



# Should secret wiretapping be legal?

## GETTING ORIENTED

The weekly passage discusses the issue of wiretapping. Here is some information that might be helpful to students who are less familiar with the issue.

### National Security Agency (NSA)

The NSA is an organization that is part of the United States Department of Defense. The NSA is responsible for collecting and analyzing information that is sent to the United States from other countries. The NSA also has the job of protecting information that is sent to other countries. One practice for protecting information is called *cryptography*. This word comes from the Greek word meaning hidden or secret. Before we used electronic systems, cryptography was the art of decoding or discovering secret messages. Now, computer science and electrical engineering are important in this work.



### Edward Snowden

Edward Snowden is a former employee of an organization that worked with the NSA on classified information. In 2013, he shared information about the NSA's phone surveillance with the media. Snowden has been called a "hero" by those opposed to the NSA's actions and a "traitor" by those who felt like he did the wrong thing. He moved to Russia to avoid arrest.



### USA Patriot Act

Following the terrorist attacks of September 11, Congress passed the Patriot Act to give the NSA the ability to monitor the phone calls, emails, and text messages of people that may be connected to terrorism. There has been a lot of controversy surrounding the act since it was passed, with many feeling like the law ignores people's right to privacy. The act was set to expire after a few years, but in 2006, it was extended and modified. The law has been extended multiple times since: most recently it was renewed through 2019. However, in 2015, a section of the law was changed to stop the NSA from continuing the phone data collection program exposed by Edward Snowden.



### Constitution

The Constitution is a document that contains the highest laws of the United States of America. It has been the basic legal document of the U.S. since 1789 and lays out the framework of the government. The American Constitution has become a model for governments in many other countries. The Constitution also has amendments, which are sections that have been added or changed over time. One of the amendments makes it illegal for the government to listen to phone conversations without a judge's permission.



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## EVIDENCE AND PERSPECTIVES

	<i>Some may have this view:</i>	<i>But others may think:</i>
<b>General Public</b>	People want to feel like they are safe. They may believe the U.S. government will do what it has to do to protect them. These people are willing to give up certain rights, such as the right of privacy, because they believe that doing so will help the government keep Americans safe.	Many Americans feel that giving the government the right to spy on people is too much power. They may worry about the loss of privacy or that government employees could abuse the ability to wiretap. They are not certain that allowing the government to secretly track communications will actually catch terrorists.
<b>Government &amp; Political Leaders</b>	Government and political leaders take their jobs very seriously. They want Americans to be safe, and they may think wiretapping is necessary for them to do their jobs well and protect people. Because political leaders always want to be reelected, they may try to do what the majority of Americans believe is right so they will be well-respected and well-liked.	Not all political and government leaders agree. Some believe that giving up our freedom goes against the Constitution. Political leaders usually want to protect the rights of the people they represent. Some leaders may feel that wiretapping is not necessary to keep people safe and may think the government should focus on other methods for finding dangerous people.

### Additional Information

- The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) says the Patriot Act “turns regular citizens into suspects” and has challenged parts of the law many times.
- The full name of the Patriot Act is “Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act” (USA PATRIOT).
- Telephone tapping (also known as wiretapping) is the monitoring of telephone and internet conversations by a third party, often by secret means. The wiretap received its name because, historically, the monitoring connection was an actual electrical tap on the telephone line.
- In 2010, a federal judge ruled that the NSA surveillance without warrants was illegal.
- Ethel and Julius Rosenberg are some of the most well-known American traitors. Ethel, 35, and her husband Julius, 34, were convicted under the Espionage Act of 1917 of attempting to sell atomic bomb secrets to the Soviet Union. They died in the electric chair on June 19, 1953.

#### Patriot Act Debate

<https://www.cnn.com/2015/05/22/politics/patriot-act-debate-explainer-nsa/index.html>

#### The Argument of the ACLU

<https://www.aclu.org/infographic/surveillance-under-patriot-act>

#### The Rosenbergs

<https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/julius-and-ethel-rosenberg-executed>



Police mugshot of Ethel Rosenberg. Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ethel\\_Rosenberg\\_mugshot.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ethel_Rosenberg_mugshot.png)



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## ANNOTATIONS FOR TEACHERS

### Features of Academic Text: *Dense and concise*

Academic language is more dense and concise than informal text. Compare the third paragraph with the more informal version of it in the box.

Whenever Alina talks to her cousins in Mexico, she wonders if someone from the government is listening in. She heard on the news that the government was **wiretapping** international phone calls. After the September 11th attacks, the government passed the USA Patriot Act, which allowed the National Security Agency (NSA) to tap phone calls, email accounts, and text messages of **suspicious** individuals under certain conditions. The Act required the NSA to ask judges for permission to access communications between people in the U.S.

But those in charge of protecting American security thought the limitations on surveillance of suspicious people were too strict. In 2006, a court secretly approved collecting, storing, and analyzing phone records from all the major phone companies. In fact, Verizon had to turn over all information on all phone calls in its system every day. With the growth of the internet, the records collected soon included much more than information about who was calling whom. Facebook, YouTube, Google, Skype, and other companies handed over their data to the NSA. Anything could be tapped and stored if there was a reasonable suspicion that a “non-U.S. person” had “foreign intelligence information.” Government officials argued that all the information collected came from **sources** that might reveal terrorist plans. Only a few members of the government knew, though, how much data was being collected, and from how many people!

That situation changed in 2013, when a British newspaper reported that the NSA collected phone records from millions of customers every day. NSA contractor Edward Snowden was soon revealed as the source of this information. Snowden was opposed to the massive NSA surveillance, and felt it was his duty as a **patriot** to reveal its existence. That act led to widespread anger about the U.S. policy and a demand to **eliminate** government wiretapping.

*Academic text*

Though many viewed Snowden as a traitor, his actions led to important changes. Many members of Congress and prominent judges have begun to take action against NSA surveillance programs. In addition, some major tech companies like Google have developed increased security and privacy measures. Meanwhile, Edward Snowden fled the U.S. to avoid arrest. He stated he was acting out of patriotism, but he has made himself an ex-patriot by accepting refuge in Russia. He may never be able to return to the U.S. without facing arrest.

What do you think? Was Snowden a patriot? Should wiretapping to help the government catch terrorists be legal? How much privacy are we willing to give up? Where do you stand? Remember, someone may be listening!

*The secret got out in 2013 when a British newspaper wrote a story about the NSA. They had found out that the NSA collected phone records from millions of people every day. Soon after that, everyone found out that a man who worked for the NSA, named Edward Snowden, had told the newspaper about what was happening. Snowden thought all of this NSA surveillance was wrong. He thought that telling everyone about it was the right thing for a good American to do. Finding out about what the NSA was doing made a lot of people angry. Many of them demanded that the government stop collecting all of those phone records.*

*Informal text*

*The academic version is more dense and concise:*

- ✓ *The academic version has 37 fewer words.*
- ✓ *The academic version is only four sentences, while the informal version is seven sentences.*
- ✓ *The academic version uses more formal, academic words. (Ex: duty vs. right thing; eliminate vs. stop)*



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### GENERATING WORDS

#### Using Prefixes

Prefixes are affixes that come before a word. Learning the meanings of some prefixes can help you recognize the meanings of many words.

Sometimes the prefix can have more than one meaning. The prefix *re-*, for example, can mean either *again* or *back/backward*.

- If you *remarry*, you get married *again*.
- If you *revert*, you go *back* to doing what you did before.

 Discuss with a partner what the prefix *re-* means in each of these words.

to reuse (verb)

to restrain (verb)

a recount (noun)

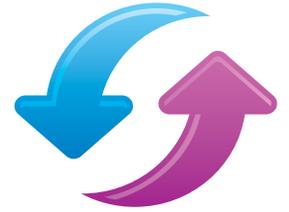
to recoil (verb)

? Can you think of other words that being with the prefix *re-*?

 Write a sentence using one of the words from your list.

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### DEVELOPING DISCUSSIONS

#### Perspective Cards

The President of the United States is looking for some advice on whether or not the government should use secret wiretapping to fight terrorism. The President wants to hear as many perspectives on this issue as possible and has asked members of his government to interview people who are suspicious of wiretapping.

#### Directions:

**Step One:** With a partner, decide who is going to be the inventor and who is going to be the government agent. Study the information on your card only.

**Step Two:** Have a discussion with your partner from your assigned perspective. You can use the information from your card, but try to not read from your card.

Here is the perspective of  
a famous inventor.

- ◆ “The technology might not work correctly, and the government might listen to the wrong conversation. People who are not considered suspicious could have their phones tapped.”
- ◆ “I have inventions and ideas that I want to patent before other people. Wiretappers could steal my ideas if they hear my conversations.”
- ◆ “They should tap all of the phones of government workers! They do more harm than anyone!”
- ◆ “It goes against the Fourth Amendment of the Constitution.”

Here’s what a government  
agent might say to the inventor.

- ◆ “We only use wiretaps on people under suspicion of terrorism.”
- ◆ “A quick wiretap might have prevented the 9/11 tragedy in New York.”
- ◆ “If you have nothing to hide, you will never notice if you have been wiretapped or not.”
- ◆ “The information from the wiretap is not the only source of terrorism evidence that we use.”