Chilling Effects of and Plummeting Support for Surveillance

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STUDIES
(involving thousands of Americans)
PEN America (2013)

Negative impacts of surveillance on their members, namely journalists and other writers:

> 50%

Engaged in **self-censorship** because they knew or suspected that the government monitored their communications and internet browsing activities.

92%

Said personal data collected by U.S. government “will be **vulnerable to abuse** for many years because it may never be completely erased or safeguarded.”
Types of self-censorship reported:

- Curtailed or avoided activities on **social media**;

- Reluctance to **communicate** with sources or with friends abroad;

- Reluctance to:
  - pursue research,
  - write, or
  - speak about certain subjects.
“Chilling effects”

A person is “chilled” if they are deterred from speaking or engaging in some lawful activity out of fear of a legal threat, privacy harm, or other punishment.
“Chilling effects” on Wikipedia use (2016)

- Analysis of tens of millions of Wikipedia page views between 2012 and 2014 demonstrated:
  - Traffic to pages related to terms DHS uses for social media monitoring (including “attack,” “nationalism,” and “pirates”) dropped up to 25% and on average 19.5% after mass surveillance disclosures in 2013.
“Chilling effects” on online speech (2017)

- **78%** of American internet users said government surveillance chills their online speech.

- Greater awareness of surveillance news led to more chilled speech.

- In order from greatest chilling effect to least:
  - “Personal legal threat” from a third party (81%)
  - Government surveillance (78%)
  - Corporate surveillance (71%)
Americans’ support for warrantless surveillance of communications plummeted.

Phone calls made outside the U.S.:
- In 2011, 36% opposed and 49% support.
- In 2021, 44% opposed and 28% support.

Emails sent between people outside the U.S.:
- In 2011, 30% opposed and 47% support.
- In 2021, 46% opposed and 27% support.
AP-NORC (2011-2021)

**Tl;dr:** Within a decade, support for warrantless surveillance has been cut in half across the board, and now most Americans oppose such surveillance — even of *foreigners’ communications.*
Sources:
