

Report: Mexican activists suffer spyware hack attempt

February 12 2017

An internet watchdog group said Saturday that a spyware hacking attempt targeted activists who campaigned against soft drinks and junk foods, and purportedly used Israeli-produced software sold to governments.

The Citizen Lab based at the University of Toronto's Munk School of Global Affairs said the attack targeted public health advocates Alejandro Calvillo and Luis Encarnacion, and public health researcher Simon Barquera.

Mexico passed a soda tax several years ago and Calvillo has campaigned for sugar warnings on food products.

The report implicated software produced by Israel's NSO Group. The Pegasus spyware gives hackers free reign to eavesdrop on calls, harvest messages, activate cameras and drain a phone's trove of personal data.

The report said "NSO's government surveillance tool may have been misused on behalf of special commercial interests, not for fighting crime or terrorism."

NSO said Saturday its programs are intended only "for the investigation and prevention of criminal activities and terrorism" and doubted its products were involved.

Calvillo said he suspected the Mexican government or the soft drink and

snacks industry.

"Whether the industry did it or the government did it, we don't know," said Calvillo, who was a leading force behind a special per-liter tax on sugary [soft drinks](#) established in 2014.

Calvillo said the hacking attempt arrived in the form of a message from an unknown number last year, and contained a link to a purported news story.

Calvillo said it was both a hacking attempt and a threat: when he clicked on the link, it led him to a page for a funeral home chain.

Mexico has some of the world's highest obesity, diabetes and soda-consumption rates.

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Citation: Report: Mexican activists suffer spyware hack attempt (2017, February 12) retrieved 29 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2017-02-mexican-activists-spyware-hack.html>

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