

New spying revelations prove once again Edward Snowden was right

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Your government is spying on you — again.

A [heavily redacted letter](#) from Sens. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) and Martin Heinrich (D-N.M) revealed Thursday that the CIA has been doing some sort of bulk collection of Americans' data. We don't really know the details — those parts are blacked out in the redactions, natch — but it was enough to alarm the senators, who both sit on the Senate Intelligence Committee. "These documents reveal serious problems associated with warrantless backdoor searches of Americans," they said in a [joint statement](#).

This is an old problem, but one that was supposed to have been reined in. It's been nearly a decade since whistleblower Edward Snowden revealed the National Security Agency had bulk collected records of Americans' [phone calls](#) and [emails](#). Federal courts later found the practice [was illegal](#), and Congress tightened up the laws to [end the snooping](#). (Here's a good [Twitter thread](#) detailing the state of the law.)

The CIA, however, literally plays by a different set of rules. The agency's program exists "entirely outside the statutory framework that Congress and the public believe govern this collection, and without any of the judicial, congressional or even executive branch oversight," Wyden and Heinrich wrote.

That's an obvious problem. Even if bulk collection is somehow justifiable — and that's a [big "if"](#) — it's dangerous in a democratic society to let an agency like the CIA Hoover up Americans' personal info without some form of

outside scrutiny. That power is easily abused, and indeed the data has been misused in the past: The Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court found in 2018 the FBI had [regularly used](#) NSA information to check up on potential informants who weren't suspected of criminal or national security violations. The FBI blamed the transgression on a "fundamental misunderstanding" of how the data could be legally used. Funny how that happens.

Snowden, still living in exile after fleeing the United States when he turned whistleblower, had something to say about all of this. "You are about to witness an enormous political debate in which the spy agencies and their apologists on TV tell you this is normal and okay and the CIA doesn't know how many Americans are in the database or even how they got there anyway," he [tweeted](#) on Thursday. "But it is not okay."

He's right. It's a dangerous world, sure, but Americans have every right to be left alone unless there's a reasonable, evidence-based belief they're up to no good. Mass surveillance generally fails that test. But because the details are so fuzzy, it might be difficult for the new revelations to make a splash. That would be unfortunate. When it comes to snooping, the government keeps showing us it doesn't deserve the benefit of the doubt.