
Case For Privacy

A real life example of why privacy matters

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25/04/2021



The Case

Background Part 1

Government surveillance is a fact of life and it exists to different degrees in every country. The extent of government surveillance on her citizens can be seen as a test of Democratic norms in the country. Surveillance often increases with authoritarianism (e.g. Eastern Germany, China, United States of America).

Take the Snowden revelations (2013) for example. Edward Snowden leaked a huge treasure trove of NSA (an intelligence agency in the United States) documents that revealed the extend of NSA's spying. It was shocking that (1) all American phone companies were sharing phone records (who called whom, when) with NSA. Millions of American Citizens' information was shared with secret court orders. The court orders were broad and allowed NSA to collect information on thousands of unrelated citizens for each foreign suspect they were interested in. This is a big deal as normally spying on American citizens is legally more complex. (2) Through a program known as PRISM, NSA could compel American companies to give NSA access to their records. Google, Apple, Facebook... All of these companies were sharing information with NSA and were not allowed to speak of it. (3) XKeyscore program allowed NSA to access records of your online activity. The records included browsing history, searches, emails, chats, metadata. NSA training materials promoted the program as covering "nearly everything a typical user does on the Internet." What was the most shocking was that this program did not require prior authorization. NSA could tap into this information without a warrant, or a court clearance. (4) NSA tried to undermine encryption. (5) PRISM required some tiny legal hurdle. When NSA couldn't get what they wanted through PRISM, they went through their backdoors into links between American tech giants datacenters directly.

Reading Piece 1

Please read the following article from the year 2014: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-23123964>

Take a break here for in class discussion. Proceed with the rest only after you have completed the related class activities:

Background Part 2

While Snowden revealed the extent of governments' capabilities, the surveillance and government's abuse of surveillance is not a uniquely American phenomenon. Danes can expect the government to respect their privacy as it is enshrined in the 72nd article of the Danish constitution and the laws based

on this. Yet Denmark too had its share of intelligence faux pas. Since 2014, there have been revelations about FE's illegal collaboration with NSA almost every year. Yet somehow nothing seems to change. The spy agencies prevented by law from violating their citizens' privacy rely on each other to spy on their citizens and share the information in the cases that require the most egregious violations of the laws.

Obviously, the intelligence agencies illegally collecting information on citizens is problematic. This brings us to a classical dilemma. If the citizen has nothing to hide is there any reason for her to be worried about government spying?

Reading Piece 2

Please read the following article from the year 2020. Do this only after you have read the first one and completed the related class activities: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-denmark-defence-idUSKBN25O1XP>



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