(Continued)

Critics asked how Snowden could portray himself as a defender of liberty and human rights and yet seek asylum in a repressive regime like Russia. Some high-ranking intelligence officials claim that Snowden's disclosures have made the United States less safe and have placed Americans at risk.

Polls indicated that the majority of Americans view Snowden as a whistle-blower rather than a traitor. Absent his unlawful leaking of information, the "metadata" program would not have been revealed. Snowden's revelations led to the disclosure of other surveillance programs, such as the Post Office's extensive monitoring of the mail sent and received by Americans and the Obama administration's approval of the warrantless search for suspicious addresses or computer codes that might be linked to malicious hackers regardless of whether they were affiliated with a foreign government.

The journalistic community recognized Snowden's contribution to public awareness of government surveillance by awarding him the Ridenhour Award for "truth telling," and the journalists who worked with him also were the recipients of prestigious awards for their reporting. Should Snowden be permitted to return to the United States and plead guilty to a minor criminal violation?