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National Security and Surveillance Lesson

Planning Overview

Should the federal government monitor phone and internet activity to protect the security of the United States?

Introduction

In June 2013, government contractor Edward Snowden gave an interview to reporters from *The Guardian* revealing the National Security Agency (NSA) had been secretly monitoring phone records of the American people. Phone companies, according to Snowden, have been turning over massive quantities of information detailing phone numbers used, emails, instant messages, and contact info, also referred to as metadata, to the NSA, which is storing them in a government database.

Using this metadata, the NSA could create maps and social networks of people to reveal electronic traffic information that could potentially uncover the identities of people who threaten national security. Recent investigations uncovered evidence of secret tapping and monitoring of electronic devices belonging to heads of allied nations, such as Germany and France. The fallout from the Snowden confession called into question the credibility and legality of government agencies, like the NSA.

The central question in this deliberation is whether or not the NSA's activities are legal and should the NSA, a federal agency, continue such activities? Students will be asked to consider: ***Should the federal government monitor phone and internet activity to protect the security of the United States?***

Objectives and Outcomes

- Students will understand and be able to use vocabulary regarding the National Security Agency and surveillance. These terms include: NSA, FISA, FISC, metadata, surveillance, and declassify, among others.
- Students will be able to explain how the federal government conducts domestic surveillance under FISA and the role of the FISC.
- Students will be able to summarize and evaluate competing positions on the legality of the federal government's surveillance programs. Students will experience one critical component of civic engagement by participating in an informed debate on the monitoring of phone calls and internet communication by the federal government.

Lesson Plan

Pick and choose from the following strategies to engage your students in the issue using this website.

1. **Warmup Activity:** Activate students' background knowledge and pique their interest in the topic.
 - a. **Take a Stand.** Ask the students, "Should the government be able to monitor internet and phone communications metadata without a warrant?" Have them line up in a continuum based on their responses. Ask several students along the continuum to share their reasoning and defend their position.
 - b. **Think-Pair-Share.** Ask the students, "Is privacy or security more important?" Have students silently write down their thoughts, discuss them with a partner, and then have several pairs share their responses with the class.
 - c. **A/B writing.** Write the following two statements on the board: "The federal government should use whatever means necessary to protect its citizens." and "The federal government should protect the privacy of individuals no matter what." Have students choose one of the two statements and silently write an argument supporting that statement. Then, have several students share their responses.
2. **Vocabulary Preview:** Build students' understanding of key terms before they watch videos and read articles that use these terms. This activity could be done for homework before class, it could be done in small groups using a ["jigsaw"](#) strategy in class, or it could be done individually in class. Googling these terms yield interesting results that may be more informative than what is found in a standard dictionary. Save a copy of the [vocabulary graphic organizer](#) so you can adapt it to meet your students' needs.
3. **Background Knowledge:** Have students read the [background articles](#), watch the [background video clips](#), and respond to the questions for each resource to prepare for the Deliberation.
4. **Deliberate:** Watch the videos and read the articles on both sides of the issue. Have students take notes on the [note-taking chart](#) for use with any video or article. Then, have your students complete an activity from the [Deliberations website](#).
 - a. Bring the class together for a Congressional [debate deliberation activity](#).
 - b. Hold a [simulated Congressional hearing](#) on the topic of governmental surveillance.
5. **Assess:**
 - a. Have students write a [position paper](#) to outline which perspective they most agree with and why. Students can then modify their paper into a letter to their member of Congress expressing what position he or she should take in the upcoming negotiations and debates.
 - b. Students can research their member of Congress' position on federal governmental surveillance using [C-SPAN's Congressional Chronicle](#) and prepare a presentation to share with the class.
 - c. Students could also be assessed based on their participation in the deliberation activity, or take a traditional test using vocabulary and key facts from the preceding activities.