

DNA algorithms can help convict criminals, but 'trade secret' status blocks independent verification

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In pop culture, DNA is often portrayed as a magical piece of evidence that links perpetrators to crimes and exonerates the innocent. But deciphering it is usually much messier in real life, especially in cases that involve samples of more than one person's DNA. Over the last decade or so, forensic scientists have come to realize that traditional methods for interpreting these "mixed samples" are often less reliable than previously thought.

Now, Pittsburgh company called [Cybergenetics](#) and a handful of other companies are selling a solution: software that claims to interpret mixed DNA with a high degree of accuracy. These companies point to [several peer-reviewed studies that](#) describe the underlying mathematical concepts of their programs, as well as results of mock testing in which they correctly interpreted known samples.

But here's the problem, according to some attorneys and geneticists: These companies claim that the details of how the computer programs carry out their calculations, spelled out in their source codes, are trade secrets. So there's no way to independently verify that the programs are pinning the real criminal, critics say.

Apart from how well the software works, privacy advocates say it exemplifies an even bigger problem: the growing and often unchecked influence of secret algorithms on society, from Facebook's News Feed experiment on users' emotions to the 11 million Volkswagen cars programmed to cheat emissions tests.

Read full, original post: [People Are Going To Prison Thanks To DNA Software – But How It Works Is Secret](#)