Security & Privacy

# Assignment #2

## Apple vs. UK Government: Data Privacy

Earlier this year, Apple received a confidential request from the UK government for access to its users’ data, via the Home Office under the Investigatory Powers Act, or IPA. The IPA gives UK law enforcement powers to request and obtain information from companies, including user data. The request targets Apple’s Advanced Data Protection feature, or ADP, which allows its users to enable end-to-end encryption on messages and even cloud data. This level of security blocks even Apple from seeing its own users’ data. The request, while it cannot be publicly disclosed due to its ties to the IPA, is likely motivated to allow for targeting of terrorist activity and/or criminal activity involving personal data.

The request requires Apple add a backdoor to this feature, effectively breaking end-to-end encryption for anyone who knows how to get in. Apple, alongside the security and privacy community as a whole, are against adding backdoors into any of their products, for fear bad actors with malicious intent find their way inside to steal all Apple user data. In response, Apple blocked ADP from being enabled in the UK, leaving existing users of the feature with access until an unspecified future data. This was an attempt to appease the UK government, however, it is most likely not enough to satisfy the request.

An event like this is highly significant, not only for the entirety of the UK, but also for the world. A government body making a direct request for unfiltered access to user data sets a horrifying security and privacy precedent. If successful, it opens up the door for any other nation, whether good-intentioned or otherwise, to do the same. If Apple lose this fight to the UK government and end up adding a backdoor or permanently disabling ADP, it will give other governments or bodies of power the courage to do the same, regardless of their goals. Requesting access to private companies’ data, meaning user data, would become a dangerous norm across the globe.

Events like these are the exact reason why security and privacy standardisations are crucial for the protection of human rights, such as privacy. If end-to-end encryption with no backdoors was a standard for companies dealing with personal communications and data, this request would almost certainly have never become a legitimate threat to user security and privacy. To take an example, the internet features many security protocols for communication that all vendors and service providers must comply with to maintain access. If a government body were to demand a particular vender to disable theses security protocols for their services, they would immediately break and become non-functional, because they are no longer following the same standards everyone else is. But as Apple’s ADP is not standard and can be disabled without consequence, it becomes an exposed flaw that can be undone by forceful laws.

Fortunately, Apple see the same significance of what this can mean for privacy and security, as they are a strong advocate for user data protection. Most recently, they have taken legal action against the UK government to appeal this request, hoping to revoke to the demand to install a backdoor into the ADP system for the UK government to access. The situation is ongoing, and it looks likely there will be more developments as the year carries on.

* ~~Paragraph 1: Say what the request is, who made it and what it means~~
* ~~Paragraph 2: Say the follow up reaction from Apple and how it may not be enough~~
* ~~Paragraph 3: Explain why this request is bad for security and privacy, setting a bad precedent and gives other nations courage to do the same~~
* ~~Paragraph 4: Explain how standardization of end-to-end encryption would be a combat to this, but this request threatens that from ever happening~~
* ~~Paragraph 5: Say about the most recent development, Apple takes legal action to fight the request for user privacy, a good reaction but will it be enough to set a precedent to not bow down to governments requesting data~~