

MAY 2015

**ONLINE
PRIVACY**

**ANWAR
ODURO-KWARTENG**



DEBATING MATTERS
**TOPIC
GUIDES**

MOTION:

**“IN A DIGITAL AGE
WE SHOULD NOT
EXPECT OUR ONLINE
ACTIVITIES TO
REMAIN PRIVATE”**

ABOUT DEBATING MATTERS

Debating Matters because ideas matter. This is the premise of the Institute of Ideas Debating Matters Competition for sixth form students which emphasises substance, not just style, and the importance of taking ideas seriously. Debating Matters presents schools with an innovative and engaging approach to debating, where the real-world debates and a challenging format, including panel judges who engage with the students, appeal to students from a wide range of backgrounds, including schools with a long tradition of debating and those with none.

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KEY TERMS

[Censorship](#)

[Digital Revolution](#)

[Privacy](#)

[Right To Be Forgotten](#)

INTRODUCTION

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25 years on from the introduction of the World Wide Web, the internet now permeates our everyday lives; many of us use it daily to shop, pay our bills, and communicate with friends. The digital revolution [Ref: [Techopedia](#)] has made unfathomable amounts of information available at the click of a mouse, opening us up to the world like never before. But have the benefits of the digital age come at a cost to our privacy? From recent stories involving celebrities such as Jennifer Lawrence having their email accounts hacked, resulting in personal photographs being leaked to the media and online [Ref: [Independent](#)], and Facebook attempting to manipulate users moods [Ref: [London Review of Books](#)], to Google admitting that users of its Gmail system can have no “reasonable expectation” that their communications are confidential [Ref: [Guardian](#)], privacy online has become a key issue of our time. Some argue that: “The rules of online privacy will continue to change” [Ref: [Slate](#)], but suggest that technological innovation means that we actually have a more dynamic, interconnected world as a result. Whilst for others, the threat to privacy in the digital world is far more dangerous, because “the internet doesn’t just see what we want it to see. Its gaze is not limited to the airbrushed facades of our digital profiles. It peers around the corner, and sees the tangled mess behind the scenes” [Ref: [Guardian](#)]. In addition, the State’s role in surveilling our online activities for security reasons also concerns many observers, and following their victory in the recent General election, the new Conservative government has pledged to push through its previously blocked ‘snoopers’ charter’ [Ref: [Independent](#)]. With many of us now increasingly living our lives online, has the digital age changed how we perceive the private sphere, or is privacy an absolute that we should expect online as well as off?



ONLINE PRIVACY:

“In a digital age we should not expect our online activities to remain private”



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How much do we care about online privacy?

For civil liberties campaigner Shami Chakrabarti, privacy is “an important part of the human experience” both online and off, and should be protected as far as possible [Ref: [British Library](#)]. However despite such sentiments, John Naughton, a professor of the public understanding of technology, observes that the debate about online privacy is a fundamentally confused one – with users complaining about breaches of privacy by government, social media sites and corporations, whilst simultaneously surrendering all kinds of personal information on the web. He concludes by arguing that “when push comes to shove, their privacy isn’t as important to them as they say it is” [Ref: [Guardian](#)]. More fundamentally, for writer Alex Preston, the digital age has meant that: “We have come to the end of privacy...the internet is radically altering our sense of what (if anything) should remain private” [Ref: [Guardian](#)]. The advent of the digital age was meant to embody the free sharing and dissemination of information between people across borders, and this human need to remain connected with each other is the very basis of the internet. However, media commentator Greg Satell observes that our ambivalence towards privacy is not new because: “Whilst we do value privacy, we value other things more” [Ref: [Forbes](#)]. After all, as one critic of internet privacy argues, we are not compelled to use social media: “If you want your online social activity to be as private as possible, simply stop using free, ad-supported social networks altogether” [Ref: [Independent](#)].

State security in the digital age

“Privacy has never been an absolute right” declared Richard Hannigan, the new head of the British intelligence and security organisation GCHQ, when defending state surveillance [Ref: [Financial Times](#)]. In July 2014, the debate surrounding privacy and security came to public attention when the UK Government controversially passed the new Data Protection and Investigatory Powers Act (DRIP), which strengthened their ability to access digital information by compelling communications companies to store all user data for 12 months for use by the security services [Ref: [Gov.uk](#)]. Advocates of State surveillance argue that radical terrorist groups such as Islamic State now regularly use social media to communicate, and even obtain instructions on how to build incendiary devices online, meaning that robust legislation is vital [Ref: [BBC News](#)]. Home Secretary Theresa May also suggests that powers which allow police and security services to track our online activities, are vital in solving complex criminal enterprises, and could even be used to help catch paedophiles who may use the internet to distribute indecent images [Ref: [Guardian](#)]. In opposition to these arguments, many are gravely concerned about the encroachment on our privacy that state surveillance represents, with the United Nation’s Navi Pillay describing internet privacy as being an issue as important as human rights [Ref: [Guardian](#)]. For supporters of online privacy more broadly, the issue is a moral one; privacy is an inviolable right, even in a digital age, and the state and corporations having the ability to invade that right is a very serious issue because: “To maintain any validity, our democratic rights must apply in virtual as well as real space” [Ref: [Change.Org](#)].



THE ONLINE PRIVACY DEBATE IN CONTEXT CONTINUED...

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Do we need an online Magna Carta?

In response to the revelations of widespread online surveillance by former United States National Security Agency (NSA) operative Edward Snowden, the UN Human Rights Council stated that: “There is a universal recognition of the fundamental importance, and enduring relevance, of the right to privacy, and to ensure that it is safeguarded in law and in practice” [Ref: [Human Rights Council](#)]. Subsequently, 800 years after Magna Carta [Ref: [British Library](#)], creator of the World Wide Web, Sir Tim Berners-Lee has been among those calling for a Digital Bill of Rights, in order to ensure privacy and freedom of expression to all internet users worldwide [Ref: [Huffington Post](#)]. Supporters of online privacy are unhappy with the effect that surveillance and data collection is having on the web, with one commentator suggesting that the internet has lost its way - abandoning the principles of freedom and egalitarianism which it was meant to embody: “At its inception the world wide web seemed to promise an escape from corporate and governmental powers, an egalitarian free-for-all. Now? It has increasingly become a sophisticated extension of them. The hopes once nurtured by the man who invented the web have been not so much abandoned as betrayed” [Ref: [Guardian](#)]. However, questions remain about the degree to which privacy should be protected online. In 2014, the ‘Right to be forgotten’ ruling by the European Court of Justice, set a precedent which means that individuals, companies and even Governments, can apply to internet search engines such as Google requesting that information about them be removed from search results [Ref: [BBC News](#)]. For critics this is worrying because the principle of the ruling indicates that “the balance between privacy and freedom of expression is tilting

in the wrong direction” [Ref: [The Times](#)], as a Times editorial opines. In addition, writer John Hendel argues that individuals and governments now essentially have the right to airbrush their past, meaning that: “The question of censorship is inevitable” [Ref: [Atlantic](#)]. Has the digital age so fundamentally changed our understanding of the private sphere that: “The edifices of privacy that we once thought we understood are melting like ice in a heat wave” [Ref: [Guardian](#)]? Is the right to privacy an absolute, or should we be more realistic online – after all, the internet was created for the sharing and dissemination of information, which we all do willingly? And ultimately, in a digital age, should we expect our online activities to remain private?



ESSENTIAL READING

[Data Retention and Investigatory Powers Act \(DRIP\) 2014](#)

Home Office 25 July 2014

[The right to privacy in a digital age](#)

Human Rights Council 30 June 2014

FOR

[The web is a terrorist's command and control network of choice](#)

Richard Hannigan *Financial Times* 3 November 2014

[Freedom to search](#)

The Times 5 July 2014

[Im not worried about online privacy](#)

Alex Proud *Telegraph* 16 June 2014

[We are looking at PRISM from the wrong angle](#)

Andy Law *Huffington Post* 13 June 2013

AGAINST

[Nobody cares about their online privacy, until its gone](#)

John Naughton *Guardian* 1 March 2015

[Destroying online privacy will make the world a more dangerous place](#)

Carly Nyst *Telegraph* 6 November 2014

[The death of privacy](#)

Alex Preston *Guardian* 3 August 2014

[The primacy of internet privacy](#)

The Age 9 March 2014

IN DEPTH

[The solace of oblivion](#)

Jeffrey Toobin *New Yorker* 29 September 2014

[The Internet's original sin](#)

Ethan Zuckerman *Atlantic* 14 August 2014

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ORGANISATIONS

[British Library: My Digital Rights Project](#)

[Change.org](#)

[GCHQ](#)

[Privacy International](#)

[Web We Want](#)



BACKGROUNDERS

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[Magna Carta in the twentieth century](#)

Dr Alexander Lock *British Library* 2015

[Europe's expanding right to be forgotten](#)

New York Times 4 February 2015

[State surveillance is enabled by our own sloppy habits](#)

John Naughton *Guardian* 13 December 2014

[Let's face it, we don't really care about online privacy](#)

Greg Satell *Forbes* 1 December 2014

[Why the internet has turned us all into hypocrites](#)

John Naughton *Guardian* 16 November 2014

[While the internet is accountable to nobody, privacy will be in crisis](#)

Jenny Judge *Guardian* 31 October 2014

[Jennifer Lawrence's nude photo leak is not her fault](#)

Grace Dent *Independent* 1 September 2014

[There is no privacy in the internet of things](#)

Daniel Newman *Forbes* 30 August 2014

[How the web lost it's way, and its founding principles](#)

Stuart Jeffries *Guardian* 24 August 2014

[Short Cuts](#)

Thomas Jones *London Review of Books* 17 July 2014

[Don't complain about privacy, it's your fault](#)

Oliver Moody *The Times* 8 July 2014

[We need a Magna Carta for the internet](#)

Sir Tim Berners-Lee *Huffington Post* 5 June 2014

[What is the right to be forgotten?](#)

John Lee *BBC News* 13 May 2014

[Privacy in the digital age](#)

Shami Chakrabarti *British Library* 2014

[Brazil: not the web we want](#)

Martyn Perks *Spiked* 7 April 2014

[Take my online data, please](#)

Cyrus Nemati *Slate* 6 February 2014

[Privacy for me, not thee](#)

Brendan O'Neill *Spiked* 26 November 2013

[Snowdon's legacy: a public debate about online privacy](#)

John Cassidy *New Yorker* 20 August 2013

[Facebook: if you're worried about privacy, simply don't use it](#)

Alex Masters *Independent* 4 December 2012

[Big Data puts privacy in question as information becomes currency](#)

Aleks Krotoski *Guardian* 22 April 2012

[The end of online privacy?](#)

Charles Arthur *Guardian* 28 February 2012

[In Europe a right to be forgotten trumps the memory of the internet](#)

John Hendel *Atlantic* 3 February 2011



IN THE NEWS

[Theresa May suggests Conservative majority could lead to huge increase in surveillance powers](#)

Independent 8 May 2015

[Leave Facebook if you want to retain your privacy](#)

Guardian 26 March 2015

[Facebook data privacy case to be heard before European Union Court](#)

Guardian 24 March 2015

[‘Internet Privacy as important as Human Rights’ says UN’s Navi Pillay](#)

Guardian 26 December 2014

[Theresa May: Bill could have helped catch paedophiles](#)

Guardian 10 December 2014

[‘We thought Google was the future, but is becoming Big Brother’](#)

The Times 19 November 2014

[Facebook and Twitter have become ‘command and control network of choice for ISIS’ GCHQ chief warns](#)

Independent 4 November 2014

[GCHQ, terrorists and the internet: what are the issues?](#)

BBC News 4 November 2014

[US threat to British online privacy](#)

Telegraph 27 September 2014

[BT boss says that internet privacy cannot be 100% guaranteed](#)

Guardian 22 January 2014

[World’s leading authors: State surveillance of personal data is theft](#)

Guardian 10 December 2013

[Google: don’t expect privacy when using Gmail](#)

Guardian 23 August 2013

[Nick Clegg: No web snooping Bill whilst Lib Dems are in Government](#)

BBC News 25 April 2013

[Senators vote to require a search warrant for emails](#)

Independent 30 November 2012

[Blueprint for privacy Bill of Rights unveiled](#)

The White House 23 February 2012

[Privacy no longer a social norm says Facebook founder](#)

Guardian 11 January 2010

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AUDIO/VISUAL

[Is nothing private anymore?](#)

Battle of Ideas 19 October 2013



ADVICE FOR DEBATING MATTERS



FOR STUDENTS

READ EVERYTHING

In the Topic Guide and in the news - not just your side of the argument either.

STATISTICS ARE GOOD BUT.....

Your opponents will have their own too. They'll support your points but they aren't a substitute for them.

BE BOLD

Get straight to the point but don't rush into things: make sure you aren't falling back on earlier assertions because interpreting a debate too narrowly might show a lack of understanding or confidence.

DON'T BACK DOWN

Try to take your case to its logical conclusion before trying to seem 'balanced' - your ability to challenge fundamental principles will be rewarded - even if you personally disagree with your arguments.

DON'T PANIC

Never assume you've lost because every question is an opportunity to explain what you know. Don't try to answer every question but don't avoid the tough ones either.

FOR TEACHERS

Hoping to start a debating club? Looking for ways to give your debaters more experience? Debating Matters have a wide range of resources to help develop a culture of debate in your school and many more Topic Guides like this one to bring out the best in your students. For these and details of how to enter a team for the Debating Matters Competition visit our website, www.debatingmatters.com

FOR JUDGES

Judges are asked to consider whether students have been brave enough to address the difficult questions asked of them. Clever semantics might demonstrate an acrobatic mind but are also likely to hinder a serious discussion by changing the terms and parameters of the debate itself.

Whilst a team might demonstrate considerable knowledge and familiarity with the topic, evading difficult issues and failing to address the main substance of the debate misses the point of the competition. Judges are therefore encouraged to consider how far students have gone in defending their side of the motion, to what extent students have taken up the more challenging parts of the debate and how far the teams were able to respond to and challenge their opponents.

As one judge remarked *'These are not debates won simply by the rather technical rules of schools competitive debating. The challenge is to dig in to the real issues.'* This assessment seems to grasp the point and is worth bearing in mind when sitting on a judging panel.



**“A COMPLEX
WORLD REQUIRES
THE CAPACITY
TO MARSHALL
CHALLENGING IDEAS
AND ARGUMENTS”**

**LORD BOATENG, FORMER BRITISH HIGH
COMMISSIONER TO SOUTH AFRICA**