



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on September 28, 2012

AP-Constitution Center Poll: 35% Fear Drones Threaten Privacy

Americans are concerned about the continuing erosion of privacy, but results of a recent Associated Press (AP)-National Constitution Center poll reveal they aren't nearly as worried as they should be.

From August 16-20 GfK Roper Public Affairs & Corporate Communications conducted phone surveys of 1,006 adults and [the headline on the press release](#) announcing the findings is surprising.



"Associated Press-National Constitutional Center Poll Reveals Public Concern About Protection of Privacy, but more Americans favor rather than oppose the use of domestic drones," the headline reports.

Particularly interesting is the number of Americans who participated in the survey that reported being concerned about the threat to privacy posed by the use of drones.

Thirty-five percent of respondents expressed a high level of concern for the loss of privacy from the use of drones in law enforcement surveillance.

David Eisner, president and CEO of the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia, is surprised by the public's apparent disregard for police drone deployment.

"I had assumed that the idea that American police would be using the same technology that our military is using in Afghanistan would garner an almost hysterical response," Eisner said in an [AP story reporting the poll's findings](#). Support for drone use "shows that people are feeling less physically secure than they'd like to because they are willing to accept fairly extreme police action to improve that security," he added.

Maybe this relative lack of concern is attributable to the fact that there is almost no coverage in the mainstream media regarding the legitimate questions of constitutionality relating to the use of drones and the Fourth Amendment's prohibition on unwarranted searches and seizures.

A [Monmouth University poll](#) conducted in June revealed that 44 percent of respondents reported hearing have heard "only a little" or "nothing at all" about the use of drones by the military or the federal government.

In fairness, it's not the public's fault that so many know so little about the drone war. [A poll from 2011 shows](#) that despite the increasing reliance on web-based news sources 66 percent of Americans say television is where they get most of their news.

With that in mind, the lack of concern is less surprising. For example, how many segments have the 24-hour news channels devoted to the story of Rodney Brossart.

About a year ago, [Rodney Brossart became one of the first American citizens](#) (if not the first) arrested by local law enforcement with the use of a drone owned by a federal agency. Police launched this loaner after Brossart held the police at bay for over 16 hours.



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Brossart's run-in with law enforcement began after six cows found their way onto his property (about 3,000 acres near Lakota, North Dakota), and he refused to turn them over to officers. In fact, according to several sources, Brossart and a few family members ran police off his farm at the point of a gun. Naturally, police weren't pleased with Brossart's brand of hospitality, so they returned with a warrant, a SWAT team, and a determination to apprehend Brossart and the cows.

A standoff ensued, and the Grand Forks police SWAT team made a call to Grand Forks Air Force Base, home to one of the Department of Homeland Security's squadron of Predator drones. No sooner did the call come in than the drone was airborne, and Brossart's precise location was pinpointed with laser-guided accuracy. The machine-gun toting SWAT officers rushed in, tased, and then arrested Brossart on various charges, including terrorizing a sheriff.

At a legal hearing on the matter, Bruce Quick, the lawyer representing Brossart, alleged a violation of the Fourth Amendment's protection against unwarranted searches and seizures. Although the police possessed an apparently valid search warrant, Quick asserts that no such judicial go-ahead was sought for or obtained for the use of the Predator drone to track Brossart. Therein lies the constitutional rub.

In an interview, Quick claims that the police exceeded their authority in several instances, especially when they decided to bypass the Fourth Amendment and illegally search Brossart's farm. "The whole thing is full of constitutional violations," he says.

North Dakota state prosecutor Douglas Manbeck defends the deployment of the drone, claiming, "The use of unmanned surveillance aircraft is a non-issue in this case because they were not used in any investigative manner to determine if a crime had been committed. There is, furthermore, no existing case law that bars their use in investigating crimes." [On August 1, Judge Joel Medd](#), agreeing with Manbeck, denied the defense's motion to dismiss.

Such drone-based searches and arrests — something incidentally that years ago would have formed a plot point in futuristic movies — will become more frequent as thousands of additional drones are launched in the next couple of years.

While the sight of drones over U.S. cities and towns is rare right now, the [Federal Aviation Administration \(FAA\) predicts that by 2020, 30,000](#) of these unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) will be patrolling American airspace.

Scores of these UAVs will be deployed by state and local law enforcement, adding to the many that will be sent airborne by the federal government.

Another result that is equally unsurprising and unsettling is that 35 percent of those surveyed in the poll sponsored by the AP and National Constitution Center reported having a "high level of concern" about the use of cameras by law enforcement.

As with the case of the drones, perhaps more Americans would be concerned about being constantly under the watchful eye of the government — local or federal — if they had seen even a single story on the tale of TrapWire.

As for the scope and significance of TrapWire, the size of it cannot be exaggerated.

TrapWire is a massive and technologically advanced surveillance system that has the capacity to keep nearly the entire population of this country under some form of surveillance 24 hours a day. Using this network of cameras and other methods of monitoring, the federal government is rapidly constructing an impenetrable, inescapable theater of surveillance, none of which is ever covered by the mainstream



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media.

Unlike other elements of the central government's cybersurveillance program, word about TrapWire was not leaked by Obama administration insiders. The details of this nearly unbelievable surveillance scheme were made public by WikiLeaks, the anti-secrecy group founded by Julian Assange. The TrapWire story [percolated from the millions of e-mails from the Austin, Texas-based private intelligence-gathering firm Stratfor](#), published this year by WikiLeaks. Covering correspondence from mid-2004 to 2011, these documents expose Stratfor's "web of informers, pay-off structure, payment-laundering techniques and psychological methods."

This coterie of Stratfor co-conspirators is apparently angry about the leaks, considering that the WikiLeaks servers have been under near-constant [Distributed Denial of Service \(DDoS\) attacks](#) since the TrapWire revelations began attracting notice of alternative journalists. Some outlets report that the cyberattacks are being carried out by agents of the American intelligence community determined to prevent the full depth of this scandal from being explored by reporters.

Exactly what is TrapWire? According to one description of the program, [from Russia Today](#):

Former senior intelligence officials have created a detailed surveillance system more accurate than modern facial recognition technology — and have installed it across the US under the radar of most Americans, according to emails hacked by Anonymous.

Every few seconds, data picked up at surveillance points in major cities and landmarks across the United States are recorded digitally on the spot, then encrypted and instantaneously delivered to a fortified central database center at an undisclosed location to be aggregated with other intelligence.

As the Internet becomes the primary source of news for a greater number of Americans — 41 percent and climbing — perhaps there will be a proportional increase in the level of concern about drones and the decline in privacy and the use of the unmanned, all-seeing airborne vehicles to weave additional strands in the worldwide web of government surveillance.

Complete data from the AP-National Constitution Center poll are available [here](#).



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