

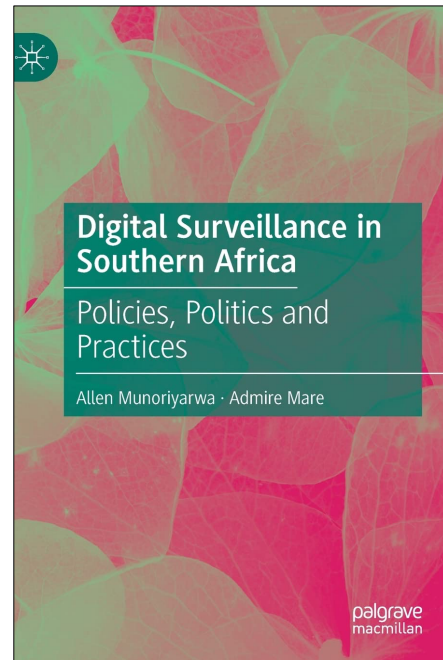
Allen Munoriyarwa and Admire Mare, **Digital Surveillance in Southern Africa: Policies, Politics and Practices**, Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022, 233 pp., \$129.99 (hardcover), \$129.99 (softcover).

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Digital surveillance that targets journalists, human rights workers, human rights lawyers, politicians, and dissidents has rightfully developed into a global concern. Bahrain, China, Egypt, Russia, and Saudi Arabia are among many known users of spyware, a form of malware that surreptitiously gathers information on unsuspecting users, but these countries are not the only ones. In ***Digital Surveillance in Southern Africa: Policies, Politics and Practices***, authors Allen Munoriyarwa and Admire Mare remind us that Southern Africa—though often overlooked in surveillance scholarship—has not only secured extensive surveillance technologies but is widely practicing digital surveillance and frequently through legally dubious ways.

In this astonishing contribution, Munoriyarwa and Mare uncover, map, and analyze emerging digital surveillance practices across the region, particularly Botswana, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Namibia, Eswatini, Lesotho, and Mozambique. They adumbrate the often-anti-democratic regulations and legislations governing surveillance practices while also providing much-needed political economy context for the emanation of these laws. *Digital Surveillance in Southern Africa* adds to a steadily expanding literature on human rights and surveillance at a critical moment. Munoriyarwa and Mare conducted their study following Edward Snowden’s 2013 exposure of worldwide mass surveillance programs by the United States and its allies. This moment set ablaze urgent and pressing inquiries on protecting the rights of individuals and democratic freedoms at a moment primed for unmatched mass digital surveillance. The COVID-19 pandemic served as the second catalyst. *Digital Surveillance in Southern Africa* came out in 2022, when the world was in chrysalis. The authors focus on surveillance laws’ impact on journalists, media workers, scholars and academics, activists, and human rights lawyers. For instance, journalists must be cautious when interviewing over their mobiles and take greater pains to safeguard the confidentiality of their sources.

Munoriyarwa and Mare are well-positioned to articulate the effects of surveillance laws in Southern Africa within a milieu of glaring gaps in global rules and regulations governing surveillance technologies. Munoriyarwa is an associate professor at Walter Sisulu University in South Africa, with a deep background in media studies and the region. Having achieved his BA in communication and media studies from Zimbabwe Open University, Munoriyarwa went on to earn a PhD in journalism from the University of Johannesburg. Mare, an associate professor in the Department of Communication and Media at the University of Johannesburg, South Africa, is also a research fellow at the African Centre for the Study of the



United States, University of the Witwatersrand. Their deep knowledge of a region, regrettably and erroneously overlooked in media law and security studies, alight the pages of their piercing study.

Building upon the definition of surveillance from Lyon (2003), who describes surveillance as “focused, systematic and routine attention to personal details for purposes of influence, management, protection or direction” (p. 14), Munoriyarwa and Mare assail the current literature for ignoring the “everydayness” of surveillance, insisting that a pervasive “watching over” shapes our lives. They offer WhatsApp, a popular mobile messaging app service, especially in the region, as an example of a platform surveilled. This instance, they argue, is evidence of the persistent and ubiquitous nature of surveillance in the quotidian aspects of daily life in the region.

This contention leads to Munoriyarwa and Mare’s core argument: surveillance practices have become infused into our digital communications and everyday lives, culminating in human rights violations, particularly in Southern Africa. In this region, pervasive surveillance becomes especially disturbing within a political environment that lacks transparency and necessary and proportionate regulations but also features weak constitutionalism, democracy in recession, and semi-authoritarianism.

Munoriyarwa and Mare employ a political economy lens to conduct their evaluation. This approach enables the authors to better explore the existing interactions and relationships between technopolitical stakeholders, economic processes, and key constituents. The lens is edifying for readers because it allows them insight into the authors’ contention of the inherent clash between what some mount as the public need for surveillance and *actual* personal concerns. A political-economic lens, widely employed in surveillance studies, is *apropos* here as well because Southern African states share complex relationships with China, Russia, the United States, and other powers. Munoriyarwa and Mare indicate these countries have “assisted” in devising efforts to drastically write and revise surveillance laws under the pretext of data protection, cybersecurity, computer bills, and intelligence laws with no end in sight.

Many achievements characterize *Digital Surveillance in Southern Africa*, but geography is its enduring one. Limited literature exists on surveillance in Southern Africa. Jane Duncan (2014, 2016, 2018) published groundbreaking research on surveillance in Africa, but this research focused on South Africa. Roberts, Ali, Farahat, Oloyede, and Mutung’u (2021), Munoriyarwa and Chiumbu (2022), and Mare (2015, 2019) have contributed significant research in South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Mauritius, but Munoriyarwa and Mare expand our understanding of surveillance practices and politics with an updated and smartly written contribution.

The choice of topic is also critical; research on surveillance laws and regulations in Africa is still in its early stages. Only a few organizations, such as the Collaboration on International ICT Policy for East and Southern Africa (CIPESA) (2021) and the Media Legal Defence Initiative (2021), have published on the topic. Munoriyarwa and Mare’s focus on surveillance laws in Southern Africa is fresh.

Their findings demonstrate surveillance can occur outside the perimeters of national constitutions and existing legal frameworks. Even with robust safeguards in place, many laws contain swinging elements that open the opportunity for infringement, especially where “national security” is concerned (p. 105). For

instance, data protection laws are outdated and, ironically, at least partially responsible for increased state surveillance that further conflicts with individual rights. One example: 31 out of 55 African states have adopted specific personal data protection laws, but privacy rights violations are alarmingly on the rise. Another illustration: Mozambique and Zimbabwe have descended into legally dubious areas of digital communication surveillance. The authors further compare Southern African cybersecurity laws to others, noting the region's laws fail under the standards of international human rights norms and laws. Further complicating the matter is the lack of clear and appropriate oversight, remedy mechanisms, and redress coupled with outdated legislation and policies in the age of mass digital surveillance.

*Digital Surveillance in Southern Africa* is not entirely ominous. Reading about citizens and organizations countering surveillance through defiance leaves readers inspired by individual and institutional resilience against Goliath-like foes. Munoriyarwa and Mare draw on Right2Know, Digital Society of Zimbabwe (DSZ), and MISA Zambia as examples of tech-based approaches to resistance in civil society. They also note grassroots efforts from DSZ to train citizens on digital literacy and cybersecurity. They enumerate ways journalists and human rights lawyers take precautions to protect themselves, such as using notebooks and pens to conduct interviews instead of mobile devices. One possible critique: the authors could have provided more specifics on the challenges tech-based resistance organizations face. An elaboration like this could make for an interesting case study in the future. However, the lack of these specifics in no way diminishes the triumph that *Digital Surveillance in Southern Africa* is. The authors' care and concern for the topic—demonstrated through comprehensive interviews with journalists, academics, and human rights lawyers—resound.

*Digital Surveillance in Southern Africa* is indispensable for students, practitioners, and scholars from myriad fields. Law and policy students interested in international, human rights, and comparative law would appreciate the introduction to cybersecurity regulations. Elegantly written, the text brims with illuminating anecdotes that international and regional studies students would like. Finally, citizen activists, journalists, and policymakers should also pick up *Digital Surveillance in Southern Africa* because, ultimately, this book, about a pernicious issue in a profoundly understudied region experiencing significant political turbulence amidst a proliferation of surveillance technologies, also serves as a cautionary tale for us all.

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