

Is It Better To Be Public or Private In an Age of Surveillance?

Like it or not, we now live in an age of surveillance.

If the state isn't actually surveilling you, a corporation or business is gathering data about your location, your browsing history, your interests, your employment, and more. You're also probably subscribing yourself to a system of (voluntary) surveillance from friends, family, and colleagues via social media.

Whether or not any of this is good for humans on net, it's clear that there are new risks to deal with in a surveillance-oriented world. There's the growing risk of social engineering attacks (people pretending to be you to get your stuff or hurt you), scaled-up libel due to "cancel culture," doxxing, and actual physical attacks.

So, what is the best way to protect yourself and people you love from the consequences of the surveillance state? Beyond personal cybersecurity (that could be its own blog post **series** from a better techie), there are two possible approaches.

The argument for privacy

Being public in the way many folks are can open you and your loved ones to attack. Every time you post something on social media about yourself or your family, you might be opening yourself up to attack via that vector. So just don't do it.

You can resist the surveillance society is to disappear – relatively speaking. While it may not be possible to get fully off the radar and off the grid, if you ditch your cell phone, run a privacy-friendly OS, use a VPN, delete your social media accounts, and use cash, you can get pretty hard to track.

There are still millions of unknown folks all over the world who live blissfully free of Facebook and its ilk. They don't have to worry about their digital "permanent record" because they aren't really known to begin with.

The argument for publicity

On the other hand, if it is impossible for you to go off the grid, being as public as possible – building a brand/reputation, developing a following, and documenting much of your life online – may be your best defense.

Criminals and even states like to work in secret and attack the marginalized. If you have a clean public reputation and supporters who have your back, it will be harder for bad actors

to use the outcomes of surveillance to harm you. If you do go down, bad folks can be pretty sure that they will be found out.

If you are in the public eye, attempts on you will certainly increase, but your access to deterrents and protection will also increase.

I don't know which is the right answer, but I have considered (and lived) both approaches in my own small way. Right now I lean toward privacy – before I leaned toward publicity. But whatever the case, I hope to maintain the freedom to choose either.

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