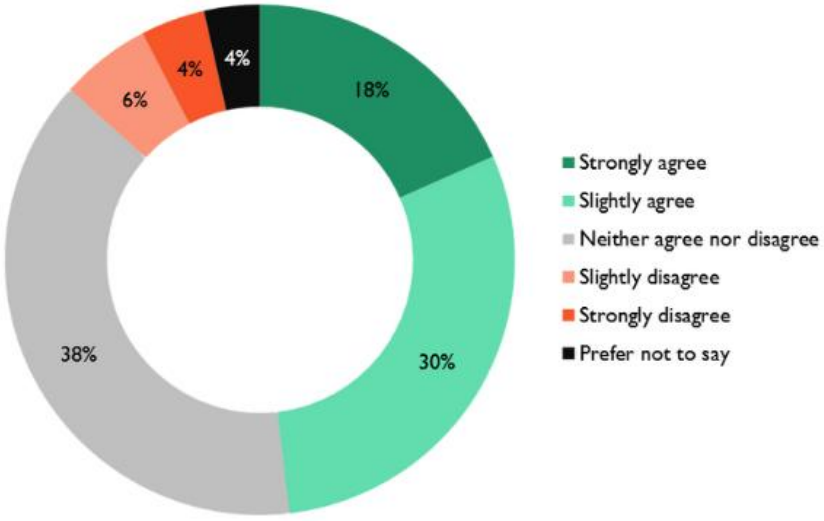
[65] Survey question: "*Knowing this information, how, if at all, does it affect your level of comfort with the police using facial recognition technology in this way?", by SEG,* weighted base n=656-1,272

Regulation and oversight

Nearly half of respondents felt that FRT is currently controlled using appropriate rules and regulations

48% of survey respondents felt that the police use of facial recognition technology is currently regulated to an appropriate level. However, nearly 4 in 10 (38%) remained neutral.

Chart 25: Proportion of respondents that agreed or disagreed that the police use of facial recognition is currently controlled using rules/regulations to a necessary or appropriate level[66]



This might suggest uncertainty or limited awareness of what this looks like in practice, which was commonly discussed in the focus group where participants often assumed regulation existed but couldn't describe it in detail.

> *"I would assume at the moment GDPR protects people from the misuse of this technology."*
>
> **Northern Ireland, remote focus group**

[66] Survey question: "*To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement - "I think the use of facial recognition technology by the police in the UK is currently controlled using rules/regulations to a necessary or appropriate level"*, weighted base n=3,216

Respondents in Northern Ireland were significantly less likely to strongly disagree with this statement (2%) compared to those in England and Wales (both 4%) and Scotland (5%)[67]. Responses did not vary by ethnicity.

Respondents did not think that police forces were following the same regulations, but most thought they should

42% of survey respondents thought that police forces across the UK are currently following the same rules and regulations in relation to facial recognition technology.

Respondents in England were significantly more likely to say "Yes" – that police forces currently follow the same rules and regulations around FRT use – at 43%, compared to 36% in Scotland. Those in Scotland were significantly more likely to respond "No" (58%) than those in England (50%) and Wales (also 50%). Additionally, respondents in Northern Ireland were significantly more likely to say "No" (56%) than those in England.

However, 91% of survey respondents thought that police officers across the UK *should* be following the same rules and regulations. There were no significant differences by nation when asked whether they think all police forces should be following the same rules.

*Chart 26: Proportion of respondents that think all police forces across the UK **currently follow** the same rules and regulations* [68]

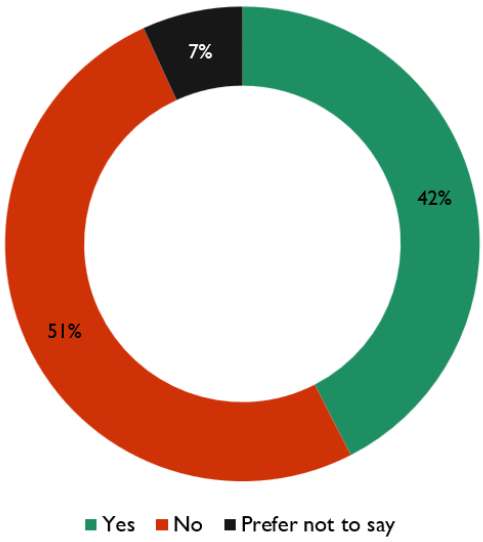
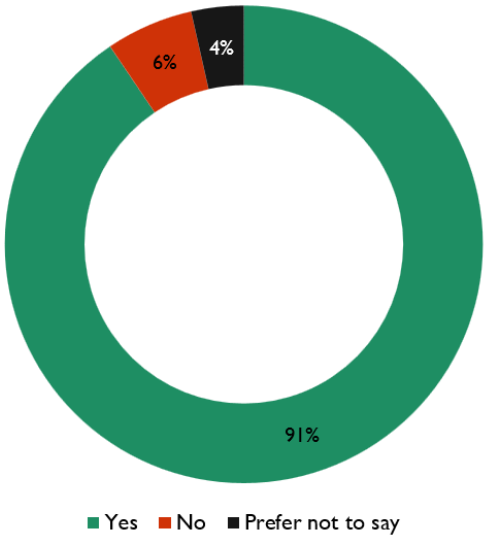


*Chart 27: Proportion of respondents that think all police forces across the UK **should** be following the same rules and regulations*[69]



In focus groups, participants were more concerned about whether police officers followed any of the rules in place. There was a common view that even if safeguards were in place, ensuring compliance would be a challenge.

[67] Survey question: "*To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement - "I think the use of facial recognition technology by the police in the UK is currently controlled using rules/regulations to a necessary or appropriate level", by Nation,* weighted base n=89-2,708

[68] Survey question: "*Do you think all police forces across the UK currently follow the same rules and regulations regarding the use of facial recognition technology? Please think about what you expect or believe might be true, even if you feel you do not know",* weighted base n=3,216

[69] Survey question: "*And do you think all police forces across the UK should be following the same rules and regulations regarding the use of facial recognition technology?",* weighted base n=3,216

"Whatever the rules are… I don't know what the rules are. There must be some… but it's whether they're going to adhere to the rules"

London focus group

"The reality is the police don't care and don't follow the rules and there isn't any legal recourse."

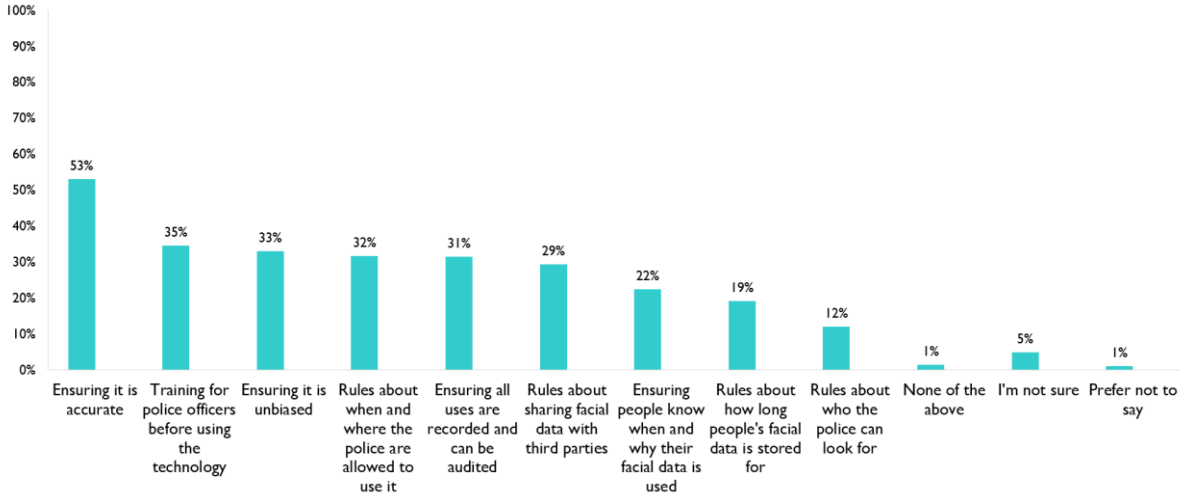
Ex-Offenders focus group

The majority felt that regulation should ensure the accuracy of facial recognition technology

Survey respondents were asked to select the top 3 things that they thought were most important when it comes to regulation of the police using FRT. The factors deemed most important were:

- Ensuring it is accurate (53%)
- Training for police officers before using the technology (35%)
- Ensuring it is unbiased (33%)

Chart 28: What respondents felt was most important regarding the regulation of police use of facial recognition technology[70]



In the focus groups, concerns about accuracy were also raised and highlighted as an area requiring regulation. Participants' concerns were particularly focused on situations where facial recognition technology might affect people's legal rights, liberty or reputation.

They expressed worry that mistakes, even if rare, could carry serious consequences for individuals' lives. As a result, they believed regulation should ensure clear accuracy benchmarks are established.

"If you're going to use something like facial recognition I would rather it be like 100% accurate"

London, remote focus group

"The concept is great… until it doesn't work."

Northern Ireland, remote focus group

"There needs to be safeguards and abilities in place for us to know 100% that that is accurate."

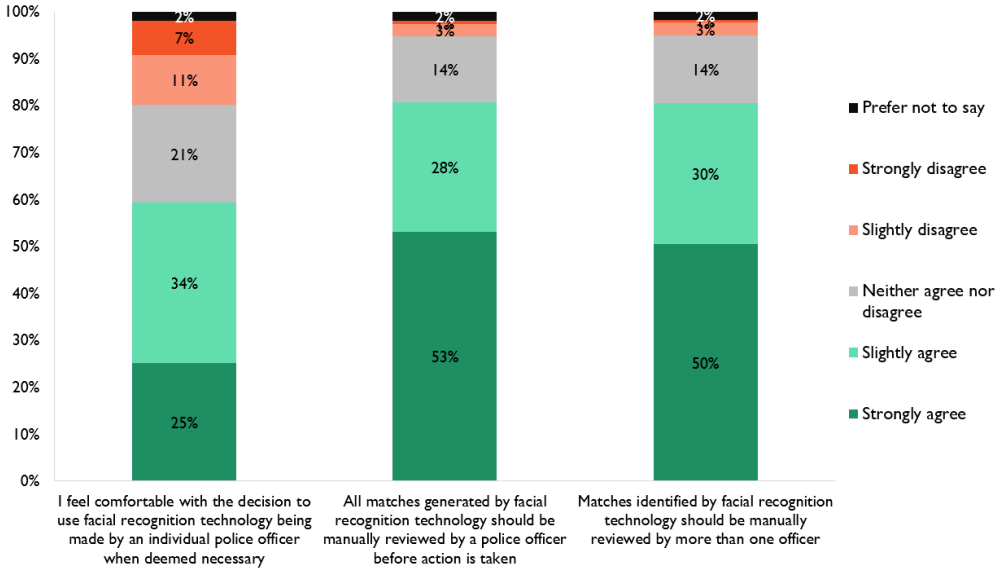
Ex-offenders, focus group

[70] Survey question: "*Please select, from the following options, the 3 things that you think are most important when it comes to regulation of the police using facial recognition technology*", weighted base n=3,216

Around 80% of the sample emphasised the importance of matches being reviewed manually or by multiple officers before action was taken

Specifically, 81% agreed that matches should be manually reviewed by a police officer, and 80% agreed that matches should be reviewed by more than one officer, highlighting strong public support for human oversight as part of the process.

Chart 29: Extent respondents agree or disagree with the following statements relating to the importance of review[71]



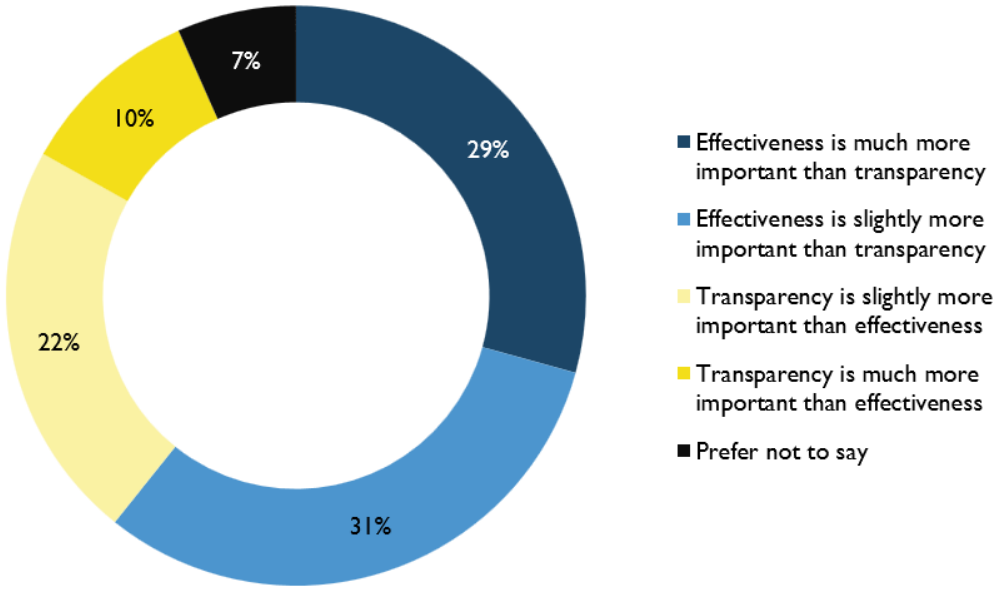
Despite 70% reporting that they wanted to be informed about LFR usage, effectiveness was valued over transparency by over half of the sample

Respondents were specifically asked to consider a trade-off between transparency (being informed when facial recognition technology is being used) and its effectiveness (its ability to correctly identify people on watchlists or who have committed offences). When presented with this choice, 61% said they would prioritise effectiveness over transparency, even if that meant the public wouldn't always be made aware when the technology was in use. While 7 in 10 (70%) respondents agreed with the idea that police should always make the public aware of when and where Live Facial Recognition (LFR) is being used[72], it appears that when asked to make a trade-off, the majority ultimately valued effectiveness more than transparency.

[71] Survey question: "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements", weighted base n=3,216

[72] Survey question: *"To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: The police should make people aware of when and where they are going to use live facial recognition."*, weighted base n=3,216

Chart 30: Proportion of respondents that thought effectiveness or transparency was more important[73]



This preference was reflected in comments from focus groups suggesting that people were willing to "trade off" some awareness if the technology helped keep people safe. In the qualitative research, some participants recognised that the police need to make decisions quickly and also that being transparent may make the process less effective, for example, if people avoided certain areas where they knew facial recognition was deployed.

> *"If the police are completely transparent with when and how they're using facial recognition technology, it might make it less effective…"*
>
> **Digitally excluded focus group**

> *"If you're going to use something like facial recognition I would rather it be like 100% accurate and without my knowledge… than 91% accurate and you're telling me."*
>
> **London, remote focus group**

> *"Yeah [I'd choose effectiveness]. Because again, using facial technology outside in public, you have no rights. So they can do what they want because there's no such thing as privacy in public."*
>
> **Non-London England, remote focus group**

Many respondents had concerns about data use associated with police use of FRT

Concerns about what happens to people's data were common across the survey and the focus groups. 56% of survey respondents selected *at least one* issue relating to the use or retention of personal information in their top three priorities for regulation.

- 29% selected 'rules on sharing facial data with third parties'
- 22% selected 'ensuring people know when and why their data is used'

[73] Survey question: "*If facial recognition technology is transparent, meaning people are made aware that their facial data is being processed (e.g. with visible signage), this may impact on its effectiveness, because people could cover their faces or avoid the area if they do not want their facial data to be processed. Please select the statement which you agree with most",* weighted base n=3,216

- 19% selected 'rules about how long people's facial data is stored for'[74]

In focus groups, the main concern expressed by participants was a lack of clarity and certainty about what pictures were being captured and stored by the police and how long these images were being stored. This concern appeared to stem primarily from a misunderstanding that the cameras would collect and store images of 'innocent people.' Participants raised questions about where these pictures go, who has access to them, and how long they would be retained in police systems.

> *"If you've not committed a crime or you're found not guilty… what do they do with the data? Now by law they're supposed to delete the data… I personally don't believe that happens."*
>
> **Scotland, remote focus group**

> *"Is that person going to be… on the police database for years or for life?"*
>
> **Northern Ireland group**

> *"Even pictures they're using that don't have a match are being used to improve the detection and the AI algorithm… people should still have the right to give their consent."*
>
> **Ex-offenders, focus group**

[74] Survey question: "*Please select, from the following options, the 3 things that you think are most important when it comes to regulation of the police using facial recognition technology*", weighted base n=3,216

Conclusion

Overall, public awareness of biometric technologies is high, with most people familiar with fingerprint, facial, and voice recognition. Many respondents already assume that facial recognition technology (FRT) specifically is being widely used by police, and a majority (63%) report feeling comfortable with police use of facial recognition technology.

When comparing these findings with previous research conducted by the Ada Lovelace Institute in 2019, there appears to be an increase in public awareness of biometric technologies, especially regarding facial and voice recognition. However, these comparisons should be interpreted with caution due to notable differences in question wording and research methodology. While general awareness has grown, comfort levels with some technologies show varying patterns, highlighting the evolving nature of public opinion as these technologies become more embedded in everyday life.

However, this general comfort is nuanced and context dependent. People express the greatest comfort with retrospective facial recognition technology (RFR), viewing it as an enhancement to existing uses of CCTV footage, rather than a novel new piece of technology. Comfort levels are somewhat lower for live facial recognition (LFR), particularly when deployed at protests or in public spaces without a specific reason to target that area. For operator-initiated facial recognition (OIFR), there were concerns about the responsibility placed on individual officers and the risk of 'bad apples'.

The key factors that influence public comfort with police use of FRT include the belief that society benefits from the technology, perceptions of accuracy, and holding positive views of the police. People who agree with these ideas are substantially more comfortable with its use. Conversely, concerns about civil liberties, privacy, bias, and lack of transparency correlate strongly with discomfort.

On the regulatory front, nearly half of respondents believe current regulation is appropriate, though a sizeable proportion remain neutral, suggesting limited awareness of existing regulatory frameworks. The vast majority (91%) believe that all police forces across the UK *should* follow the same rules regarding FRT use, though only 42% think this is *currently* happening.

While 70% said they thought the public should be informed about where or when LFR was being used, when asked to make a trade-off, the public prioritised effectiveness over transparency, with 61% preferring that FRT be effective even if the public isn't always made aware of its use. However, people do express concerns about data storage and sharing, with many wanting clear rules on how long images are kept and who has access to them.

When it comes to regulation, ensuring the accuracy of the technology emerges as the clear priority (53%), followed by proper training for police officers (35%) and ensuring the technology is unbiased (33%). There is also strong support for human oversight, with most respondents agreeing that matches should be manually reviewed by more than one officer.

While the public generally accepts police use of FRT, particularly for specific, high-priority uses such as locating missing people or identifying suspects after an incident, this acceptance is conditional on the technology being accurate, unbiased, and used in a responsible manner that respects privacy and data protection requirements. As biometric technologies continue to evolve and become more embedded in policing practices, these findings

highlight the importance of the ICO's role in maintaining public trust through appropriate safeguards, clear data protection guidance, and consistent regulatory oversight across the UK.