

# In an Internet vacuum, private securities companies prosper in the 'new wild west'

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A "quiet" revolution in unregulated areas of the internet has led to the emergence of a new private security industry, according to latest research from the University of Portsmouth.

Often described as the "new wild west", criminals see new opportunities online, with this latest study showing how individuals and organisations are now taking the law into their own hands in order to protect themselves.

The study, published in the *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice* investigated the impact of changing technologies and found these [private companies](#) operated where government had failed to regulate, often leading to other forms of private policing—largely rooted in volunteerism and vigilantism.

Professor Mark Button, Director and founder of the Centre for Counter Fraud Studies at the Institute of Criminal Justice Studies, University of Portsmouth, describes this phenomena as a, "second quiet revolution" that has caused the emergence of a new security industry and urges policy makers to respond quickly to regulate it.

He warns "It is time for researchers to start better understanding these new forms of private policing. And where the evidence supports it, develop new policy ideas for the better regulation of these growing increasingly important activities. Technology is moving quickly and policing needs to keep up with it."

The way most people shop, play, bank and date is very different to 20 years ago—as is the way many organisations offer services. This shift has also meant a change in crime patterns. The Crime Survey for England and Wales showed that fraud and computer misuse related offenses doubled from 5.8 million in June 2017 to 10.7 million in September 2018.

The growth in internet crime is perhaps unsurprising, especially when the rapid rise in internet usage is taken into account. In 2006, the number of adults using the internet Great Britain was 36 per cent. By 2018 the number had risen to 86 per cent.

Many organisations have sought to protect themselves from the growing problem of cybercrime by purchasing services and creating new roles in their structures.

Professor Button explains, "the needs of organisations and individuals to deal with the growing cybersecurity problems has spawned a wide range of new companies to offer such services as well as some traditional security companies moving into this area."

This is a new and expanding sector is very dynamic, responding as technology evolves and threats change. The size of this sector is growing fast globally. In 2017, "Markets and Markets" estimated the global cyber security market was worth US\$137.85 billion. It is predicted to grow to US\$231.94 billion in 2022.

Technological changes have also fuelled new opportunities for people to voluntarily participate in policing. The internet creates a space for individuals who have the time and skill to carry out their own desk based investigations.

There are some positive examples where criminals have been brought to justice by members of the public. However, more controversially this has facilitated a new form of vigilantism, perhaps the most contentious form of [internet](#) vigilantism that has emerged is the so-called "paedophile hunters", which can lead to instant justice and harmful outcomes.

Professor Button makes several suggestions for researchers and policy makers to help fill the gap:

- To map the activities and extent of the new private security and private policing
- To identify areas of concern which regulatory and other governance responses, with particular reference to new roles that may require licensing
- To explore the adequacy of existing regulatory and governance structures to undertake such functions where necessary

- To identify new models of regulation and governance where existing structures are not deemed appropriate

The study concluded that a priority for policy-makers must be more depth and focused consideration of these new activities to assess if current regulatory and governance mechanisms work and whether new structures should be created to deal with them.

**More information:** Mark Button, The "New" Private Security Industry, the Private Policing of Cyberspace and the Regulatory Questions, *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice* (2019). [DOI: 10.1177/1043986219890194](https://doi.org/10.1177/1043986219890194)

Provided by University of Portsmouth

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