

CONCLUSION

Policymakers have the opportunity to transform the classification and declassification system. Their actions will improve security, increase democratic discourse, and conserve valuable resources. The recommendations in this report require leadership, a detailed implementation strategy, and vigorous oversight to ensure success. Transformation of the security classification system will take time and resources and a commitment to shift the culture from primarily risk aversion to risk management and information sharing. This will entail fundamental changes across all agencies in how information is viewed and valued, how it is accessed and preserved, and how it is managed and safeguarded. A balanced security classification system will maintain the secrecy necessary to protect national security and at the same time assure the transparency and openness required in and for a democratic society.

To make classification and declassification functional for the future, respected by users, and trusted by the public, longstanding policy and practice must change. Staying the present course will prove exceedingly difficult, costly, and even damaging to national security. Technology and the rapid growth of digital information, in particular, places extraordinary stresses on the current classification system beyond anything that could have been anticipated when the system was created. Paper-based protocols developed seventy years ago no longer suffice.

To meet contemporary challenges, the Government needs a fresh approach. Abandoning outdated attitudes and embracing a new vision will transform the Government's ability to manage secrecy, accomplish the national security mission, and appropriately inform the public. Transforming the classification system will not happen overnight. It will take time, resources, and commitment. The way forward will require a fundamental change in how American society and its Government understand, manage, safeguard, and preserve Government information.

