

Researchers: AI surveillance is expanding worldwide

17 September 2019, by Matt O'brien



In this Feb. 26, 2019, file photo commuters walk by surveillance cameras installed at a walkway in between two subway stations in Beijing. The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace released a report Tuesday, Sept. 17, that found at least 75 countries are actively using AI tools such as facial recognition for surveillance. The new report says a growing number of countries are following China's lead in deploying artificial intelligence to track citizens. (AP Photo/Andy Wong, File)

A growing number of countries are following China's lead in deploying artificial intelligence to track citizens, according to a research group's report published Tuesday.

The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace says at least 75 countries are actively using AI tools such as facial recognition for surveillance.

The index of countries where some form of AI surveillance is used includes liberal democracies such as the United States and France as well as more autocratic regimes.

Relying on a survey of public records and media reports, the report says Chinese tech companies

led by Huawei and Hikvision are supplying much of the AI surveillance technology to countries around the world. Other companies such as Japan's NEC and U.S.-based IBM, Palantir and Cisco are also major international providers of AI surveillance tools.

Hikvision declined comment Tuesday. The other companies mentioned in the report didn't immediately return requests for comment.

The report encompasses a broad range of AI tools that have some public safety component. The group's index doesn't distinguish between legitimate public safety tools and unlawful or harmful uses such as spying on political opponents.

"I hope citizens will ask tougher questions about how this type of technology is used and what type of impacts it will have," said the report's author, Steven Feldstein, a Carnegie Endowment fellow and associate professor at Boise State University.

Many of the projects cited in Feldstein's report are "smart city" systems in which a municipal government installs an array of sensors, cameras and other internet-connected devices to gather information and communicate with one another. Huawei is a lead provider of such platforms, which can be used to manage traffic or save energy, but which are increasingly also used for public surveillance and security, Feldstein said.

Feldstein said he was surprised by how many democratic governments in Europe and elsewhere are racing ahead to install AI surveillance such as facial recognition, automated border controls and algorithmic tools to predict when crimes might occur. The index shows that just over half of the world's advanced democracies deploy AI surveillance systems either at the national or local level.

"I thought it would be most centered in the Gulf

States or countries in China's orbit," Feldstein said.

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APA citation: Researchers: AI surveillance is expanding worldwide (2019, September 17) retrieved 14 November 2019 from <https://techxplore.com/news/2019-09-group-ai-surveillance-worldwide.html>

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