

SURVEILLANCE

Who is watching you?

Governments around the world are adopting new surveillance tools in the battle to slow the spread of the coronavirus pandemic. Although most people approve of using technology to trace people with the virus, there are concerns that some of these tools may be used for less ethical purposes. This lesson looks at some surveillance tools that have been introduced recently and their consequences for citizens and society.

Learners will be able to:

- ▶ Reflect on the recent use of surveillance technology to prevent the spread of the coronavirus pandemic;
- ▶ Analyse the impact of this kind of technology on citizens and society;
- ▶ Identify ways of using surveillance technology which are acceptable and unacceptable.
- ▶ Develop their knowledge and critical understanding of the world of politics and media.

STIMULUS

1. Thought experiment:

Imagine a country where the government made it compulsory for every citizen to wear a bio-metric bracelet that monitors body temperature and heart-rate 24 hours a day. The information collected would not only tell the government about the state of citizens' health, it would also enable it to monitor their emotions. For example, the government would be able to tell when anyone was laughing, crying or getting angry. This was not the purpose for which the bracelets were made, of course.

2. Video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TUFzN7So6GM>

This idea is taken from an article by Yuval Noah Harari: <https://www.ft.com/content/19d90308-6858-11ea-a3c9-1fe6fedcca75>

Look for a similar video in your own language, one which details a range of surveillance technologies used in the course of the pandemic. If you can't find this, mute the sound on the one here and explain what is happening.

DISCUSSION

After the thought experiment:

- ▶ Why might citizens want to wear a bracelet like this?
- ▶ Why might a government want to introduce it?
- ▶ Why might some citizens be suspicious?
- ▶ Would they be right to be suspicious? Why or why not?
- ▶ What do you think of the idea overall? Is it a good one? Why or why not?
- ▶ Would it be better if wearing the bracelets were voluntary? Why or why not?

After the video:

- ▶ What kinds of monitoring technology are today's governments using in the fight against the pandemic?
- ▶ What sort of things are they monitoring?
- ▶ Is the monitoring compulsory or voluntary?
- ▶ Some people are suspicious of this. Do you think they are right to be? Why or why not?
- ▶ What do you think of this kind of monitoring overall? Is it a good idea? Why or why not?
- ▶ Is it better when it is compulsory or when it is voluntary? What do you think? Why?

Paired- or small-group work would be ideal for this activity, but not essential.

Encourage learners to generate a range of answers for each question.

There is an opportunity here to explain developments in your own country.

This would be a good point to introduce the right to respect for privacy (ECHR, Article 8).

CONCLUSION

Re-cap on different forms of surveillance technology, e.g., CCTV face-recognition, smartphones, drones, Alexa, etc.

Explain different ways in which surveillance technology can be used to control citizens as well as to help them. Give some examples – current, historical or in fiction.

Try to use some examples from your own country or region.

This would be a good point to contrast a democratic society with a totalitarian one.

ASSIGNMENT

Learners create an infographic showing where they would draw the line between government surveillance that is acceptable and unacceptable. They include examples of each and reasons for their choice.

There are a number of online tools learners could use for this, e.g. Canva, Coggle or Google Jamboard.

FOLLOW-UP

Learners share their infographics.

They reflect on who else is using technology to collect information on people, the types of information they are collecting and the uses to which these are put.

Include the collection and monetization of data by big technology companies.