

Essay type: Argument

Question: Should state or local governments have the power to use surveillance cameras in their communities?

Federal government should regulate the use of surveillance cameras in all states to protect citizens' rights

[1] Protecting citizens has always been an important duty of the government, and in times of war or terrorism, people trust the decisions of the government officials to keep them safe. [2] After the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995, and the September 11th attacks in 2001, many citizens were ready to give up some civil liberties to keep their families safe. [3] The U.S. Department of Defence reported that "from half of Congress to New York street corners, Americans are calling for more military involvement in homeland defense" (Granone, 2001, p.1). [4] Congress responded by passing the Patriot Act and establishing an office of Homeland Security. [5] Surveillance cameras started appearing on city streets and in public buildings across the country, but there has been a lot of controversy. [6] Concerned citizens across the United States are demonstrating their opposition to "being watched". [7] In October 2002, Pennsylvania State University students rallied against the college's plan to mount surveillance cameras on campus. [8] However, in many cities, local governments allow police forces to monitor and record the movements of residents every day. [9] To protect citizens' rights to privacy and to prevent the misuse of taxpayers' money, the federal government should regulate the use of surveillance cameras in all states.

[10] One major argument of those who defend the use of high-tech surveillance systems is that citizens' Fourth Amendment rights to privacy are not violated when cameras are mounted in public areas, because their privacy cannot be invaded in public places. [11] As the former mayor of New York Rudolph Giuliani summarized, "it's about balancing a sense of security against an invasion of privacy" (Boal, 1988). [12] However, when New Yorkers were surveyed on the issue of the growing use of surveillance cameras, 92 per cent responded that they were concerned about threats to privacy. [13] Therefore, while it may be true that such cameras make some people feel secure, many ordinary people feel like criminals, and most feel uncomfortable, mistrusted, and even vaguely guilty. [14] Why should ordinary people have to feel like that every day? [15] Using surveillance might not be breaking the law, but as Whitehead (2001) wrote in his *WorldNet Diary* online news article, "It's important to realise that the protection of privacy is not simply a legal technicality - it is a basic principle of democracy" (p.2).