

Thomson Reuters actively helping Trump administration target immigrants

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Thomson Reuters—the Toronto, Canada-based parent company of the Reuters news agency—has been actively helping the Trump administration target immigrants for arrest, detention and deportation.

The company's contracts with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), which amount to over \$70 million, have been public knowledge for a few years. However, the nature of its extensive involvement in aiding the implementation of President Donald Trump's anti-immigrant policies has only been recently exposed.

Far from just being a passive data broker, Thomson Reuters Special Services plays a critical role in helping ICE process information that could lead to arrests, detention and deportation.

Documents obtained by immigrant rights groups including Mijente, #NoTechForICE and Documented reveal that the support provided by the company goes beyond what has been associated with other big tech firms. It includes not just “automation” but a network of “trained analysts” who process the data internally before supplying information to ICE.

The extensive involvement has been exposed in the solicitation documents for the latest \$4 million contract between Thomson Reuters Special Services and the Department of Homeland Security. The contract stipulates that the company provide assistance to ICE's Targeting Operations Division by building a “continuous monitoring and alert system” that gathers credit history, property information, employer records, real-time jail bookings, phone numbers, addresses, etc. to facilitate and refine tracking and arrests of immigrants.

Specifically, the company has been contracted to develop a “multi-tiered internal vetting system,” where ICE data is “analyzed internally by both automation

and trained analysts” to “provide the best leads possible and to reduce the number of false positives forwarded to the [Targeting Operations Division].”

Thomson Reuters also provides “risk mitigation services,” purportedly aimed at helping ICE track threats against their agents. In fact, these services have been generally used to target immigrant rights groups and others who protest against ICE's activities.

The company's reputation as an ICE contractor has been well known for a few years. This past February, immigrant rights groups organized a protest, which attracted several hundred people, against Thomson Reuters at its New York City corporate office in Times Square. However, at that point, it was believed that the involvement of the company was restricted to the provision of its CLEAR software. The software automatically collects data from multiple public and private databases around the country, including personal information gathered through utility bills, phone records, social media posts, property records, criminal records, healthcare data and other sources.

While the federal government is legally prohibited from collecting certain kinds of data, these laws do not apply to private corporations like Thomson Reuters. Therefore, through the use of so-called “mission critical” contracts, ICE has been circumventing legal barriers by buying information from big tech companies.

The *New York Times Magazine* documented the manner in which ICE has been using CLEAR data to terrorize entire immigrant communities. In Washington state, for instance, hundreds of immigrants have been “disappeared” over recent months, in ICE operations that have instilled immense fear across communities. People have been arrested standing outside their homes or going for a walk, or have been actively entrapped by

agents. In one case, a woman was arrested outside a bank after communicating via Facebook with a person she had assumed was a buyer for her piñata, but was most likely an ICE agent.

The “help” provided by Thomson Reuters, however, goes beyond merely supplying the software used by ICE to carry out its anti-immigrant mandate. The level of custom support it provides is novel in terms of the relationship between contractors and government agencies, and thus even more troubling. Sarah Lamdan, a Law Professor at the City University of New York (CUNY) and a member of Researchers Against Surveillance, told Documented that while companies viewed data as “extremely valuable capital,” they tended to stockpile and sell it, but “Thomson Reuters seems to be helping the customer past the point of sale.”

The reason for this above-and-beyond support may be clearer if one pays attention to the revolving door between Thomson Reuters and the Trump administration. Stephen Rubley, CEO of Thomson Reuters Special Services, served on the board of the ICE Foundation, a nonprofit that “supports the men and women of ICE,” as of 2018. James Dinkins, the president of the company, was previously “responsible for establishing” Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), an investigative arm of ICE, where he served as executive associate director from 2010-2014. Prior to that, he had served as the Special Agent in charge of Baltimore from 2006-2008, and Washington D.C. from 2008-2010.

As the news about Thomson Reuters extensive involvement with ICE became public, a Canadian shareholder, the British Columbia Government and Service Employees’ Union (BCGEU), filed a shareholder proposal for the company’s upcoming annual general meeting calling for the board to produce a human rights risk report. The proposal pointed out that Thomson Reuters “has no formal commitment to remedy adverse impacts of human rights abuses by its customers” and called for more information “to gauge whether Thomson Reuters is addressing this serious risk.”

The reaction of the ruling class to any appeal based on the possibility of reforming the system can be gauged in the Thomson Board of Directors’ response to this modest proposal. Rejecting it outright, the Board

wrote that a human rights risk report is “not in the best interest of Thomson Reuters or its shareholders,” and that the company’s “current policies and practices appropriately and adequately reflect Thomson Reuters’ commitment to respecting human rights.”

The callousness of this statement is only matched by the blatant disregard for the facts on the ground. In any scenario, the role of big technology corporations in helping government agencies circumvent the minimal legal protections available to immigrants can only be regarded as the shameful and inhumane product of a capitalist system in which every aspect of human life is commodified and mined for profit. In the context of the ongoing pandemic, when overcrowded ICE detention facilities have become breeding grounds for the coronavirus, any support for the war against immigrants is nothing short of criminal.



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