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## Privacy Rights Activism in Latin America

Posted By [Katitza Rodriguez](#) On 27 September 2012 @ 9:09 pm In [Activism, Advocacy, Latin America, Privacy, Surveillance](#) | [No Comments](#)



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*This article has been co-written with [Renata Avila-Pinto](#) [2].*

Throughout Latin America, new surveillance practices threaten to erode individuals' privacy, yet there is limited public awareness about the civil liberties implications of these rapid changes. Some countries are pursuing [cybercrime](#) [3] policies that seek to increase law enforcement power without strong legal safeguards. In other nations, [government-run biometric identification systems](#) [4] are on the rise, while certain governments are [even turning to drones](#) [5] to aid in their surveillance activities. A [culture of secrecy](#) [6] surrounds these surveillance practices, and citizens remain largely unaware of what types of information are being collected and how it is being used against them.

For Latin American privacy advocates, all of this makes for an uphill battle. There are relatively few NGOs working in the region specifically on privacy and surveillance, and the lack of specialization is further complicated by a pervasive societal attitude that security trumps privacy. Despite the inherent difficulties, the fledgling privacy movement has been working tirelessly to shed light on overarching surveillance practices and to preserve civil liberties in the face of these changes. Social media and blogs have made a huge impact in activism work in several countries throughout the region.

Below, we present a quick snapshot of some privacy groups, academic institutions, and dedicated individuals working in the field.

### Advocacy by specialized NGOs

Let's begin with [Via Libre Foundation](#) [7]. An Argentinian digital rights advocacy group founded in 2000, Via Libre has advocated against mandatory biometric identification systems and data retention mandates. Via Libre has challenged Argentina's "electronic crime" bill, fighting draconian provisions to limit coders rights. Via Libre [has also trained](#) [8] activists and journalists on secure communications, such as mastering the use of encryption and anonymity tools.

In Brazil, [Movimiento Mega Nao](#) [9] is a grassroots movement responding to threats to Internet rights. Mega Nao recently fought an invasive cybercrime bill by advocating a civil rights framework for the Internet that includes safeguards for free expression and privacy. The Brazilian Institute of Consumer Protection (IDEC) [has also launched](#) [10] a similar campaign. [IDEC](#) [11], which was founded in 1987, specializes in consumer privacy and other Internet-related issues. Another important Brazilian NGO, Instituto NUPEF, educates

policymakers and civil society on Internet rights, including privacy. [NUPEF](#) <sup>[12]</sup> also publishes a specialized [Internet policy magazine](#) <sup>[13]</sup>.

In Chile, the NGO Derechos Digitales has, since 2005, worked to promote [human rights](#) <sup>[14]</sup> in the digital environment and [advocate](#) <sup>[15]</sup> for more balanced copyright laws. On the privacy front, [Derechos Digitales](#) <sup>[16]</sup> has defended [bloggers](#) <sup>[17]</sup> and [small Internet companies](#) <sup>[18]</sup> from warrantless demands for private user information. Relatively new NGOs, such as [ONG Meta](#) <sup>[19]</sup>, [Internet users Association](#) <sup>[20]</sup> (Ecuador) and Fundación Proceso (Venezuela), are also working on privacy in the region.

In Latin America, the [Association for Progressive Communication's activities](#) <sup>[21]</sup> include research, policy analysis, and capacity building in the area of human rights on the Internet. APC has developed an [Internet rights charter](#) <sup>[22]</sup> to guide Internet policy development. In 2011, APC compiled stories on [human rights abuses](#) <sup>[23]</sup> in the region, which it published in its annual project [Global Information Society Watch](#) <sup>[24]</sup> (GISWatch). Since 2008, APC, NUPEF and others have been organizing [an annual regional preparatory meeting](#) <sup>[25]</sup> for the United Nations Internet Governance Forum (IGF).

There are also longstanding human rights NGOs who are beginning to focus more on Internet policy (including privacy). For instance: civil rights advocates Asociación por los Derechos Civiles (ADC, or Civil Rights Association in English) in Argentina, has now begun turning its attention to Internet freedom. This group of Argentinean lawyers works on defending free expression and access to information at the national level and within Inter American Human Rights System. [Instituto Prensa y Sociedad \(IPYS\)](#) <sup>[26]</sup>, an NGO working on investigative journalism, freedom of expression, and access to public information in Latin America, has long been [fighting government](#) <sup>[27]</sup> [surveillance](#) <sup>[28]</sup> and protecting journalists' free expression rights. Like IPYS, [Asociación Pro Derechos Humanos](#) <sup>[29]</sup> (Aprodeh) has challenged illegal government surveillance in Peru during the Presidency of Alberto Fujimori. Fujimori has since been jailed for human rights violations after being tried for violating the secrecy of communication and other human rights abuses during his Presidency. It marked the first time a democratically elected former president was prosecuted at home for serious human rights violations, including the violation of privacy.

In 2007, [ARTICLE 19](#) <sup>[30]</sup> regionalized, moving from a single office to a growing number of regional offices supported by an international office in London. Article 19 in Latin American does litigation in precedent-setting cases defending free speech, and makes recommendations for improvement of draft laws. The organization has also called attention to the civil liberties implications of [cybercrime proposals](#) <sup>[31]</sup> under discussion in the region. In Venezuela, a human rights organization called [Espacio Publico](#) <sup>[32]</sup> is working to protect freedom of expression and access to information, while also offering trainings in privacy and security.

### **Academia**

Brazil is one of the most advanced countries in the region working on Internet policy research, and the [Center for Technology and Society](#) <sup>[33]</sup> at Getulio Vargas Foundation remains one of the most important groups exploring Internet policy, including privacy and surveillance. The [Research Group on Public Policies for Access to Information of the University of São Paulo](#) <sup>[34]</sup> has also published good analysis on [privacy and surveillance](#) <sup>[35]</sup> policies. The [Center for Studies on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information](#) <sup>[36]</sup> (CELE) in Argentina has also pioneered research on freedom of expression and privacy issues.

### **Voices in new territories**

There is also a group of dedicated individuals, academics and bloggers with technical and legal backgrounds in the region who've dedicated time and effort to exploring the topics

and increasing awareness on Internet policy.

Individuals with expertise in this area include Victor Chapela, [Jose Luis Fernando Garcia](#) [37], Helios Mier and Cristos Velasco in Mexico; Oscar Montezuma, [Miguel Morachimo](#) [38], and [Marco Sifuentes](#) [39] in Peru; [Andres Guadamuz](#) [40] in Costa Rica; [Carolina Botero](#) [41], [Nelson Remolina](#) [42] in [Colombia](#) [43], [Renato Jijena](#) [44] in Chile; [Pablo Palazzi](#) [45] in Argentina; Pablo, Renato, Nelson and Danilo Doneda (Brazil) co-directed La [Revista Latinoamerica de Proteccion de Datos Personales](#) [46] (Latin American Magazine on Personal Data Protection). Carolina Flores, based in Costa Rica, published a guide to protect the privacy and security of human rights activists and discusses related issues [on her blog](#) [47]. Cedric Laurant, while based in Colombia, published [The Privacy Guide for Spanish Speakers](#) [48].

There are also several hacker spaces in Latin America such as [Hacklab Autonomo](#) [49] in Mexico DF or [Escuela Lab in Peru](#) [50]. There is also a strong free software community that gets the word out via the [Free Software Foundation in Latin America](#) [51] when privacy threats arise.

[Global Voices Advocacy](#) [52] also reports regularly about privacy topics in Latin America, both in regular articles and in its [Latin American Netizen report](#) [53].

## Conclusion

Privacy activism in Latin America is on the rise, and several countries still lack strong civil society groups working in this area. In Central America and the Caribbean, online privacy and surveillance remain largely unexplored topics, disconnected from the larger human rights agenda. Human rights NGOs in the region tend to prioritize traditional human rights causes such as health, education, citizen security and ongoing battles surrounding forced disappearances and torture. While privately funded organizations work passionately on privacy-related topics, privacy is not their sole priority. Unpaid volunteers are driving much of this activism, and the organizations struggle with limited resources.

Despite these challenges and limited coverage of their efforts in the mainstream media, support for their campaigns has continued to grow. EFF will continue to work alongside civil society groups in Latin America, and to help their efforts by sharing knowledge on core Internet rights issues with policymakers throughout the region.

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[3] cybercrime: <http://www.article19.org/resources.php/resource/3432/en/brazil:-draft-computer-crime-bill>

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