

COMMUNITIES OF INTEREST

This Eric Lichtblau article provides a lot of dots that have been, heretofore, missing in our picture of the surveillance they've got us under. It's no surprise the government has been using data mining on not just suspects themselves, but also on their friends and associates—a virtual "Friends and Families" plan of surveillance.

The documents indicate that the Federal Bureau of Investigation used secret demands for records to obtain data not only on individuals it saw as targets but also details on their "community of interest" — the network of people that the target in turn was in contact with.

But given the description, it's more clear now why the Administration refused all meaningful oversight of the minimization they're doing on their warrantless wiretapping. You can't really collect a "community of interest" and at the same time be claiming you're eliminating all data on those not directly targeted.

Further, the article explains why Alberto Gonzales got all squirmy early this year when SJC asked him for information on National Security Letters. They were still trying to hide these communities of interest, so Gonzales didn't want to provide much information on the program. And meanwhile, they were trying to bury the program.

The government official who spoke on condition of anonymity said the F.B.I. recently stopped asking the telecommunications companies for the community of interest data. The exact time of and reason for the suspension is unclear, but it appears to have been set off in part by the questions raised

earlier this year by the inspector
general’s initial review into abuses in
the use of national security letters.