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# A GAME THEORETICAL ANALYSIS OF SURVEILLANCE IN DEMOCRACIES

It's all fun and games until somebody loses a spy

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**Abstract**

The extent of the mass surveillance being carried out by the US National Security Agency (NSA), as revealed by Edward Snowden, presents a puzzle in terms of costs and benefits. This project uses a game theoretical approach to examine the rationality of such programmes for the decision-makers involved in implementing them. This has implications for protection of the right to privacy, other inter-related human rights and democracy itself. The game is modelled as a non-cooperative game of complete information between three players: the electorate, terrorists and the government. Because of the particularly vast scope of the NSA's programmes, the focus of this project is on the US. However, it is proposed that generalisation from this analysis is possible. The model demonstrates how political and economic self-interest can interact to produce incentives for governments to conduct mass surveillance on their own citizens, despite the fact that doing so appears to compromise the programmes' efficacy for their designated purpose. Thus it is suggested that although the newly drafted legislation in the US aimed at reining in the excesses of the NSA will have an impact in limiting some of the capabilities of that organisation, it still fails to tackle key root causes of domestic mass surveillance and infringement on the privacy rights of innocent citizens.

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