

Understanding Attitudes Toward Police Surveillance: The Role of Authoritarianism, Fear of Crime, and Private-Sector Surveillance Attitudes

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Résumé de l'article

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Article

Understanding Attitudes Toward Police Surveillance: The Role of Authoritarianism, Fear of Crime, and Private-Sector Surveillance Attitudes

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Abstract

Public attitudes toward domestic police surveillance have important implications for its political salience and regulation. An increasing number of jurisdictions have sought to regulate law enforcement surveillance, in part due to growing concerns over issues related to privacy, civil liberties, and the potential for bias (Beyea and Kebde 2021; Chivukula and Takemoto 2021; Smyth 2021). This study explores what factors help to predict and shape public attitudes toward police surveillance. Two groups of participants (n = 131 and n = 299) completed measures of authoritarianism, fear of crime, consumer surveillance technology use, and attitudes toward private-sector surveillance (such as surveillance by private companies, employers, or citizens) and police surveillance. Demographic factors (age, race/ethnicity, education level, gender, and political leaning) were also examined. Of these factors, legal authoritarianism, level of interaction with surveillance-related consumer technology, and attitudes toward private-sector surveillance were positively associated with the acceptance of police surveillance.

Introduction

Recent technological innovations have greatly expanded the potential reach of police investigations (ACLU 2016; Brayne 2017, 2020; Haggerty 2012; United States v. Jones 2012). Advances in surveillance technology used by law enforcement, in conjunction with access to information gathered by third party entities, has made it easier, faster, and less expensive to monitor a wide range of the population, and to gather detailed information about a given person (Brayne 2017, 2020). As more facets of daily life are mediated by technology, there is a larger quantity of data retained for indefinite periods of time that could be accessed during criminal justice investigations, in addition to the information that is gathered by law enforcement via direct, real-time surveillance (Brayne 2017; Haggerty 2012). State surveillance practices have also increasingly encouraged citizens to not only become accustomed to being subjected to surveillance but also actively participate in it (Haggerty 2012; Ward 2021). The large amount of data routinely gathered by private entities and developments in law enforcement surveillance technology and data analysis pose new issues and challenges for understanding and regulating crime surveillance.

Surveillance by state and local police can have serious, potentially negative implications for a range of social behaviors. Concern about being targeted for police surveillance—perhaps because it is seen as an unwarranted invasion of privacy—can have negative social and psychological consequences, including

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psychological distress and avoidance of public institutions that may involve surveillance, such as medical, financial, and educational institutions (Brayne 2014; Byfield 2019; Del Toro et al. 2018; Ferguson 2017; Sewell, Jefferson, and Lee 2017). Certain types of surveillance and data analytics, such as facial recognition technology and predictive policing algorithms, can perpetuate racial bias and inequity (Byfield 2019; Diaz 2020; Nkonde 2019). In response to growing civil liberties and social justice concerns about the use of these technologies, an increasing number of jurisdictions have sought to regulate law enforcement surveillance, including state limits on facial recognition technology and local community control over police surveillance regulations that allow for local control and oversight over the adoption and use of police surveillance technology (Beyea and Kebde 2021; Chivukula and Takemoto 2021; Smyth 2021).

Given the significant political, social, and individual consequences that police surveillance can have, it is important to develop a greater theoretical understanding of what factors drive support and acceptance of such practices. Although the decision to implement police surveillance tools and practices is largely made without public input, public attitudes can play an important role in surveillance regulation, whether it is through voting, organizing, or otherwise communicating the importance of this issue to elected representatives. Advocacy and political momentum have led to increased surveillance regulation on a local level (Chivukula and Takemoto 2021). For example, the New York City Public Oversight of Surveillance Technology (POST) Act was passed following several years of continued civil rights organization and community activism and the 2020 nationwide demonstrations against racism and police brutality following the murder of George Floyd (Brennan Center for Justice 2021).

Much of the existing research examining public attitudes toward government surveillance has been focused on counter-terrorism surveillance by federal law enforcement agencies, such as the National Security Agency (see, e.g., Cohrs et al. 2005; Nakhaie and de Lint 2013; Valentino et al. 2020). While likely relevant to understanding police surveillance attitudes, there are important differences between terrorism and the types of domestic “street” crime that policing is typically associated with, including differences in the likelihood of victimization and stereotypes and narratives about the causes and perpetrators. There has also been substantial research investigating crime control attitudes and punitiveness largely in the context of sentencing (e.g., Costelloe, Chiricos, and Gertz 2009), yet it is unclear whether factors associated with support for harsh sentencing would also predict support for greater surveillance by state and local police. It is possible that attitudes toward police surveillance practices are different from those that affect criminal sentencing. That is, the fact that police surveillance implicates the privacy and civil liberties of a wide range of people, rather than being limited to those who have been accused of a crime, may lead to higher levels of wariness and concern. Alternatively, people also encounter (and even employ) forms of surveillance in many non-criminal justice contexts that might accustom them to or positively influence how they feel about similar technologies being used by police.

This study investigates the attitudinal characteristics that are associated with greater acceptance of police surveillance, including authoritarianism, fear of crime, and attitudes toward and use of private sector surveillance. Fear of crime and authoritarianism have each been associated with support for government surveillance in the context of terrorism and punitive attitudes toward crime policy (Cohrs et al. 2005; Gerber and Jackson 2016). Police surveillance is both an aspect of crime policy and involves similar tools, practices, and privacy concerns as federal law enforcement counter-terror surveillance, which suggests that factors associated with both support for punitive crime policy and support for war on terror surveillance would also be associated with support for police surveillance. Private sector attitudes and interactions are also examined because of the high volume of daily interactions that most have with surveillance by non-state entities, such as private corporations and employers, and indication in the literature that government surveillance and consumer surveillance attitudes may be related (e.g., Dinev, Hart, and Mullen 2008).

Literature Review

Interaction with Private Sector Surveillance

The prevalence of surveillance technologies has resulted in the average person both being surveilled more and engaging in more surveillance (Stark and Levy 2018). For example, consumers are often encouraged to engage in managerial surveillance functions through features that allow consumers to track orders and rate their service, which involves surveillance of the employees in charge of the preparation and delivery of the item while also yielding data about the customer for the company to analyze (Stark and Levy 2018). Some forms of surveillance are also marketed to consumers as a mechanism for enacting familial care desires and responsibilities, as seen with the array of available infant- and child- tracking products, home surveillance cameras, and teen driver vehicle safety features (Stark and Levy 2018). Together, the frequency with which people both surveil and are surveilled may further acceptance of surveillance as a normal feature of many types of technology-mediated relationships and transactions and can frame surveillance as an antidote to anxiety and uncertainty (Stark and Levy 2018). Additionally, familiarity with specific forms of biometric surveillance technology has been associated with greater perceptions of security (Buckley and Nurse 2019).

If people are regularly encountering a specific form of surveillance technology in their everyday interactions, it is possible that they could perceive the use of that technology by law enforcement as more acceptable, despite the different purpose and implications. Moreover, the surveillance industry itself is invested in highlighting the positive aspects of surveillance, such as greater convenience, to encourage more widespread use of its products. The aggressive marketing of these products and services may mask the potential negative consequences of certain kinds of surveillance and suggest to the public that there are none.

Thus, people's attitudes toward private sector surveillance may relate to how they feel about police surveillance. One study of attitudes toward government monitoring of online activity found that government surveillance concerns were positively associated with internet privacy concerns, and participants who viewed government surveillance as necessary were more likely to disclose personal information during internet transactions and had lower internet privacy concerns (Dinev, Hart, and Mullen 2008). Therefore, we predicted that private sector surveillance attitudes and interactions would be positively associated with support for police surveillance practices, and that attitudes toward private sector surveillance would mediate the relationship between the level of interaction with surveillance-implicating consumer surveillance and police surveillance attitudes.

Several recent studies comparing attitudes toward government and private sector surveillance have indicated that people may be more tolerant or trusting of the government using certain forms of surveillance technology than of private companies, although overall support has tended to be low for both categories. In a Pew survey of Americans, more reported feeling "somewhat concerned" or "very concerned" about the amount of data gathered about them by private companies (79%) compared to by the government (64%), and more viewed corporate data collection as posing greater risks than benefits (81%), compared to that by the government (66%) (Auxier et al. 2019). According to a separate Pew report, more than half of surveyed Americans reported trusting law enforcement to use facial recognition technology responsibly, whereas a slightly smaller share trusted use by advertisers and technology companies (Smith 2019). A UK study similarly found that participants reported feeling more comfortable with the government storing various types of biometric data than they were private companies, which the authors noted was interesting considering the extent to which many people already entrust private companies with their biometric data (Buckley and Nurse 2019). Several other recent studies with European participants have found greater tolerance for government surveillance and data practices (Cayford, Pieters, and van Gelder 2020; Leckner 2018; van den Broek et al. 2017).

It is possible that these differences in support for private and government surveillance reflect perceptions about differences in the purposes, risks, and benefits of surveillance across these different contexts, which, if so, may mean that many overlook the risks that accompany government surveillance. Traditionally there has been greater public concern and opposition toward government surveillance, but concerns over privacy threats posed by the private sector grew steadily with increased uses of technology and online transactions and accompanying concerns about the risks associated with improper uses and safeguarding of personal data (see Westin 2003). The significant acceleration in government surveillance post-9/11 has been largely promoted as necessary for security and as something that should be unproblematic for those with “nothing to hide” (Solove 2007). Among European participants, government surveillance has been associated with higher public acceptance when justified based on national security (Antoine 2022). Conversely, corporate surveillance has varying purposes, including monetization, which may be less compelling, particularly when considered alongside concerns about the appropriate safeguarding of personal information. Among Swedish participants, where participants reported more positive or very positive feelings toward online data collection by state authorities compared to social media companies or search engines, there was a strong positive association between support for corporate data collection and a belief that the benefits outweighed the risks (Leckner 2018).

Authoritarianism

High scores on general measures of authoritarianism have been linked to punitive crime sentencing attitudes (Colemont, Van Hiel, and Cornelis 2011; Gerber and Jackson 2016). One explanation for this is, because people high in authoritarianism value authority and conformity to conventional values, they are therefore supportive of harsh responses by institutions to actions that fall outside social norms and threaten the collective order (Gerber and Jackson 2016). Legal authoritarianism is a subset of authoritarian attitudes pertaining specifically to legal issues and has largely been studied in the context of its relationship to juror bias and punitive crime policy attitudes. (Kravitz, Cutler, and Brock 1993). Legal authoritarianism, as measured by the Revised Legal Attitudes Questionnaire, includes beliefs about the legitimacy and trustworthiness of criminal legal system actors, the procedural rights of the accused, and the fairness and perceived leniency of the criminal legal system (Kravitz, Cutler, and Brock 1993). People who score high in legal authoritarianism tend to be more conviction prone (Kravitz, Cutler, and Brock 1993).

Right-wing authoritarianism has been linked to support for government surveillance in several studies, but most of the research examining this connection has been in the context of terrorism, not domestic crime (Cohrs et al. 2005; Hetherington and Suhay 2011; Kossowska et al. 2011). The association between authoritarianism and support for government surveillance that curtails civil liberties may be the result of similar underlying psychological factors that explain the link between authoritarianism and punitiveness, particularly when surveillance is framed as a way to mitigate potential threats (Kossowska et al. 2011).

We predicted that both legal authoritarianism and right-wing authoritarianism would predict greater police surveillance acceptance.

Fear of Crime

Fear of crime and fear of terrorism have been linked to support for various forms of government surveillance and civil liberties restrictions in previous studies among European participants (Gurinskaya 2020; Trudinger and Steckermeier 2017; van Heek, Arning, and Ziefle 2017). A recent study of American attitudes toward government surveillance found that participants’ level of threat perception of a terrorist attack was negatively associated with their concern over government surveillance, opposition to various government surveillance practices, and unwillingness to trade civil liberties for greater security (Valentino et al. 2020). Fear and concern about crime has also been associated with punitive attitudes toward sentencing and punishment for adult and juvenile defendants and prisoners (Costelloe, Chiricos, and Gertz 2009). Thus, we predicted that fear of crime would predict police surveillance acceptance.

Socio-Demographic Factors

Demographic factors may influence attitudes toward surveillance. Findings from previous studies have tended to be somewhat inconsistent, indicating the need for further study in this area (see Auxier et al. 2019; Nakhaie and de Lint 2013; Nam 2019). Here, demographic factors (e.g., age, gender, political leaning) are analyzed, but this element of the study is largely exploratory due to the inconsistencies in the literature, and no predictions were made about the directionality of any possible effects.

Method

Participants

This study was first piloted with 133 psychology undergraduate students who volunteered to participate in exchange for course credit. The purpose of the pilot study was primarily to assess internal consistency for the measures developed for this study. Subsequently, the main data collection was conducted with an online sample of 300 participants who were recruited through Prolific, an online research participant recruitment service, and paid \$3.17 in exchange for participating. The online sample was stratified across age, sex, and ethnicity using simplified US census data (Prolific 2022). Because only one measure, the consumer surveillance technology interaction scale, was modified between the pilot and main data collection, and given the relatively large number of participants who volunteered for the pilot study, the pilot results are reported here as a source of comparison with the online sample. Inclusion of the pilot data offers a means of evaluating consistency of the main findings across two groups with considerable demographic differences.

For both groups, all participants had to agree that they were over the age of eighteen, and participants in the online sample had to reside in the United States. Two student participants' responses and one online participant's response did not answer most or all items and were excluded from data analyses, leaving 131 student respondents and 299 online respondents respectively. Participant in the student sample ranged in age from eighteen to fifty-three, with a mean of 20.5 years, and the online sample ranged from eighteen to eighty, with an average of 45.85 years. See Table 1, below, for a summary of participant demographic data.

Table 1: Participant Characteristics

| | Student sample n (%) | Online sample n (%) |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| <i>Gender</i> | | |
| Male | 38 (29.0) | 147 (49.2) |
| Female | 87 (66.5) | 149 (49.8) |
| Non-binary | 6 (4.6) | 3 (1.0) |
| <i>Race/Ethnicity¹</i> | | |
| Asian/Asian American | 31(23.7) | 21(7.0) |
| Black/African American | 5 (3.8) | 41(13.7) |
| Latinx/Hispanic | 43(32.8) | 9 (3.0) |

| | | |
|--|-----------|------------|
| Middle Eastern/Arab American | 1 (0.8) | 2 (0.7) |
| Native American/Indigenous Alaskan | 5 (3.8) | 4 (1.3) |
| Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander | 3 (2.3) | 1 (0.3) |
| White/Caucasian | 67 (51.1) | 229 (76.6) |
| White Only | 52 (39.7) | 219 (73.2) |
| <i>Education Level</i> | | |
| Some high school | 1 (0.8) | 3 (1.0) |
| High school diploma | 28 (21.4) | 29 (9.7) |
| Some college | 73 (55.7) | 55 (18.4) |
| Associate degree/trade certificate | 19 (14.5) | 38 (12.7) |
| Bachelor's degree | 10 (7.6) | 113 (37.8) |
| Graduate/professional degree | 0 (0) | 61 (20.4) |
| <i>Political Leaning</i> | | |
| Very liberal | 25 (19.1) | 47 (15.7) |
| Liberal | 67 (51.1) | 123 (41.1) |
| Moderate | 36 (27.5) | 69 (23.1) |
| Conservative | 3 (2.3) | 48 (16.1) |
| Very Conservative | 0 (0) | 12 (4.0) |

¹Total percentages exceed 100% because participants could select multiple categories.

Materials

Outcome Variable Measure. The dependent measure was a ten-item set of questions developed for this study (Appendix A), which asked participants to rate the level of acceptability for different types of law enforcement surveillance, with responses ranging from 1 (totally unacceptable) to 5 (totally acceptable). All types of surveillance in this questionnaire involved practices directed at the general population or at suspects who have not yet been convicted of a crime. Responses were combined into an overall average score. Among student participants, a Cronbach's alpha of .82 was observed, and among the online sample an alpha of .87 was observed.

Private Sector Surveillance Attitudes. A twelve-item private sector surveillance attitude questionnaire measured how acceptable participants viewed surveillance activities by private employers, private citizens, and technology companies, ranging from 1 (totally unacceptable) to 5 (totally acceptable). Cronbach's alpha was .82 for the student participants and .79 for the online sample.

Technology Use. A seven-item technology use questionnaire asked student participants about their own interaction with and/or use of surveillance-related technologies, such as social media, DNA testing kits, and

wearable fitness trackers. The answer choices in the pilot round consisted of “No AND would not consider using in the future” or “YES OR would consider using.” When first administered with the student participants, initial internal consistency for this measure was low (Cronbach’s alpha = .49). To address the possibility that the answer choices were confusing to participants, potentially contributing to low scale reliability in the pilot round, the answer choices for the main sample were converted to three options, “No, and would not consider using,” “No, but would consider using,” and “Yes.” Additionally, four items were added to the scale, for a total of eleven items, for data collection with the online sample. The modified technology use scale that was used with the online sample had an alpha of .74.

Fear of Crime. Fear of crime was measured using Costelloe, Chiricos, and Gertz’s (2009) six-item fear of crime scale, which asks participants to use a 1 to 10 scale to rate their level of fear about being the victim of a crime, such as theft, sexual assault, or murder. Responses were combined to create a fear of crime index. Costelloe, Chiricos, and Gertz (2009) reported an alpha of .91, which was the same alpha level noted among the student participants. Among the online sample, it was .93.

Legal Authoritarianism. Legal authoritarianism was measured using the twenty-three-item Revised Legal Attitudes Questionnaire (RLAQ-23) (Kravitz, Cutler, and Brock 1993). The RLAQ-23 contains three subscales that measure authoritarian, antiauthoritarian, and equalitarian attitudes, and contains both regular and reverse-coded items, which participants are asked to rate their agreement with on a six-point Likert scale. The word “men” in Item 14 (“It is better for society that several guilty men be freed than one innocent one wrongfully imprisoned”) was changed to “people.” Kravitz, Cutler, and Brock (1993) reported a Cronbach’s alpha of .83 for the RLAQ-23. Among the student participants, an alpha level of .79 was observed, and among the online sample participants the alpha was .86.

Right-Wing Authoritarianism. Right-wing authoritarianism was measured using the six-item Very Short Authoritarianism Scale (VSA) (Bizumic and Duckitt 2018). This measure is highly correlated with Altemeyer’s Right Wing Authoritarianism scale (.86). Responses are given on a nine-item Likert scale. Bizumic and Duckitt (2018) reported a Cronbach’s alpha of .71 in validation studies with US participants. Internal consistency was slightly lower among the student participants, at .67, and higher among the online sample, at .83.

Demographic Measure. A set of demographic questions asked participants to provide their age, race/ethnicity, gender, political leaning, and education level. Age was an open-ended response option, and the remaining items had multiple-choice response options.

Open-Ended Items. The pilot administration with student participants included two final open-ended questions asking for their feedback on the study and whether any items were confusing or difficult to answer. These questions were intended to aid in identifying any potential issues with the study prior to administration with the main sample participants. The main issue noted in responses was that some participants felt that the language of the RLAQ-23 was overly technical in terms of legal jargon. But, given the high scale reliability among pilot participants and a reluctance to modify an established measure, no changes were made based on this feedback.

Procedure

Following IRB approval, this study was administered using Qualtrics, first to the student sample (October to early December 2021), then to the online sample (July 2022). No study questions asked for potentially identifying information, and Qualtrics was configured to not collect participant IP addresses. After being provided with the informed consent agreement, participants received the police surveillance attitude measure to avoid effects from the other measures. The private sector surveillance attitude measure, level of interaction with surveillance technology questionnaire, fear of crime scale, RLAQ, and VSA scale were then administered in a random order. Following completion of all scales, participants were asked to complete

the demographic questions. The end of the survey displayed a message thanking the participants and had a box to click to complete the study. Data were exported from Qualtrics to SPSS version 27 for statistical analysis, and the Laerd Statistics (2015) SPSS guides were consulted for checking statistical assumptions and conducting the multiple linear regression analysis, paired samples T-tests, and independent samples T-tests.

Results

Scale Responses Overview

Police Surveillance Attitudes

The mean police surveillance attitude score for the student sample was 3.20, 95% CI [3.08, 3.32]), and among the online sample it was 3.35, 95% CI [3.26, 3.45]. See Table 2, below, for a summary of police surveillance attitude item ratings.

Table 2: Police Surveillance Attitude Item Ratings

| Police surveillance attitude items (1 = totally unacceptable, 5 = totally acceptable) | Student sample mean (SD) | Online sample mean (SD) |
|---|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Overall scale average | 3.20 (.71) | 3.35 (.84) |
| Automatic license plate readers | 3.39 (1.19) | 2.95 (1.33) |
| Facial recognition for public security camera footage | 3.08 (1.16) | 3.24 (1.31) |
| Public security cameras | 3.84 (1.04) | 4.20 (1.01) |
| Drones equipped with video cameras | 2.77 (1.04) | 3.19 (1.19) |
| DNA samples from arrestees | 3.61 (1.15) | 3.54 (1.32) |
| Cell site simulators | 2.61 (1.17) | 2.59 (1.28) |
| Person-based predictive policing | 2.47 (1.22) | 2.83 (1.30) |
| Location-based predictive policing | 3.17 (1.25) | 3.59 (1.16) |
| Automated public security camera footage analyzers | 3.20 (1.22) | 3.32 (1.28) |
| Gunshot detectors | 3.86 (1.12) | 4.08 (1.08) |

A Welch t-test was run to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference between the student and online samples' average police surveillance approval ratings due to the assumption of homogeneity of variances being violated, as assessed by Levene's test for equal variances ($p = .017$). Two values were determined to be outliers based on visual inspection of a boxplot. These values were not extreme (within three box lengths from the edge of the box), were examined for clear indications of error (e.g., usually short completion time), and were included in the analysis. Responses among the student sample were normally distributed, as assessed by Shapiro-Wilk's test ($p > .05$). The online sample's response scores

were not normally distributed, as assessed by Shapiro-Wilk's test ($p = .002$), but visual inspection of the Normal Q-Q plot indicated that data were approximately normal.

There was not a statistically significant difference between the student and online sample's overall police surveillance approval ratings. The mean difference between the student and online samples was $-.15$ (95% CI $-.31, .001$), $t(290.44) = -1.95$, $p = .052$. To check the impact of including outliers, a separate analysis was run with the outliers removed and still yielded non-significant results ($p = .109$). Therefore, although the student and online samples differed across several demographic characteristics, such as the student sample being on average considerably younger and reporting more liberal-leaning political attitudes than the online sample, these differences did not result in significantly different levels of approval for police surveillance.

Private Sector Surveillance Attitudes

The mean private sector surveillance scale ratings for the student sample were lower (3.05, 95% CI [2.94, 3.16]) than for the online sample (mean = 3.27, 95% CI [3.20, 3.35]). See Table 3, below, for a summary of item ratings.

Table 3: Private Sector Surveillance Attitude Item Ratings

| Private sector surveillance attitude items (1 = totally unacceptable, 5 = totally acceptable) | Student sample mean (SD) | Online sample mean (SD) |
|--|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Overall scale average | 3.05 (.64) | 3.27 (.65) |
| Social media platform data collection for displaying targeted ads | 2.49 (1.20) | 2.62 (1.25) |
| Computer monitoring software for remote private employees | 2.04 (1.12) | 2.68 (1.25) |
| Private employers reviewing job applicant social media | 2.90 (1.23) | 3.01 (1.38) |
| Health/fitness apps sharing anonymized usage for ads/analytics | 2.54 (1.10) | 2.68 (1.26) |
| Private employers reviewing employee work email | 2.81 (1.24) | 3.27 (1.41) |
| Private employers requiring drug tests for applicants | 3.24 (1.25) | 3.76 (1.22) |
| Private citizen home security cameras with facial recognition | 3.38 (1.12) | 3.77 (1.06) |
| Online retailers tracking purchases and browsing for targeted ads | 2.93 (1.14) | 2.96 (1.25) |
| Private citizens using dash cams | 4.30 (.92) | 4.51 (.67) |
| Video camera monitoring of childcare/cleaning service providers | 4.19 (.99) | 4.31 (.90) |
| Private citizens using hobby drones with cameras | 3.14 (1.12) | 3.02 (1.13) |
| Internet browsers tracking history for displaying targeted ads | 2.62 (1.03) | 2.70 (1.23) |

An independent samples t-test was performed to determine whether the difference between the online and student samples' private sector surveillance approval ratings was statistically significant. Responses were normally distributed, as assessed by Shapiro-Wilk's test ($p > .05$), and there was homogeneity of variances,

as assessed by Levene's test ($p > .05$). There were six outlier values, which were not extreme and were included in the analysis. The student sample's overall acceptability ratings for private sector surveillance were statistically significantly lower than the online sample's, with a mean difference of $-.23$ (95% CI $-.36, -.09$), $t(428) = -3.35$, $p < .001$. The effect size, measured by Cohen's d , was small, $d = -.35$ (95% CI $-.56, -.15$). To examine the impact of including outlier values in the results, the analysis was re-run with the outliers excluded and still yielded significant results ($p < .001$).

Paired-sample t -tests were performed to determine whether there were statistically significant differences between police and private surveillance attitude ratings within the student and online sample groups. For the student sample, the assumption of normality was not violated based on Shapiro-Wilk's test ($p > .05$). There was one outlier that was more than 1.5 box-plot lengths from the edge of the box in a boxplot. However, this value was not extreme, was inspected for indications of error, and remained in the analysis. The student sample's overall mean police surveillance acceptance rating was 3.20, compared to a mean private sector surveillance rating of 3.05. The mean difference between the student sample's mean overall police and private sector surveillance ratings was $.15$ points (95% CI $.03, .27$), which was statistically significant, $t(130) = 2.52$, $p = .013$. The effect size, measured by Cohen's d , was small, $d = .22$ (95% CI $.05, .39$). Running the analysis without the outlier still yielded significant results ($p = .021$).

For the online sample, the assumption of normality was not violated based on Shapiro-Wilk's test ($p > .05$). There were eight outlier values (more than 1.5 box-plot lengths from the edge of the box in a boxplot). However, these values were not extreme, were inspected, and were included in the analysis. The online sample's average overall police surveillance acceptance rating was 3.35, and the mean overall private sector surveillance acceptability rating was 3.27. The mean difference, $.08$ (95% CI $-.02, .18$), was not statistically significant, $t(298) = 1.61$, $p = .109$. When the analysis was repeated without outliers it still yielded non-significant results ($p = .071$).

Overall, the student sample gave a statistically significantly higher average of police surveillance acceptability ratings compared to private sector surveillance, although this difference was small. Among the online sample, there was not a statistically significant difference between overall police and private sector surveillance acceptability ratings. However, results from both groups indicate that there was not a significantly lower tolerance for police surveillance compared to private sector surveillance, and the student participants' results are consistent with recent literature finding greater resistance to private sector surveillance than government surveillance (Auxier et al. 2019; Cayford, Pieters, and van Gelder 2020).

Multiple Linear Regression

A multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to identify which factors were significant predictors of police surveillance acceptability ratings. For the overall model with five predictor variables (legal authoritarianism, right-wing authoritarianism, fear of crime, private sector surveillance attitudes, and consumer surveillance interaction), the student sample R^2 was 45.4% with an adjusted R^2 of 43.2%, $F(5, 125) = 20.81$, $p < .001$. The online sample had an R^2 of 44.5% with an adjusted R^2 of 43.6%, $F(5, 293) = 47.011$, $p < .001$. For the student sample, fear of crime, legal authoritarianism, and private sector surveillance attitudes were statistically significant predictors of police surveillance attitudes. Among the online group, legal authoritarianism, private sector surveillance attitudes, and level of interaction with surveillance-implicating consumer technology were significant predictors. Right-wing authoritarianism was not a significant predictor for either group. The regression models for both groups indicate that the factors studied here explained slightly less than half of the variance in individual police surveillance attitudes, which points to a need for future studies to explore other relevant factors.

Next, the five demographic variables (age, gender, race/ethnicity, political leaning, and education level), which were included primarily for exploratory purposes, were added to the regression equation along with the five main predictor variables (see Tables 4 and 5). None of the demographic factors examined in this

study (race/ethnicity, age, gender, education level, and political leaning) were significant predictors of police surveillance attitudes for the student or online sample participants, although in the online sample political leaning (measured on a 1–5 scale from very liberal to very conservative) bordered on significance ($p = .056$). For the student sample, fear of crime was no longer significant once demographic factors were added to the model.

The lack of relationship in this study between the demographic factors and police surveillance attitudes is consistent with Nam's (2019) findings that demographic factors (being male, being white, age, and education level) were not significant predictors of overall government surveillance acceptability ratings, although in that study political liberalism was significant. Police surveillance attitudes are likely informed by more complex factors that are not linked to a single given demographic trait, which is also supported by the fact that, despite the considerable socio-demographic differences between the student and online sample, there was no statistically significant difference between the two groups in overall police surveillance acceptability ratings.

Table 4: Multiple Linear Regression Results with Demographic Factors,¹ Student Sample ($n = 131$)

| Police surveillance attitudes | <i>B</i> | 95% CI | | <i>SE B</i> | β | R^2 | ΔR^2 |
|-----------------------------------|----------|--------|-----|-------------|---------|-------|--------------|
| | | LL | UL | | | | |
| Model | | | | | | .48 | .44*** |
| Constant | -.001 | -1.2 | 1.2 | .60 | | | |
| Tech use | .12 | -.39 | .64 | .03 | .12 | | |
| Private sector attitudes | .48*** | .32 | .64 | .08 | .44*** | | |
| RLAQ | .60*** | .35 | .85 | .13 | .44*** | | |
| VSA | -.006 | -.12 | .12 | .06 | -.01 | | |
| Fear of crime | .03 | -.02 | .07 | .02 | .10 | | |
| Age | -.02 | -.04 | .01 | .01 | -.08 | | |
| Race/ethnicity (white = 1) | .09 | -.12 | .29 | .10 | .06 | | |
| Gender (male = 1) | -.17 | -.40 | .07 | .12 | -.12 | | |
| Education level | .02 | -.10 | .14 | .06 | .03 | | |
| Political leaning | -.08 | .09 | .18 | .08 | -.08 | | |

¹ Note. Model = “Enter” method in SPSS. *B* = unstandardized regression coefficient; CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit; *SE B* = standard error of the coefficient; β = standardized coefficient; R^2 = coefficient of determination; ΔR^2 = adjusted R^2 .

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 5: Multiple Linear Regression Results with Demographic Factors,¹ Online Sample (n = 299)

| Police surveillance attitudes | <i>B</i> | 95% CI | | <i>SE B</i> | β | <i>R</i> ² | ΔR^2 |
|-----------------------------------|----------|--------|------|-------------|---------|-----------------------|--------------|
| | | LL | UL | | | | |
| Model | | | | | | .46 | .45*** |
| Constant | -.97 | -1.64 | -.30 | .34 | | | |
| Tech use | .44*** | .24 | .64 | .10 | .21*** | | |
| Private sector attitudes | .30*** | .18 | .42 | .06 | .23*** | | |
| RLAQ | .62*** | .47 | .77 | .08 | .52*** | | |
| VSA | .03 | -.04 | .10 | .03 | .06 | | |
| Fear of crime | .03 | -.004 | .06 | .02 | .08 | | |
| Age | .004 | -.001 | .01 | .002 | .08 | | |
| Race/ethnicity (white = 1) | .01 | -.16 | .19 | .09 | .01 | | |
| Gender (male = 1) | .03 | -.13 | .18 | .08 | .02 | | |
| Education level | .04 | -.01 | .10 | .03 | .07 | | |
| Political leaning | -.09 | -.19 | .002 | .05 | -.12 | | |

¹Note. Model = “Enter” method in SPSS. *B* = unstandardized regression coefficient; CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit; *SE B* = standard error of the coefficient; β = standardized coefficient; *R*² = coefficient of determination; ΔR^2 = adjusted *R*².

p* < .05. *p* < .01. ****p* < .001.

Authoritarianism

Legal authoritarianism was a statistically significant predictor of higher police surveillance acceptability ratings among both the student and online sample, which suggests that support for police surveillance is related to support for other punitive crime policies. Support for authority figures and perceptions of their legitimacy are inherent components of authoritarianism, and legal authoritarianism has been linked in recent studies to perceptions of police officer behavior as appropriate or justified (Korva et al. 2022; Watson and Stevenson 2020). Perceived trustworthiness of surveilling institutions has been identified as an important factor in surveillance acceptance (van den Broeck et al 2017; Degli Esposti, Pavone, and Santiago-Gomez 2017). In the context of these findings, it makes sense that people scoring higher in legal authoritarianism—who are more likely to report greater trust in criminal legal system actors, believe that the criminal legal system is fair or even excessively lenient, and express less concern over procedural rights of the accused—would also be more likely to view police surveillance as acceptable.

Interestingly, right wing authoritarianism (RWA), as measured by the VSA, did not significantly predict attitudes toward police surveillance in either sample. As discussed, right-wing authoritarianism has been associated with support for counter-terrorism surveillance and other civil liberties restrictions (Cohrs et al. 2005; Hetherington and Suhay 2011; Kossowska et al. 2011), which led us to expect that it also would be

associated with support for police surveillance. In this case, however, the lack of a significant relationship between RWA and police surveillance acceptance appears to be due to the fact that the RLAQ measure of legal authoritarianism was included in the model, and that measure better accounted for the aspects of authoritarianism traits that would predict support for police surveillance. Unlike the VSA, which has items that focus on traditional or conventional social and religious values (i.e., attitudes toward “God’s laws about abortion, pornography, and marriage” and “premarital sexual intercourse”), the RLAQ focuses primarily on the criminal legal system. The finding that the RLAQ is a better predictor of police surveillance support than the VSA has implications for understanding the aspects of authoritarianism that might account for greater support for surveillance and for future studies investigating links between authoritarianism and surveillance attitudes.

Fear of Crime

Fear of crime was not a significant predictor of police surveillance attitudes for the online sample and was no longer significant in the student sample once the demographic factors were included in the model. To determine which demographic variables caused fear of crime to no longer be significant, a separate regression was run with fear of crime as the outcome variable and the five demographic variables and four remaining independent variables as the predictors. The results indicated that being male ($\beta = -.36, p < .001$) and white ($\beta = -.18, p = .036$) were statistically significant negative predictors of fear of crime scores. Thus, when controlling for those variables in the regression model, fear of crime was no longer a significant predictor of the dependent variable.

These results are consistent with a recent study with German participants that found that varying crime rates in hypothetical scenarios did not have a statistically significant relationship to participants’ law enforcement surveillance acceptance ratings (Antoine 2023). With respect to previous studies with non-US participants that found a relationship between fear of crime and greater support for certain forms of police surveillance (Gurinskaya 2020; van Heek, Arning, and Ziefle 2017), aside from the possibility that these inconsistencies reflect the different socio-political context, it may be that there is a more nuanced relationship between types of crime and specific forms of surveillance that was not reflected in our police surveillance attitude measure, which covered a fairly broad range of different forms of surveillance technologies.

Previous studies have found that fear of a terrorist attack is associated with greater support for government surveillance (Malhotra and Popp 2012; Valentino et al. 2020). A possible distinction may be that many of the more prominent forms of counter-terror government surveillance have been more overtly presented by authorities as a necessary preventative tool for intercepting future terrorist attacks, which could explain why there is clearer link between fearing terrorism and tolerating government surveillance than there is with crime. In contrast to the framing of war on terror-related surveillance practices as preventative measures, such as the monitoring of citizens’ online activities, some of the more visible or familiar forms of police surveillance, such as CCTV, might be perceived as utilized more in after-the-fact investigations than as prevention (see Degli Esposti and Gomez 2015; see also Koskela 2015). Moreover, counter-terror surveillance is explicitly linked with a relatively specific and serious category of crime, whereas police surveillance may be associated a much broader category of crimes, some of which are less well-defined and range in seriousness.

Private Sector Surveillance Attitudes

A central question explored in this study was how people’s interactions with “everyday surveillance” in the private sector, such as that by private companies, individuals, and employers, might relate to their attitudes toward police surveillance. Here, private sector surveillance acceptance was a significant predictor of police surveillance acceptance in both groups. This is consistent with recent findings from participants from Sweden, Portugal, and Estonia, three very distinct socio-political backgrounds, where tolerance for online state surveillance was predicted by tolerance for corporate surveillance across all groups (Kalmus, Bolin, and Figueiras 2022). These findings may indicate that surveillance attitudes are relatively stable across

different contexts, with some people tending to be more concerned and others more tolerant. For example, if someone is generally unconcerned by news of government surveillance because they believe that they are not doing anything problematic, then they may apply a similar analysis to surveillance by their smartphone service provider. Solove (2007) described the divergent reactions people had when news broke in 2006 that the NSA maintained a database of US customer phone records: some were scandalized while others had relatively mild reactions because they felt they had “nothing to hide” and saw government surveillance as a concern only for persons who were concealing illicit behavior. This would be consistent with Westin’s (2003) privacy ideology types, which classify generalized differences in individual privacy attitudes and concerns.

The relationship between the degree of acceptance of surveillance by private citizens or companies and surveillance conducted by law enforcement may also mean that the public is unwilling or unable to differentiate the potential implications of police versus private sector surveillance. Police surveillance often utilizes similar technological features and approaches to those used by private companies and citizens. Yet, surveillance by law enforcement can have vastly more serious and immediate implications for people who become involved in the criminal legal system.

Another, related, explanation could be that, because many people experience surveillance on a regular basis in everyday contexts and rarely encounter clear negative consequences, over time surveillance generally comes to be perceived as relatively benign. As we noted earlier, the companies who manufacture and market private sector surveillance technology have an interest in emphasizing its positive uses and minimizing or ignoring its potential pitfalls. As potential consumers, the public is encouraged to perceive surveillance technology as conferring many benefits and as having few or no visible negative externalities. These positive views may generalize to law enforcement contexts where their use may not be as beneficial or benign.

Future studies should explore the underlying explanations for police surveillance attitudes and the relationship between private sector and police surveillance attitudes. For both groups of participants, the overall mean scores for both the police and private sector surveillance attitude scales were slightly over the middle on the 1–5 scale (3.20 and 3.35), and an important unanswered question is whether this is because many people have not fully articulated and developed their attitudes toward surveillance, or if there is a genuinely neutral level of tolerance or indifference toward many forms of surveillance. Qualitative work, such as focus groups, could be especially helpful for better understanding the underlying justifications for the attitudes identified in this study. Additionally, future studies could examine the effects of interventions aimed at educating the public at the different implications surrounding crime versus private sector surveillance on their attitudes toward law enforcement surveillance.

Mediation Analysis

Level of interaction with consumer surveillance technologies was a significant predictor of police surveillance attitudes in the online sample only. However, because the consumer surveillance technology interaction scale was modified to improve internal consistency following the administration with the student group, it is difficult to draw any conclusions from that discrepancy in findings between the two groups, which is an important limitation to this study. To investigate the potential role of private sector surveillance attitudes in mediating the relationship between surveillance-implicating consumer technology use and police surveillance attitudes in the online sample, a mediation analysis was conducted using the PROCESS Macro Model 4. Greater use of surveillance-implicating consumer technology significantly predicted more favorable police surveillance attitudes ($B = .59$, $Bse = .097$, $\beta = .22$, $t = 6.05$, $p < .001$) and private-sector surveillance attitudes ($B = .43$, $Bse = .09$, $\beta = .27$, $t = 4.78$, $p < .001$). More favorable private-sector surveillance attitudes predicted favorable police surveillance attitudes ($B = .30$, $Bse = .06$, $\beta = .23$, $t = 4.97$, $p < .001$). The total effect of technology use on police surveillance attitudes was $.59$, $SE = .097$, $p < .001$, and the indirect effect of technology use on police surveillance attitudes was small but statistically

significant, effect = .13, standardized effect = .06, SE .04, 95% CI [.06, .22]. Additionally, the Sobel test for the indirect effect was also significant, $p < .001$.

The overall results of the mediation analysis indicated that private-sector surveillance attitudes partially mediated the relationship between technology use and police surveillance attitudes, meaning that a small but significant part of the positive relationship between consumer surveillance technology use and support for police surveillance can be explained by the positive association between consumer surveillance technology use and private-sector surveillance approval, which in turn is associated with greater support for police surveillance. These findings are consistent with results from a study with Swedish, Portuguese, and Estonian participants, where tolerance for corporate surveillance was in part predicted by use of a broad range of internet or app use (Kalmus, Bolin, and Figueiras 2022). This is consistent with the view that regular interactions with surveillance technology in private sector contexts may lead to normalization and greater acceptance of these practices, which extends to the use of surveillance technology in other contexts, like policing (see Stark and Levy 2018).

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that attitudes toward police surveillance are related to both crime policy-related attitudes (legal authoritarianism) and private-sector surveillance attitudes and behaviors. Moreover, among the online sample there was no significant difference in participants' overall level of acceptance for police and private sector surveillance, and among the student sample there was a statistically significant but small difference in favor of police surveillance. These results contribute to the theoretical understanding of surveillance attitudes by highlighting the importance of studying attitudes toward police surveillance within their broader context of widespread surveillance across many different facets of society and daily life.

An important question that remains unanswered by these findings is whether they reflect that individual privacy and surveillance attitudes are relatively generalized and stable across different contexts, or if widespread "everyday" surveillance by private companies, employers, institutions, and individuals is having a more causal effect and contributing to a normalization of surveillance and, in turn, greater public tolerance for state surveillance. In either case, policy efforts aimed at law enforcement surveillance regulation may wish to consider increasing public awareness about the different implications of surveillance by private sector actors compared with law enforcement. As surveillance and the data economy continue to expand, new tools and practices for police surveillance will likely continue to emerge, making public attitudes toward forms of police surveillance increasingly important.

Lastly, there are several limitations to this study that should be acknowledged. The lack of established, validated measures of attitudes toward surveillance required us to employ untested ones that were designed specifically for this study. Surveillance technologies and the social and political contexts that surround them are constantly evolving, which makes technology-specific measures, including ours, vulnerable to becoming outdated. Thus, the future utility of the measures developed for this study may potentially be short-lived, which poses issues for replication. There are also limitations to the use of self-report and the degree to which these measures accurately reflect participants' actual attitudes and opinions about surveillance when faced with day-to-day decisions about using it or reactions to being subjected to it. It may be the case that some people oppose certain forms of surveillance in theory but in practice accept them due to the burdens of avoiding surveillance and the perceived inevitability of being surveilled despite a preference for greater privacy (see Zuboff 2019). Therefore, participants' responses to these various measures might not directly translate into their actual behaviors when presented with situations in which surveillance is involved.

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Appendix A

Police Surveillance Attitude Questionnaire

Instructions: The following questions involve the use of technology in the criminal justice system. Please read each item carefully and select the response that corresponds with how acceptable or unacceptable you find the use of technology that described.

| |
|--|
| <p>Using devices that automatically scan and collect information about all passing cars' license plate number, the location, date, and time.</p> <p>Totally unacceptable</p> <p>Mostly unacceptable</p> <p>Neutral</p> <p>Mostly acceptable</p> <p>Totally acceptable</p> |
| <p>Using facial recognition technology to identify people in public security camera footage.</p> <p>Totally unacceptable</p> <p>Mostly unacceptable</p> <p>Neutral</p> <p>Mostly acceptable</p> <p>Totally acceptable</p> |
| <p>Installing security cameras in public locations.</p> <p>Totally unacceptable</p> <p>Mostly unacceptable</p> <p>Neutral</p> <p>Mostly acceptable</p> <p>Totally acceptable</p> |
| <p>Using drones equipped with video cameras.</p> <p>Totally unacceptable</p> <p>Mostly unacceptable</p> <p>Neutral</p> <p>Mostly acceptable</p> <p>Totally acceptable</p> |

| |
|---|
| <p>Collecting DNA samples from people who have been arrested.</p> <p>Totally unacceptable</p> <p>Mostly unacceptable</p> <p>Neutral</p> <p>Mostly acceptable</p> <p>Totally acceptable</p> |
| <p>Using devices that remotely track the location and identifying information of suspects' cell phones ("cell site simulators") and, in the process, potentially collects information about other nearby cell phones.</p> <p>Totally unacceptable</p> <p>Mostly unacceptable</p> <p>Neutral</p> <p>Mostly acceptable</p> <p>Totally acceptable</p> |
| <p>Using software that identifies people likely to engage in violent crime based on information about possible gang affiliation, arrest and conviction history, and other personal data, and engaging in targeted deterrence interventions with those individuals ("person-based predictive policing").</p> <p>Totally unacceptable</p> <p>Mostly unacceptable</p> <p>Neutral</p> <p>Mostly acceptable</p> <p>Totally acceptable</p> |
| <p>Using software that identifies geographic locations and times where crime is likely to occur based on historical crime data and using that information to target policing ("location-based predictive policing").</p> <p>Totally unacceptable</p> <p>Mostly unacceptable</p> <p>Neutral</p> <p>Mostly acceptable</p> <p>Totally acceptable</p> |
| <p>Using software with an automated system that analyzes public security camera footage in real-time for potentially suspicious behaviors and notifies police when such events occur.</p> <p>Totally unacceptable</p> |

Mostly unacceptable

Neutral

Mostly acceptable

Totally acceptable

Audio sensors in public locations that identify gunshots and generate an alert to dispatch police to the location of the sound.

Totally unacceptable

Mostly unacceptable

Neutral

Mostly acceptable

Totally acceptable