SHOULD SECRET WIRETAPPING BE LEGAL?

Focus Words

wiretapping | notwithstanding | eliminate | suspicious | source

WEEKLY PASSAGE

Alina Woods was talking to her cousin in Mexico over the phone. She remembered hearing about **wiretapping** on the news. She had heard that the government was listening to international telephone conversations. Government officials were doing this so they could know if terrorists were planning attacks. Alina wondered if someone was listening to her conversation.

After the September 11th attacks, President Bush told the National Security Agency (NSA) to pay attention to conversations between Americans and foreigners who the government thought were **suspicious**. The NSA could tap phone calls, email accounts, and text messages as **sources** of information. He told the NSA officials to do this in secret, **notwithstanding** the fact that they were supposed to ask a court for permission. But President Bush said this secret wiretapping was necessary to keep the country safe. He called his new rules the Protect America Act.

Some people defend the Protect America Act because they think it will protect Americans from terrorists. They think that if a person seems suspicious, it is important to listen to that person's conversations and read his or her e-mail messages. People who support the President's new rules point out that the Protect America act **eliminates** any possible delays in getting information about possible terrorists because the government does not have to wait for a judge's permission. They believe it ensure America's safety.

Other people are against the Protect America Act, notwithstanding the need for safety and security. They think wiretapping violates a person's right to privacy. The main problem for opponents is that the Protect America Act allows the President the power to spy without warning or court permission. These people think the price we are paying for security is too high and that we are giving up some of the personal freedom provided by the Constitution.

What do you think? Should secret wiretapping to help the government catch terrorists be legal? Or do you think, notwithstanding the risks of a possible attack, nobody should be able to spy on our conversations without telling us? Where do you stand? Remember someone may be listening!

Should secret wiretapping be legal?

FOCUS WORDS OF THE WEEK

wiretapping : (noun) the act of listening in on a telephone conversation to get information.

FORMS:

EXAMPLES OF USE:

NOTES:

notwithstanding : (preposition) despite

FORMS:

EXAMPLES OF USE:

NOTES:

eliminate : (verb) to get rid of, remove

FORMS:

EXAMPLES OF USE:

NOTES:

suspicious : (adjective) believed to be potentially dangerous

FORMS:

EXAMPLES OF USE:

NOTES:

source : (noun) something or someone that supplies information

FORMS:

EXAMPLES OF USE:
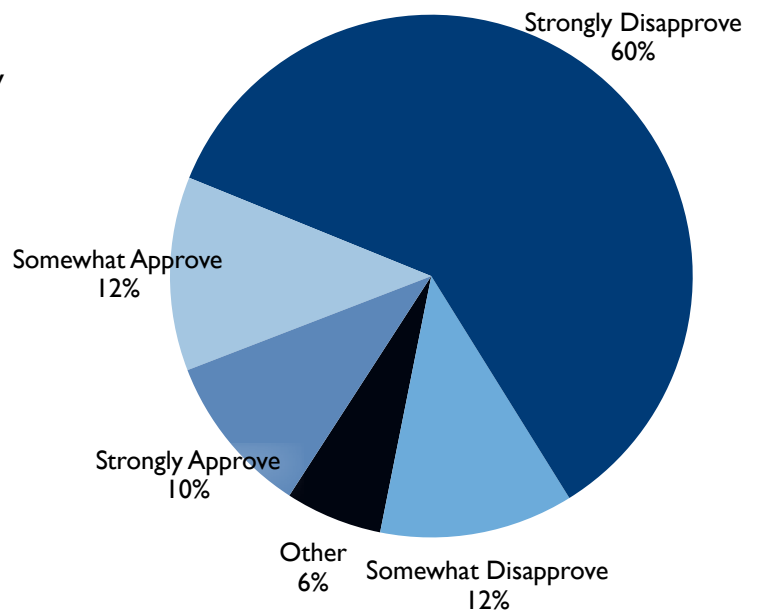
NOTES:

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PROBLEM OF THE WEEK

Option 1: After 9/11, the National Security Agency began **wiretapping** American telephones and e-mail messages in secret. Government officials decided it was important keep watch over people who seem **suspicious**. They said that secret wiretapping would help eliminate terrorist attacks. **Notwithstanding** this **explanation**, many Americans oppose secret wiretaps. They believe it takes away the right to privacy that the Constitution provides.

Twenty-two percent of people approve of secret wiretapping. What fraction is closest to 22%?

A) 1/2

B) 1/5

C) 1/4

D) 1/3

Strongly Disapprove 60%

Somewhat Approve 12%

Strongly Approve 10%

Other 6%

Somewhat Disapprove 12%

Source: International Communications Research

Option 2: In March of 2010 a judge ruled that **wiretapping** without a warrant was illegal. Before the trial, the U.S. Justice Department had requested that the case be thrown out of court. **Notwithstanding** this request, the judge heard the case and made his ruling. He said that allowing the government to spy on **suspicious** people without warrants would **eliminate** an important limit on executive power. The judge wrote a 45-page opinion on the case.

Luka just wrote a 10-page paper on wiretapping. He used government documents as **sources** of information. His 10-page paper took him a total of 36 hours. If he worked at the same rate, how long would it take him to write a 45-page paper?

Discussion Question: The judge mentioned above says the warrantless **wiretap** program must be **eliminated** because it breaks a federal law made in 1978. In 1978, people were **suspicious** that allowing spying on U.S. citizens would allow the government to become the **source** of too much power. Government officials must follow the rules, the judge said, **notwithstanding** the threat of terrorist attacks or other dangers. Do you agree with his decision? Or, in times of national trouble, should we allow the government to bend the rules?

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THINKING SCIENTIFICALLY

Students in Ms. Kahn's class were reading an article about how many Americans are upset that the United States government could be reading their email or **wiretapping** their phones. However, there are other **sources** of threats to our privacy besides the government! Criminals sometimes try to steal money or learn personal information about people by guessing the passwords for their online accounts. **Notwithstanding** this danger, many **unsuspicious** internet users choose passwords that are very easy to guess. One study found that some of the most common passwords are "password," "password1," "123abc," and "abc123"! Experts about online privacy have come up with ways to help **eliminate** the chance that a stranger could guess your password. The best passwords are longer than 12 letters, are not words you can find in the dictionary, and include some numbers and symbols.

"We should probably look at the passwords we use and make sure they are safe!", said Ryan after reading about this issue. "I wonder how many other internet users also have unsafe passwords?", asked Eva. To find out, Eva examined data from a time when about 33,000 people were tricked by criminals into typing their password into a fake login page. The criminals later published all the passwords that they stole.

Question:

> How safe are the passwords chosen by internet users?

Hypothesis:

> Since safety is a concern, most people will create passwords with 10 or more characters.

Materials:

> ‣ List of 33,340 stolen passwords published by criminals.

Procedure:

> 1. Sort the passwords by length.
>
> 2. Count the number of passwords that have a length of 6 or fewer characters, 7 characters, 8 characters, 9 characters, 10 characters, 11 characters, and 12 or more characters.
>
> 3. List the quantities of each length, and calculate the percentage of passwords with each length.

Password Length Data

Length	Count	Percent
6 or fewer	5,196	15.6%
7	7,821	23.5%
8	8,449	25.3%
9	5,904	17.7%
10	4,420	13.3%
11	918	2.8%
12 or more	632	1.9%

✎ Is Eva's hypothesis supported by the data she examined? How do you know?

✎ Eva decided to round to the nearest tenth when calculating the percentages. You may have noticed that her percentages total 100.1. Do you think this is acceptable?

💬 *Does Eva's data table show whether the passwords have a mix of letters and numbers? Does that matter?*

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DEBATING THE ISSUE

Get ready...

Pick one of these positions (or create your own).

A Secret wiretapping should be allowed. The government should have the right to listen to people's conversations and read their e-mails or keep track of their Internet history. Wiretapping will keep the United States safe from possible attacks.

B Secret wiretapping is not acceptable. The government invades our privacy by reading our email and listening to our conversations. We should be able to write and talk about what we want, as long as we do not hurt anyone.

C If the United States is in danger and there are people who might harm our country, secret wiretapping should be used. The government needs to ask a court first before doing it, though.

D Wiretapping should only be allowed if the government warns people first. People have the right to know whether the government is recording their phone conversations and reading their email messages.

E _____
_____
_____

Get set...

Be ready to provide evidence to back up your position during your class discussion or debate. Jot down a few quick notes:

_____
_____
_____
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GO!

Be a strong participant by using phrases like these.

I believe that...

I agree with you, but...

You make a good point, but have you considered...

Can you show me evidence in the text that...

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WRITE ABOUT IT

Support your position with clear reasons and specific examples.
Try to use relevant words from the Word Generation list in your response.

Focus Words

wiretapping | notwithstanding | eliminate | suspicious | source

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