Mass Surveillance, Democracy, and the Open Internet in Latin America

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My desire to pursue a Tinker Research Fellowship stemmed from my desire to conduct a multi-sited ethnographic study to learn more about the social and ethical implications of mass surveillance abuses, democracy, social movements, and the open internet and social good. This fellowship allowed me to conduct a study on research topics I'm passionate about, advance my training, and explore further how I might incorporate some key concepts and values regarding democracy and technology policy in my practice and research. Most of my time centered on interviewing persons working at the intersection of technology policy and science and technology studies to understand better the societal and cultural implications of life under surveillance. I also conducted in-depth interviews with open internet and democracy advocates. While my scope was broad, I also focused on specific questions regarding the increased use of mass surveillance technologies among marginalized communities in Latin America.

There has been a significant increase in the use of mass surveillance technologies in Latin America, including the abuse of surveillance technologies by Latin American Governments (*Latin American Governments Must Commit to Surveillance Transparency | Electronic Frontier Foundation*, n.d.). When surveillance technologies are utilized without maximizing the social good for constituents, problems can occur, and threats to democracy and the open internet can increase (Gimmler, 2001; Lu & Luo, 2020). With funding via the Tinker Research Fellowship, I researched the following topics: democracy and the open internet, mass surveillance in marginalized communities, and data privacy and transparency. There is a strong need for judges, politicians, government officials, activists, advocates, volunteers, and community organizers to work together to

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ensure they are properly advocating for the rights of their people (Fuchs, 2021; Jasso López & Jasso González, 2021; Kosta, 2022; Muñoz et al., 2019; Topak, 2019; Zhuravskaya et al., 2020).

Questions I examined included the following: What are the lived experiences of life under mass surveillance on marginalized persons in Latin America? How is the discourse on mass surveillance understood by judges, activists, policy officials, technology developers, and lawyers in Latin America? How is the discourse on mass surveillance, democracy, and open internet understood by NGO staff concerned with social justice and the accuracy of advanced surveillance technologies such as facial recognition? How is race understood by scientists that develop genetic surveillance technologies? Overall, I aimed to understand better how these emerging mass surveillance technologies are understood by the organizations and companies that research and create them. I also sought to understand better how these emerging mass surveillance technologies are understood by the various racial and ethnic groups disproportionately affected by them and the legal and science professionals and representatives that advocate against the abusive use of technology that exacerbates inequalities.

During my time, I conducted semi-structured interviews and ethnographic fieldwork with persons working at the intersection of data and democracy, open internet, and technology policy in Latin America. I found my time filled with discussions regarding the role of race and ethnicity in technological innovation and policy. It's fascinating that technology is now being used to create opportunities to enact social good, but unfortunately, much of the use of technology has been abused. The main focus of my discussions, interviews, and observations centered on the evolving discourse around the topics of democracy and open internet, mass surveillance in marginalized communities, and data privacy and transparency.

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This opportunity allowed me to combine my academic and research interests in the social, ethical, and moral implications of various science and technology topics. This fascinating opportunity allowed me to use my skillset in science and technology studies, bioethics, ethics, sociocultural analysis, humanities, and the social sciences to learn more about mass surveillance, democracy, and the open internet. I look forward to expanding upon this work. In addition, I hope to continue collaborating with academic, policy, and research teams to learn more about the ethical and social dimensions of pertinent questions centered on the ethics of scientific and technological advancements.

# Bibliography

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