



The ethics (or not) of massive government surveillance

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References

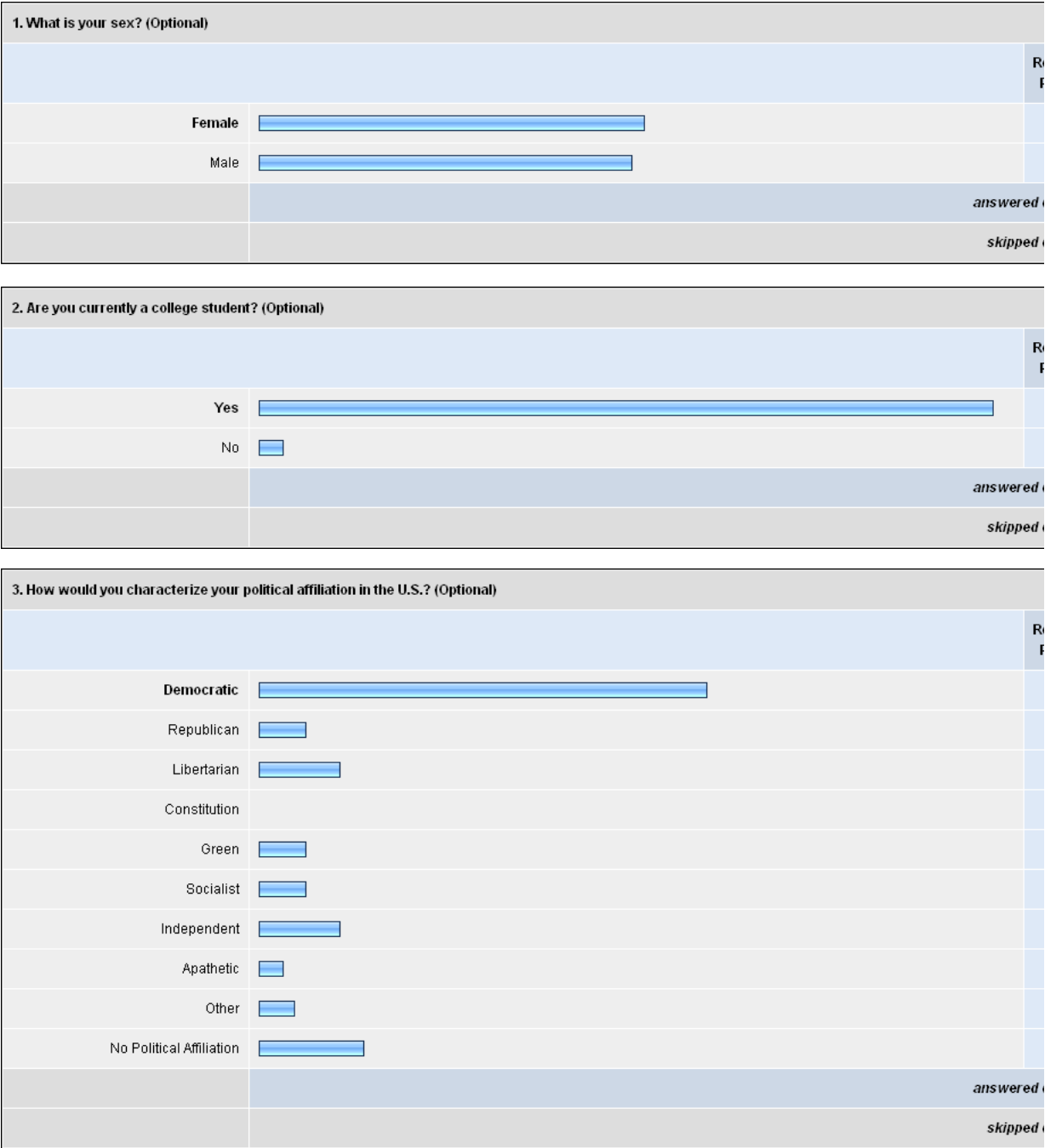
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Survey

70 people responded to our survey. The three types of questions we asked we wanted to get the following from the surveyed: information about general knowledge about the topic of government surveillance in the U.S. and their feelings and opinions regarding the topic.

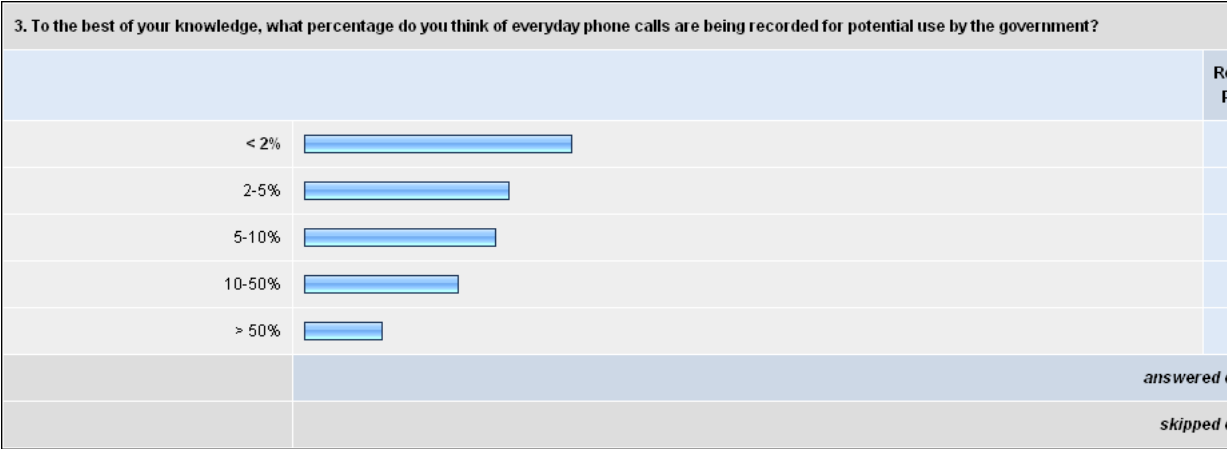
Information about the Sample

Before we wanted to get responses we wanted to find out any information that would possibly lead to biases. Also we wanted to see if we could find regarding demographics and tendencies to either be informed or misinformed regarding surveillance and whether certain types of people held certain views about governmental surveillance. One particular thing to notice is that a majority of the sample described themselves as “Democrats” and almost all described themselves as college students.

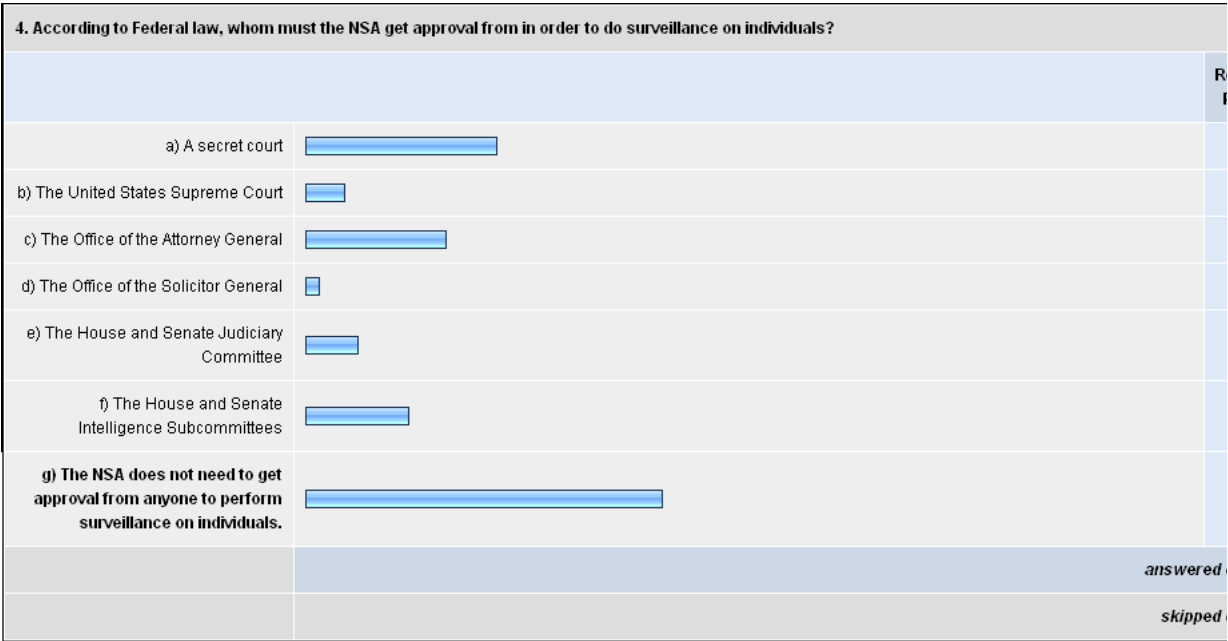


Knowledge about topic of Government Surveillance


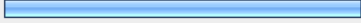
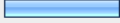
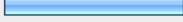

One thing we wanted to find out was whether people at large had good knowledge regarding what the government was doing and the “rules” by which government is allowed to operate. The shocking finding was that none of the questions had a plurality of respondents answer correctly.





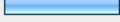

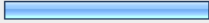

The correct answer was >50%, in fact 99% (almost all) of commercial phone calls are recorded by phone companies; the percentage of these that the government demands to look at is unknown. [1, 2]



The correct answer was **a)**; according to the **Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA)**, in order for the federal government to engage in an surveillance it must obtain approval from the court **FISC (Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court)**, which meets in secret. It is disconcerting that people believed that the NSA has the unilateral ability to wiretap individuals, in other words they believe that the governmental surveillance was [3]

5. What level of involvement has Alberto Gonzales, the former Attorney General of the United States, admitted to with regard to the NSA's wiretapping?			
a) He denies having wiretapped anybody.			
b) He neither denies nor affirms having wiretapped anybody.			
c) He acknowledges that the NSA has such a plan exists in to wiretap only in extreme circumstances.			
d) He acknowledges of having wiretapped people, but has gotten approval			
e) He acknowledges of having wiretapped people, without having gotten approval from anywhere.			
		answered	
		skipped	

The correct answer was **e)**, he acknowledges of having wiretapped people, without having gotten approval. ^[4]

6. If the NSA wanted to get approval to wiretap from a court, how easy do you feel it would be for it to get such an approval (what's the likelihood a judge would grant it)?			
a) Extremely difficult (less than 5% chance per each request)			
b) Moderately difficult (5-15% chance)			
c) Neither easy nor difficult (15-65%)			
d) Fairly easy (65-80%)			
e) Very easy (80-95%)			
f) Extremely easy (+95%)			
		answered	
		skipped	

The correct answer was **f)**, extremely easy. In the period 1979-2006, FISC rejected only 5 requests for warrants out of 22,990 applications. Part of the reason for such ease in getting warrants is that unlike other courts, FISC is not adversarial, because of its secret nature. Nobody is against the government. ^[4]

Their feelings/opinions regarding the topic of Governmental Surveillance

Lastly, we wanted to find out what people's general feelings about the governmental encroachment on civil liberties, particularly in the right to mind that a majority of the people polled described themselves as "Democrats".

7. To what degree do you agree or disagree with the following statements:						
	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree	I don't know
There exists a necessary trade-off between security and civil liberties.	8.6% (6)	48.6% (34)	8.6% (6)	17.1% (12)	17.1% (12)	0.0% (0)
If it makes us safer, we should sacrifice civil liberties in order to get security.	1.4% (1)	14.3% (10)	8.6% (6)	38.6% (27)	37.1% (26)	0.0% (0)
If people have nothing to hide, then they should not be afraid of being surveilled.	4.3% (3)	4.3% (3)	4.3% (3)	30.0% (21)	57.1% (40)	0.0% (0)
The fact there have been no more terrorist attacks since Sept. 11 on U.S. soil is in part due to the surveillance program.	1.4% (1)	8.6% (6)	28.6% (20)	25.7% (18)	31.4% (22)	4.3% (3)
The legislative and judicial branches are (Congress and the courts) are too slow to respond to national security emergencies; therefore it's up to the executive branch (the President).	2.9% (2)	15.7% (11)	14.3% (10)	28.6% (20)	35.7% (25)	2.9% (2)
	answered					
	skipped					

1. How justified do you think the U.S. government was in suspending civil liberties in the following situations:				
	Very Justified	Somewhat Justified	Not very Justified	Not at all Justified
The Passage of the Alien and Sedition Acts in 1798, which allowed the President to deport "enemies of the state" and prohibited "malicious slandering" of the U.S. government	2.9% (2)	23.5% (16)	38.2% (26)	35.3% (24)
The Surveillance and Internment of Japanese Americans during Second World War (WWII)	0.0% (0)	2.9% (2)	27.9% (19)	69.1% (47)
The Suspension of Habeas Corpus (right to not be detained without being charged with a crime) during the Civil War	5.9% (4)	16.2% (11)	35.3% (24)	42.6% (29)
The Wiretapping of civilians in America recently in the aftermath of September 11th	1.5% (1)	22.1% (15)	41.2% (28)	35.3% (24)
	answered			
	skipped			

2. To what degree do you believe the following parties to be concerned about your civil liberties?				
	Extremely Concerned about your civil liberties	Somewhat Concerned	Not very Concerned	Not at all Concerned
The U.S. Courts	16.2% (11)	63.2% (43)	17.6% (12)	2.9% (2)
U.S. Congress	10.3% (7)	51.5% (35)	32.4% (22)	5.9% (4)
Telephone Companies	6.0% (4)	10.4% (7)	40.3% (27)	43.3% (29)
Web Companies with many clients' information (ie. Google, Facebook)	8.8% (6)	25.0% (17)	50.0% (34)	16.2% (11)
The National Security Administration	4.4% (3)	17.6% (12)	32.4% (22)	45.6% (31)
	answered			
	skipped			

Sources:

1. http://www.usatoday.com/news/washington/2006-05-10-nsa_x.htm
2. http://www.usatoday.com/news/washington/2006-05-10-nsa-qna_x.htm
3. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foreign_Intelligence_Surveillance_Act
4. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/12/20051219-1.html>