



STOP



**SURVEILLANCE TECHNOLOGY
OVERSIGHT PROJECT**

ANNUAL REPORT

2021

Letter from the Executive Director

Friends,

We know that 2021 was a dark and trying year for so many around the globe, but it was a year of perseverance and even growth here at S.T.O.P. **We pushed groundbreaking surveillance bans, published cutting-edge research on emerging technologies, and sued the NYPD and their worst vendors.** We even convened dozens of partners from across movements and geographies to design a privacy-protective vision for the city of the future.

As COVID-19 raged on, S.T.O.P. continued to fight against the growth of biased, invasive, and dystopian technologies. We stood up to the surveillance profiteers that sought to cash in on the pandemic, calling for evidence-based public health solutions instead of endless tracking. We rose to meet these unprecedented challenges as we've always done, bringing together coalitions, standing with directly-impacted communities, and calling for the future New Yorkers and humanity deserve.

Three years ago, I never imagined what this dream could grow into: An indispensable force for change at a uniquely precarious time. We don't just push back on the ways that surveillance fuels the worst abuses of mass incarceration, discrimination, and mass deportation. **We fight the threat that surveillance poses to democracy itself.**

We grew so quickly these past three years, our team larger, our budget higher. But the threat has become only more dire. This is not a campaign we can afford to lose. Because if we do, the surveillance society of the future, where we live under constant tracking and suspicion, in constant fear – that is a place where none of us would willingly live.

As the Supreme Court seeks to make our work ever harder, your help is ever more important.

We know we stand at the crossroads of the future. This is the time when technology tests the truth of who we are, the society we wish to have. For those of us who want a free, open, and untracked society, it means that we must fight harder than ever. The alternative is one that none of us can accept.

Thank you to the incredible staff, board members, interns, volunteers, pro-bono partners, and donors who make it possible for us to carry out our mission. I am humbled every day to see the incredible work our community does and the remarkable people we recruit. **And thank you in advance to every single person who joins us in the year ahead. We truly can't do it without you.**



With gratitude,
Albert Fox Cahn, Esq.
Executive Director

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Litigation

In 2021, S.T.O.P. forged brand new pathways in the fight against surveillance.

S.T.O.P. challenged surveillance vendors in the courts. We won in court against Thomson Reuters, in our lawsuit alleging the company illegally sold data on millions of people to private companies, police, and ICE. In August, a federal judge ruled that Thomson Reuters can't use the First Amendment as a defense for selling information to police and companies. **This decision opens the door to litigation against an entire industry of data brokers who turn information on every aspect of our lives into their product.**



We took on the NYPD – and we’re winning. The NYPD claims that its facial recognition software is not biased, but it has denied our requests for any data to prove this, claiming under oath the documents don't exist. S.T.O.P. challenged the NYPD's denial and we won our motion in December. The court granted our request for a hearing and rejected the NYPD's motion to dismiss, finding that the NYPD's claims were not credible. This victory will give us an unprecedented opportunity to cross-examine NYPD officials about facial recognition.

We pushed for greater oversight and accountability. Despite NYPD efforts to undermine the POST Act, we leveraged the law to **reveal more than \$500 million in secret NYPD surveillance contracts, previously hidden from the public.** This was the first successful effort to document the exponential growth in NYPD surveillance spending since 9/11.

We grew our legal team! S.T.O.P. launched our Defense Against Technology Abuse (D.A.T.A.) Law Fellowship for recent law graduates who want to fight back against governments' growing abuse of dystopian technologies. These one-year, full-time positions allow D.A.T.A. Fellows to not just stop the expansion of surveillance technology, but to help us build a better future for all. In 2021, we hosted our first D.A.T.A. Fellows: Evan Enzer and Nina Loshkajian.

Advocacy & Legislation

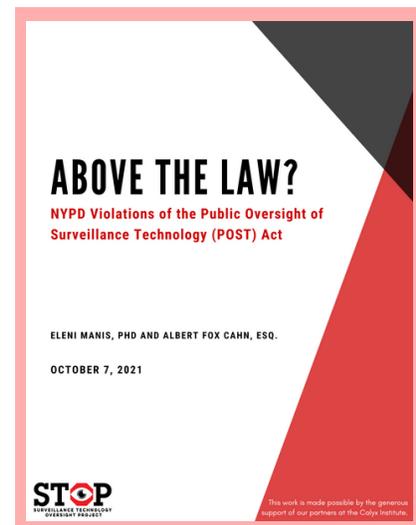
Through S.T.O.P.'s community-driven model, we partnered with activists and privacy watchdogs in New York and around the country to fight dangerous spy tools.

Building on our historic 2020 victories, S.T.O.P. and Amnesty International launched **"Ban the Scan"** – our campaign to outlaw facial recognition in New York – in January 2021. The campaign leverages Amnesty's history of human rights advocacy and S.T.O.P.'s deep ties to local communities: S.T.O.P. leads the New York campaign, including policy formation, advocacy, and education, while Amnesty amplifies our efforts as part of a five-city global initiative.



S.T.O.P. also continued to push for **our first-in-the-nation ban on "reverse" search warrants, which allow police to obtain location and keyword search data on thousands of people at a time.** After drafting our novel ban in 2020, we partnered with the ACLU to adapt it into a model bill to be adopted across the country. We also led an advocacy campaign that forced Google to disclose the number of geofence warrants it receives from police departments; their reports show that the number of these warrants are skyrocketing, from less than 1,000 in 2018 to nearly 12,000 in 2020.

Since passing the POST Act in 2020, S.T.O.P. has fought to ensure the NYPD complies with the law by disclosing every spy tool it uses – and how. After the NYPD posted its draft surveillance policies in January 2021, S.T.O.P. led a massive push for New Yorkers to submit public comments by the February deadline. **Nearly 10,000 public comments were submitted to the NYPD, detailing a multitude of errors, omissions, and false statements in the policies.** (Many New Yorkers also demanded that the NYPD ban these surveillance technologies outright, particularly facial recognition.) The NYPD released its revised policies in April, **which S.T.O.P. analyzed in-depth.** S.T.O.P. views the POST Act as an important step toward accountability, and ultimately as a tool to push the NYPD and city agencies for further transparency and reforms in the future.

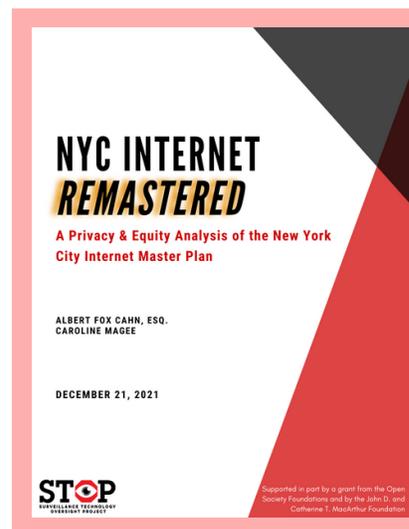
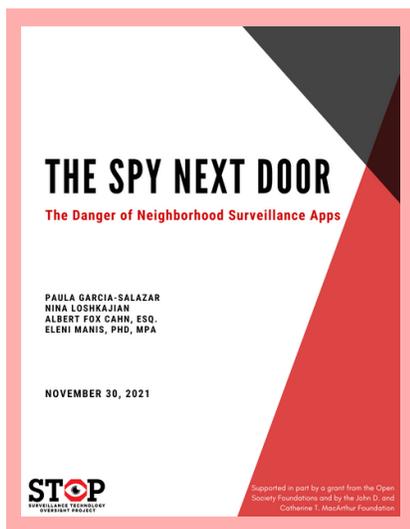
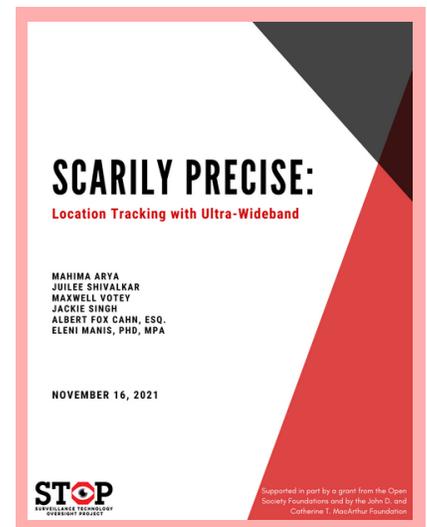
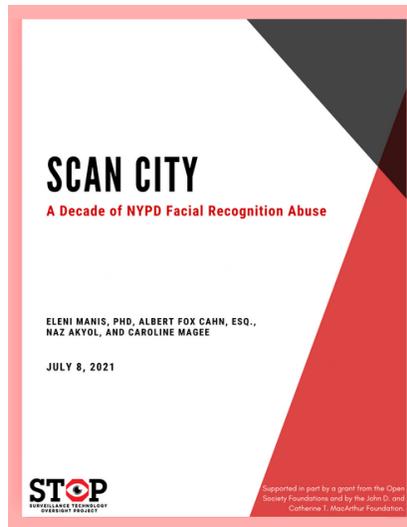
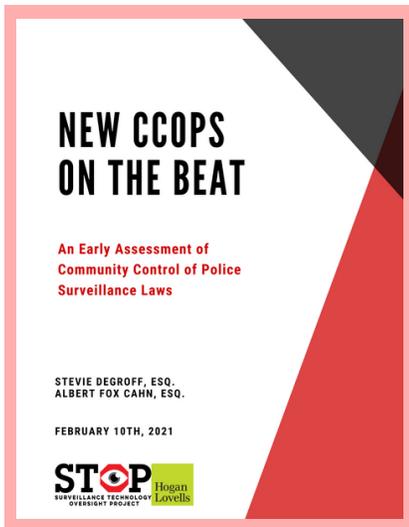


Research

S.T.O.P.'s research empowered the public to understand complex surveillance systems and regulations.

At S.T.O.P., we know that we can't achieve change unless we democratize the surveillance debate. Leveraging our position as a thought leader and dystopian storyteller, we brought much-needed attention to surveillance issues, demystified complex surveillance systems and their regulations, and countered dangerous narratives pushed by police, tech vendors, and the media.

Our 2021 research reports included:



Also in 2021, S.T.O.P. conducted our **first-ever surveillance census of New York City**, in which we sought to map out all the internet-enabled cameras operating in the five boroughs. While many manufacturers mask the location of internet-enabled surveillance devices, **we were able to map nearly 17,000 cameras manufactured by one vendor** – the controversial company Hikvision – alone. For every Hikvision camera we mapped, there are dozens, possibly hundreds of other camera systems whose location remains hidden. Each of these cameras also has the capacity to be paired with faulty facial recognition technology.

Communications

S.T.O.P. shaped the narrative on surveillance in the United States and abroad, emphasizing the harms of these technologies in local, national, and international outlets.

Beginning first with questions of efficacy, efficiency, and equity rather than the abstract notion of privacy, we show how surveillance technologies fail to accomplish their stated goals, how technological “solutions” create unintended consequences for impacted communities, and how even seemingly neutral technologies can amplify bias.

The New York Times

New York’s ‘Excelsior Pass’ could cost up to \$27 million.

The Washington Post

Federal agencies need stricter limits on facial recognition to protect privacy, says government watchdog

WIRED

The NYPD Had a Secret Fund for Surveillance Tools

Documents reveal that police bought facial-recognition software, vans equipped with x-ray machines, and “stingray” cell site simulators—with no public oversight.

VICE

NYPD’s Sprawling Facial Recognition System Now Has More Than 15,000 Cameras



Major utilities agree to stop sharing data with ICE

Other featured publications include:

DAILY BEAST



Vox



The Intercept

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.



The Guardian

Events and Education

Throughout 2021, S.T.O.P. convened communities impacted by surveillance to build coalitions, capacity, and shared knowledge.

In October, S.T.O.P. hosted [our first-ever “Just Cities” Symposium](#), a month-long series of convenings. The symposium brought together directly impacted community members, activists, government officials, technologists, academics, ethicists, and lawyers from cities across the country to develop a policy framework to govern the adoption of “smart” technology platforms in cities and towns across the United States. Together, we strategized how to advance equity in civic tech and opposing growing surveillance across the country.

We hosted additional convenings, partnering with Yale Law School to discuss one of the fastest growing facets of “smart” cities technology in the United States: remote proctoring technology. **We also partnered with local activists in London and New Delhi to host a panel on facial recognition**, examining how the technology is used and regulated in each city’s communities and the advocacy campaigns emerging in response.

S.T.O.P. took to the streets to raise awareness of cybersecurity threats through our “Think Quick, Don’t Click” initiative. We placed QR code-bearing flyers for bogus events, menus, and promotions around New York, taking visitors to pages warning of the risks of scanning the untrusted codes that have become popular since the pandemic.

Finally, S.T.O.P. expanded our community trainings on surveillance. We design custom privacy trainings driven by the needs of communities, partnering with trusted messengers to deliver the trainings around New York and the country. By moving away from a “one-size-fits-none” approach, we address the need for equity in privacy advocacy. **We hosted nearly 100 events reaching thousands of New Yorkers.**



Courtesy of Catie Wilkinson, Calyx Institute



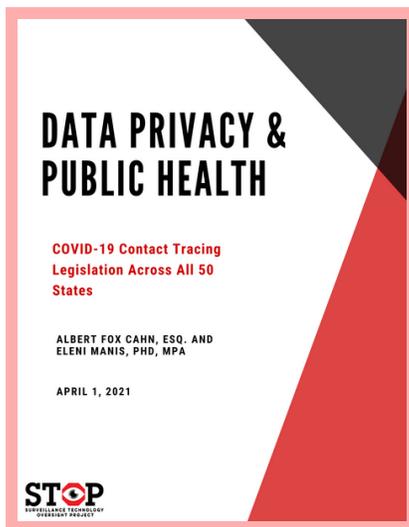
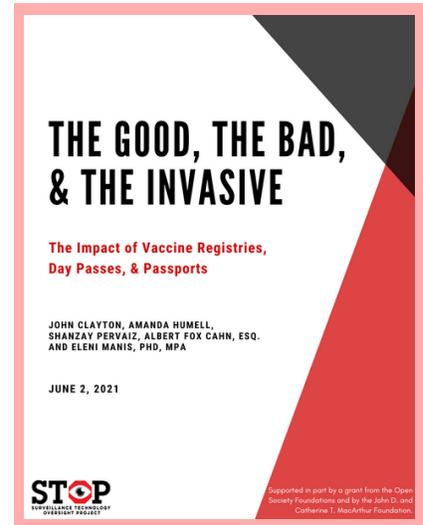
Courtesy of the GANGS Coalition

COVID-19 Response

In the second year of the pandemic, S.T.O.P. continued to highlight governments' surveillance-based alternatives to proven public health responses.

When the first life-saving COVID-19 vaccines became available, S.T.O.P. supported distribution efforts in New York and elsewhere. At the same time, we warned against investing critical funds into flashy "vaccine passport" apps that quickly became popular. Our open records request revealed the true cost of the Governor Cuomo's "Excelsior Pass" app totaled **\$27 million, more than 10 times the amount New Yorkers were told.**

We also highlighted the privacy concerns raised by these apps: they potentially track every place we check in to, and some – like New York City's "Covid Safe" app – even track users' IP addresses. We showed how these apps can create a false sense of security, demonstrating how the NYC app **accepted an image of Mickey Mouse** as vaccine verification.



Building on our own advocacy to enact privacy protections for contact tracing data, we published a **sweeping survey** of contact tracing data privacy laws across the country, looking at how both state and federal health privacy laws fail to protect data from being accessed by immigration and law enforcement. We found that **New York was the only state that had banned law enforcement from accessing contact tracing records**, while Kansas and South Carolina have protections in place for only limited types of data.

Other states have used executive and administrative orders to require participation in contact tracing, or even to relax privacy protections for personal health information. As communities continue to rely on contact tracing as one of the most valuable tools to combat the COVID-19 pandemic and countless other public health threats, work is urgently needed to protect this data from misuse and abuse – now and in future health crises.

As the pandemic evolves, S.T.O.P. continues to monitor emerging tech and the threats they pose. In particular, we're fighting the normalization of surveillance that has resulted from the widespread adoption of contact tracing apps, remote proctoring and worker surveillance software, and other tools – **ensuring that the privacy concessions made during the pandemic don't become the new normal.**

2021 Financials

S.T.O.P. Statement of Activity: January - December 2021

Revenue		Total
Direct Contributions	\$	96,159
Non-Government Grants	\$	817,790
Program Sales & Fees	\$	3,392
Investments Revenue	\$	48
Special Events	\$	1,950
Cash Revenue	\$	919,339
In-Kind Professional Services	\$	1,362,302
Total Revenue	\$	2,281,641
Expenses		
Salaries & Related Expenses	\$	439,509
Contract Service Expenses	\$	27,108
Non-Personnel Expenses	\$	16,503
Facility Expenses	\$	1,495
Travel & Conference Expenses	\$	355
Insurance - Non-employee Related	\$	13,987
Membership Dues - Organization	\$	400
Bank Fees	\$	135
Merchant Fees	\$	380
Advertising Expenses	\$	100
Business Taxes & Licensing Fees	\$	399
Cash Expenses	\$	500,372
In-Kind Professional Services	\$	1,362,302
Total Expenses	\$	1,862,673
Net Revenue	\$	418,967

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Foundations

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Brooklyn Community Foundation
FJC - A Foundation of Philanthropic Funds
MacArthur Foundation
The Morrison and Foerster Foundation
New Profit

New York Immigration Coalition
Open Society Foundations
Resist
Rise Together Fund, A Proteus Fund Initiative
Rose Foundation for Communities & the Environment

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Friends of the High Line
NYU School of Law
Urban Justice Center

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DuckDuckGo
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