

Research examines global security and surveillance technologies

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As governments around the world scramble to better respond to security threats, they are increasingly monitoring everyday things used to commit crime, like cell phones and automobiles. This novel approach to fighting crime forms the backdrop of recent research published by Keith Guzik, a sociologist at the University of Colorado Denver.

In his new book "Making Things Stick: Surveillance Technologies and Mexico's War on Crime" Guzik examines Mexico, one of a number of countries around the globe beset by criminal networks, in order to understand how surveillance technologies impact security policy around the world.

Using documents, survey data and interviews with government officials and Mexican citizens, Guzik followed a trio of federal programs featuring cutting-edge information systems designed to fight [crime](#). These included a national cell phone registry devised to help authorities respond to kidnappings and extortion calls; a national identity card featuring biometric data to protect people from identity theft and fraud; and a national automobile registry with radio-frequency identification (RFID) tags to fight car thefts, kidnappings, and drug trafficking.

Guzik found that government plans to fight crime through advanced surveillance and information technologies often stumble.

"My research showed that these security programs in Mexico faltered because people saw measures like having to register their mobile

numbers with the government as invasive and therefore refused to comply. Companies also balked at the financial costs associated with having to store caller data or applying RFID stickers onto new vehicles," Guzik said. "In other cases, the technical design of the programs and technologies often proved inadequate."

The programs also failed after push back from politicians and state governments themselves, who saw the federally implemented measures as a threat to their own power and independence.

While all of this should be cause for alarm for governments trying to deal with [security threats](#) through advanced technologies, Guzik believes they also illustrate the need for more traditional approaches to crime-fighting based on mutual trust and cooperation between authorities and the people they govern.

"The failed experiment of the Mexican security programs demonstrates that state surveillance technologies yield neither the secure utopia nor the police state dystopia promised by their supporters and opponents," Guzik said. "The inherent uncertainty of technology-based state surveillance programs ensures that civic involvement in the work of crime control will remain critical to the shape of [security](#) governance in the future."

More information: "Making Things Stick" is available through the University of California Press's new open access publishing program: [www.luminosoa.org/site/books/d ... making-things-stick/](http://www.luminosoa.org/site/books/d...making-things-stick/)

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