

Privacy 2014: Google As An Arm Of The Surveillance State

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Convicted in 1994 of sexually assaulting a young boy, John Henry Skillern of Texas once again finds himself incarcerated and awaiting trial, this time for possession and production of child pornography. Skillern's arrest comes courtesy of Google. Few, I expect, will shed tears for Skillern with respect to his alleged sexual predations. Nonetheless his case once more brings Google into the privacy spotlight, this time as an arm of "law enforcement."

Google makes no secret of the fact that it "analyzes content" in emails sent and received by users of its Gmail service, mostly for purposes of targeting advertising to users most likely to click thru and buy things. That's how Google makes money — tracking users of its "free" services, watching what they do, selling those users' eyeballs to paying customers.

It's also understood by most that Google will, as its privacy policy states, "share personal information ... [to] meet any applicable law, regulation, legal process or enforceable governmental request." If the cops come a-knocking with a warrant or some asserted equivalent, Google cooperates with search and seizure of your stored information and records of your actions.

But Google goes farther than that. Their Gmail program policies unequivocally state that, among other things, "Google has a zero-tolerance policy against child sexual abuse imagery. If we become aware of such content, we will report it to the appropriate authorities and may take disciplinary action, including termination, against the Google Accounts of those involved."

As a market anarchist, my visceral response to the Skillern case is "fair cop — it's in the terms of service he agreed to when he signed up for a Gmail account."

But there's a pretty large gap between "we'll let the government look at your stuff if they insist" and "we'll keep an eye out for stuff that the government might want to see." The latter, with respect to privacy, represents the top of a very slippery slope.

How slippery? Well, consider Google's interests in "geolocation" (knowing where you are) and in "the Internet of Things" (connecting everything from your

toaster to your thermostat to your car to the Internet, with Google as middleman).

It's not out of the question that someday as you drive down the road, Google will track you and automatically message the local police department if it notices you're driving 38 miles per hour in a 35-mph speed zone.

Think that can't happen? Think again. In many locales, tickets (demanding payment of fines) are already automatically mailed to alleged red-light scofflaws caught by cameras. No need to even send out an actual cop with pad and pen. It's a profit center for government — and for companies that set up and operate the camera systems. In case you haven't noticed, Google really likes information-based profit centers.

And keep in mind that you are a criminal. Yes, really. At least if you live in the United States. Per Harvey Silverglate's book *Three Felonies a Day*, the average American breaks at least three federal laws in every 24-hour period. Want to bet against the probability that evidence of those "crimes" can be detected in your email archive?

To a large degree the Internet has killed our old conceptions of what privacy means and to what extent we can expect it. Personally I'm down with that — I'm more than willing to let Google pry into my personal stuff to better target the ads it shows me, in exchange for its "free" services. On the other hand I'd like some limits. And I think that markets are capable of setting those limits.

Three market limiting mechanisms that come to mind are "end to end" encryption, services for obfuscating geographic location and locating servers in countries with more respect for privacy and less fear of "big dog" governments like the United States. If Google can't or won't provide those, someone else will (actually a number of someones already are).

The standard political mechanism for reining in bad actors like Google would be legislation forbidding Internet service companies to "look for and report" anything to government absent a warrant issued on probable cause to believe a crime has been committed. But such political mechanisms don't work. As Edward Snowden's exposure of the US National Security Agency's illegal spying operations demonstrates, government ignores laws it doesn't like.

Instead of seeking political solutions, I suggest a fourth market solution:

Abolition of the state. The problem is not so much what Google tracks or what it might want to act on. Those are all a matter of agreement between Google and its users. The bigger problem is who Google might report you TO.

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Generation Jobless

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LIBERTY FEATURES

Since March 2007, right before the Great Recession began, the population of those aged 20-34 — so-called millennials — has increased by almost 4.3 million to 64 million according to data compiled by the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Only 44,000 of the 4.3 million — a little more than 1 percent — have found jobs on a net basis.

I'm one of the lucky ones in that age demographic who did find work. And every month, one of my jobs is to look at these depressing numbers, watching in slow motion as a generation of opportunity is lost — seemingly irrecoverably.

Taking into account the March 2007 employment-population ratio for this age bracket — that is, the percentage of the population working — of 76.38 percent, 3.25 million of them should have found jobs, but didn't. As a result, that ratio has dropped to 71.36 percent.

Those with jobs now total 45.861 million. In 2007, it was 45.817 million.

Some perspective on these numbers. By October 2009, this age group had lost 3.6 million jobs. It has taken five years since, then, just to get back to where we were before the recession on a quantitative basis prior to taking into account population growth.

But at its current rate of growth since January 2010, the employment-population ratio for 20-24 year olds will not return to its March 2007 levels for another 8 years approximately.

For 25-34 year olds, it will take

longer, almost 12-and-a-half years. So, sometime in, say, 2026? Suffice to say, that is longer than these people will even be included in the applicable age range.

Consider how precious the labor market really is. Two years to lose the jobs, and about a decade-and-a-half to get them back. And that's assuming the current rate of growth continues with no more bumps in the road. That is, no more major recessions, and the labor market continues to grow fast enough to get us back to previous levels seen.

But the current growth trend in job creation for young people may simply be reverting to what is a diminishing mean. Meaning, this ratio may in all likelihood level off long before it ever reaches pre-recession levels — and, then, we'll never get back to where we were.

The fact is the employment-population ratio for young people has been dropping steadily for far longer than since the Great Recession. The decline began in 2001.

In January 2001, 44.725 million Americans aged 20-34 had jobs, just 1.1 million fewer than today. Back then, those with jobs totaled nearly 78.4 percent. But since then, again, the ratio has dropped to 71.36 percent.

All told, that represents 4.5 million younger Americans in the past 12-and-a-half years who should have entered the workforce, but never did. These are people who are in the prime working years of their lives either failing to enter the labor force, or have lost their jobs and gave up looking for another one.

That is beyond pathetic. It is a national tragedy — the effects of which may be reverberating for generations to come.

In short, millions of young people are piling up as the economy fails to grow fast enough to even keep up with the growth of population. This is a land of diminishing opportunity. We are a generation lost.

Robert Romano is the senior editor of *Americans for Limited Government*.

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