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Big Brother Is Watching... So What Do We Do?

An interview with **Ron Deibert**, Founder and Director, Citizen Lab
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In the early days when I started getting interested in the relationship between the internet and world politics and global security issues, there was a lot of enthusiasm about the technology. People thought that it would empower social movements and bring about a flourishing democracy.

But what we've been tracking, and what's become really apparent now is that the tables are turning. The technology is actually helping facilitate authoritarian practices. So it's a pretty troubling picture. You're trying to raise awareness, indeed almost alarm people and say, "Look, this is a crisis. We need to do something about this."

What is the aim of your work?

These actors are using these powerful technologies to infiltrate what they see as the most important threats — which tend to be journalists, human rights activists, lawyers, refugees living abroad who think they're in some kind of safe haven because they've escaped the country that they're in — but the digital technologies allow these autocrats to effectively get inside their devices and monitor everything that they're doing, often with lethal consequences.



If we're ever going to solve problems that afflict the planet as a whole, we need to have a robust, open, secure communication system that respects rights and through which people can debate and share ideas. What we've created, though, unintentionally I think, is totally counterproductive to those aims. And so we need to raise awareness about the problems that are going on, and then think about how we're going to remedy this, and that's a big, big challenge.