



YES

from members:

Anthony W. Morris
Houston, TX



Privacy has become an informality for the federal government. This is a cause that will rock our democracy to its core.

Joseph Jaffe
Mountain View, CA



I believe that very little security is being gained by the collection of much of the information that is being collected.

Merwin R. Severtson
Post Falls, ID



This is a violation of our Bill of Rights. Specifically our Fourth Amendment. It really has little to do with catching terrorists.

Is America giving up too much privacy for security?

NEWS THAT THE National Security Agency has been collecting the phone records of hundreds of millions of Americans each day, along with all Internet usage from nine major U.S. Internet providers, has critics concerned that this is one more step toward our abandonment of privacy in the fight against terrorism. Others contend that such measures are a democratically made choice, that there are controls in place and that the government's collection of information is less extensive than what Americans voluntarily subject themselves to every day.

What do you think?



Find out more about this topic on the Web:

- www.slate.com (search: "The Foundation of a Very Oppressive State")
- <http://millercenter.org/debates/privacy>
- www.schneier.com/book-beyondfear.html
- www.epic.org/NSApetition

NO

from members:

Kristen Muehlhauser
Ann Arbor, MI



If this protection comes at the cost of Internet or phone privacy, I think it is worthwhile.

Lorin Krueger
Tallahassee, FL



Freedom is not always free.

Laura Simmons
Strongsville, OH



If, as a nation, we can avoid repeating the heartache of 9/11, then I will happily give up my privacy.

from an expert in the field:



Neil Richards, www.neilrichards.com, is a professor of law at Washington University in St. Louis, where he writes and teaches about privacy law. He is on Twitter as [@neilmrichards](https://twitter.com/neilmrichards).

IT'S DIFFICULT TO say whether Americans are giving up too much privacy for security, because the government won't tell us how much privacy it is invading.

How can we possibly decide whether any sacrifice is worth it, when we don't know what we're sacrificing? Ironically, one of the strongest advocates for privacy seems to be the National Security Agency itself, which demands vast amounts of privacy for its secret, unaccountable surveillance programs.

It's difficult to balance privacy and security in another respect, because we don't know the nature of the threat. Politicians and the surveillance industry frequently warn us about the dangers of terrorism, but they are always vague about the nature of the threat. They ask us to make a cost-benefit analysis with no sense of the costs or of the benefits.

Here's what we do know. First of all, privacy from government surveillance is not just important, it's the hallmark of a free society. Information is power, and unchecked power to peer into the lives of ordinary citizens is a recipe for disaster. We know the cautionary tales of civil liberties abuses by totalitarian states, but America's own experience with unconstrained surveillance is bad, too.

We know that the FBI blackmailed Martin Luther King Jr. with evidence of marital infidelity that was unrelated to his civil-rights campaign in order to silence his criticism of racial oppression.

We know spectacular terrorism of the 9/11 kind is very rare, and that few people have the potent mix of evil motivation, resources and skill to pull off something like that. We also know that acts of terror occupy our attention out of all proportion to their actual risk, because they are dramatic and rare. But, as with plane crashes, the spectacle grabs us and makes us act irrationally. High speed limits, unhealthy diets, alcohol and toddlers with guns all kill far more Americans than terrorists, yet terrorism dominates the news because of its spectacle. This is exactly what terrorists want.

In a free society, the people have the right to know what their elected governments are doing in their name. But governments have got in the habit of denying privacy to their citizens while shrouding their own activities in secrecy. This is entirely the wrong way around. Free citizens have the right to know what the government is up to, and the right to live their lives free from unregulated government prying into their lives, reading their email and watching them surf the Web. If they don't, then they are not really free. [E]

from an expert in the field:



Paul R. Pillar, former deputy chief of the Counterterrorist Center at the CIA, is the author of *Intelligence and U.S. Foreign Policy: Iraq, 9/11, and Misguided Reform* (Columbia University Press, 2011; not available at Costco).

ALL GOVERNMENTS perform certain functions in the interest of security, including domestic law enforcement and the collection of information about

external threats. This is part of what is expected of government. Democracies differ from dictatorships in that those who carry out these functions are accountable to leaders elected by the people. What a democratic government does for the sake of security is thus not an arbitrary or unwarranted blow against privacy or anything else. It is instead the result of a free choice by the citizenry, exercised through their elected representatives.

Such choices are necessary because there are indeed trade-offs between security, on one hand, and values such as privacy and personal liberty on the other. Not even a free people can have unlimited amounts of all of those things. Exactly where the people decide to strike a balance between security and privacy will change over time.

Security has understandably received more weight whenever events have increased concern about a threat such as international terrorism. Combating terrorism is in large part a finding-a-needle-in-a-haystack task of identifying potential attackers before they act. Careful collection and

sifting of large amounts of data is an important way to increase the chance of finding the needle.

Our government's collection of information that may involve its own citizens and their activities is subject to multiple checks and controls. Those checks begin within the executive branch, where the chains of accountability run up to the president whom American voters elected. They continue in Congress, with appropriate committees being charged with overseeing the information-gathering activities of agencies such as the FBI or CIA.

Political competition provides an incentive to uncover and root out any infringements on privacy to which the American people would likely object. The judiciary also has an important role, with court approval required for the most sensitive collection of information. In short, the privacy of American citizens is the objective of a substantial structure of protection.

The actual compromise of personal privacy by the U.S. government is quite small. Americans give to the private sector vast information about themselves as they shop, make phone calls, search the Internet and conduct financial transactions, with little or no control over subsequent commercial use of that information. Any infringement of privacy by heavily controlled government agencies, for the purpose of security, is minor by comparison. [E]

AUGUST DEBATE RESULTS:
Are standardized tests a fair measure of student achievement?

8% YES
92% NO

Percentage reflects votes received by August 7, 2013. Results may reflect Debate being picked up by blogs.

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JULY DEBATE RESULTS:

Should offshore bank accounts be taxable?

YES: 50% NO: 50%
Percentage reflects votes received by July 31, 2013.



See Dialogue pages for more debate responses

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