

Biden Administration Envisages Using Private Firms to Spy on Americans Via their Online Social Media Activity

It's illegal for law enforcement to gather information under false pretenses and so using outside sources would be a way to infiltrate 'domestic extremists.'

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The Biden administration is reportedly interested in contracting with private firms to collect information on Americans supposedly involved with “extremist groups” in an apparent effort to circumvent legal limits on the government’s ability to spy on American citizens.

CNN [reported](#) that a “source familiar with” the U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s (DHS’s) efforts to monitor “domestic extremists” via their social media activity has discussed working with outside entities that could legally join private groups on platforms such as Facebook under false pretenses, then collect data on those groups and turn it over to DHS.

The government would analyze that data to assess “narratives” that it claims could lead to violence - i.e., political views, assertions, or theories declared beyond the pale by those currently in control of the executive branch. “What do you do about ideology that’s leading to violence? Do you have to wait until it leads to violence?” a former senior intelligence official said.

Such partnerships would effectively be an end-run around the legal prohibition against federal agents joining such groups under false pretenses for the purposes of intelligence-gathering, which critics suspect is a pretext to persecute the Biden administration’s political foes. Judicial precedent [allows](#) illegally-obtained evidence to be used in court only if it was obtained by a private citizen not acting as an agent of law enforcement.

DHS denied the report as “blatantly false” in a statement, insisting it is “not partnering with private firms to surveil suspected domestic terrorists online” and that its current activities are “done consistent with the Constitution and other applicable law, and in close coordination with our privacy and civil liberties experts.”

Despite that denial, one DHS official told CNN that the department is “exploring with our

lawyers, civil rights, civil liberties and privacy colleagues, how we can make use of outside expertise.”

“There’s a tension between wanting to empower (DHS’s intelligence office) to do this kind of work around domestic terrorism on the one hand and then on the other hand the misuse of its capabilities during the summer of 2020, gives a lot of people on the Hill pause (about) potentially giving them new authorities, capabilities or resources,” said an unidentified Senate aide, referring to the government’s violations of the privacy rights of journalists and innocent civilians over the course of its response to [left-wing riots in Portland, Oregon](#) last summer.

They spied on Donald Trump’s presidential campaign and skated by with no consequences... and now they want to spy on you too.

This is a chilling, terrible idea that should be roundly rejected.
<https://t.co/fD1GxLDjUQ>

— Mark Meadows (@MarkMeadows) [May 3, 2021](#)

Spying on Americans through proxies is still spying on Americans.
<https://t.co/3ylqzXG12g>

— Derek Hunter (@derekahunter) [May 3, 2021](#)

But at least there are no more mean tweets amirite <https://t.co/8jQic4MKC3>

— Dana Loesch (@DLoesch) [May 3, 2021](#)

Such drastic measures are predicated on claims that the [January 6 riot](#) at the U.S. Capitol was fueled in part by conservatives questioning the accuracy of the 2020 presidential election results. Despite dramatic rhetoric that the riot constituted an “insurrection,” most of the individuals arrested for their participation [have only been charged](#) with non-violent misdemeanors such as trespassing.

Nevertheless, many on the “Left” have cited the riot as a justification for further restrictions of conservative speech on social media and stigmatization of political positions the establishment deems beyond the pale.

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