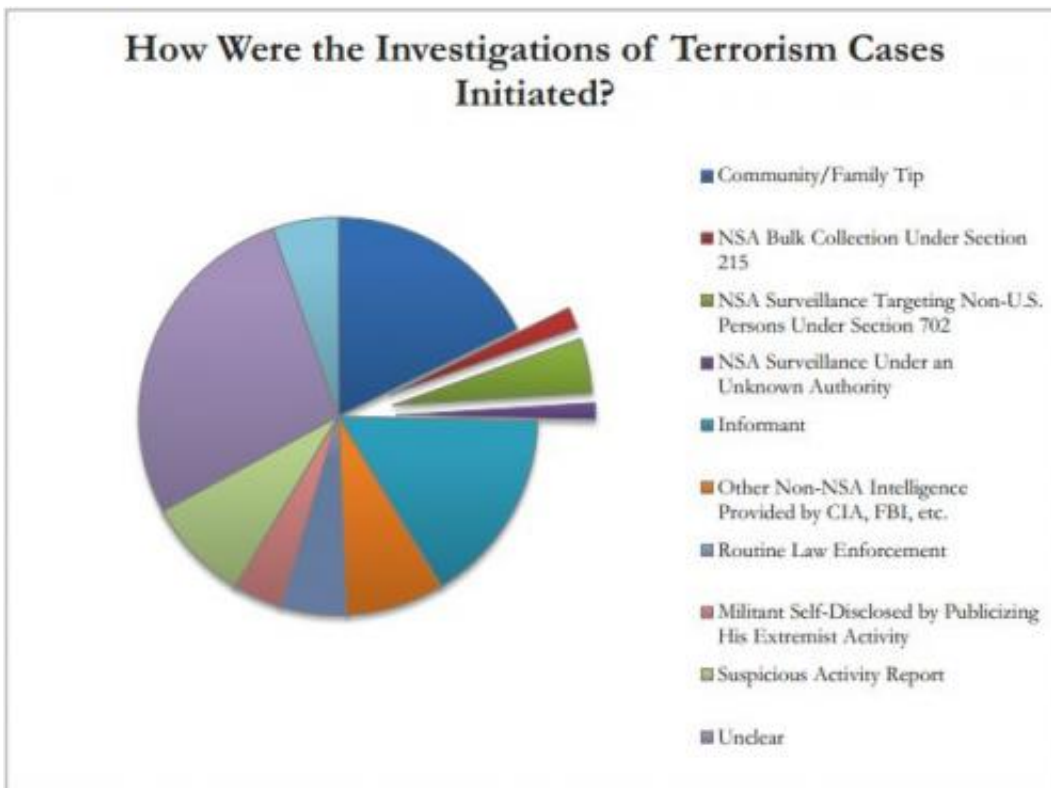


Report: NSA data swoop has had minimal counterterrorism role

January 14 2014, by Nancy Owano



Credit: New America Foundation

(Phys.org) —A report from the New America Foundation National Security Program finds that the NSA's bulk data collection's contribution to prevent terrorism has been minimal and that traditional investigation paths have been more helpful. The 32-page report published Monday looked at 225 terrorism cases, in an attempt to review claims about NSA

bulk surveillance of phone and email communications records as playing a role in keeping America safe. The authors did not find that the collection of phone records, had a significant impact on preventing acts of terrorism in the United States. Peter Bergen, David Sterman, Emily Schneider, and Bailey Cahall authored the report titled, "Do NSA's Bulk Surveillance Programs Stop Terrorists?" Bergen is the director of the National Security Program at the New America Foundation. Sterman and Schneider are research assistants and Cahall is a research associate. Commenting on their report on Monday, the authors wrote that their analysis "demonstrates that traditional investigative methods, such as the use of informants, tips from local communities, and targeted intelligence operations, provided the initial impetus for investigations in the majority of cases."

According to their findings, the NSA was responsible for about 7.5 percent of the counter-terrorism investigations that they [analyzed](#). They broke that down further into categories. "The controversial bulk collection of telephone metadata appears to have played an identifiable role in, at most, 1.8 percent of the terrorism cases we examined. In a further 4.4 percent of the cases, NSA surveillance under Section 702 of targets reasonably believed to be outside of the country that were communicating with U.S. citizens or residents likely played a role, while NSA surveillance under an unknown authority likely played a role in 1.3 percent of the cases we examined."

The New America Foundation describes itself as a nonprofit, nonpartisan public policy institute that "invests in new thinkers and new ideas to address the next generation of challenges facing the United States."

One of the issues addressed is the controversy that has taken root over the importance of the NSA's bulk [surveillance programs](#) to preventing terrorism.

In their statement about the full report on Monday, the authors said that "Surveillance of American phone metadata has had no discernible impact on preventing acts of terrorism and only the most marginal of impacts on preventing terrorist-related activity, such as fundraising for a terrorist group." They also remarked that the "[overall](#) problem for U.S. counterterrorism officials is not that they need vaster amounts of information from the bulk surveillance programs, but that they don't sufficiently understand or widely share the information they already possess that was derived from conventional law enforcement and intelligence techniques."

More information: newamerica.net/sites/newamericaydocs/Bergen_NAF_NSA%20Surveillance_1.pdf
natsec.newamerica.net/nsa/analysis

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