

S R C

SRC-TR-99-002
August 1999

TRENDS IN PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARDS GOVERNMENT SECURITY PROGRAMS

An Analysis of General Social Survey Data, 1994-1998

Lynn F. Fischer
Security Research Center

Approved for Public Distribution:
Distribution Unlimited

19990907 121

Security Research Center
Defense Security Service
99 Pacific Street, Suite 455-E
Monterey, California 93940-2481

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302, and to the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (0704-0188), Washington, DC 20503.

1. AGENCY USE ONLY (<i>Leave Blank</i>)	2. REPORT DATE <p style="text-align: center;">August 1999</p>	3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED <p style="text-align: center;">Technical Report 1994-1998</p>
---	--	---

4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Trends in Public Attitudes Towards Government Security Programs (U)	5. FUNDING NUMBERS
--	--------------------

6. AUTHOR(S) Fischer, Lynn F.	
----------------------------------	--

7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Security Research Center 99 Pacific Street, Suite 455-E Monterey, CA 93940	8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER SRC-TR-99-002
--	---

9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Defense Security Service 1340 Braddock Place Alexandria, VA 22314-1651	10. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER
---	--

11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES

12a. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public distribution: Distribution unlimited	12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE
---	------------------------

13. ABSTRACT (*Maximum 200 words*)
The Security Research Center has been working with the National Opinion Research Center since 1993 to define the climate of public opinion in which government security policy is developed. Security-related items have been included in the 1994, 1996, and 1998 General Social Surveys concerning how much protection should be provided for national security information, the appropriate areas of inquiry for establishing eligibility for position of trust, and acceptable methods for monitoring cleared employees. This report summarizes attitude trends and magnitudes of public support on these issues across the four-year time span. In general, the data show that there is a solid and sustained endorsement for protecting various categories of national security information and a strong and continuing support for investigative inquiry into personal areas such as finances, mental health, criminal history, and substance abuse. Espionage is clearly perceived to be a serious crime that should warrant severe sentencing after conviction. However, there is mixed and uncertain support for security measures to ensure the continued reliability of cleared employees.

14. SUBJECT TERMS Public opinion, security policy, personnel security, security attitudes, security countermeasures, employee monitoring	15. NUMBER OF PAGES <p style="text-align: center;">39</p>
	16. PRICE CODE

17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT <p style="text-align: center;">Unclassified</p>	18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE <p style="text-align: center;">Unclassified</p>	19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT <p style="text-align: center;">Unclassified</p>	20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT <p style="text-align: center;">Unclassified/Unlimited</p>
--	---	--	---

Preface

The Security Research Center (SRC) of the Defense Security Service (DSS) has a continuing interest in describing the social context in which national security policies are developed and implemented. We have since 1991, sponsored a series of studies designed to tap into various security-related opinions and the likely direction these will take in the future. In that year we published *Security Awareness and the Climate of Public Opinion: With Special Attention to Financial and Credit Issues*. This was followed in 1993 by another technical report, *Security Awareness and the Climate of Public Opinion: An Analysis of Recent Trends*. These two studies were analyses of survey data collected by other researchers around the nation.

In 1994 SRC sponsored several security-related interview items in the National Opinion Research Center's General Social Survey (GSS) for that year. The resultant study, *Public Attitudes towards Security and Counterespionage Matters in the Post Cold-War Period*, probed issues thought to be particularly relevant to the Department of Defense and the Intelligence Community. Questions concerned opinions regarding the need for secrecy, the extent to which secrecy is over-used, reporting adverse information about coworkers, and the appropriateness of collecting various types of personal background information before granting access to classified information.

In 1996 we modified and added more items to the GSS. The included questions about the need to protect specific types of national security information and about the government's right to enquire into details of an individual's financial status and mental health history before granting a security clearance. Following the 1996 survey we issued *Public Attitudes Towards Security and Counter-espionage Matters in 1994 and 1996*. The 1998 GSS included additional items that measure perceptions of the seriousness of espionage-related crimes and attitudes about security measures for monitoring cleared employees.

Several of the same security-related questions have been asked in each of the three survey years, now making it possible to begin tracking changes in specific opinions over time. This study of trends, or in some instances the lack of trends, is the focus of the present report.

In reviewing these findings, I personally am struck by the general strength of the public endorsement of government security measures and by its stability over a period of years. I am convinced that public awareness, receptiveness and sensitivity to acts of government should be one of the several important factors to be considered in policy development. Therefore, the primary intent in interpreting and disseminating the findings from these analyses is to provide the policymaker with pertinent information about the public opinion environment in which security policy is formulated and implemented. All security professionals may find reassurance that their efforts, almost without exception, are endorsed by popular consent.

James A. Riedel, Ph D.
Director

Executive Summary

At a time when public opinion plays an increasingly large role in national decision-making, our ability to maintain and enhance security programs depends in part upon the public's willingness to endorse measures to safeguard national security information. The feelings held by our fellow citizens about current events, their sensitivity to hot-button issues, and their levels of resistance or willingness to cooperate with security programs impact on our ability to carry out the mission. And it is also from this population that are drawn the trusted, three million-plus workforce who are relied upon to safeguard national assets.

The General Social Survey (GSS)

To assess this public opinion climate, the Security Research Center (SRC), Defense Security Service, since 1993 has been working with the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago. The goal has been to develop and administer scientifically accurate tests of public attitudes and preferences about what the government is doing, or should do, to address internal vulnerabilities and the foreign intelligence threat. SRC staff drafted several interview questions for inclusion in NORC's biennial General Social Survey (GSS) beginning in 1994 and continuing in 1996 and 1998. The GSS is based on a nationally representative sample of adults living in households in the United States.

Areas of Inquiry

The special focus of this effort has been on popular approval for areas of investigative inquiry to assess individuals for a position of trust, and for maintaining security to protect sensitive national security information. This report confronts some of the previously unanswerable questions about the public opinion climate in which security policy is debated and implemented.

The answers to these questions are particularly pertinent to security professionals and their effectiveness in a variety of roles. These include policymakers who need to be aware of trends in public sentiment, investigative agents who routinely interact face-to-face with members of the community, and security educators who need to know the values and sensitivities of cleared employees drawn from the general population of adults.

Thirty fixed-response items included in three consecutive survey years cover four distinct lines of questioning. With the results from the 1998 survey now in, we can look at trends over a 6-year period and observe the stability of specific attitudes in the face of a changing environment and dramatic national events. It is now possible to track the pattern of stability and change for the first two of the following four issue areas:

- How much protection should be provided by the government for different types of national security information?
- What areas of inquiry are appropriate for determining eligibility for a position of trust?

- What methods are acceptable for monitoring personnel who are in a position of trust (asked only in 1998)?
- How serious is the crime of espionage as compared to other criminal acts against the government (asked only in 1998)?

Underlying all of these is the implied question: How far should the government of a modern constitutional democracy be permitted to go in the protection of national security information and other assets? In other words, what is an appropriate balance between the government's occasional need to be intrusive, restrictive, and covert in the national interest; and the full enjoyment of what are commonly held to be constitutional guarantees of freedom and privacy?

Findings: What the GSS Tells Us

From these data one can determine that there is:

□ *Solid and sustained support for protecting national security information*

A continuing reservoir of popular support exists in favor of information security programs and security countermeasures, but some aspects of our programs have stronger public endorsement than others.

Strong majority support remains in place for measures to protect national security information in five key areas: technology having military applications, diplomatic initiatives, military operations, domestic counter-terrorism, and lastly, the US intelligence budget. In all areas but the last, support for security has remained fairly constant, at about the 70% level or higher. While sentiment in favor of providing protection for military technology remains at approximately the 70% level over the 6-year period, a downward trend in support since 1994 may signal the need more clearly to define and articulate what needs to be protected by government.

□ *Strong and continuing support for investigative inquiry into personal areas*

Agreement levels over the 6-year period are almost without exception strong and consistent in those areas where the need for information has been verified by empirical research as productive for reaching a fair personnel security adjudication. These include support for inquiry into financial and credit history, criminal records, illegal drug use, alcohol abuse, and mental health history. Support in 1998 in the above areas (respondents saying that the government definitely should or probably should ask) ranges between 74.1% and 95.1%.

Concerning inquiry into mental health history, a strong majority of respondents feel that asking for information about diagnosis and treatment by a mental health professional is warranted. However, there has been a slight weakening of support for this since the 1996

survey. The one area in which a significant decrease in public support has occurred is inquiry into personal financial/credit history, with public endorsement slipping from about 82% in 1994 to 74% in 1998. While intrusion by government into areas of personal privacy is a sensitive issue, it is clear that in general the public views investigative agents' inquiry into private matters as justifiable, so long as this is done for the purpose of placing an applicant in a position of trust.

□ *Mixed and uncertain support for security measures to ensure the continued reliability of cleared employees*

Data from the 1994 GSS revealed a strong expression of support for personal intervention when another employee is seen violating rules to protect classified information. However, a set of more detailed items presented to respondents in 1998 reveals a mixed pattern of support for other security measures proposed for monitoring and continuing evaluation of cleared employees. While nearly 90% endorse random drug testing and 74% agree to periodic polygraph testing, measures which prescribe some form of continuous surveillance—electronic and non-electronic—fare poorly, with less than majority approval: While 49.5% agree or strongly agree that cleared employees should be monitored in the workplace, 29.7% disagree or disagree strongly with this proposal. However, with regard to monitoring *outside* the work environment (including database searches), while 42.4% support this measure, 34.2% do not.

□ *A perception of espionage as being a very serious crime*

Reactions to a set of scenarios depicting various types of criminal activity refute the assertion that the public sees espionage as merely some sort of white-collar crime or theft of government property. Most respondents unmistakably see espionage, even on behalf of a friendly interest, as being a serious offense against the United States and deserving of a long sentence, even life in prison. As an indication of public perception of the seriousness of espionage on behalf of an adversary, 35.5% believe that it warrants a sentence of 10 to 20 years behind bars and 38% believe that it should result in a life sentence. By contrast, respondents' views on the offense of unauthorized disclosure result in a preference by only 4.9% for a 10-20 year sentence and by 1.8% for life imprisonment.

□ *Differences of opinion about security that do not correspond to demographic divisions or other attitudes in the national population*

In general one can conclude that what differences exist on the attitudinal scales related to security do not appear to be strongly related to or reinforced by demographic, ideological, philosophical, or religious divisions in society. Tests of statistical association and significance between security measures and demographic variables show a consistent and moderate strength of association only between age grouping and attitudes about security. Adults under the age of 21 appear to be slightly less approving of measures to protect national security information and of government inquiry for security clearances. With regard to non-security attitudes measured

by the survey, only a very few show more than a slight degree of association with views about security.

Conclusions

The analysis of three snap-shots of public thinking about security-related issues in the United States in 1994, 1996 and 1998 has been both encouraging and disconcerting. One can feel confident that by and large the American electorate generally supports what agencies of the Federal Government are doing in information security, personnel security, and counterespionage programs. There are specific policy and program areas which have received surprisingly strong endorsement in terms of public backing: (1) government efforts to reduce the total inventory of classified holdings, (2) personnel security investigations in general and inquiry into mental health history in particular, and (3) the use of the polygraph and random drug testing to ensure continuing reliability in the cleared workforce. Furthermore, the respondents clearly acknowledge that espionage (perhaps now more closely linked with terrorism in the public mind) is indeed a serious crime deserving of the most severe punishment.

Opinions about other aspects of our programs cause us to be less complacent: Current events, such as the alleged theft of nuclear weapons technology by China, indicate that the greater threat to national security is the targeting of technology for military use. In contrast, data from the GSS show that the public is less concerned with the protection of technology than in 1994. Although support for personnel security investigations into all key issue areas is sustained, there are signs of growing resistance to collecting information about private financial affairs. This is in spite of the fact that recent espionage cases point to financial indicators as one of the most important early warning signs of insider betrayal.

Lastly, while other research tells us that what precipitates espionage has a lot to do with foreground or situational conditions immediately preceding a betrayal of trust, public support for certain types of monitoring of cleared employees is ambivalent at best—under 50%, except for direct co-worker intervention. This is an area where many of the respondents were not comfortable, perhaps because of the associations people make between covert government surveillance and totalitarian regimes.

These findings may be a call for policymakers and security managers alike critically to examine policies and practices in those program areas that touch on financial privacy and which require employee monitoring and surveillance. In the course of protecting the nation's critical information from foreign adversarial interests, government leaders need to articulate clearly how what is being done, or proposed as a future security countermeasure, is consistent with our national consensus on such issues as freedom, ethics, and how far government may go in the invasion of privacy even for a good purpose.

Table of Contents

Preface	i
Acknowledgments	iii
Executive Summary	v
Table of Contents	ix
List of Figures	xi
List of Tables	xi
Introduction	1
The General Social Survey (GSS).....	1
The Relevance of GSS Findings for Security Professionals.....	2
Investigative Personnel need to interact favorable with the public.....	2
Security educators need to understand and to educate our trusted employees.....	2
Policy makers need to develop and promote policies that are congruent with prevailing public attitudes.....	3
The Magnitude of Support for Security Measures 1994-1998	4
Types of Measures Being Tested for Public Support.....	4
Trends for Each Type of Security Measures 1994-1998.....	5
How much protection should be given by the government for different types of national security information?.....	5
What areas of inquiry are appropriate for determining eligibility for a position of trust?....	8
Financial and credit history as an investigative issue.....	9
Mental health as an investigative issue.....	12
What methods are acceptable for monitoring personnel who are in a position of trust?...	14
How serious is the crime of espionage as compared to other criminal acts against the government?.....	16
Relationships with Demographic Variables and Non-Security Attitudes	18
Security Attitudes and Demographic Differences.....	18
Security Attitudes and Other Opinions in the National Community.....	18
Summary	19
Solid and sustained support for protecting national security information.....	19
Strong and continuing support for investigative inquiry into personal areas.....	20
Mixed and uncertain support for security measures to ensure the continued reliability of cleared employees.....	20
A perception of espionage as being a very serious crime that deserves severe punishment...	21
Differences of opinion about security do not correspond to demographic divisions or other Attitudes in the national community.....	21

Conclusions.....21

Appendices

Appendix A: The Historical Context for GSS 1994-1998.....23

Appendix B: General Social Survey Inventory of Interview Items Related to Security....26

List of Figures

1. Support for Asking about Financial and Credit History11
2. Support for Asking about Mental Health History.....13

List of Tables

1. Protection for Technology with Military Uses.....5
2. Government Protection of Classified Documents.....6
3. Government Protection for National Security Information.....7
4. Privacy vs. the Government's Need for Information.....8
5. Appropriate Areas of Inquiry for a Security Clearance.....9
6. Verification of Financial Information.....12
7. Inquiry into the Mental Health of Applicants.....14
8. Continuing Evaluation for Cleared Employees.....15
9. Appropriate Measures for Monitoring Cleared Employees.....16
10. Appropriate Punishments for Crimes.....18

Introduction

The protection of national security information remains a vital concern despite the end of the Cold War. As the recent cases of Harold Nicholson, Earl Edwin Pitt, Douglas Groat, David Boone, and others underscore, espionage against the United States continues, and efforts to combat such subversion must be sustained. Our ability to maintain and enhance security programs in part depends upon the public's willingness to endorse appropriate measures to neutralize security risks and upon the importance and priority the electorate gives to safeguarding national security information.

General indifference to security needs or hostility to procedures designed to ensure the loyalty and reliability of our trusted workforce in government and industry could seriously undermine or threaten US interests. Consequently, it is important from time to time to check the national pulse in order to answer the question: Do the people support the government with regard to measures taken to safeguard national security information? In theory, it is ultimately the people to whom the government is accountable for its policies. And it is also from this population that we draw our officially cleared, three million-plus workforce on which we rely to safeguard our national security assets and information.

The General Social Survey (GSS)

To examine public opinion on security issues, the Security Research Center (SRC) has been working since 1993 with the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) to develop and administer scientifically accurate tests of public attitudes and preferences about what the government is doing, or should do, to safeguard national security information.¹

Beginning with the biennial General Social Survey in 1994, and continuing in 1996 and 1998, SRC staff drafted several interview questions for inclusion. The General Social Surveys are nationally representative, full-probability samples of adults living in households in the United States. All respondents are interviewed in person and each interview takes about 90 minutes to complete. SRC included 11 security-related items on the 1994 Survey, 17 in 1996, and 28 in 1998. In the latest survey there were over 3,000 discrete items on all topics available for analysis. These questions were administered to scientifically drawn random samples of 1474 in 1994, 1460 in 1996, and 1387 in 1998.²

The special focus of our effort has been on areas of investigative inquiry to assess individuals for a position of trust and on the public's sense of the need for security to protect sensitive national security information. With the results from the 1998 survey now in, we can

¹ The present report is to some extent based on a report by Dr. Tom W. Smith, of the National Opinion Research Center, at the University of Chicago, on the 1998 GSS data in comparison with findings from the two previous surveys. Smith, Tom W., "Public Attitudes towards Security and Counter-Espionage Matters: 1994-1998," National Opinion Research Center, November, 1998.

² Most of these questionnaire items are in fixed, alternative-response format in what is known as the Likert 5-point scale (Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree or disagree, disagree, and Strongly disagree) with an additional "Don't know" choice. In several items the respondent was asked to choose between Definitely should, Probably should, Probably should not, Definitely should not, and Don't know.

look at trends over a 6-year period and measure the stability of specific attitudes in the face of a changing environment and dramatic national events.

The following discussion deals with some of the previously unanswerable questions about the public opinion climate in which we labor to protect national security information: What kind of judgments do people in our national community have about what we are doing and why we are doing it? And what opinions about our security programs are held by our sizable populations of cleared employees and military personnel who are drawn from the wider society and who share responsibility for the safeguarding of vital information and other national assets?

The Relevance of GSS Findings for Security Professionals

The answers to these questions are particularly pertinent to the effectiveness of security professionals who work in a variety of roles. These include investigative agents who routinely interact face-to-face with members of the community, security educators who need to know the values and sensitivities of cleared employees drawn from the general population of young adults, and policymakers who need to be aware of trends in public sentiment.

Investigative personnel need to interact favorably with the public.

In the course of gathering information relevant to making a determination concerning the eligibility of any person to hold a security clearance, security professionals depend upon the willing and candid cooperation of members of the general public. Personnel security investigators are often called upon to ask complete strangers, not only for facts about a co-worker or acquaintance, but for a personal evaluation about an applicant's loyalty and fitness to serve in a position of trust.

Investigative personnel also rely on the helpfulness of persons who have administrative responsibility for access to records and data to assist us in the verification of pertinent information. Investigative agents for the Department of Defense constantly interact with members of the general public who we hope and assume are neither hostile nor fearful about expressing their opinions. We would also like to believe that members of the public understand the necessity and justification for these inquiries into the lives of citizens who, in almost every instance, are law-abiding and loyal Americans. We count on the fact that, even in the freest of all modern nation-states, citizens agree that some information needs to be protected and that we are justified in efforts to ensure that personnel who have legitimate access to this information are loyal and trustworthy.

Security educators need to understand and to educate our trusted employees.

In our frequent roles as educators and communicators, we promote ideas, reinforce motivations, and try to instill accurate information. Our target audience is no small gathering of elite insiders. At last count the total population of officially cleared employees in government and industry is in the neighborhood of 3.7 million. That sizable aggregation of people of diverse backgrounds, education, and skills may not look exactly like our national community of 275

million. But it may be reasonable to assume that the attitudes, values, loyalties, and sensitivities of cleared employees and service members are fairly representative of the nation's adult employed population from which the GSS sample is drawn.

One important function of security professionals working at the field unit level is to provide initial indoctrination through briefings, literature, and other media to newly cleared personnel and regularly to reinforce the skills and motivations of continuing employees through security awareness activities. The question always arises: Are we giving our employees what they need to know? And do the arguments we use make any sense to our cleared workforce?

Survey data of this type, therefore, has clear practical value for security educators. Knowing the values and interests of our personnel will help us to communicate more effectively. We might conclude from the GSS, for example, that a younger audience, whose memory of the Cold War is less vivid, might be more difficult to convince when promoting our security programs. Or we might find support here for the idea that we are still on target when we link motivation for security with patriotism and national loyalty. Whatever emphasis we choose, we need to get through to each trusted employee with the logic and arguments to which he or she can relate. To do this we need current and reliable information about the values, sensitivities and interests of the trusted workforce.

Policymakers need to develop and promote policies that are congruent with prevailing public attitudes.

We must also be concerned about the socio-political context in which security-related laws, regulations, and policies are developed and implemented. An important part of this context are the views and preferences of the voting public or at least those who are eligible to vote. Officials who craft policy benefit from a knowledge about whether the government's position is supported by a national consensus (or at least a silent majority) with regard to the measures taken to safeguard national security information and other assets.

This is an important question because government programs increasingly must meet the test of public acceptance as expressed not only by the people's representatives in Congress but by well-informed journalists. Whether it be about drug use as disqualifying for a clearance or the employment of the polygraph in personnel security investigations, policymakers and legislators need to be aware of the depth and stability of public sentiments.

We know, for example, that there are several general issues that historically attract media attention and are of concern to the electorate. These include wasteful spending by the Federal Government, excessive surveillance of the public by government agencies, betrayal of trust by government officials, and excessive secrecy about things of public interest. Each of these general issues is pertinent to specific contemporary security policies and legislation that focus on the protection of, or access to, government information. And each has been addressed in the set of GSS security-related interview items.

In our present era, the science of public opinion is becoming, like the ballot box, an instrument of democracy. The biennial GSS offers an accurate and scientifically precise method

for testing public attitudes and trends. The opinions held by our fellow citizens about current events, their sensitivity to hot-button issues, and their levels of resistance or willingness to cooperate with security programs impact on our ability to carry out the mission.

The Magnitude of Support for Security Measures 1994-1998

From 1994 to 1998, overall support for security and counterespionage measures has been consistently strong almost across the board. But there are some qualifications to this blanket endorsement and several interesting trends that can be better understood by looking in more detail at the results from the responses to specific questions.

Types of Measures Being Tested for Public Support

Security-related items in the General Social Survey during the three consecutive survey years were designed to address several avenues of inquiry. Those included in the 1994 and 1996 GSS focused on government protection of different types of national security information and on the appropriateness of areas of inquiry for establishing eligibility to hold a security clearance. In 1998 we added items reflecting two additional areas of inquiry: appropriate punishment for the theft of government property up to and including espionage and the appropriateness of government security measures to ensure the reliability of personnel currently in a position of trust. Many questions over this period were stimulated by spirited public debate that had implications for Defense security programs.

Therefore, looking at the full collection of data for all three surveys, we see four distinct lines of questioning represented by a cluster of narrowly focused questions. For some of the interview items we are now able to track the pattern of stability and change in attitudes in the national community over the 6-year period:

- How much protection should be provided by the government for different types of national security information?
- What areas of inquiry are appropriate for determining eligibility for a position of trust?
- What methods are acceptable for monitoring personnel who are in a position of trust (asked only in 1998)?
- How serious is the crime of espionage as compared to other criminal acts against the government (asked only in 1998)?

Underlying this is the primary question: How far should the government of a modern constitutional democracy be permitted to go in the protection of national security information and other assets? In other words, what is an appropriate balance between the government's need to be intrusive, restrictive, and covert in the national interest on one hand, and the full enjoyment of what are commonly held to be constitutional guarantees of freedom and privacy on the other? This is a central issue of modern democracy, and its resolution is more likely to be found where a

consensus about security among the electorate crystallizes over time as conflicts are aired and opinions formed.

Trends for Each Type of Security Measure 1994-1998

How much protection should be provided by the government for different types of national security information?

The lead security-related question in each of the three survey years asked whether militarily significant technology (without reference to it being classified information or not) warrants "a high level of secrecy." Table 1 illustrates that strong public support for safeguarding technology appears to claim moderately strong and fairly consistent support over a period of 6 years, although total support appears to have declined slightly from a high of 74.8% in 1994 to 69% in 1998. Nevertheless, in each survey year, about a third of those in support indicate that they "strongly agree" with the statement.

TABLE 1
Protection for Technology with Military Uses

Interview Item: *Government should maintain a high level of secrecy surrounding technology with military uses: (Percent responding in each response category)*

	1994	1996	1998
Either agree or Strongly agree	74.8	70.9	69.0
Strongly agree	34.0	31.2	32.2
Agree	40.8	39.7	36.8
Neither Agree nor Disagree	11.5	9.7	11.5
Disagree	7.1	11.7	11.0
Strongly disagree	3.1	4.1	3.7
Either Disagree or Strongly disagree	10.2	15.8	14.7
Don't know/No answer	3.6	3.6	4.8
<i>Total sample size</i>	(1474)	(1460)	(1387)

The flip side of this endorsement for necessary secrecy is seen in the public's strong view that the government classifies too much information. This has been an issue widely covered in the press in which agencies holding still-classified documents dating from World War I are held up to ridicule. On this issue, public skepticism towards the magnitude of government secrecy is substantial and has been moderately high from 1994 to 1998. In each year, as indicated in Table 2, between 54 and 60% of respondents either agree or strongly agree. And above 13%

consistently strongly agree with the proposition each year. Conversely, about 20% consistently disagree. It is of interest that so few fail to have an opinion on this subject.

TABLE 2
Government Protection of Classified Documents

Interview Item: *Government protects too many documents by classifying them as Secret or Top Secret.* (Percent responding in each response category)

	1994	1996	1998
Either agree or Strongly agree	54.2	55.0	58.9
Strongly agree	13.3	13.6	16.2
Agree	40.9	41.4	37.1
Neither Agree nor Disagree	16.6	14.6	17.9
Disagree	17.8	19.8	15.6
Strongly disagree	4.4	4.0	3.8
Either Disagree or Strongly disagree	22.2	23.8	19.4
Don't know/ No answer	7.1	6.5	9.4
Total sample size	(1474)	(1460)	(1387)

The fairly one-sided response concerning excessive classified government holdings from 1994 to the present begs the question: If too much is being classified, what sort of information is the government justified in restricting by the employment of secrecy rules? This was asked beginning in 1996. Of the four categories of national security information identified for respondents in 1996 and 1998, as shown in Table 3, we can see a clear and stable consensus for the protection of information about diplomatic initiatives, military operations, and domestic terrorism. The public remains split on the issue of secrecy regarding the US intelligence budget. We do not know whether minor changes in these percentiles from 1996 to 1998 indicate a trend or are a product of marginal fluctuations over time. Should these same questions appear in the GSS in 2000, a clearer picture might emerge.

From a more detailed examination of the response distributions in Table 3, we do see that for each of the four categories of information, the proportion of respondents who say "definitely should maintain secrecy" as opposed to "probably should" is slightly less in 1998 than in 1996. For example, in 1996, 57.7% said that the government definitely should maintain secrecy for military operations. Only 53.1% said this in 1998, although the total in agreement is slightly higher in 1998. Does this mean that the intensity of support for security programs is softening? Again, data from 2000 may shed more light on this question. At this time, we can say only that since 1994 the public has become slightly less concerned about the protection of critical technology and that for other categories of information, with the exception of the intelligence budget, there is a healthy and persistent consensus favoring secrecy measures.

TABLE 3
Government Protection for National Security Information

Interview Item: *Government should maintain secrecy for:*
(Percent responding in each response category)

	1996	1996 General Support	1998	1998 General Support
Diplomatic initiatives		72.8		73.8
Definitely should	33.6		28.8	
Probably should	39.2		45.0	
Probably should not	12.3		10.5	
Definitely should not.	4.7		4.7	
Don't know/ No answer	10.1		11.0	
Military operations		86.8		87.6
Definitely should	57.7		53.1	
Probably should	29.1		34.5	
Probably should not	6.6		5.2	
Definitely should not	3.0		2.2	
Don't know/ No answer	3.6		5.0	
Controlling domestic terrorism		82.8		80.8
Definitely should	57.3		50.0	
Probably should	25.5		30.8	
Probably should not	7.9		8.2	
Definitely should not	4.9		4.9	
Don't know/ No answer	4.3		6.1	
US intelligence budget		53.4		53.8
Definitely should	26.2		23.1	
Probably should	27.2		32.7	
Probably should not	24.0		22.9	
Definitely should not	16.5		14.2	
Don't know/ No answer	6.1		7.1	
<i>Total sample size</i>	(1460)		(1387)	

General Support = Definitely Should + Probably Should

What areas of inquiry are appropriate for determining eligibility for a position of trust?

This issue was first addressed in general terms in 1994. At that time, individual privacy rights were juxtaposed with the government's need for personal information in order to make an objective decision about an applicant's eligibility to be granted a security clearance. In a sense, this is a leading question, but not unfair; it forces the respondent to admit that if there is to be such a thing as a security clearance, the government is justified in finding out *something* about the applicant's trustworthiness and loyalty. And it follows that to do this, adjudicators who make decisions about the granting of a clearance need "personal" information. A high level agreement of 78.4% with the government's need for information, as shown in Table 4, is not surprising.

TABLE 4
Privacy vs. the Government's Need for Information

Interview Item: *When faced with the conflict between an individual's right to privacy and the government's need to collect personal background information before giving a Secret or Top Secret clearance, the government should....*

(Percent responding in each response category)

<i>Response alternatives</i>	<i>1994 (only)</i>
Favor the government's need to collect personal background information	78.4
Favor protecting an individual's right to privacy	15.5
Don't know/ No answer	6.0
Total sample size	(1474)

Data from other security-related items, beginning with the 1994 survey, shed more light on the issue. Respondents were asked about the government's justification for looking into specific private areas. With the data from 1998 now available, we are able to track over time the level of public comfort with official inquiry into financial matters, criminal history, drug use, mental health, foreign attachments, alcohol consumption and sexual orientation.

The percentages displayed in Table 5, showing the results from all three surveys, represent some of the most interesting findings from the GSS to date. If public support for inquiry into any of these areas is weakening or strengthening, we should be able to discern it here. It is, however, apparent that support for inquiry into these areas is consistently strong and stable across time except for asking about sexual orientation, and possibly foreign relations and friends.

Support for asking about financial and credit history appears to have waned from a high of about 82% in 1994 to 74% in 1998. Nevertheless, a strong level of support continues for this type of inquiry that produces very valuable information about the honesty and responsibility of clearance applicants. Not surprisingly, endorsement for the two areas which focus on possible criminal activity, Drug Use and Criminal Arrests, are consistently high throughout the 1994-1998 timeframe. For these two areas, most of the approximately 95 to 97 percent of those who endorse government inquiry say "Definitely should."

TABLE 5
Appropriate Areas of Inquiry for a Security Clearance

Interview item: Before giving an individual a SECRET or TOP SECRET clearance, the Government has the right to ask about:

(Percent responding in each response category.)
(Total Support = Definitely should + Probably Should)

	1994	Total Support	1996	Total Support	1998	Total Support
<i>a. Financial and credit history</i>		81.6		79.2		74.1
Definitely should	54.3		50.9		44.1	
Probably should	27.3		28.3		30.0	
Probably should not	10.8		10.4		13.3	
Definitely should not	6.0		7.7		8.7	
Don't know/ No answer	2.5		2.7		3.8	
<i>b. Criminal arrests and convictions</i>		97.1		96.4		95.1
Definitely should	88.3		87.9		81.5	
Probably should	8.8		8.5		13.6	
Probably should not	.6		1.3		1.8	
Definitely should not	.5		.4		.8	
Don't know/ No answer	1.8		1.8		2.2	
<i>c. Illegal drug use</i>		95.2		95.4		94.7
Definitely should	83.7		85.3		79.4	
Probably should	11.5		10.1		15.3	
Probably should not	1.9		2.1		2.0	
Definitely should not	1.1		.8		1.0	
Don't know/ No answer	1.8		.9		2.3	
<i>d. Foreign relatives and friends</i>		76.9		78.3		76.9
Definitely should	46.3		48.1		45.3	
Probably should	30.6		30.2		31.6	
Probably should not	12.3		12.9		13.8	
Definitely should not	7.5		5.2		5.6	
Don't know/ No answer	3.3		3.6		3.7	
<i>e. Alcohol use</i>		91.9		91.5		88.5
Definitely should	67.5		69.8		62.4	
Probably should	24.4		21.7		26.1	
Probably should not	4.4		4.6		6.3	
Definitely should not	2.0		1.9		2.7	
Don't know/ No answer	1.6		2.0		2.5	

TABLE 5 Continued

<i>f. Sexual orientation</i>		47.2		47.2		44.4
Definitely should	28.6		28.5		25.8	
Probably should	18.6		18.7		18.6	
Probably should not	24.6		26.7		25.2	
Definitely should not	24.7		22.4		26.5	
Don't know/ No answer	3.6		3.7		4.0	
<i>g. Mental health history</i>		93.7		94.7		93.7
Definitely should	75.2		78.3		70.4	
Probably should	18.5		16.4		23.3	
Probably should not	3.3		2.6		2.6	
Definitely should not	.8		.5		1.0	
Don't know/ No answer	2.2		2.2		2.7	
<i>Total Sample Size</i>	(1474)		(1460)		(1387)	

When these questions were drafted in 1994, (items *a* through *g* in Table 5) they were all areas of adjudicative concern. Since the issuance of Executive Order 12968 neither homosexuality nor mental health counseling are by themselves disqualifying factors for holding a clearance. Public perception of sexual orientation as a suitability issue appears to be in harmony with the evolution of personnel security policy on this issue in recent years.

In all three survey years, fewer than 50% of respondents agree that sexual orientation should be an area of inquiry. Very little change has taken place on this item from 1994 to 1998, with the only noticeable shift being a slight reduction of respondents indicating "Definitely should" from 28.6% to 25.8%. Extensive press coverage of the related issue of gays in the military beginning in 1992 may have raised the salience of the question of sexual orientation and personnel security in the public consciousness, but there is no obvious indication here that the media have influenced opinions.

Whereas the GSS respondents are very supportive of the government's need to collect information about such things as an applicant's drug use or criminal history, they are much less certain about questions that concern an applicant's foreign connections. For example, while in 1998, 81.5% of respondents said the government "Definitely should" collect criminal history information, only 45.3% said it "Definitely should" collect information about foreign friends and relatives.

For several of the areas of personal inquiry for which we have data from all three surveys. Overall support remains remarkably stable over time, there has been a shift of a few percentage points from the "Definitely should" to the "Probably should" response category. Whether this pattern proves to be unexplained fluctuation over time or a softening of public support that will become more pronounced in the future remains to be seen.

Financial and credit history as an investigative issue

Since the question of support trends for collecting financial data is of special importance, it is helpful to examine these changes in a graphic presentation. Figure 1 illustrates that the softening in overall support for inquiry into personal financial affairs can be attributed to a slight but steady decline in the proportion who believe that government "Definitely should" be doing this. This trend, if confirmed in the 2000 GSS, may reflect growing public sensitivity to the general issue of financial privacy. One might speculate that this is related to media discussion about violations of financial confidentiality via the Internet.

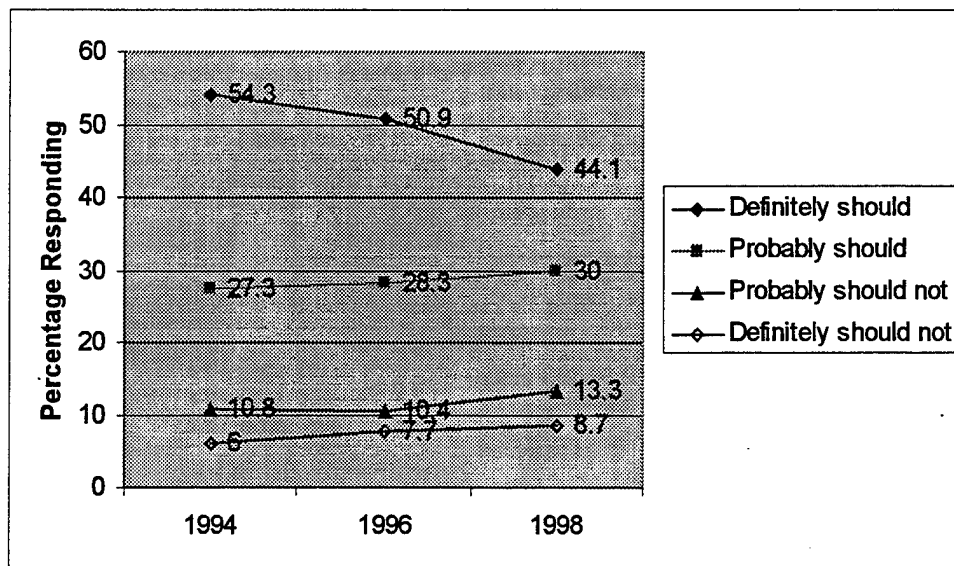


FIGURE 1. Approval for asking about Financial and Credit History

In 1996 three items were added that focus on a somewhat different aspect of financial inquiry: public sensitivity about 3 third-party verification of three categories of information: assets, spouses' finances, and tax records. (The last two are normally are not required for the completion of a background investigation.) For all three indicators there is a similar degree of reticence about endorsing this type of inquiry in our respondent sample, as shown in Table 6. Nevertheless, at least 60% of the respondents agree that these questions definitely should or probably should be asked. The reduction by several percentage points from 1996 to 1998 for all three indicators does mirror the short-term trend in evidence in Figure 1.

TABLE 6
Verification of Financial Information

Interview item: *Before granting a clearance, the government should contact other people to verify personal data on:* (Percent responding in each response category)
(Total Support = Definitely should + Probably should)

	1996	1996 Total support	1998	1998 Total support
a. Financial assets		76.3		71.5
Definitely should	47.5		38.8	
Probably should	28.8		32.7	
Probably should not	11.9		15.4	
Definitely should not	8.4		8.7	
Don't know/No answer	3.4		4.3	
b. Spouse's finances		67.0		62.5
Definitely should	37.1		31.3	
Probably should	29.9		31.2	
Probably should not	17.7		20.7	
Definitely should not	11.6		12.0	
Don't know/No answer	3.6		4.8	
c. Tax records		76.7		70.2
Definitely should	46.0		38.1	
Probably should	30.7		32.1	
Probably should not	11.7		15.9	
Definitely should not	8.0		9.3	
Don't know/No answer	3.6		4.6	
Total sample size	(1460)		(1387)	

Mental health as an investigative issue

As mentioned earlier, new adjudicative policies related to sexual orientation and mental health counseling were introduced by Executive Order 12968 which received press coverage in leading newspapers at the time of its issuance in August 1995. As support levels for both areas of inquiry appear to be unchanged from 1994 to 1996, it is unlikely that this press coverage had much impact on public opinion. The trend in the level of general support for asking about mental health is seen in Figure 2. While overall support for this area of inquiry has remained strong and consistent, there appears to be a softening of the intensity of support in that the percentage of the "Definitely should" responses has slipped from 75.2 to 70.4% in a 4-year period.

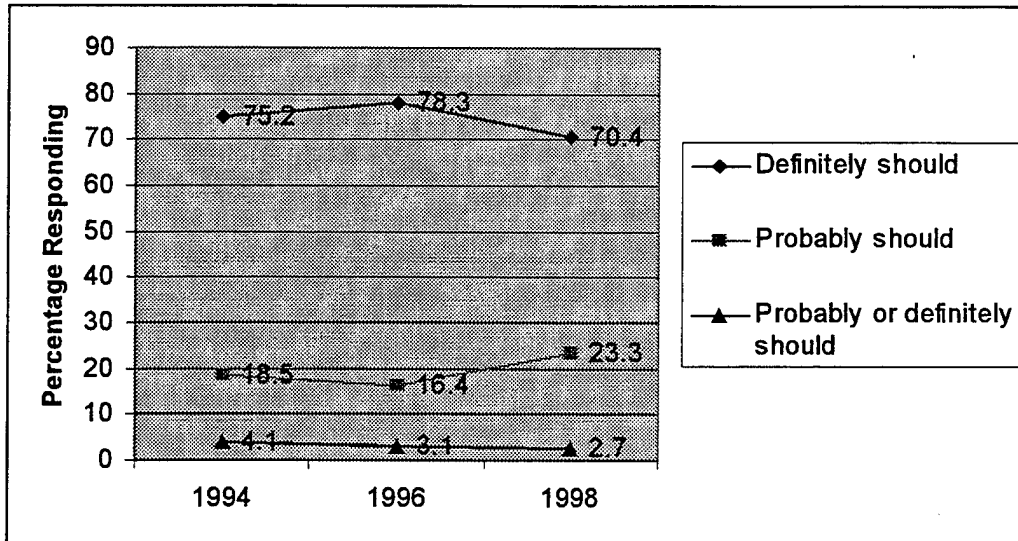


FIGURE 2. Approval for asking about mental health history

Beginning with the 1996 General Social Survey, SRC researchers included a more detailed item that focused on just what members of the general public considered to be an appropriate level of intrusiveness to satisfy the government's need for medical history information. The very interesting responses to this question, asked in both 1996 and 1998, are shown in Table 7. In both survey years, at least 65% of the respondents (the sum of response alternatives D and E) stated that the government was justified in asking at least whether an applicant has ever consulted a mental health professional and the general nature of the diagnosis and counseling provided. Only 6.5% percent or less would deny the government's right to ask anything about an individual's emotional or mental health.

We can conclude from Table 7 that the public has a sense of the justification for inquiring into mental health questions when considering an applicant for a position of trust and that a strong consensus exists for making some inquiry into past history. A strong majority feels that asking for information about a diagnosis and treatment by a mental health professional is warranted as well. A slight weakening of support in response category E between 1996 and 1998 from 39.9% to 37.6% may indicate a shift away from this consensus. The 2000 GSS may clarify the picture.

TABLE 7
Inquiry into the Mental Health of Applicants

Interview item: *Before giving an individual a Secret or Top Secret clearance, the government should have the right to know:* (Percentage answering in each response category)

<i>Response alternative</i>	<i>1996</i>	<i>1998</i>
A. Nothing about an individual's emotional or mental health	6.5	4.8
B. Whether or not an individual is currently consulting a mental health professional	11.9	11.6
C. Whether an individual has ever consulted a mental health professional	8.4	9.8
D. Whether an individual has ever consulted a mental health professional, and the general nature of the diagnosis and counseling by the mental health professional	25.1	27.5
E. Whether an individual has ever consulted a mental health professional, the general nature of the diagnosis and counseling by the mental health professional, and the specific information revealed in confidence to the mental health professional	39.9	37.6
Don't know or no answer	8.2	8.8
<i>Total sample size</i>	(1460)	(1387)

What methods are acceptable for monitoring personnel who are in a position of trust?

The data reviewed up to this point show that in general the American public is cognizant of the threats still posed by espionage. And it is supportive of the measures the government takes to protect critical information and to ensure that our employees are assessed for loyalty and reliability before being placed in a position of trust. But how much importance do members of the general public place on measures to ensure that those already in a position of trust remain reliable?

In 1994, respondents in the general population sample were asked to see themselves as an employee who has access to classified information. And they were asked what they would do if they saw someone violating the rules. Whose interests would they honor: the co-worker's or the employer's?

The table that follows shows an overwhelming proportion of respondents, over 80%, claiming that as an employee, they would set aside interpersonal loyalty in favor of loyalty to the employer. These respondents stated that they would report the co-worker to a company official,

with 40% saying they would do this immediately, and 41.1% saying they would report the co-worker if their behavior continued after having been asked to stop.

TABLE 8
Continuing Evaluation for Cleared Employees

Interview Item: *When faced with a conflict between loyalty to one's employer and loyalty to a co-worker who is violating rules protecting Secret and Top Secret information, a person should....*

(Percent responding in each response category)

<i>Response alternatives</i>	<i>1994 Only</i>
Report the co-worker to a company official	40.0
Ask the co-worker to stop, but report him/her if the behavior continues	41.1
Ask the co-worker to stop, but do nothing further	5.8
Mind one's own business and not get involved	8.4
Don't Know	4.6
Total sample size	(1474)

As optimists, we would like to embrace this as evidence that the respondents, if placed in a position of trust, not only would understand the continuing threat of espionage, but also would be willing to take personal responsibility for protecting security. However, we lack evidence that this attitude would be reflected in actual behavior. In several instances of recorded espionage, suspicious behavior or security violations have not been reported in time to prevent damaging loss or compromise. Consequently, while these respondents, representing the general population of American citizens in 1994, provided what might be considered a pro-security answer, there is no way of knowing whether this would be matched by actual behavior.

The issue of how to provide safeguards against betrayal or compromise by members of the cleared workforce was re-addressed in 1998, but in an entirely different way. In a question which is similar to our enquiry into appropriate questions for determining eligibility for access to classified information, the respondents were asked how aggressive the government should be in its efforts to keep cleared personnel from getting involved in espionage. Here the respondent may easily have inferred that there is a tension between the need to ensure the reliability and trustworthiness of our workforce on the one hand and our commitment to personal privacy and freedom from invasive government control on the other. By accepting a position of trust, should an employee accept a diminished expectation of privacy in the national interest? In general the answer is yes, but this depends upon the type of security measures which the government uses to monitor its trusted workforce.

TABLE 9
Appropriate Measures for Monitoring Cleared Employees (1998 only)

Interview item: *Employees with a Secret or Top Secret clearance should be subject to:*

<i>Total sample size = 1387</i>	<i>Agree or Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neither Agree Nor Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree or Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Don't Know/ No answer</i>
Periodic lie detector tests (polygraph)	74.3	28.7	45.6	9.9	9.9	1.9	11.8	4.1
Random drug testing	89.6	44.6	45.0	3.5	3.3	.7	4.0	2.9
Wiretapping or electronic surveillance	38.2	12.5	25.7	19.3	28.8	8.9	37.7	4.8
Regular questions about financial assets and liabilities	49.5	12.6	37.0	16.7	24.6	5.0	29.6	4.2
Monitoring at work, (e.g., searches of briefcases and desks)	49.5	13.6	35.9	17.2	25.1	4.6	29.7	3.7
Monitoring off the job (e.g., reviews of airline and financial databases)	42.4	8.7	33.7	18.0	26.8	7.4	34.2	5.3

The percentage distributions presented in Table 9 present a range of general public support for workplace security measures, from strong consensus for drug testing to a sharp division of opinion regarding electronic surveillance. Endorsement for the use of the lie detector (polygraph) is surprisingly strong and can be seen as a vote in support of the random, espionage-scope polygraph testing and continued comprehensive testing for personnel in extremely sensitive intelligence work. Other types of workplace monitoring and inquiries into financial status and history receive only moderate acceptance in the GSS 1998 population sample.

Respondents are similarly divided regarding off-the-job monitoring. About 42% agree that cleared personnel should be monitored by reviewing airline and financial databases and court records; over 34% do not. Eighteen percent neither agree nor disagree with this type of surveillance. In fact, for several of these questions about the monitoring of cleared personnel, there is a high percentage of respondents who are unwilling to come down on one side or the other of the issue. These figures may indicate that members of the larger community are uncomfortable with the general concept of continuous surveillance or monitoring and its unstated implications, even if applied to cleared government employees by their employing agency.

How serious is the crime of espionage as compared to other criminal acts against the government?

In 1998, respondents were asked for the first time about their perceptions of espionage as a serious crime in comparison with other offenses against the government. Do members of the

public see espionage as a type of white-collar crime or as equivalent to treason? As a means of determining their sense of seriousness, respondents were asked what they would consider to be the appropriate punishment in each of the following situations (A through E below). While the first two scenarios (A and B) describe theft of government property, the last three concern the loss of valued information. Scenario C describes an intentional unauthorized release of sensitive information; D and E describe espionage. In scenario E, espionage is committed in the interest of a "friendly" country, an argument often made to mitigate the magnitude of betrayal by such offenders as Jonathan Pollard, who provided classified information to an Israeli intelligence organization, and Robert C. Kim, who spied on behalf of South Korea. Scenario D is the example of classic espionage in which the offender is serving an adversarial country.

- A. An army sergeant was convicted of stealing airplane parts, ammunition, explosives, and other government property and selling them to civilians.
- B. A government employee was convicted of stealing truck parts and tires from a military depot and selling them to civilians.
- C. A high-placed government official leaked sensitive information to a newspaper in order to influence public opinion about a controversial political issue. The official received no money.
- D. A Navy petty officer with the highest security clearance made copies of secret codes and other classified intelligence materials and sold them to an agent of a hostile foreign government.
- E. What if the petty officer had sold these materials to a *friendly* foreign government?

As shown in Table 10, the higher-response alternatives for the crime of espionage on behalf of a hostile adversary (38% selecting Life in prison and 35.5%, 10-20 years in prison), come close to the prevailing sentencing guideline of 42 years for the transmission of Top Secret information and 37 years for lesser categories of national security information. For a conviction for unauthorized disclosure to the press (Scenario C) 42.6% of the respondents favor only a dismissal and 19.7%, a reprimand. Had the scenario stated "classified information" rather than "sensitive information," the perception of seriousness might have been greater. Actual convictions for leaking classified information are, in fact, rare since members of the press claim a constitutional immunity from disclosure of sources. However, in one such case, Navy employee Samuel L. Morison provided a classified reconnaissance photograph to *Jane's Defence Weekly* in 1984. Morison was convicted under the espionage code and received a sentence of 2 years in prison.

The essential message seen in Table 10, however, is that a majority of the public agrees that espionage, even on behalf of a friendly country (Scenario E), is a far more serious class of crime than theft of government property, and deserves an extended sentence up to and including life in prison. There is an apparent distinction in the minds of some of the respondents between providing secrets to a friendly country as opposed to an adversary. Nevertheless, there is little evidence here to support the argument that espionage on behalf of either a friendly or a hostile foreign interest is seen by the public as a white-collar crime.

TABLE 10**Appropriate Punishments for Crimes****Interview Item: *Indicate what you would consider the appropriate punishment for each case:*****(Percent of respondents in each response category)**

Scenario (above)	Reprimand Only	Dismissal or firing	1 yr. in prison	5-9 years in prison	10-20 yrs. in prison	Life in prison	Don't Know/ No answer
A (theft)	2.5	28.5	12.0	25.8	19.6	7.0	4.6
B (theft)	6.9	32.2	26.4	21.8	6.3	1.4	4.9
C (leaking)	19.7	42.6	13.3	11.2	4.9	1.8	6.4
D (espionage)	0.9	6.6	3.0	12.8	33.5	38.0	5.3
E (espionage)	3.2	11.8	8.9	19.0	28.6	22.8	5.8

Relationships with Demographic Variables and Non-Security Attitudes**Security Attitudes and Demographic Differences**

A comprehensive review of tests of significant and association between security measures and demographic indicators show, in general, that differences of opinion about security do not correspond to basic divisions in the national population. What is discernable is a consistent and moderate degree of association only between age grouping and several security measures. Younger adults appear to be slightly less approving of measures to protect national security information and government inquiry for security clearances. However, it is not yet clear whether this negative association between age and pro-security views reflects the effect of generational differences or maturation.

Discounted in this analysis is the likelihood that significantly different attitudes about security are held by groups identified by race, gender, employment, or level of education or region of the country. This is actually good news in terms of public relations where the work of forming a overriding national consensus on national policy is made easier where the interests of one group or another in society are not linked with particular policy outcomes.

Security Attitudes and Other Opinions and Views in the National Community

Similarly, attitudes about security measures do not appear to be strongly related to other opinions, views, and values in the national community. Out of nearly 3,000 attitude and opinion items in the biennial GSS that we might use to help explain or predict variations on security summary measures, only a very few show more than a slight degree of association. Those attitudes which do have a clear relationship with security opinions include: (1) support for the military with safeguarding national security information (positive) and (2) opinions about the

legalization of marijuana with asking about drug use for a security clearance and for subjecting cleared employees to drug testing (both negative). None of these relationships is particularly surprising.

Possibly of greater importance is what is *not* present in the matrix of possible associations, at least in terms of clear and consistently statistically significant measures. While there appears to be a weak but indecisive relationship between political conservatism and pro-security attitudes, this does not show up when looking at party or voting preference. Potential predictors of variation in security attitudes as religious orientation, sense of patriotism, job satisfaction, trust in others, and confidence in government can be discounted by this analysis. In general one can conclude that what differences exist on attitudinal indicators related to security do not appear to be strongly associated with prevailing ideological, philosophical, or religious divisions in the electorate. This finding is encouraging in the same sense that security views do not parallel demographic divisions in society.

Summary

The value of these public opinion data for the security professional is pertinent to a variety of specific roles carried out by security professionals. Whether as investigative agents, security educators, program administrators, or policy makers, to be oblivious to the social and public opinion context in which they carry out their work jeopardizes their ability to carry out their mission with the greatest effectiveness. In an open democracy such as ours, it is not enough for public policy and administrative practice to simply work or to be cost-effective. The decisions made by security professionals in their official positions must occasionally meet the test of popular support. Policymakers and executives should be aware of popular sensitivities and whether policy decisions are in harmony with cultural values.

The analysis of General Social Survey data is one method of defining that social context in which policy is developed and professional responsibilities are undertaken. Our expectation for future surveys is that we will enlarge upon the current list of security-related items to more directly address specific policy and management issues for which public support and awareness of popular sensitivities are important. The current survey results up to 1998 lead to the following statements that characterize the climate of public opinion regarding government security practices:

Solid and sustained support for protecting national security information

The principal conclusion from this analysis is that a strong and continuing popular consensus can be counted on for the carrying out of those aspects of security programs and policies for which public support is necessary. Despite the fact of slight variation over the 4-year period, between 1994 and 1998, strong majority support remains in place for measures to protect national security information in five key areas: technology having military applications, diplomatic initiatives, military operations, domestic counter-terrorism, and lastly, the US intelligence budget. Efforts to protect information related to military operations and domestic

counter-terrorism appear to have a much higher priority in the public view, with lesser support for diplomatic initiatives and the US intelligence budget. While sentiment in favor of protecting military technology remains at approximately the 70% level over the 4-year period, a slight downward trend in support since 1994 may signal the need more clearly to define and articulate what needs government protection and why.

The similarly strong view that the government protects too many documents is in no sense contradictory to support for protecting national security information. The public is aware that we need to protect what is essential, and eliminate what is not essential, from the system of protection.

Strong and continuing support for investigative inquiry into personal areas

Agreement levels over the 4-year period are almost without exception strong and consistent in those areas of inquiry which have been verified by empirical research as productive for reaching a fair personnel security adjudication. While intrusion by government into areas of personal privacy is a sensitive issue, it is clear that the public views the work of investigative agents as a justifiable invasion of privacy, so long as this is done for the purpose of placing an applicant in a position of trust.

The one area in which a significant decrease in public support has occurred is personal financial/credit history, with endorsement for inquiry slipping from 82% in 1994 to 74% in 1998. Ironically this is an area in which (in part responding to the facts of the Ames case) more investigative effort has been placed. One might assume that increasing sensitivity about the privacy of personal finances is tied to increasing concern about the invasion of privacy in the private sector as commercial and public databases are being searched and exploited for marketing advantage. Nevertheless, the fact remains that, given increased public wariness, expanded government use of financial records, even in the interest of national security, may be challenged.

Support for all areas of inquiry has remained high except for questions about the sexual orientation of applicants, which fewer than half the respondents favor. This view is consonant with current investigative practice and policy derived from the guidelines established in Executive Order 12968 of 1995.

Mixed and uncertain support for security measures to ensure the continued reliability of cleared employees

Data from the 1994 GSS revealed a strong expression of support for personal intervention when an employee is seen violating rules to protect classified information. Over 80% actually endorsed reporting such behavior to a company official. However, a set of more detailed items presented to respondents in 1998 reveals a mixed pattern of support for other security measures for monitoring and continuing evaluation of cleared employees. While nearly 90% endorse random drug testing and 74% agree to periodic polygraph testing, measures that prescribe some

form of continuous surveillance—electronic and non-electronic—fare poorly, with less than majority approval.

In contrast to respondents' endorsement of the polygraph and drug tests, which are relatively infrequent or one-time tests, much less support for other measures may be indicative of discomfort in the public mind with the concept of continual monitoring and surveillance by government. And this concern applies even to government employees who are in positions of trust. Similarly, no more than about half of the respondents agree that questioning about an employee's financial assets and liabilities is appropriate. Nevertheless, just as financial data are thought to be essential for reliable initial vetting, security professionals increasingly look to financial indicators of illegal activity and potential vulnerability to compromise among members of the cleared workforce.

A perception of espionage as being a very serious crime that deserves severe punishment

Reactions to a set of scenarios depicting various types of criminal activity refute the assertion that the public sees espionage as merely some sort of white-collar crime or theft of government property. Most respondents do in fact see espionage, even on behalf of a friendly interest, as being a serious offense against the United States and deserving of a long sentence, even life imprisonment. These preferences for the length of punishment, with over 71% of the respondents favoring at least 10 to 20 years in prison, and 38%, life imprisonment, are a close approximation of current sentencing guidelines.

Differences of opinion about security do not correspond to demographic divisions or other attitudes in the national population

In general one can conclude that what differences exist on the attitudinal scales related to security do not appear to be strongly related to or reinforced by demographic, ideological, philosophical, or religious divisions in society. Tests of statistical association and significance between security measures and demographic variables show a consistent and moderate strength of association only between age grouping and attitudes about security. Adults under the age of 21 appear to be slightly less approving of measures to protect national security information and of government inquiry for security clearances. With regard to non-security attitudes measured by the survey, only a very few show more than a slight degree of association with views about security.

Conclusions

The analysis of three snap-shot views of public thinking about security-related issues in the United States in 1994, 1996 and 1998 have been both encouraging and disconcerting. We can feel confident that when confronted with these issues, the American electorate will generally support what the Federal Government is doing in information security, personnel security, and counterespionage programs. There are policy and program areas which have received

surprisingly strong endorsement in terms of public backing: (1) government efforts to reduce the total inventory of classified holdings, (2) personnel security investigations in general and inquiry into mental health history in particular, and (3) the use of the polygraph and random drug testing to ensure continuing reliability in the cleared workforce. Furthermore, we see a clear acknowledgement that espionage (perhaps more closely linked with terrorism in the public mind than previously) is indeed a serious crime deserving of the most severe punishment.

Opinions about other aspects of our programs cause us to be less complacent. At a time when we recognize that the greater threat to national security is the targeting of technology for military use, we have data that show that the public is becoming less concerned with its protection than in 1994. Although support for personnel security investigations into all key areas is sustained, there are signs of growing resistance to collecting information about private financial affairs although recent espionage cases point to financial indicators as one of the most productive areas for early warning signs.

Lastly, security professionals have begun to realize that, based on research on espionage occurring during and after the Cold War era, we need to place at least as much emphasis ensuring the continued reliability and loyalty of cleared personnel as we have expended on the initial clearance process. We can demonstrate, for example, that what precipitates espionage has a lot to do with foreground or situational conditions. In contrast to this reality, public support for certain types of monitoring for cleared employees is ambivalent at best—under 50%, except for co-worker intervention. This is an area where many of the respondents were not comfortable, perhaps because of the associations we make between covert government surveillance and totalitarian regimes.

These findings are a call for policymakers and security managers alike to examine seriously and openly the current trends in policy and administrative practice in those program areas that touch on personal privacy, employee monitoring, and surveillance. While protecting the nation's critical information from foreign adversarial interests, we also need to confirm that what is being done or proposed as a future security countermeasure is consistent with the national consensus on such issues as freedom, ethics, and how far government may go in the invasion of privacy, even for a good purpose. The General Social Survey has provided, and we hope will continue to offer, a window from which we can determine the parameters of that consensus and the public's view of what policies are acceptable in the name of national security.

Appendix A: The Historical Context for the GSS 1994-1998

Media experts assert that public opinion is influenced, if not molded, by the events and intense debates of our time, both domestic and international. It is, therefore, useful to be reminded of what was going on in the printed and broadcast media particularly in the months and weeks immediately before the GSS interviewers set out with their lists of questions for the approximately 1,500 respondents throughout the nation. Obviously, highly publicized disasters—such as the World Trade Center or Oklahoma City bombings which have great emotional impact—have the potential for intensifying awareness of a particular type of threat and for generating support or government action. The crystallization of a consensus view may also be accelerated by continuous press coverage of a public issue, particularly if members of the general population see that issue and its outcome as impacting on their freedoms, physical security, or economic status.

So it is that we can see the administration of each GSS survey itself as an event in time and the results of each as a reaction, to some extent, to other events and cultural and political developments that preceded it. According to the National Opinion Research Center, nearly all of the GSS interviews take place in February, March, and the first part of April of a given year. Therefore, to place these three tests of public opinion in context, we would want to track the highly salient events and public debates in the months preceding the 1994 survey and continuing through 1997 and the first 2 months of 1998.

1993

The bombing of the New York Trade Center in February was the riveting event of 1993. Americans were shocked to learn that it was possible for international terrorists to violate US national security barriers and literally destroy a major, high-visibility facility. This incident alone pushed the issue of international terrorism to the forefront of public consciousness.

Other security-related press coverage beginning in July was much less salient for the public. In that month media reports discussed the continuing dialog within government about how to stem the growing cost of security, particular regarding the storage and accounting for millions of classified documents. The focus of these discussions was on declassification and on the astronomical cost of protecting documents for which, according to commentators, no reasonable justification existed for their continued classification. Although only indirectly related to security programs, 1993 marked the high point of the "Gays in the Military" debate which resulted in the Clinton Administration's controversial "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy. The issue of security clearances and sexual orientation was to be confronted 2 years later in Executive Order 12968.

1994

The arrest of Aldrich Ames and his wife Rosario earlier in the year set off a proliferation of front page stories and political cartoons on the ineptitude of government counterintelligence organizations. The CIA, in particular, was vilified for failing to detect and shut down a very

damaging spy operation for which there had been obvious indicators of unexplained affluence and compromising behavior. The timing of this event coincided with the launching of the 1994 General Social Survey, with interviewers spreading out to sample opinions in February and March of that year. It is reasonable to suppose that the high visibility of the Ames case just at that time heightened public awareness of the continuing espionage threat in the post-Cold War era.

Press coverage of the Ames case continued through most of 1994, culminating with the sentencing of Rosario Ames in October. At the same time, at a much less visible level for most members of the public, press coverage on the cost of government security continued, but focused now on a draft executive order that would address this issue. To this debate was added a related discussion having to do with eligibility for personal security clearances. In July public attention was drawn by Tipper Gore to the alleged disqualification of applicants for security clearances for past mental health problems. The arrest of Geneva Jones in June, reinforced the opinion that the insider threat was still with us despite the end of the KGB.

1995

Media coverage related to government information and personnel security programs continued into 1995. In March, the GAO announced that federal agencies were no longer, in practice, excluding gays from receiving security clearances. In April the President signed Executive Order 12958 which dealt with the process of declassification and excessive classification. This was followed in August with the issuance of E.O 12968 which clarified the government position on eligibility for clearances especially in regard to mental health history and sexual orientation. It is doubtful whether a large proportion of the general public followed this press coverage or were even exposed to it in local newspapers or broadcast media.

The major event of 1995, which did capture universal attention, was the bombing of the Federal Building in Oklahoma City in April. While many jumped to the conclusion that this was another case of international terrorist activity, it soon became apparent that the United States had a serious problem with domestic terrorism. According to various press reports, fringe groups were preparing to commit acts of violence particularly against federal facilities and employees. One of the most significant of these was the Amtrack derailment in Arizona, in October, still believed to be a case of domestic terrorism. The publication of the *Unabomber Manifesto* further heightened awareness of the domestic threat. 1995 concluded with another terrorist event, in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, which in this instance was the result of an international terrorist organization.

1996

The year began badly for the federal government as a result of a partial shutdown of government services as a result of a budget dispute. This public relations setback for the government was not resolved before the launching of the 1996 General Social Survey and the administration of interviews in February and March of that year. It is, of course, difficult to determine after the fact whether unfavorable press comment early in 1996 adversely biased

public prior to the launching of the 1996 GSS. Terrorism continued to be a high visibility issue in 1996. The Unabomber was arrested in April and in another act of terrorism against the U.S. overseas, the bombing in Dharan, Saudi Arabia, took 23 lives. July 1996 was marked by a pipe bombing at the Olympic games in Atlanta and the TWA explosion over Long Island Sound, which many at the time believed to be an act of international terrorism. According on one journalist, these events further diminished America's sense of security.

Important events of the year also included a number of arrests for espionage, several for very damaging activities, which again brought home the reality of post-Cold War espionage to the American public. Included in this list were Robert Lipka in February, Kurt Lessenthein in April, Robert Kim in September, Harold Nicholson in November, and Earl Edwin Pitts in December.

1997

Press coverage of the arrest and prosecution of espionage offenders continued into 1997 with the arrest of Kelly Warren in June, the Stand/Squillacote espionage ring in October and Peter H. Lee in December. Pitts and Nicholson were sentenced in June and Lipka in September. During the same year both Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichhols were convicted for the Oklahoma City bombing, with McVeigh receiving a death sentence.

1998

1998 began uneventfully, leading up to the startup date for the GSS interviews, but for those members of the public who follow national news reports, the series of arrests and convictions in 1996 and 1997 must have reinforced the view that the international threat to American interests continues unabated.

Appendix B: General Social Survey Inventory of Interview Items Related to Security

	Year asked:		
	1994	1996	1998
1. In order to maintain American's leadership in the world, the government should maintain a high level of secrecy surrounding technology with military uses. Do you:	X	X	X
♦ (Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree nor disagree, or Don't know)			
2. Given the world situation, the government protects too many documents by classifying them as SECRET and TOP SECRET. Do you:	X	X	X
♦ (Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree nor disagree, or Don't know)			
3. When faced with a conflict between loyalty to one's employer and loyalty to a co-worker who is violating rules protecting SECRET and TOP SECRET information, a person should:	X		
♦ Report the co-worker to a company official			
♦ Ask the co-worker to stop, but do nothing further			
♦ Ask the co-worker to stop, but report him/her if the behavior continues			
♦ Mind one's own business and not get involved			
♦ Don't Know			
4. When faced with the conflict between an individual's right to privacy and the government's need to collect personal background information before giving a SECRET or TOP SECRET clearance, the government should:	X		
♦ Favor protecting an individual's right to privacy by not gathering information			
♦ Favor the government's need to protect security by gathering information			
♦ Don't know			

1994 1996 1998

5. Before giving an individual a SECRET or TOP SECRET clearance, the government should have the right to ask him or her detailed, personal questions in the following areas:

- a. Financial and credit history
- b. Criminal arrests and convictions
- c. Illegal drug use
- d. Mental health history
- e. Foreign relatives and friends
- f. Alcohol use
- g. Sexual orientation

◆ (Definitely should, Probably should, Probably should not, Definitely should not, Don't know)

6. Should or should not the government maintain a high level of secrecy surrounding:

- a. Diplomatic initiative
- b. Military operations
- c. Efforts to control domestic terrorism
- d. The US intelligence budget

◆ (Definitely should, Probably should, Probably should not, Definitely should not, Don't know)

7. Before giving an individual a SECRET or TOP SECRET clearance, the government should contact other people and verify information provided by the individual concerning his or her:

- a. Financial assets and liabilities
- b. Spouse's financial assets and liabilities
- c. Tax records

◆ (Definitely should, Probably should, Probably should not, Definitely should not, Don't know)

X X X

X X

X

X

X

X

1994

1996

1998

8. Please tell me which one of the statements on the card best describes what the government has a right to know. Before giving an individual a SECRET or TOP SECRET clearance, the government should have the right to know:

- ◆ Nothing about an individual's emotional or mental health
- ◆ Whether or not an individual is currently consulting a mental health professional.
- ◆ Whether or not a individual has ever consulted a mental health professional
- ◆ Whether an individual has ever consulted a mental health professional, and the general nature of the diagnosis and counseling by the mental health professional.
- ◆ Whether an individual has ever consulted a mental health professional, the general nature of the diagnosis and counseling by the mental health professional, and the specific information revealed in confidence to the mental health professional.
- ◆ Don't know

X

X

X

9. Now I'm going to ask you about several offenses. For each case, indicate what you would consider the appropriate punishment for each case:

X

- ◆ Reprimand
 - ◆ Dismissal from the military/Being fired by the government
 - ◆ One year in prison
 - ◆ 5-9 years in prison
 - ◆ 10-20 years in prison
 - ◆ Life in prison with possibility of parole
- a. An army sergeant was convicted of stealing airplane parts, ammunition, explosives, and other government property and selling them to civilians.
- b. A high-placed government official leaked sensitive information to a newspaper in order to influence public opinion about a controversial political issue. The official received no money.
- c. A navy petty officer with the highest security clearance made copies of secret codes and other classified intelligence materials and sold them to an agent of a hostile foreign government
- d. What if the petty officer had sold these materials to a friendly foreign government?
- e. A government employee was convicted of stealing truck parts and tires from a military depot and selling them to civilians.

1994 1996 1998

10. Protecting secrets is a continuing concern of the government. I am going to ask you about various security measures that the government might apply to individuals with SECRET or TOP SECRET clearance. **X**

◆ Do you (strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree) that people with SECRET or TOP SECRET clearance should be subject to:

- a. Periodic lie detector tests
- b. Random drug tests
- c. Wiretapping or electronic surveillance
- d. Regular questions about financial assets and liabilities
- e. Monitoring and work (e.g., searches of briefcases and desks)
- f. Monitoring off the job (e.g., reviews of airline and financial databases, court records)