

## Arguments over the PATRIOT Act

According to the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*, “argument” has a meaning of “a reason or a set of reasons that subject uses to show that something is true or correct.” This is true when writing an argumentative paper. Here are two argumentative articles: “The USA PATRIOT Act: Preserving Life and Liberty” which defends the PATRIOT Act and “Surveillance under the USA PATRIOT Act” which is against the act. The former article is on the Web site of the Department of Justice and the later one is on the Web site of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). Regardless of readers’ opinions on the issue, contrasting the arguments of the articles offers a good chance to understand what argumentative writing is. In order to deliver a cogent argument, writers have to be very careful to give concrete examples, the reasoning behind the idea, and consideration to readers’ sentiments. In this manner, “The USA PATRIOT Act: Preserving Life and Liberty” provides better arguments than “Surveillance under the USA PATRIOT Act” does.

Whether an argument is convincing or not is highly depend on its details. To be begin with, “The USA PATRIOT Act: Preserving Life and Liberty” provides more specific examples than “Surveillance under the USA PATRIOT Act” does, so it carries more conviction than another. For example, the Department of Justice introduces Alisa Flatow as a victim of terrorism in the article. This specific case attracts readers’ attention effectively because it evokes readers’ feelings of sympathy for victims and anger toward terrorists. In addition, the article introduces a specific case of investigation, the Zodiac gunman. When the case of the Zodiac gunman occurred, investigators could not attain library records which had the possibility of identifying the murderer. This implies that examining business records is essential to obtaining crucial evidence of crimes. This is why this specific example justifies the PATRIOT Act that allows investigators to obtain business records effectively. In addition, the Department of Justice enhances the interest and credibility of the article by using quotations from Senator Joseph

Biden and Senator John Edwards.

In contrast to “The USA PATRIOT Act: Preserving Life and Liberty,” all the examples of “Surveillance under the USA PATRIOT Act” are abstract. This article does not include neither specific names of people, quotations, nor particular examples of violations of human rights. There is petty information of human rights violation, “abuses that took place in the 1970s and before, when the CIA engaged in widespread spying on protest groups and other Americans” (AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION 525). This is far from effective as a specific. ACLU should have clarified one or more specific cases of the “widespread spying” in the 1970’s in order to connect past cases of human rights abuses and the PATRIOT Act. This is a glaring omission and gives the impression of the article fatally vague and obscure.

Second, “The USA PATRIOT Act: Preserving Life and Liberty” presents the better causal relation than “Surveillance under the USA PATRIOT Act” does since it succeeds connecting some positive circumstances in America with the PATRIOT Act. For example, this article introduces a case of arresting the U.S. leader of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Sami-al-Arian, as one of a concrete results of the PATRIOT Act. According to this article, the leader of “one of the world’s most violent terrorist outfits” was arrested because of the PATRIOT Act (LIFEANDLIBERTY 517). Furthermore, the article asserts that the PATRIOT Act accounts for the prevention of the subsequent terrorist attacks after nine-eleven. In reality, terrorist attacks in the USA have not occurred since the act was issued. The first article identifies these results as the biggest fruits of the PATRIOT Act. These results are so concrete that they make this article very persuasive.

Contrary to “The USA PATRIOT Act: Preserving Life and Liberty,” “Surveillance under the USA PATRIOT Act” does not show any concrete evidence of negative results caused by the PATRIOT Act. In the article, ACLU mainly emphasizes the danger to the Constitution and human rights because of the PATRIOT Act. However, there are no specific descriptions of

the violations of the Constitution or human rights. Although this article introduces many negative consequences of the PATRIOT Act, all of them are no more than suppositions. In fact, magazines, the news, and the Internet report many human rights abuses as negative consequences of the PATRIOT Act. For instance, a Newsweek report contributed by an Arab-American lawyer, Randall Hamud, shows the negative causal relationship between the PATRIOT Act and the damage of human rights. According to his report, “We’re Fighting Terror, But Killing Freedom,” innocent American-Arabic people have been held in custody with thin evidence. In addition, Hamud also suffers from a lot of threats which condemn his defenses of Arabic clients such as Zacarias Moussaoui who is suspected of being a terrorist. ACLU neglects to show this kind of specific outcomes caused by the PATRIOT Act. Therefore, “Surveillance under the USA PATRIOT Act” is less convincing than another.

Finally, “The USA PATRIOT Act: Preserving Life and Liberty” successfully shows the clear relevance to people’s daily lives, whereas “Surveillance under the USA PATRIOT Act” bears little relationship to ordinary life. In other words, the Department of Justice threatens readers by descriptions of various terrorist attacks on American society as if the threats are at hand. To be specific, the article lists “destruction of aircraft; use of nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons; use of weapons of mass destruction; bombing of government property; sabotage of nuclear facilities; and aircraft piracy” as examples of “terrorist offences”, and “arson, killings in federal facilities, attacking communications systems, material support to terrorists, sabotage of nuclear facilities, and interference with flight crew members” as examples of “conspiracies to commit the underlying offences” (LIFEANDLIBERTY 518). These descriptions of damages make strong impressions on readers and can terrify them. Since whether preventing terrorism or not is a matter of life and death, people are likely to have serious interests in this article.

On the other hand, ACLU fails to show clear associations between the PATRIOT Act

and the average person's disadvantages. The arguments merely warn against violations of the Constitution and the right to privacy. Although these violations have potential for abuse of power, people are likely to underestimate the impact of the violations on their daily lives. Such political crimes are thought of as white collar crimes like bribery, embezzlement, or price fixing. These white collar crimes are less noticeable to common people because these crimes are less likely to cause physical damage than blue collar crimes such as a theft, rape, and murder are. The descriptions about unjust wiretaps in the article may remind some readers of the Watergate Scandal. This case was a serious political crime involved with a former president Richard Nixon and an example of abuse of governmental power concerned with stealing information. However, average people do not connect such excesses of governmental power with their daily lives. For the above reasons, "Surveillance under the USA PATRIOT Act" lacks appeal to average American people compared with "The USA PATRIOT Act: Preserving Life and Liberty".

In conclusion, "The USA PATRIOT Act: Preserving Life and Liberty" is a more persuasive, argumentative article than "Surveillance under the USA PATRIOT Act" because of three reasons: its specific examples, well-planned causality, and relevance to people's daily lives. To make persuasive arguments is not easy because the issues involved are often controversial and sometimes a matter of individual value. It goes without saying the PATRIOT Act is also highly controversial. As the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English* states, "argument" is a matter of "reason". One of the definitions of "reason" in the dictionary is "the power of the mind to think in a logical way, to understand and have opinions". This is why an argument must be a power which invokes other's causal minds based on down-to-earth examples, so that it leads them to understand and have specific opinions.

## Works Cited

American Civil Liberties Union “Surveillance under the USA Patriot Act”. Elements of Argument <[www.aclu.org](http://www.aclu.org)>

Hamud, Randall. “We’re Fighting Terror, But Killing Freedom.” New York Times. 31 March 1996.

The Department of Justice “The USA Patriot Act: Preserving Life and Liberty” Elements of Argument <[www.Lifeandliberty.org](http://www.Lifeandliberty.org)>