



PRESS RELEASE

November 20, 2025
For Immediate Release

PCLOB RELEASES REPORT ON FBI'S USE OF OPEN SOURCE INFORMATION

WASHINGTON, DC – The Privacy and Civil Liberties Oversight Board (PCLOB) today released the first comprehensive government report of the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) use of open source information in support of its counterterrorism efforts.

As the staff report explains, open source information includes both information freely accessible to the public and information available for sale from a commercial entity. The FBI often relies on such information—which is found in public records, news reporting, public social media, commercial databases, and other similarly accessible forums—in early stages of counterterrorism investigations.

PCLOB's report confirms that the FBI does not purchase continuous or "real time" location data from any phone, internet, or electronic service provider. The report also finds that the FBI includes additional safeguards specific to the use of three tools capable of analyzing sensitive data such as facial imagery and public social media posts. The report describes the specific tools employed by the FBI, and the policies and privacy protections governing the use of those open source tools.

The report explains that because open source information is publicly available, it is among the least intrusive means of investigation for counterterrorism and other potential crimes or threats. Nevertheless, the collection and use of open source information may pose risks to privacy and civil liberties, especially when aggregated with other information that may reveal sensitive personal data.

PCLOB found the FBI takes steps to mitigate these risks by including privacy and civil liberties protections in all phases of its use of open source information. The report concludes that the FBI will need to continually evaluate the privacy and civil liberties impacts of new tools and datasets as access to aggregated open source information continues to evolve.

"I congratulate our professional staff on the completion of the review of the FBI's use of open source information," Board Member Beth Williams said. "As this project extended over eight years, I thank all current and former staff members who contributed to it, and I also thank the FBI, and especially its privacy and civil liberties leadership, for their cooperation and assistance with PCLOB's requests for information over many years."

PCLOB's full report containing law enforcement sensitive information has been shared with the White House, Executive Branch agencies including the FBI, and Congress. PCLOB has published an abbreviated, unclassified version of the report on its website.

For further information, please contact Director of Legislative and Public Affairs Alan Silverleib at info@pclob.gov or pao@pclob.gov.

###

The Privacy and Civil Liberties Oversight Board is an independent agency within the Executive Branch established by the Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007. The Board's mission is to ensure that the federal government's efforts to prevent terrorism are balanced with the need to protect privacy and civil liberties.