Essay 2: Option 1

Privacy Vs. Security

The EFF provides much more information on privacy than on security, and the information it does provide on security is relatively broad in terms of this course. To the extent that the EFF provides sufficient content for a debate to be had, I would say privacy is probably more important. This is not to say that security isn’t important either because privacy is essentially security of data from others. I would argue that privacy is impossible without a secure cryptographic method, unless “security” in this case means something along the lines of “the government needs to violate your privacy to ensure the nation’s security.” The EFF probably wouldn’t promote such a security narrative given their clear opposition to SOPA/PIPA, which is why most of the security topics are related to malware or, for example, the actual secureness of the HTTP protocol. To reiterate, a cryptographic system can have both security in this regard and can provide privacy. For the remainder of this essay, I’ll talk about my thoughts on data privacy on a broad scale.

One of the greatest scams in the modern world is the collection and marketing of user data from large corporations such as Google, Amazon, Microsoft, and even Adobe in the case that EFF highlighted regarding “super-cookies.” Privacy is necessary because data that anybody provides while performing basic tasks sometimes necessary in today’s society (such as searching for information, shopping online, or watching videos) are being sold to advertisers and the profits aren’t going to us, the originators of the data, but instead are going to the corporations at the additional loss of our privacy. This is merely the massive monetary loss that a lack of sufficient privacy has resulted in; there is still the issue of the corporations keeping potentially sensitive data, not to mention a government that could be actively looking to surveil us.

Government surveillance from the NSA is a very good example of why privacy should be valued and why corporations need to be held accountable for their abuse of privacy: according to the EFF’s page on NSA spying, AT&T was essentially carbon-copying their customers’ communications directly to the NSA – warrantless wiretapping. Despite this, AT&T still exists and services its customers today. There are two primary issues that I have with these kinds of behaviors: 1) if the NSA wanted to justify that their actions were for the greater good of the country, they have failed to do so publicly, and 2) the information they are collecting would undoubtedly reveal personal information that could be used against the general public by any bad actor.

To conclude, I do not think we live in a world today where national security overrides the individual privacy of the citizen. Perhaps if the country was at war this could be justified, but even national security legislation following 9/11 (such as the Patriot Act) is now controversial and doesn’t seem to provide a justifiable excuse to violate our privacy.