

## **The Normalization of Surveillance and the Invisibility of Digital Citizenship: Media Debates After the Snowden Revelations**

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Based on an analysis of newspaper and blog coverage of the Snowden revelations and their aftermath, our study demonstrates that newspapers normalize surveillance by highlighting concerns over national security and focusing on surveillance of elites, and minimize the attention given to the mass surveillance of citizens. By contrast, blogs allow more critical discussions relevant to digital citizenship, enabling debates on civil rights and privacy. This article argues that if conventional media limit debates relevant to digital citizenship, blogs may provide a space that contests and makes visible the key problems scantily evident in newspapers. We suggest research on digital citizenship in mediated debates should focus on how political subjects are silenced, as well as the emerging spaces where this silence can be broken.

*Keywords: blogs, bulk data, digital citizenship, digital rights, journalism, mass surveillance, normalization, Snowden, surveillance*

The 2013 Edward Snowden revelations and their aftermath could be understood as a specific historical moment that crystallized debates about surveillance and digital citizenship. Snowden leaked information about previously unknown surveillance programs by the main U.S. and UK intelligence agencies, the National Security Agency (NSA) and the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ). These included the widespread gathering of “bulk data” from mobile phone and Internet companies, encompassing both the content of communications as well as metadata. The surveillance activities of the NSA, under the so-called PRISM program, had been ongoing since 2007 and involved a range of major Internet players and phone companies. In the UK, the GCHQ had run its TEMPORA surveillance program since 2011 (see Bakir, 2015, for a more detailed discussion). Snowden also revealed that the intelligence agencies had gathered information about the communications of embassies and world leaders, including Germany’s Angela Merkel.

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Snowden's leaks have occasioned extensive discussion about surveillance. These discussions unfold in the broader context of concerns about how privacy and digital rights are being reconfigured in a surveillance society (e.g., Lyon, 2007), but have also taken a specific shape given the sheer scope and nature of the data gathered about all of us.

Our article is based on a content analysis of media coverage of the revelations and subsequent incidents representing peak coverage in UK-based newspaper articles and blogs. It demonstrates a striking pattern that tells us much about the relationship between power, normalization, and spaces for digital citizenship in a network society (Castells, 2011). Our research showed that traditional newspapers appeared to normalize surveillance with reference to concerns over national security and minimize the attention given to the surveillance of citizens. Newspaper coverage focused largely on the surveillance of elites (including embassies and political leaders). It paid relatively less attention to practices of mass surveillance directed at ordinary citizens, which were at the heart of Snowden's revelations. By contrast, blogs enabled the contestation of surveillance by creating a space for more critical opinions, and also opened up for discussions relevant to digital citizenship by providing more detailed information on practices of mass surveillance and enabling debates on civil rights and privacy. What this suggests is that if conventional media normalize surveillance and limit debates relevant to digital citizenship, then blogs may provide a space that contests the normalization of surveillance. Ultimately, the terrain on which debates about surveillance and digital citizenship is carried out is not an even playing field, but one that is heavily shaped by prevailing power relations.<sup>1</sup>

### **Theorizing Digital Citizenship and Surveillance Society After Snowden**

In studying the Snowden revelations and their aftermath, we are not primarily interested in the details of the revelations, but rather seek to understand the media coverage of particular critical moments in terms of how they crystallized key debates about surveillance relevant to digital citizenship.

Digital citizenship is broadly understood as the ability to participate in society online (Mossberger, Tolbers, & McNeal, 2007). Isin and Ruppert (2015) have offered a nuanced engagement with the concept in their book, *Being Digital Citizens*. Their work is based on the premise that the emergence of the Internet has created the new political subjectivity of the "digital citizen." This conceptual category enables us to raise questions about

how it is possible for political subjects to make rights claims about how their digital lives are configured, regulated and organized by dispersed arrangements of numerous people and things such as corporations and states but also software and devices as well as people such as programmers and regulators. (Isin & Ruppert, 2015, p. 5)

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These questions are at the heart of our concerns. As we have defined it for the purposes of this project, digital citizenship requires security of (and trust in) infrastructure, an enabling policy framework, freedom to enact citizenship through expression and protest, knowledge of characteristics of the infrastructure and its affordances, and informed consent (e.g., Hintz, Dencik, & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2016).

For us, then, it is important to investigate how the Snowden revelations facilitated a discussion relevant to digital citizenship, and to understand any structural features shaping media coverage that might help or hinder such discussions. This is important because the media serve as the key site for articulating debates relevant to citizenship (e.g., Street, 2010). Debates over digital citizenship are swiftly evolving and dynamic, and raise complex and often highly technical issues ranging from distinctions between mass surveillance and targeted surveillance, the role of big data, to questions of privacy rights. At the same time, digital citizenship relates centrally to issues around power relations between the state, corporate actors, and citizens. As such, the articulation of these debates in the media is of vital importance, even if, as Isin and Ruppert (2015) note, such debates have made a relatively “faint appearance” (p. 7). Moreover, an examination of how issues relevant to digital citizenship are discussed in media coverage helps to problematize the discursive landscape—one characterized by variously articulated forms of dissent and consent—in the aftermath of the Snowden revelations.

The revelations have been described as a global “media event” (Dayan & Katz, 1992; Kunelius et al., 2017) that used the potential of mass media “to command attention universally and simultaneously in order to tell a primordial story about current affairs” (Dayan & Katz, 1992, p. 1). The media event metaphor is powerful in its suggestion that the revelations, through the global coverage that it occasioned, potentially enabled a reconstitution of the social order. Yet its emphasis on functionalist unity, operating in the interest of the stability of the social order, is less attuned to understanding critical moments as they play out in the contemporary media landscape. This is a far more complex one than that inhabited by Katz and Dayan when they first articulated the notion of media events some three decades ago. Mediated debates now unfold within the contested and agonistic space of deliberation facilitated by what is variously referred to as the “network society” (Castells, 2011), the “Networked Fourth Estate” (Benkler, 2011), and the “hybrid media system” (Chadwick, 2013). These metaphors share the acknowledgement that we are now living in a society whose discussion about itself no longer takes place primarily in and through conventional mainstream news media, such as newspapers, television, and radio, but is increasingly diverse, variegated, and fragmented through social media, blogs, and other platforms. This, indeed, was vital to the ways in which the debates over the Snowden revelations and their aftermath played out: The debate took place not merely in the context of mainstream media, but rather illustrated the complex interweaving of digital media and legacy practices (e.g., Russell & Waisbord, 2017).

To investigate the field of tension encompassing mainstream news media and newer platforms facilitated by the Internet, we study the aftermath of the Snowden revelations in UK newspapers and blogs.<sup>2</sup> The British media are interesting to study in this context for several reasons. First, the leaks were

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<sup>2</sup> Our analysis is also informed by an analysis of broadcast coverage (Lischka, 2015) and a qualitative analysis of opinionated journalism of the Snowden revelations and its aftermath (Wahl-Jorgensen & Jones,

particularly prominent in the British context after *The Guardian* played a key role facilitating the publication of Snowden's leak, which included revelations regarding the secret surveillance programs of the British intelligence services, the GCHQ. Second, the British media system has distinctive features that inform its practices. It has been described as belonging to a "liberal" or "Anglo-American" model (e.g., Mancini 2005), characterized by (1) independence from political powers, (2) a control or watchdog function over political powers, (3) objectivity, (4) professional standards that reinforce the independence of journalism from other societal powers and professions, and (5) reporting functions that are distinct from those of comment and interpretation (Mancini, 2005). On the face of it, this suggests a media system that stands outside of ideological allegiances. However, the British newspaper landscape remains distinctive in its "external pluralism" (Esser & Umbricht, 2013, p. 991), characterized by competing newspapers with distinctive ideological positions. It encompasses both popular and quality newspapers representing the breadth of the political spectrum. However, it is important to note that the mainstream newspapers we studied are in catastrophic collapse, plagued by plunging circulation figures and advertising revenue. In this respect, blogs are particularly useful to study as a complement to traditional newspapers because they enable us to pay attention to the changing news ecosystem facilitated by the digital era. Increasingly well established, blogs are increasingly competing with traditional media for audiences, legitimacy, and discursive power.

Blogs have been seen as challenging the conventional hierarchies of authority and expertise that shape the discourses of the mainstream media. Lasica (2003), in one of the earliest scholarly reflections on blogs, suggested that they create a new ecosystem that generates a "network of ideas," aided in part by audience contributions. This represents a radically different model of knowledge creation than that of mainstream media—one that does not necessarily privilege the voices of the powerful, but that instead seeks to draw on various contributions and views. What blogs share—despite their growing differentiation as they mature as a medium—is a distinctive style or epistemology (Matheson, 2004; Wall, 2005). In investigating the epistemology of blogging, Matheson (2004) took a closer look at how *The Guardian* responded to the introduction of the new form in its own hosted blogs. He demonstrated that their blogs were characterized by a way of knowing premised on the "establishment of a different interpersonal relation, of a different authority and of a journalism focused upon connection rather than fact" (Matheson, 2004, p. 453). Blogs tend to be characterized by a more opinionated and personal style of writing that circumvents conventional journalistic hierarchies and styles (Wall, 2005).

As blogs have come of age over the past decade and a half, they have become increasingly functionally and organizationally differentiated (Karlsson, Bergström, Clerwall, & Fast, 2015; Scott, Millard, & Leonard, 2015). Along those lines, some observers have seen the emergence of established blogs like The Huffington Post as an example of the breakdown in distinctions between mainstream and alternative media (Kenix, 2015; Kwak, Lee, Park, & Moon, 2010).

As such, it is also important to distinguish between journalists' blogs hosted by legacy news media and those representing digital native media such as the ones studied in this article. Although blogs

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hosted by legacy media have provided a way for these organizations to communicate with their publics in new and engaging ways (Graham & Wright, 2015), we focus on digital native blogs, given their role as a new type of actor in the media ecology that has been seen to provide an alternative (and sometimes a threat) to traditional media (e.g., Carlson, 2007). In this context, the distinctive epistemology of blogging is important, in part, because conventional media are often seen as being dominated by authoritative sources through a process of "recurring discrimination" (Carlson & Franklin, 2011, p. 2) against already marginalized groups (see also Gans, 1980; Manning, 2001). Elite sources are usually positioned to provide the primary definition of events. Secondary definers—all other sources, including journalists—then are compelled to respond to this dominant definition (Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, & Roberts, 2013). By contrast, blogs have been heralded as providing new opportunities for articulating critique and opposition ever since their inception as a platform (e.g., Kahn & Kellner, 2004). This is because of their frequently more opinionated style of writing and also because of the perception that they are hospitable to a wider range of sources and forms of expression (e.g., Carlson, 2007).

It is, however, important to note that blogs remain less influential in terms of reach and readership than conventional news and their online variants. For example, in terms of online news consumption, the 2015 Reuters Digital News Report indicates that news articles remain the most consumed type of news content, with 59% of audience members using this form in the last week, followed by lists of headlines (41%) and online news videos (24%), with blogs having been read by just 14% (Newman, Levy, & Nielsen, 2015).

Nonetheless, given the less hierarchical nature of blogs, and their greater reliance on opinion, they might carve out an opportunity to challenge the ways in which prevailing power relations shape the news—including debates about surveillance. This provides us with an opportunity to study

the changing discursive fields within which the exercise of power is conceptualized, the moral justifications for particular ways of exercising power by diverse authorities, notions of appropriate forms, objects and limits of politics and conceptions of the proper distribution of such tasks. (Rose & Miller, 1992, as cited in Karppinen, 2006, p. 55)

In other words, we are interested in investigating how practices of surveillance were variously contested and legitimated in the aftermath of the Snowden revelations, and to understand the systematic ways in which particular media forms come to privilege particular modes of argumentation and ways of exercising power.

#### **Method: Studying the Snowden Revelations and Debates About Surveillance and Digital Citizenship**

Given our interest in understanding how the Snowden revelations shaped debates about surveillance and digital citizenship, we traced mediated discussions of these topics over the course of key events relating to the revelations. We used content analysis, which is widely deployed as a key method for generative quantitative data describing larger samples (e.g., Riff, Lacy, & Fico, 2014). To aid us in constructing a meaningful sample, a newspaper timeline was produced, using the Nexis UK newspaper

database. The key terms we searched for included *Edward Snowden*, as well as the names of the two main intelligence agencies implicated in the Snowden revelations, the *NSA* and *GCHQ*. In addition, the names of the surveillance programs publicized by Snowden were searched for and charted across time. The results of this timeline were then compared against the major events from the Snowden revelations. These events were based on timelines and resources created by the major news organizations and outlets that covered the Snowden revelations in the first instance, namely, *The Washington Post*, *The Guardian*, and *Der Spiegel*. We narrowed down our sample by focusing on the following key events representing peaks in coverage:

1. The initial revelations by Edward Snowden, followed by his unveiling as the source of the leaks (June 10–14, 2013).
2. The detention of journalist Glen Greenwald's partner David Miranda at Heathrow Airport under antiterror legislation. This raised debates around freedom of the press and national security (August 19–September 15, 2013).
3. The interception of communications in foreign embassies and European Union offices (June 30–July 14, 2013), and spying on world leaders' phone communications, in particular German Chancellor Angela Merkel (October 22–November 4, 2013).
4. The publication of the British parliamentary report into the death of Fusilier Lee Rigby, which generated discussion about Facebook and social media companies' role in tackling terrorism (November 17–December 14, 2014).
5. The *Charlie Hebdo* terror attacks in Paris, which prompted debates about digital encryption, freedom of speech, and the resurrection of the so-called Snoopers' Charter (January 9–February 5, 2015).

We began sampling for each of our key events the day the first relevant story was published, and we then coded all relevant stories until the end of a four-week period in UK national newspapers. We did this for all key events except for (1) the composite event of snooping on embassies and world leaders, where we selected a two-week sample for each case, and (2) the naming of Edward Snowden as the source for the leaks, where a smaller time frame of just four days was used to keep the sample manageable.

The selection of these particular key events, and the samples for each, had both advantages and disadvantages. We took this approach to focus on how broader public debates relevant to surveillance were refracted through the lens of the Snowden revelations, as captured in major news stories that shed light on a broad range of issues around digital citizenship. Nevertheless, this sampling strategy may have overemphasized particular elements of debates about surveillance (e.g., the responsibilities of social companies, which was a key theme in the stories on the publication of the Lee Rigby report). For the purposes of this article, we do not go into each case study in substantial detail, but rather focus on overall patterns in discussions of surveillance. Across all cases, we coded 538 newspaper stories. We investigated coverage across the full range of national UK tabloid and quality/broadsheet publications, encompassing different political perspectives and readerships. This was particularly important given the distinctive polarization of the journalistic field in the UK, and the ways in which this polarization shaped discussions about surveillance (see also Wahl-Jorgensen & Jones, 2017). These newspapers included *The Guardian*

(broadsheet, center-left liberal), *The Independent* (former broadsheet, left leaning), *The Daily Telegraph* (broadsheet, center-right), *The Times* (former broadsheet, center-right), *Daily Mail* (tabloid, right leaning), *The Sun* (tabloid, right leaning), *Daily Mirror* (tabloid, left leaning), *Daily Express* (tabloid, right of center), the *i* (compact, liberal center), *Daily Star* (tabloid, right of center), *Sunday People* (tabloid, left of center). All weekend editions of these newspapers were also included in our sample.

For the blogs, we investigated the same five case studies using the same search terms and sought to examine coverage across three types of blogs: (1) well-established news blogs, (2) political blogs, and (3) specialist technological blogs. These encompassed BuzzFeed, The Huffington Post, Vice, Computing, The Register, Reddit, Jezebel, Wordpress, The Daily Dot, C-Net, Gizmodo, The Verge, TechRepublic, Engaget, DigitalTrends, iMore, ZDNet, MashableUK, TheNextWeb, ConservativeHome, Politics.co.uk, and Guido Fawkes. A total of 249 blog stories were coded. We also analyzed the opinions expressed within the top three comments made by the public under each blog story, including a total of 88 comments. We were interested in analyzing below-the-line comments because these constitute distinctive features of the format, which provide a window into broader public debate and also contribute to shaping journalistic practice (de Zúniga, 2009). However, comments were analyzed separately from blog content to avoid problems of comparability in relation to the newspaper sample.

In our content analysis of blogs and newspaper coverage, we examined a range of variables relevant to debates about surveillance after Snowden.<sup>3</sup> Our key interest was in uncovering how discourses on surveillance were articulated and contested across media organizations and platform types. Our content analysis therefore coded a range of variables, including opinions on surveillance (examining a range of views rather than merely for or against); sources used (politicians, journalists, members of the public, etc.); the targets of surveillance (elites, members of the public, journalists, etc.), as well as the depiction of Edward Snowden (whistleblower, traitor, hero, etc.).<sup>4</sup>

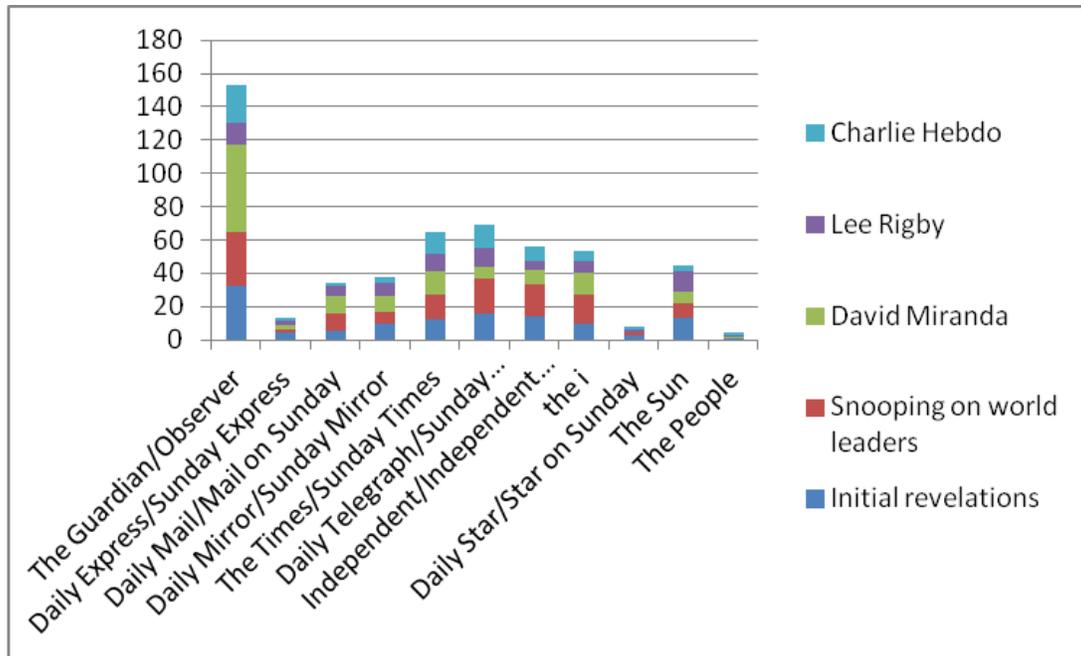
### **Findings: Debates About Surveillance in Newspapers and Blogs**

Our study of newspaper and blog coverage of surveillance in the aftermath of the Snowden leaks rendered visible some disparities between, and limitations on, the debates within and across platforms. Although the story of the Snowden revelations and their aftermath were highly newsworthy, this did not translate into a pattern of even coverage across platforms, as evident in Figure 1. *The Guardian*—itself implicated in the coverage through its central role in the initial publication of the revelations, as well as in the story surrounding the detention of David Miranda—published more stories about all of the cases than any of the other newspapers. In total, across our entire range of cases, the paper published more than twice as many stories (153) as the second-most prolific of newspapers, the right-leaning quality paper, *The Daily Telegraph* (with 69 stories).

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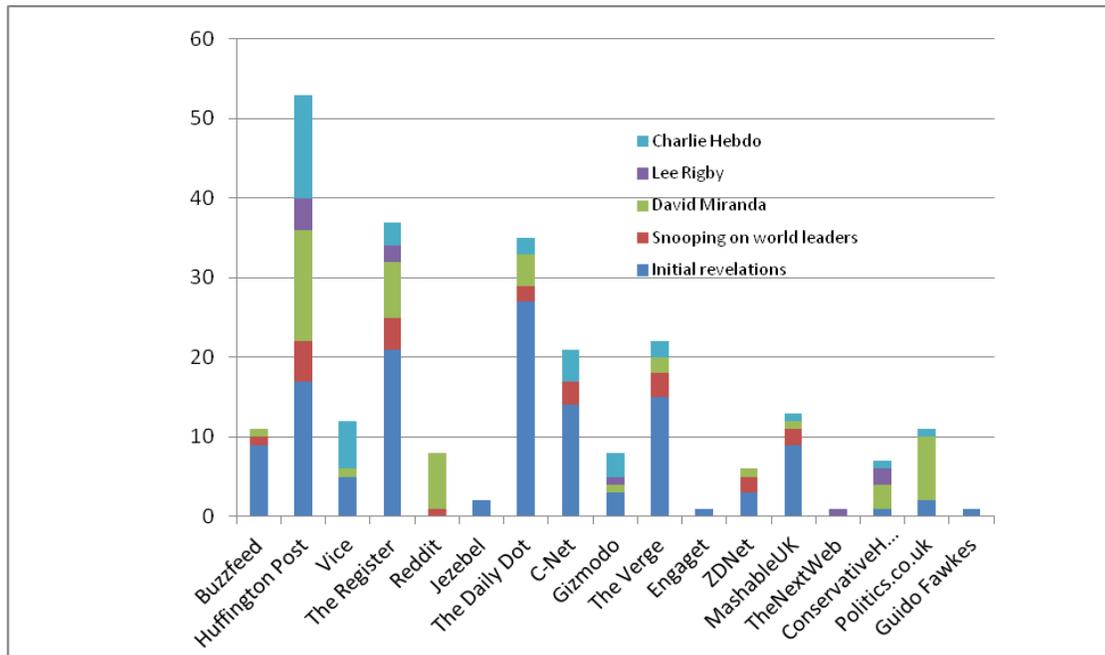
<sup>3</sup> Intercoder reliability tests were carried out on 10% of the sample—accounting for a total of 23 blog stories. The results indicated that for variables including sources, angles, and surveillance words, intercoder agreement was below 80%, which is widely considered the threshold for reporting.

<sup>4</sup> A copy of the content analysis coding sheets is available on request from the lead author.



**Figure 1. Distribution of articles by newspaper and case study (n = 538).**

If we look at the distribution of stories across blogs, as evident in Figure 2 below, there was also a distinctive spread of coverage, although for very different reasons. The initial revelations were covered most extensively in The Daily Dot, a blog that aims to be the “hometown newspaper” of the Internet (Ingram, 2011). By contrast, The Huffington Post was responsible for the overall largest volume of coverage across our blog sample. This is perhaps not surprising, given the general orientation and extensive resources of this long-established news blog compared with all the other blogs we examined.



**Figure 2. Distribution of articles by blog and case study (n = 249).**

### ***Normalizing or Contesting Surveillance: Opinions in Blogs and Newspapers***

Next, we focus primarily on how these platforms enabled the articulation of particular opinions regarding surveillance and the Snowden revelations. There was a striking disparity between opinions toward surveillance across newspapers and blogs, as reflected in Table 1.

In our newspaper sample, the most frequently expressed view was that surveillance should be increased or is acceptable/necessary (present in 9% of stories). Sources expressing this view suggested that surveillance is crucial to national security, and particularly important to strengthen in the light of terrorist threat. For example, Colonel Tim Collins (a former SAS officer), justified practices of surveillance with reference to the threat from “Islamic fundamentalists.” Writing an opinion piece in *The Sunday Telegraph* on January 11, 2015, he stated:

The reality is that Islamic fundamentalists have seized the modern tools of communication to facilitate their murderous campaigns. Governments—whose first responsibility is to defend their citizens and subjects—must fight to identify and prevent these campaigns using every method available. (Collins, 2015, para. 10)

**Table 1. Top 10 Most Frequent Opinions Across the Blog/Newspaper Sample.\***

	Blogs	Newspapers
Surveillance should be reduced/is unacceptable/illegal	19.6%*	7.5%
Surveillance should be increased/is acceptable/necessary	7.9%	9.0%
Intelligence services should be more transparent/accountable	10.6%	4.4%
Privacy is a human right that should be protected	7.8%	4.4%
The Snowden leaks are in the public interest	7.7%	2.7%
The Snowden leaks have compromised the work of the intelligence services	5.3%	6.1%
Social media/Internet companies should do more to fight terror	1.8%	6.0%
Personal data should not be accessed by intelligence services	5.8%	0.4%
Surveillance is damaging to international relations	4.4%	5.4%
Privacy must be balanced with national security	4.9%	4.8%

\*Percentages reported reflect the frequency of each opinion within the sample for each medium.

The prominence of opinions that justified surveillance in the name of national security in mainstream media is not accidental. Rather, there is evidence to suggest a longer-standing legitimization of state interventions through a reference to concerns about state security in the British context. Arguments that justify the restriction of civil liberties have increased in both prevalence and significance since the 7/7 attacks in London (MacDonald & Hunter, 2013). As Clare Birchall (2016) has argued, discourses of security and transparency are essential to contemporary practices of governmentality: States “commonly appeal to

security as a justification for covert operations and surveillance and offer forms of transparency, or open government, as a form of compensation" (Birchall, 2016, p. 152).

Legislative strategies limiting civil liberties through surveillance have typically been framed as counterterrorism laws in both government and media discourses (MacDonald & Hunter, 2013). As Picard (2015) suggested, there is a long-standing consensus in political theory that when the existence of the state is threatened, "ordinary morality" (p. 37) no longer applies. In other words, the idea of national security constitutes a discursive "trump card" overriding all other claims (see also Schulze, 2015).

Furthermore, the key justifications for surveillance that emerged after the Snowden revelations should be seen as arising out of a particular historical context. These arguments are premised on the deeply embedded nature of surveillance in our everyday lives (Ganesh, 2016) and the resulting normalization of "the watched world" (Lyon, 2007, p. 11). When we refer to normalization, we understand it in the Foucauldian sense, as the way in which norms of conduct are established and enforced through discursive practices backed up by institutional sanctions (e.g., Foucault, 1977). However, these processes of normalization are by no means uniform or uncontested. Rather, our study reveals that such discursive processes are always dynamic, resisted, and incomplete. In the context of British newspaper coverage, their articulation depends in part on the ideological allegiances of particular publications.

**Table 2. The Coverage of Surveillance Opinions Across Newspapers.**

	Surveillance should be increased/is acceptable/necessary	Surveillance should be reduced/is unacceptable/illegal
<i>Daily Express/Sunday Express</i>	1 (3.7%)	1 (3.7%)
<i>Daily Mail/Mail on Sunday</i>	5 (7.5%)	4 (6%)
<i>Daily Mirror/Sunday Mirror</i>	6 (8.1%)	3 (4.1%)
<i>Daily Star/Star on Sunday</i>	2 (22.2%)	0 (.0%)
<i>The Daily Telegraph/Sunday Telegraph</i>	15 (10.8%)	11 (7.9%)
<i>The Guardian/Observer</i>	39 (8.8%)	39 (8.8%)
<i>the i</i>	7 (7.8%)	10 (11.1%)
<i>The Independent/Independent on Sunday</i>	10 (8.1%)	11 (8.9%)
<i>The Sun</i>	8 (10.3%)	3 (3.8%)
<i>The People</i>	1 (10%)	2 (20%)
<i>The Times/Sunday Times</i>	15 (9.5%)	7 (4.4%)
Total (across full newspaper sample)	109 (9%)	91 (7.5%)

\*Percentages (except for the total) reflect the frequency of each opinion within the sample for each newspaper.

As Table 2 demonstrates, while *The Guardian*, perhaps surprisingly, provided equal visibility for opinions in favor of increasing and decreasing surveillance (both 8.8% across their news stories), other newspapers had marked differences in the coverage given to these opposing positions. *The Mirror* quoted views in favor of increased surveillance twice as often as the opposing viewpoint, as did *The Times*. However, our analysis demonstrated that the left-leaning newspapers *The People*, the *i*, and *The Independent* featured the highest levels of antisurveillance perspectives. Conversely, although the pro-surveillance view was present across the sample, our results show that it was more dominant in the right-leaning press, with *The Daily Telegraph*, *Daily Star*, and *The Sun* devoting the highest proportion of coverage of this view. For example, opinion pieces in the right-leaning quality newspaper *The Sunday Telegraph* and tabloid *The Sun* both described bulk data gathering as “comforting” in the light of security threats: “That the NSA and GCHQ should share such information ought to be a cause of comfort rather than concern. They don’t gather information for the sake of it—they do it to keep us safer” (Judd, 2013, para. 7) and “But I feel comforted, not threatened, by the thought that shadowy people are sifting through data to thwart any potential security threats” (Moore, 2013, p. 11).

Some even argued that the state does not have enough surveillance powers to keep us safe (Judd, 2013) and that the public should trust the state to do what is necessary to prevent security threats: “Rather, we should worry that our governments are prevented from snooping enough on the right people. Or doing anything else about them” (Judd, 2013, para. 10).

The emphasis on national security as the foremost concern—and surveillance as a necessary response to threats—was sometimes connected with the “nothing to hide, nothing to fear” argument: “If it’s a simple case of the emails and phone calls of ordinary, law-abiding people with nothing to fear being monitored as part of a wider effort to catch terrorist sleeper cell activities before anyone gets hurt, then so what?” (Moore, 2013, p. 11).

The “nothing to fear” position is not a distinctively British one (see Mols, 2016), but rather represents a view that circulates in globalized media debates. It offers a common-sense articulation of the idea that being under constant surveillance is not only a fact of life in contemporary societies but also entirely acceptable given the constant terrorist threat. This position has taken root in the context of an emerging “control society” where users “remain relatively unconcerned with surveillance, accepting the trade-off of greater usability for decreased control” (Best, 2010, p. 5). It underpins what Dencik (2015) has referred to as “surveillance realism”—the idea that “despite seeing, recognizing and fearing the fallacies of the system, how it impacts on our lives, limits our freedoms, and encroaches on our rights, we can no longer imagine society without ubiquitous surveillance” (para. 2). Furthermore, it flips arguments in favor of transparency of surveillance practices on their head, suggesting instead that the transparency of individual actions is secured through constant surveillance. It ultimately minimizes concerns about privacy and individual rights closely associated with debates over digital citizenship, highlighting instead the value of “law-abiding” citizens enabling and accepting regimes of monitoring and surveillance.

By contrast, as highlighted in Table 1, blogs most prominently featured the opinion that surveillance should be reduced (making up 19.6% of all opinions in blogs). Examining the spread of these viewpoints across the blogs, there is a clear dominance of antisurveillance perspectives, as evident in Table 3.

**Table 3. Opinions on Surveillance Across Blogs.**

	Surveillance should be increased/is acceptable/necessary	Surveillance should be reduced/is unacceptable/illegal
Buzzfeed	0 (0%)*	5 (20%)
C-Net	6 (7.5%)	14 (17.5%)
ConservativeHome	4 (16.4%)	4 (16.4%)
Engadget	1 (50%)	1 (50%)
Gizmodo	1 (5.3%)	7 (36.8%)
Guido Fawkes	1 (25%)	0 (0%)
Huffington Post	21 (11.7%)	34 (18.9%)
Jezebel	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
MashableUK	3 (9.1%)	6 (18.2%)
Politics.co.uk	6 (12.8%)	9 (19.1%)
Reddit	2 (6.9%)	8 (27.6%)
The Daily Dot	4 (3.7%)	24 (22.4%)
The Register	7 (5.3%)	22 (16.8%)
The Verge	4 (7.5%)	9 (17%)
TheNextWeb	0 (0%)	1 (33.3%)
Vice	3 (7.3%)	8 (19.5%)
ZDNet	0 (0%)	4 (30.8%)
Total (across full blog sample)	63 (7.9%)	156 (19.6%)

\*Percentages (except for the total) reflect the frequency of each opinion within the sample for each blog.

As we can see, all blogs in our sample except for Jezebel (which displayed neither opinion), Engadget, and the right-leaning Conservative Home and Guido Fawkes most frequently featured the opinion that surveillance should be reduced or is unacceptable. A similar pattern was evident within the public's comments on these blog stories. The following opinions were the most frequently expressed: (1) Surveillance should be reduced/is unacceptable/illegal (21.9% of all comments); (2) intelligence services should be more transparent/accountable/receive legal reforms (10.2% of all comments); and (3) privacy is a human right and should be protected (9.1% of all comments). This demonstrates that the blogosphere enabled debates on civil rights and privacy. It provoked responses from citizens that allowed them to contemplate their place in digital society and engage in the contestation of surveillance within these online spaces.

In blogs, resistance to surveillance was frequently discussed with reference to concerns over violations of privacy (accounting for 7.8% of opinions) and tied to concerns about the lack of transparency surrounding intelligence agencies (accounting for 10.6% of opinions). For instance, in a piece discussing the initial revelations, Vice (Cox, 2013) provided extensive information on practices of mass surveillance, which are placed in the context of concern about intelligence agencies "accessing the personal data of civilians" (para. 1):

The past few days haven't been good for civil liberties. Thanks to leaks from Edward Snowden, a former U.S. intelligence employee turned whistleblower, a light has been shone on a nefarious wing of the U.S. military, known as the NSA. In conjunction with its British counterpart, GCHQ, the NSA has been directly accessing the personal data of civilians stored in the servers of Google, Facebook, Apple, Skype and other Internet companies. As in, all the big, important Internet behemoths that will have detailed records of insignificant stuff like, say, your address, bank details and extended records of every single one of your personal interests. (para. 1)

This example demonstrates that blogs foreground citizen rights surrounding personal data and privacy. Indeed, the opinion that personal data should not be accessed by intelligence services made up a total of 5.8% of those expressed in blogs. By making these issues visible, they provided a greater emphasis on questions relevant to digital citizenship and to the consideration of how to negotiate the unfolding power of new technologies and their impact on the public. Along those lines, the need for transparency and privacy was a frequent theme. For example, *The Daily Dot* made this argument in the context of reporting on the extent of information held by corporations and agencies:

The National Security Agency (NSA) has your Facebook information. Today, Facebook told the public what—and how much—it has. Thing is, it's complicated. After former CIA worker Edward Snowden leaked intel that the National Security Agency was using a program called PRISM to access info from Google, Facebook, and other tech giants, the social network has pressed the government to allow it to be more transparent about the national security orders it needs to comply with. . . . It may yet be the case that Facebook is allowed to divulge more accurate numbers on the requests it has received, and how many it granted. For now, these rough numbers are the best we're getting. (Holt, 2013, paras. 1-2 & 10)

This view could be seen as a natural extension of the prevailing "Zeitgeist of transparency" (Stohl, Stohl, & Leonardia, 2016), signaling a broader trend in the "growing demand for openness, transparency and accountability" (Wood & Wright, 2015, abstract). The "triumph of transparency" (Braithwaite & Drahos, 2000) revolves around a belief in increased information and communication as a direct path to accountability, trust, and legitimacy in its own right (Christensen & Cheney, 2015).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The theme of transparency also came up in newspaper coverage, albeit to a lesser extent—as illustrated in Table 1, arguments in favor of enhanced transparency of the intelligence services accounted for 4.4% of

***In the Public Interest or Endangering Intelligence Services?  
Consequences of the Snowden Leaks***

At the same time, the extensive discussion of the details of bulk data gathering and its consequences for ordinary citizens in the blogosphere was reflective of a broader tension between newspapers and blogs over the role of the Snowden leaks in the ongoing contestation of the consequences of a surveillance society. As Table 4 shows, blogs present the leaks as predominantly being in the public interest, with this being the fifth most frequent opinion expressed across the platform, at almost double the frequency evident in our newspaper sample.

**Table 4. Perspectives Toward the Snowden Leaks Across the Blog/Newspaper Sample.**

	Blogs	Newspapers
Snowden leaks are in the public interest	7.7% (61)	2.7% (33)
Snowden leaks have compromised the work of the intelligence services	5.3% (42)	6.1% (74)

\*Percentages reflect the frequency of each opinion within the sample for each medium.

For example, *The Huffington Post*, in its coverage of the Snowden revelations and the unveiling of his identity, observed that

it appears to have just the effect on public opinion the whistleblower probably hoped it would have. Within hours of revealing his identity, a hashtag had begun circulating, #IStandWithEdwardSnowden, and a petition demanding a pardon for “national hero” Snowden has been registered with the White House. With a goal of 100,000 signatures by 9 July 2013, at time of press the petition had reached 42,000. It calls for “a full, free, and absolute pardon for any crimes he has committed or may have committed related to blowing the whistle on secret NSA surveillance programs.” (Elgot, 2013, paras. 9–12)

Thus, *The Huffington Post*’s perspective on the leaks was framed in terms of public interest and also highlights the actions of citizens in defense of Edward Snowden through social media and petitions.

Conversely, newspapers focused on the implications for the intelligence services, with a view of the leaks as compromising their work appearing as the third most expressed opinion across this platform (6.1% of all stories). For example, Eric Holder, the U.S. attorney general, argued that the “national security of the United States has been damaged as a result of these leaks” (Morris, 2013, para. 5).

These results underscore the differences we found between both media platforms—as newspaper normalized surveillance, the Snowden leaks were largely viewed through a lens of the repercussions for necessary surveillance work. Thus, the focus was on the leaks’ impact on national security and intelligence opinions in the newspaper sample, with a large proportion of these (2% of the overall sample) appearing in *The Guardian*.

work rather than their implications for citizens. Julian Petley (2014) discovered a similar pattern in his analysis of British newspaper coverage of the leaks. For some newspapers, he argued, it was “absolutely axiomatic that Snowden’s revelations via *The Guardian* have irreparably damaged national security. Skeptical or dissenting sources are very rarely quoted, and pronouncements by government ministers and ‘security chiefs’ (as they are habitually called) are taken entirely at face value” (Petley, 2014, p. 15).

In contrast, the blogs, through their inclusion of discussions relevant to digital citizenship, placed more emphasis on the meanings and repercussions of the Snowden leaks for citizens. In blogs, revelations of surveillance were framed predominantly as important for public interest rather than for elites or security services.

### ***Targets of Surveillance***

These differences between newspapers and blogs were also reflected in disparities between who was identified as the target of surveillance across the platforms. This is important because it shapes debates over, and public understanding of, what constitutes surveillance and who is surveilled.

As Table 5 shows, newspapers tended to position foreign politicians/world leaders and terrorists as targets. When targets were identified, this category accounted for almost a quarter of cases (24.7%), followed by terrorists (23.5%) and members of the public (22.5%). For example, *The Independent* reported on the (apparently widely shared) view of Jan Albrecht, Member of the European Parliament, who characterized the spying on surveillance of embassies as profoundly damaging to international relations. He described concerns about these surveillance practices as “part of a wider breakdown in trust between European nations” and stated that it “is not right for European countries to spy on each other” (Milmo & Paterson, 2013, para. 6).

***Table 5. Top Three Surveillance Targets Across the Blog/Newspaper Sample.***

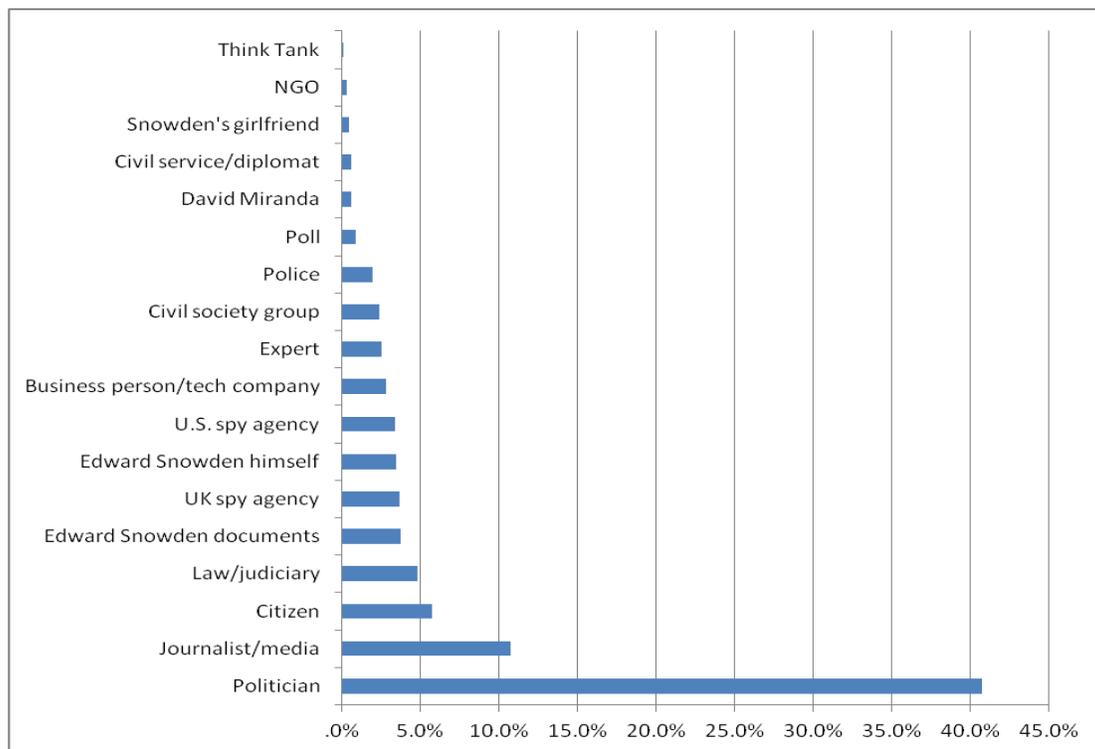
	Blogs	Newspapers
Public	43.5%* (107)	22.5% (115)
Terrorists	20.7% (51)	23.5% (120)
Foreign politicians/world leaders	11.8% (29)	24.7% (126)

\*Percentages reflect the frequency of each opinion within the sample for each medium.

This, in part, reflects the relative prominence of revelations about snooping on world leaders and embassies in newspapers. Indeed, this story figured far more prominently in newspapers (accounting for 25.1% of the overall sample) than in blogs (where they made up just 9.2% across all case studies). By emphasizing the surveillance of political elites—and the implications of this surveillance for international relations—the far more widespread and institutionalized practices of mass surveillance that Snowden was concerned about are pushed to the margins of public debate. Instead, surveillance is constructed as an

issue that is largely relevant to the elite sphere of international politics, with implications for ordinary people—and their rights as digital citizens—less visible.

This preoccupation reflects the well-documented elite-focused nature of mainstream media. The tendency to report disproportionately on events and actions associated with elites is a long-standing tendency in news production, underpinned by news values (Galtung & Ruge, 1965; O'Neill & Harcup, 2009) and one which clearly informs the universe of available information regarding surveillance. Indeed, our newspaper sample overall reflects a predominance of political sources—with politicians and their spokespersons appearing the most frequently, at 40.8% of all sources across stories, as reflected in Figure 3.<sup>6</sup>



**Figure 3. Frequency of source types in newspaper sample.**

The second-most frequent source type was journalists, accounting for 10.7% of source appearance, while citizens were used as sources in just 5.9% of cases. In newspaper coverage, then, politicians and their spokespersons were given voices far more frequently than any other source type. And their opinions reflected the preoccupations of governments and intelligence agencies, focusing on the implications of the leaks for the sphere of political life. As the primary definers of the story of the Snowden

<sup>6</sup> We are unable to provide similar figures for sourcing patterns in blogs, given intercoder agreement below 80% for this variable.

revelations, these perspectives deemphasized the importance of the revelations for the lives of ordinary citizens, leading to the invisibility of questions of digital citizenship.

In contrast, the blog sample predominantly identified members of the public as the targets of surveillance, in line with Snowden's concerns. Members of the public accounted for 43.5% of instances where targets of surveillance were discussed, followed by terrorists (20.7%), and journalists (17.9%), with foreign politicians and world leaders mentioned in 11.8% of cases.

For example, an article in *The Register*, published after the initial revelations, focused on David Cameron's attempt at responding to criticisms of "snooping on people" and gathering "e-mails, chat logs and other private information about folks" (para. 2):

British intelligence agencies have broken no laws and are subject to "proper" parliamentary scrutiny, Prime Minister David Cameron insisted today as the NSA PRISM scandal reached Blighty.

He was forced to defend Brit spooks following allegations that UK eavesdropping nerve-centre GCHQ had access to the Americans' controversial PRISM project, which gathers emails, chat logs and other private information about folks from Internet giants. It is alleged such access allowed GCHQ to circumvent the law, avoid ministerial scrutiny and sidestep the need to obtain a court order when snooping on people. (Fiveash, 2013, paras. 1-2)

Such stories were also present in our newspaper sample, but not nearly as prominent as in the blogs. Overall, our study demonstrates that blogs may contribute to expanding what the public can legitimately contest and dispute by placing issues relevant to digital citizenship on the agenda of public debate. This is precisely because of their distinctive epistemology (Matheson, 2004), which affords commentators the opportunity to express opinions. Our analysis thus suggests that the form of blog journalism allows for the articulation of a broader range of opinions than the mainstream media because blog writers in many cases serve as the primary definers of the story. And if this primary definition resists the top-down, elite-centered framework that prevails in mainstream media, it also opens up for alternative viewpoints and voices. These might be particularly alert to questions around digital rights and hence resist the normalization of surveillance and invisibility of digital citizenship that shape newspaper coverage.

### **Conclusion**

The Snowden revelations provided a critical moment crystallizing broader discussions about surveillance and digital citizenship. In this article, we investigated the ways in which newspapers and blogs covered the revelations and their aftermath. We were particularly interested in examining how surveillance was justified and contested in public debates. Our research demonstrated a striking pattern: On the one hand, newspaper coverage appeared to be largely in favor of surveillance in the interest of national security. Through the weight of opinion from elite sources legitimating surveillance, combined

with the relative inattention to mass surveillance and the emphasis on surveillance of elites and terrorists, surveillance was both justified and normalized. Moreover, the normalization of surveillance was justified with reference to a variant of the “nothing to fear, nothing to hide” argument. More than anything, what this analysis demonstrates is that the normalization of surveillance in newspapers was underpinned by the invisibility of questions of digital citizenship. This raises an interesting epistemological issue: It suggests that processes of legitimation and normalization operate not merely by means of what arguments are heard and what discourses are advanced but also by exclusion: If issues central to digital citizenship remain unheard and invisible, it is also impossible to debate and contest these issues.

This insight becomes all the more apparent in the light of our findings around debates in the blogosphere. Our research indicated that blogs enabled the contestation of practices of mass surveillance. They did this through problematizing the transgression of individual rights (including privacy), clearly identifying “ordinary people” as the targets of surveillance and entering broader debates relevant to digital citizenship. This demonstrates that the blogosphere has the potential to make visible the key problems for citizens that rest at the core of surveillance, even as they are scantily evident in the mainstream media. At the same time, we should remain cognizant of the relatively marginal role of blogs in the public sphere, and the continued dominance of mainstream media.

Isin and Ruppert (2015) argued that attention to digital citizenship involves “investigating how people use language to describe themselves and their relations to others and how language summons them into speaking beings” (p. 23). What our study demonstrates is that research on digital citizenship in mediated debates needs to pay just as urgent attention to the ways in which political subjects are silenced, as well as the emerging spaces where this silence may be broken.

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