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# Managing national security information

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MANAGING NATIONAL SECURITY INFORMATION

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By

Michael R. Wrona

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ABSTRACT

MANAGING NATIONAL SECURITY INFORMATION

by Michael R. Wrona

The evolution of national security information classification policy in the United States is sketched in historical context. Current procedures for national security information classification are described in detail. Self-report data about information classification decisions made by 66 federal executive branch agencies or departments between May 1, 1979 and September 30, 1991 are then analyzed to assess the magnitude and scope of variation in the number of documents classified and to identify the cumulative effects of annual classification decisions. Explanations for variation in classification decisions over the study interval are offered.



## Introduction

Reducing the number of documents classified as national security information has been a policy objective since President Carter signed Executive Order (E.O.) 12065 in 1978. This study looks at data collected each year since that time to determine if the number of documents classified has been reduced, and to identify the magnitude and scope of any reduction.

The scope and magnitude of national security information classification decisions have both administrative and political consequences. Politically, the act of classifying information creates asymmetries which alter power relations between branches of government, agencies within the bureaucracy, and the electorate and the elected. Administratively, classified documents require special handling, transmission, and storage procedures, as well as review prior to declassification (in most cases). The costs of managing and reviewing classified documents vary with the type and level of classification (U.S. Information Security Oversight Office, 1985).

### Background

Security classification policy and procedure were first officially defined by President Roosevelt when he signed E.O. 8381 in March, 1940. However, this wartime order "was largely confined to the protection of traditional national

defense matters" (English, 1984, p. 166). The first government-wide program for managing information security came into being when, in September, 1951 -- five years after Churchill's "Iron Curtain" speech defined the beginning of the cold war and four years after the National Security Act of 1947 created the institutions that would wage it -- President Truman issued E.O. 10290 (Garfinkel, 1984).

President Eisenhower issued his own order on national security information in November, 1953. E.O. 10501 was modified by both Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy, but it remained in force until President Nixon issued E.O. 11652 in March, 1972. Nixon's order came at a time when the American people were clamoring for greater access to government information. The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) was enacted in 1967, a few years before Nixon issued his order, but it specifically exempted national security information. When Congress amended the FOIA in 1974 the national security information exemption was retained with slight modification. The amended FOIA authorized the courts to determine whether documents requested under the FOIA were classified in accordance with an executive order. Documents properly classified continued to be exempt from the FOIA ("Keeping Secrets," 1990).

During the mid-seventies, the Church, Pike, and other Congressional committee hearings focused public attention on

numerous improprieties of government agencies operating in secret under the guise of national security. In response to public pressure created by these hearings, as well as a spirit of reform in post-Watergate Washington, President Carter issued E.O. 12065 in June, 1978. This order contained four innovative components. First, it granted only agency heads and officials with Top Secret classification authority permission to "classify information for more than six years from the date of original classification" (E.O. 10265, 1978, Section 1-402). This clause was intended to promote the automatic and timely declassification of materials. Second, it required balancing the value of the information to the public against the damage that might be caused to national security by its release. This clause acknowledged that most of the information senior officials deal with could be classified properly according to the EO's guidelines, but the fact that information could be classified properly was not reason enough for classifying the information. Third, Carter's order required that damage to the national security be clearly identifiable prior to classifying information. Under previous orders information could be classified by an authorized person for any reason. This clause held classifiers of information accountable to a objective standard. Finally, E.O. 10265 declared that the public's

right to know should prevail and documents should not be classified if there is doubt as to whether something is classifiable. This was a fundamental reversal of previous operating procedure which was exemplified by the expression "when in doubt, black it out."

Each of the four innovative components of Carter's order described above were rescinded when Ronald Reagan issued E.O. 12365 in April, 1982. The explanations offered for Reagan's decision are wide-ranging. The simplest explanation is that Reagan was a cold warrior who wanted to be able to tell the American people and the Congress one thing while doing another in secret. The fact that Reagan authorized the trading of arms for hostages in Iran after assuring everyone that he would not negotiate with terrorists lends some credibility to this explanation. Feasible, non-conspiratorial reasons for rescinding each of Carter's key clauses are available, however.

The official reason given for rescinding the six year limit is an administrative burden argument. Because many classification authorities were concerned about the dangers of automatically making information public within six years, they passed numerous documents up to their agency heads with requests that information be classified for a longer time period. Reviewing all these documents created a huge administrative burden for agency heads and therefore had to

be repealed (U.S. Information Security Oversight Office, 1984).

The balancing test clause and the clause requiring that a threat to national security be clearly identifiable were officially rescinded because they made it too difficult for the government to fight FOIA requests in the courts. By questioning whether the benefit that would be derived by granting public access to the information was properly considered at the time the information was classified or by questioning whether a threat was properly identified, plaintiffs could argue that they should be granted access to national security information. The ease with which plaintiffs could make such arguments was the ostensive reason for rescinding these clauses (Halperin, 1984).

Another reason offered by some for rescinding the progressive components of Carter's order is that the intelligence community did not like them and saw an ally in Ronald Reagan who would do whatever they told him to do. Carter instituted major reforms in the Central Intelligence Agency during his tenure as president and was not well liked in the intelligence community. Reagan, on the other hand, appointed his close friend William Casey -- a former intelligence agent and 1980 Reagan-Bush campaign director -- to the position of Director of Central Intelligence. Lending credence to this interpretation is the fact that the

"Intelligence Community played a significant role in the development of E.O. 12365" (U.S. Information Security Oversight Office, 1984, p.132). The first draft of the revised order was, in fact, composed by an interagency intelligence community committee.

The Carter and Reagan executive orders on national security information have two things in common, however. Each classified information into the same categories and each authorized an executive branch agency to oversee government-wide information security.

#### Levels and Types of Information

Each executive order authorized information to be classified in either of two ways at one of three levels. An original classification can only be made by a person given classification authority "in writing by the President or by other officials, primarily agency heads, named by the President" (U.S. Information Security Oversight Office, 1985, p.3). There are two ways information may be derivatively classified. If information is culled from a classified source document generated by an original classification authority and quoted, rephrased, or cited in a second document, then that second document must be derivatively classified. The second way information can be derivatively classified is if a classification guide specifies that the information should be classified (U.S.

Information Security Oversight Office, 1985). A classification guide is issued by an original classification authority. It instructs derivative classifiers to classify particular elements of information and specifies the classification levels for different classes of information (U.S. Information Security Oversight Office, 1984).

Note that a derivatively classified document may be wholly devoid of previously classified information. This contradicts the definition of "derivative" but is consistent with the national security information classification guidelines. Because classification guides require derivative classifiers to classify any piece of information which falls into a broad class or category, a new piece of information which falls into a category specified in a classification guide initially may be classified derivatively. The terms "original" and "derivative," when used herein, have specific meanings defined in executive orders which do not necessarily coincide with the definitions found in dictionaries. Specifically, information found in originally classified documents may have previously been classified derivatively and information found in derivatively classified documents may not have been previously classified originally. Initial classification should not be confused with original classification.

Every national security information executive order

since Eisenhower's has had three levels of information classification: top secret, secret, and confidential. More stringent handling, transmission, and storage requirements apply to higher level information. For this reason, the administrative costs associated with classifying a document at a higher level are greater (U.S. Information Security Oversight Office, 1985). The political costs may also be higher as information becomes more concentrated and asymmetries are increased.

The U.S. Information Security Oversight Office (ISOO) was created by E.O. 12065 and reauthorized by E.O. 12356. The ISOO is charged with annually gathering data on information classifications and declassifications from executive branch departments and agencies. It is located administratively within the General Services Administration, but takes its policy and program direction from the National Security Council (Garfinkel, 1984). The data used in this study were originally collected by the ISOO.

#### Research Issues

A cursory review of the data suggests that there has been a meaningful reduction in the number of classification decisions made each year since President Carter first specified this as a national policy objective in 1978. In fiscal year (FY) 1981, the first year for which data are available, the total number of classified documents of each



type at each level was 17,374,102. By FY91 that number had dropped to 7,107,017. The implication of the current state of knowledge is that the problem of excessive classification is being resolved. The principle hypothesis of this study is that the number of documents classified each year has not been meaningfully reduced. Consequently, the problem of excessive classification persists.

The practical importance of this study is that it is the first empirical attempt to determine if the policy objective has been attained. Numerous papers and books have been published over the past dozen years addressing this issue from a normative perspective, but none have attempted to empirically study aggregate national security information classification decision-making.

The Center for the Study of the Presidency sponsored a conference on The Presidency and Information Policy which addressed the relationship between information classification and separation of powers from the perspective of normative political theory. This relationship was explored in an historical context which included an attempt to determine the original intent of the constitution's framers by analyzing The Federalist, a study of the behavior of President Eisenhower after the downing of Francis Gary Powers' U-2 flight in May of 1960, and assessments of other historical incidents. These historical analyses emphasized

the information asymmetries between the legislative and executive branches and the influence of these asymmetries on the distribution of power between branches of the federal government.

The government documents librarians in the American Library Association (ALA) sponsored two symposia in the 1980s on national security information. The first focused on federal policy and practice while the second examined controls on information and communication. In 1987, the year of the second ALA symposium, "People for the American Way" published a book on government secrecy which, like the ALA symposia, emphasized normative dimensions of the information asymmetries between the electorate and the elected.

The normative perspective on the importance of reducing the number of classified documents in each of the aforementioned conferences, symposia, and publications is perhaps best summarized in a resolution, approved by the council of the American Political Science Association (APSA) at its August, 1990 meeting, on the integrity of the Foreign Relations of the United States documentary history volumes. The resolution states that "our democratic government rests on informal public debate and deliberations by policymakers based on access to the fullest possible records of the past and on an accurate presentation of our history." The

resolution goes on to urge the Secretary of State "to take necessary steps to restore the integrity of Foreign Relations of the United States by establishing a procedure by which the Advisory Committee, who have 'secret' clearances, may review the necessary materials in order to make informed judgements on the integrity of the series."

A major shortcoming of the APSA resolution is its failure to adequately differentiate between levels of information. This is a problem common to most normative studies and critiques of information classification. The APSA assumes that an advisory committee comprised of members with security clearances granting access to secret documents can improve the integrity of Foreign Relations of the United States. Yet the "changes during the last decade in the editorial review process for handling sensitive materials" (APSA Council, 1991, p.117) which the resolution claims threaten the integrity of the series clearly affect top secret documents to which members of the advisory committee, who merely possess secret clearances, do not have access.

The APSA resolution brings to the fore the importance of examining not only the total number of documents classified, but also the number of documents classified at each classification level. Furthermore, because originally classified documents can be automatically declassified upon a particular date or event, thereby reducing the number of

documents requiring review prior to declassification, it is informative to examine classification decisions by classification type as well as level.

The hypothesis to be tested herein is that there has not been a meaningful decrease in the total number of documents classified as national security information during the 1980s and early 1990s. For a decrease to be meaningful it should, ideally, be systematic and consistent across all levels for both types of information. At the very least, decreases at one level or type should not be offset by increases at another level or type. Changes which occur at one level or type only may be noteworthy, but can not be said to constitute a meaningful change. Therefore, to test the hypothesis, not only will the total number of documents reported classified each year be examined, but the number of documents reported classified at each level and type will be examined to note patterns between changes in the total and changes at each level and type.

### Method

Data about information classification decisions made by 66 federal executive branch agencies or departments between May 1, 1979 and September 30, 1991 were collected and analyzed.

#### Data Sources

Data came from two principal sources. Aggregate data for fiscal year 1981 (FY81) through FY91 were culled from the annual reports to the president produced by the ISOO. Agency or department level data for the period May 1, 1979 through September 30, 1990 were taken from the standard forms used each year by the ISOO to collect information about agency and department classification decisions.

Aggregate data. Aggregate data provided information about classification decisions made by the federal government of the United States and its contractors. These aggregate numbers were the result of data collection and cleaning procedures developed and implemented by the ISOO in conjunction with the individual executive branch agencies and departments. The statistics reported each year by most of the agencies that ISOO monitors were based on actual counts of items in each category. However, it was not possible for agencies and departments with large programs to produce item-by-item tabulations of classification actions in all categories. Because of this, some departments used

sampling procedures (which changed over time) to generate the data given to the ISOO. Others provided exact counts but did not provide information in all classification categories. For example, because the State Department could not differentiate between original and derivative classifications, it treated all classifications as original.

Changes in the sampling systems used by the Department of Defense and the Central Intelligence Agency, two of the largest producers of classified information, were discussed in Appendix A of the ISOO's annual report for FY86, with follow up discussions in subsequent annual reports. The special document reviews conducted by the ISOO which test the reliability and validity of the data and allow for assessing sampling error were described in Appendix A of the ISOO's annual report for FY87, with follow ups in 1989 and 1992.

Source data. Departments and agencies reported data annually to the ISOO on Standard Form (SF) 311. The names and acronyms of departments and agencies that reported to the ISOO at least once during the FY79 - FY90 interval are listed in Appendix A. Agencies not listed individually are included under the listing of their department. For example, Federal Bureau of Investigation data were provided by the Department of Justice. Similarly, National Security Agency data and Defense Intelligence Agency data were

provided by the Department of Defense. In these cases the unit of analysis is the department because the SF 311 data could not be disaggregated by agency. Appendix B indicates the fiscal years for which an SF 311 was available from the ISOO for each agency or department and the mean number of years of SF 311 availability.

The original (test) version of SF 311 was developed in April, 1979. This version was used for the initial data collection. Minor revisions to SF 311 were made in October, 1979 and February, 1981. A major revision of SF 311 was made in April, 1983 as part of the implementation of E.O. 12356, which took effect on August 1, 1982.

#### Procedure

Because SF 311 data on every agency were not available from the ISOO for each year, the most reliable aggregate data came from the ISOO's annual reports to the president. These reports provided summative data as well as data about the top few producers of classified documents. The data in these reports were treated as continuous, i.e., interval, variables. The SF 311 data were treated categorically to provide information lacking in the annual reports about agencies which were not major producers of classified documents.

Aggregate data. Data for FY81 through FY84 came from the FY84 annual report. Data for FY85 were reported twice

in all tables and figures comparing annual data, and once in figures showing cumulative effects. These two sets of data for FY85 correspond to data collected under two sampling plans. The FY85a data came from the FY85 annual report and were collected under the same sampling process that yielded data for the FY81 - FY84 interval. The FY85b data came from the FY86 annual report and were collected under the sampling process used in subsequent years. The FY86 through FY91 data came from the annual reports of each respective year.

The total number of classifications reported during each fiscal year from 1981 through 1991 was given in the annual reports. The annual reports also provided the number of original classifications reported at each security level for FY82 through FY91. The breakdown of original classifications by security level was not available for FY81, but the number of original classifications was derived by subtracting the reported number of derivative classifications from the total. The number of reported derivative classifications for FY81 through FY91 was culled directly from the annual reports.

For the FY84 - FY91 interval, the reported number of total and derivative classifications at each security level was given. For earlier years the security level breakdown was provided in terms of percentage of the reported total and derivative classifications, rounded to the nearest whole



percent. In some cases it was possible to deduce the actual number that were reported based on given information, but to be consistent the numbers given for FY81 through FY83 all represent percentages rounded to the nearest whole percentage point. Also presented to the nearest whole percentage point was the reported number of documents scheduled for automatic declassification upon a particular date or event.

The reported number of documents scheduled for automatic declassification was expressed as a percentage of the reported number of original classifications for FY84, FY85a, and FY86 through FY91. No data were available to determine the number of documents scheduled for automatic declassification under the second sampling plan employed in FY85, i.e., FY85b. The number and percent of documents scheduled for automatic declassification in FY83 were derived by calculating weighted averages based upon the combined percentage of documents scheduled for automatic declassification over the FY83 - FY84 period (which was given in the FY84 annual report) and the data given and derived for FY84. The numbers scheduled for automatic declassification in FY81 and FY82 were based on an a *posteriori* percentage estimate made by the ISOO because data about automatic declassifications were not collected under Executive Order 12065. This rounding and estimating

introduces some minor error.

Other errors can be found in the data, but these too are relatively minor. For example, the number of derivative confidential classifications for FY84 appears to be under reported by 308, resulting in a low total number of classifications, but the percentage error is less than one-thousandth of one percent. Because the apparently incorrect figures were used subsequently for comparison purposes in the ISOO annual reports, and because the error was so small, the numbers given in the ISOO reports were used herein without correction.

Of much greater concern than the ISOO's reporting errors are sampling errors. The ISOO has not published statistical estimates of sampling error, but has acknowledged that for some years sampling error might have been significant.

Because sampling error is unknown but likely to be considerable for some years, and because the objective of this study is to identify the minimal magnitude of the problem, the FY85 data selected for plotting cumulative curves were those values which would minimize the number of documents requiring review for declassification. Thus, the cumulative data may slightly under represent the magnitude of the problem.

Source data. Agencies renamed and reorganized during

the FY79 - FY90 interval that carried out the same mission after renaming are listed under their current name. For example, the National Archives and Records Service (NARS) existed between FY79 and FY84. Its mission was carried on by the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) after FY84. Hence, NARS and NARA are treated as the same organization and they are listed under NARA. Agencies renamed and reorganized that carried out different missions after reorganization are listed separately. Therefore, the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW), which was broken into the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Department of Education (ED), has its own listing independent of HHS and ED.

The SF 311 original and derivative classification data were reviewed for each year during the FY79 - FY90 period. Agencies were categorized according to the maximum order of magnitude of reported classification decisions. For example, if an agency generated more than 1,000 but less than 10,000 classified documents each year during the interval, it would be classified as a producer of 1,000 classified documents. The decision to categorize the data in this manner rather than use means was based on uncertainty about the reliability of the SF 311 data. It was feared that readers would bestow upon means a greater sense of precision and validity than was warranted based

upon the raw data.

Analytic strategies. Patterns of change and constancy over the years are identified by comparing changes in the ratios between types and levels of information classification. These changes are quantified by examining coefficients of variation -- which allow for the comparison of variables with greatly differing means -- and by examining the strength and significance of correlations between variables. Correlations were computed using pairwise deletion so data that were available for FY81 would be included. A two-tailed test of significance was used because of the possibility that the number of classifications in a particular category might increase as well as decrease.

## Results

The reported numbers of original and derivative classifications have decreased over the FY81 - FY91 period. As shown in Table 1, the number of documents reported originally classified during FY91 is nearly one standard deviation below the mean for the FY81 - FY91 interval. The number of derivative classifications reported is more than one standard deviation below the mean, as is the total.

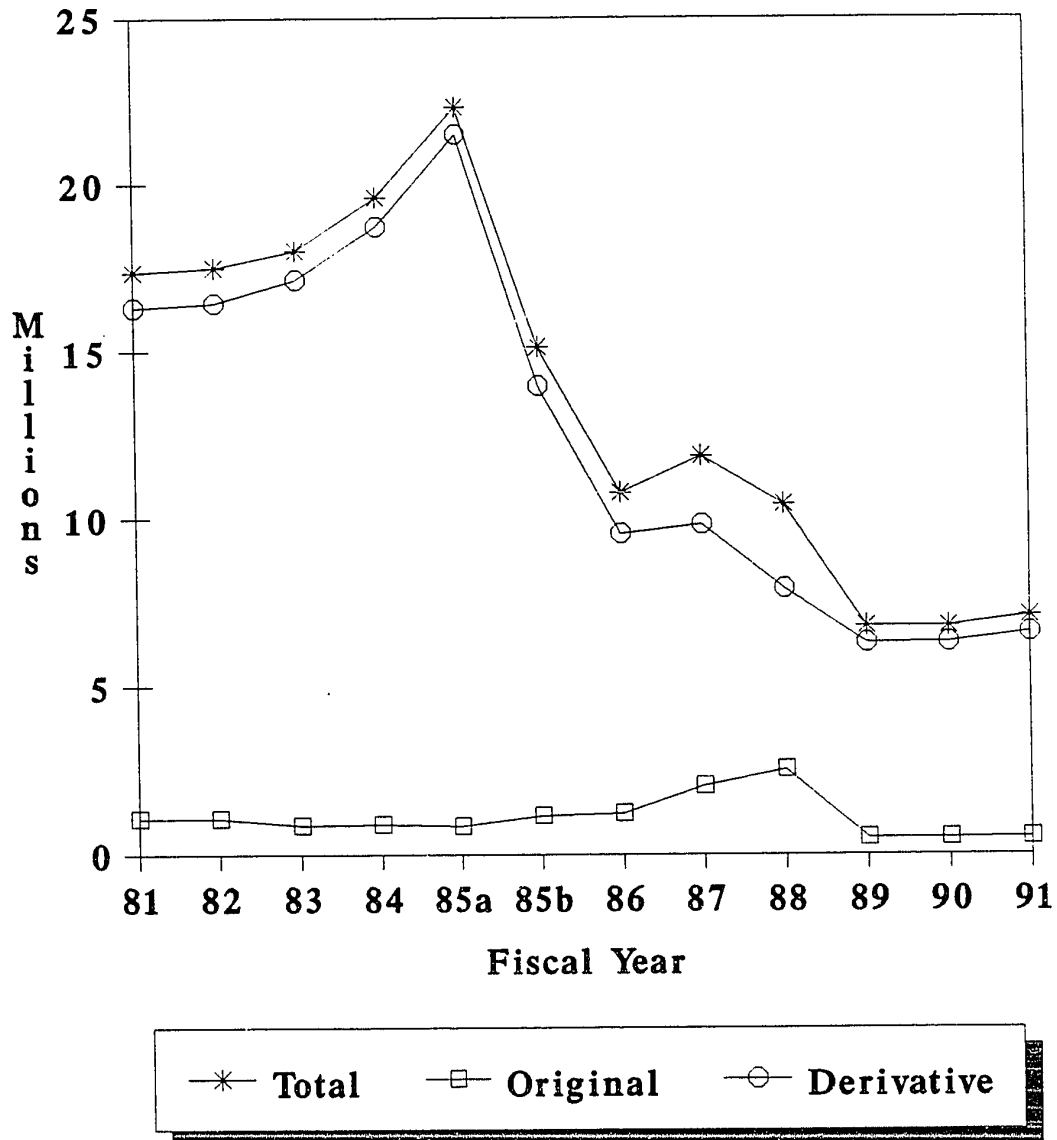
The decrease in reported classifications has not been monotonic. After a steep decline in reported total and derivative classifications between FY84 and FY86, as shown in Figure 1, the numbers rose slightly between FY86 and FY88 before tapering off again. As for original classifications, although the number reported in FY91 is half that of FY81, the number reported during FY87 and FY88 was twice as great as the number reported in FY81 and FY82. Further, while the increase in derivative and total classifications reported between FY86 and FY88 appears to have been preceded by an increase in the number of reported original classifications, the number of reported derivative classifications began dropping while reported original classifications continued to rise.

The cumulative effect of changes in reported classification decisions over the FY81 - FY91 interval is portrayed in Figure 2. The curves for total and derivative

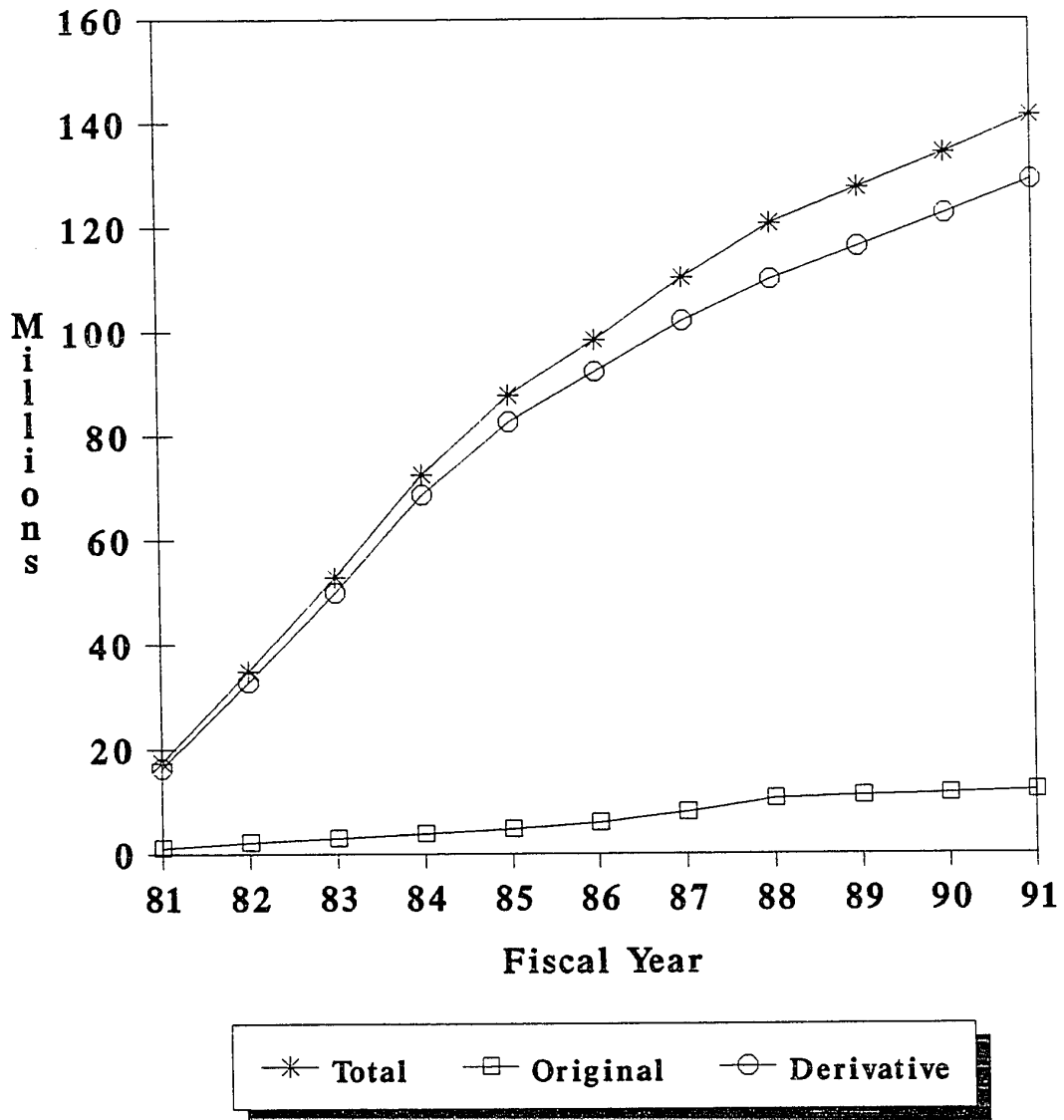
Table 1

Total Classifications by Type and Fiscal Year

Year	Original	Derivative	Total
FY81	6.15% (1,069,058)	93.85% (16,305,044)	100.00% (17,374,102)
FY82	6.03 (1,055,152)	93.97 (16,449,459)	100.00 (17,504,611)
FY83	4.80 ( 864,099)	95.20 (17,141,052)	100.00 (18,005,151)
FY84	4.50 ( 881,943)	95.50 (18,725,793)	100.00 (19,607,736)
FY85a	3.72 ( 830,641)	96.28 (21,492,254)	100.00 (22,322,895)
FY85b	7.59 (1,147,353)	92.41 (13,972,945)	100.00 (15,120,298)
FY86	11.34 (1,221,110)	88.66 ( 9,548,538)	100.00 (10,769,648)
FY87	17.13 (2,030,770)	82.87 ( 9,825,128)	100.00 (11,855,898)
FY88	24.05 (2,508,693)	75.95 ( 7,920,692)	100.00 (10,429,385)
FY89	7.38 ( 501,794)	92.62 ( 6,294,707)	100.00 ( 6,796,501)
FY90	7.22 ( 490,975)	92.78 ( 6,306,745)	100.00 ( 6,797,720)
FY91	7.20 ( 511,868)	92.80 ( 6,595,149)	100.00 ( 7,107,017)
Sum	8.01% 13,113,456	91.99% 150,577,506	100.00% 163,690,962
Mean	1,092,788	12,548,126	13,640,914
<u>STD</u>	612,032	5,409,960	5,386,779



**Figure 1.**  
**Total Classifications by Classification**  
**Type and Fiscal Year**



**Figure 2.**  
**Cumulative Classifications (1981 - 1991)**  
**by Classification Type**



classifications show an inflection point at FY84. At this point, the increase in the number of classifications per year began to decrease. The increase in the number of original classifications per year does not appear to have begun decreasing until FY88.

When broken down by security level, the only meaningful change in the total number of reported classifications between FY81 and FY91 occurred at the confidential level. As can be seen in Table 2, the number of confidential classification decisions in FY91 is more than one standard deviation below the mean for the interval and less than one-tenth the number reported at the interval's peak in FY85a.

The large decrease in the number of reported confidential classifications was not accompanied by a corresponding decrease in secret or top secret classifications. In fact, the curves in Figure 3 for secret and top secret classifications are relatively flat over the FY81 - FY91 interval.

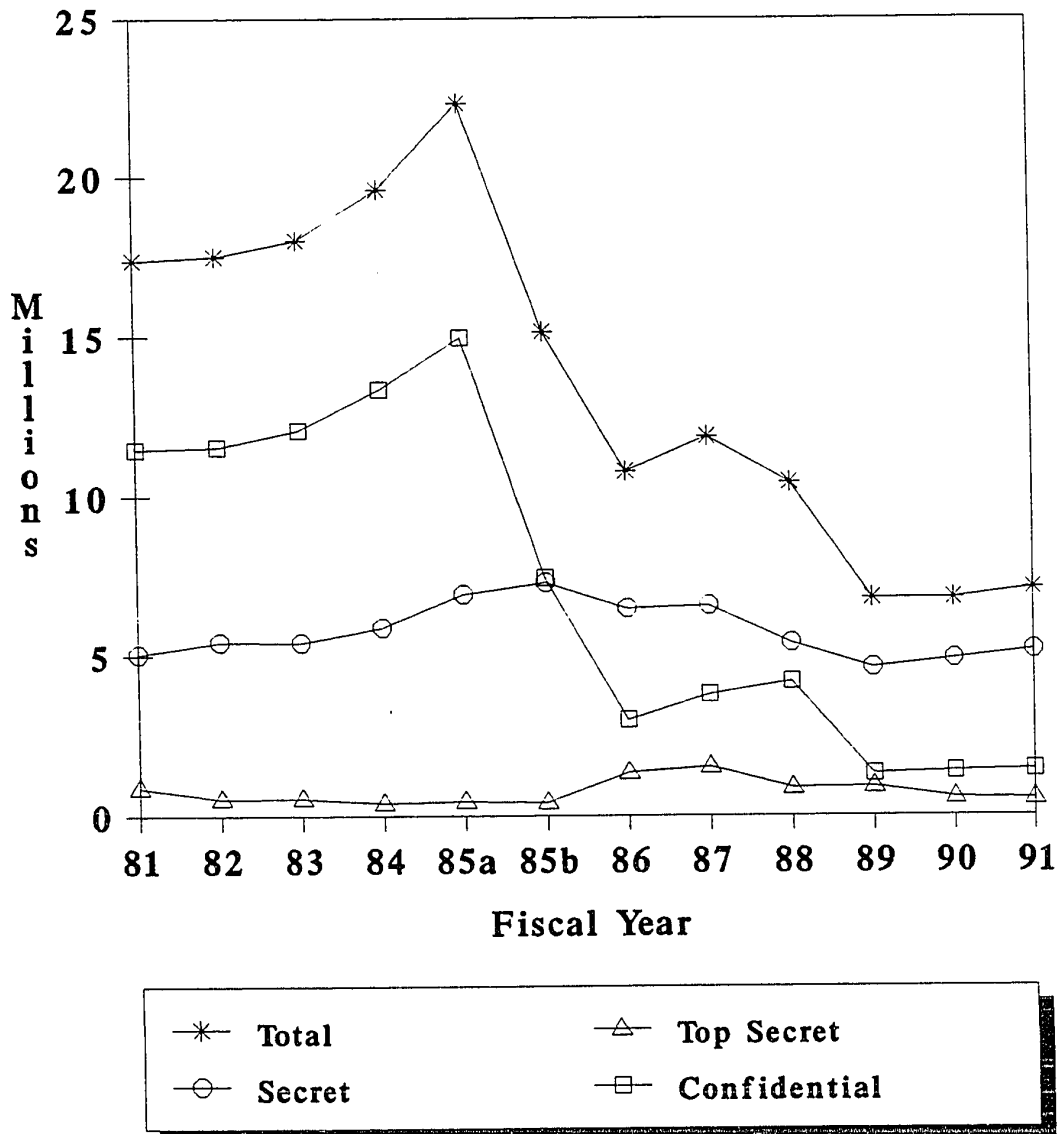
Between FY81 and FY84 the number of reported confidential classifications was more than twice as great as the number of reported secret classifications. By FY86 the reverse was true; reported secret classifications outnumbered reported confidential decisions by more than two to one. The cumulative effects of this shifting pattern are

Table 2

Total Classifications by Security Level and Fiscal Year

Year	Top Secret	Secret	Confidential
FY81*	5.00% ( 868,705)	29.00% (5,038,490)	66.00% (11,466,907)
FY82*	3.00 ( 525,138)	31.00 (5,426,429)	66.00 (11,553,043)
FY83*	3.00 ( 540,155)	30.00 (5,401,545)	67.00 (12,063,452)
FY84	2.44 ( 479,367)	29.52 (5,787,273)	68.04 (13,341,404)
FY85a	2.43 ( 542,177)	30.62 (6,835,685)	66.95 (14,945,033)
FY85b	2.67 ( 404,330)	48.21 (7,289,093)	49.12 ( 7,426,875)
FY86	12.31 (1,326,223)	60.04 (6,466,567)	27.64 ( 2,976,858)
FY87	12.78 (1,515,513)	55.43 (6,571,622)	31.79 ( 3,768,763)
FY88	8.33 ( 869,119)	51.62 (5,383,939)	40.04 ( 4,176,327)
FY89	13.30 ( 903,747)	67.73 (4,602,973)	18.98 ( 1,289,781)
FY90	8.13 ( 552,355)	71.72 (4,875,127)	20.16 ( 1,370,238)
FY91	7.42 ( 527,352)	72.53 (5,154,865)	20.05 ( 1,424,800)
Sum	5.53% 9,054,181	42.05% 68,833,608	52.42% 85,803,481
Mean	754,515	5,736,134	7,150,290
<u>STD</u>	355,413	854,760	5,218,442

\*Ns were derived from whole (rounded) percentages.

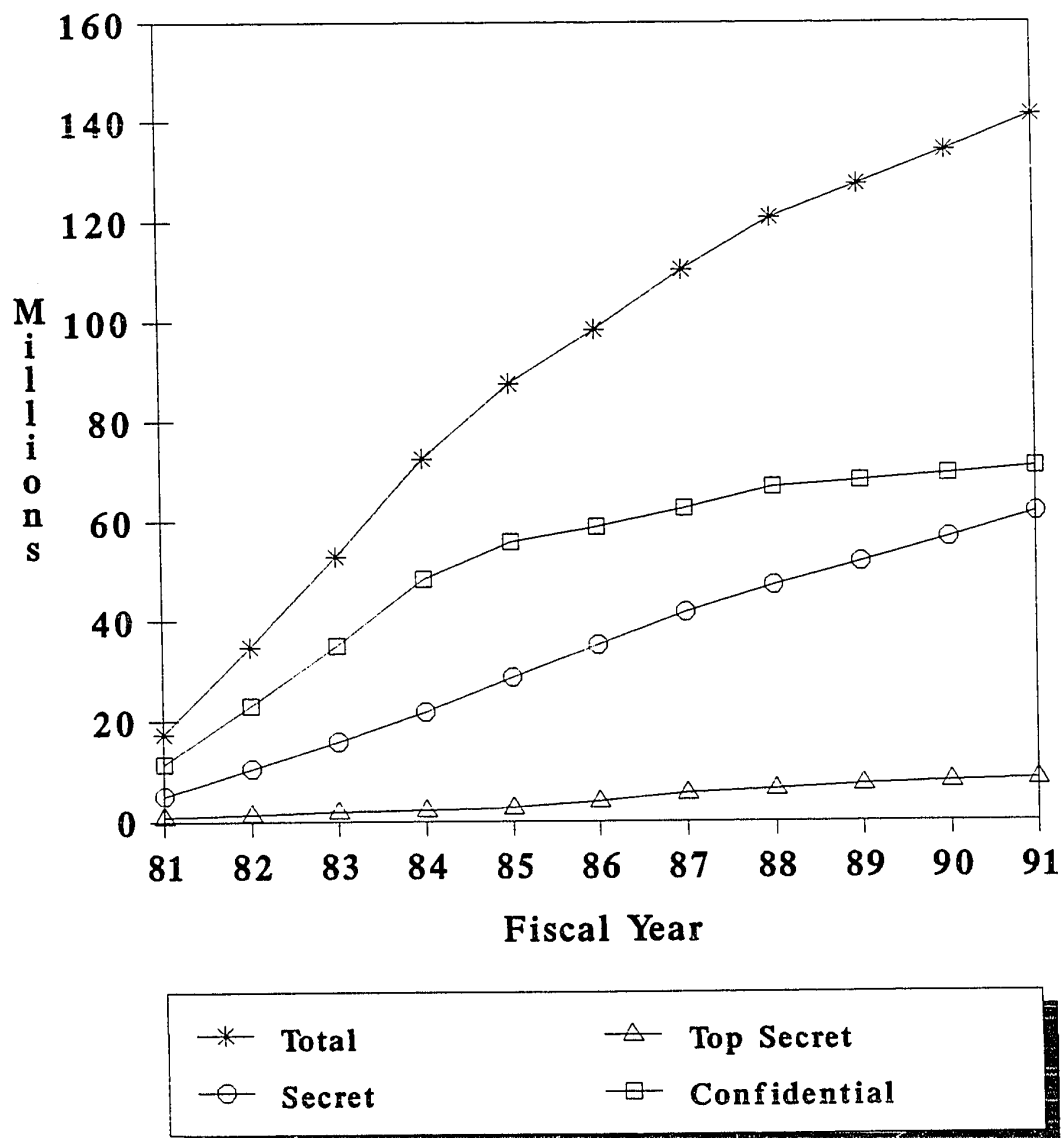


**Figure 3.**  
**Total Classifications by Security Level**  
**and Fiscal Year**

shown in Figure 4. While the curve for the cumulative number of confidential decisions shows an inflection point at FY84, the curve for secret classifications is linear and increasing. The curve for the number of reported confidential classifications appears to be approaching its asymptote, yet both the secret and top secret curves indicate continued growth.

The reported number of top secret original classifications, shown in Table 3, has remained relatively constant between FY82 and FY91. However, the reported number of secret and confidential original classifications has varied considerably over the period, with a notable increase in each occurring during FY87 and FY88. This aberration aside, the reported number of confidential original classifications appears to have steadily declined over the FY82 - FY91 interval. The number of confidential original classifications reported in the early nineties is about one-third the number reported in the early eighties.

The decrease in the number of reported derivative confidential classifications over the FY82 - FY91 interval, shown in Table 4, was even greater than the decrease in the number of reported original confidential classifications. In the early eighties, approximately two-thirds of all derivative classifications were at the confidential level. While the numbers of reported top secret and secret



**Figure 4.**  
**Cumulative Classifications (1981 - 1991)**  
**by Security Level**

Table 3

Original Classifications by Security Level and Fiscal Year

Year	Top Secret	Secret	Confidential
FY82*	2.00% (21,103)	41.00% ( 422,612)	57.00% ( 601,437)
FY83	1.87 (16,158)	32.08 ( 277,212)	66.05 ( 570,729)
FY84	2.27 (19,982)	29.63 ( 261,286)	68.11 ( 600,675)
FY85a	3.85 (31,998)	35.61 ( 295,825)	60.53 ( 502,818)
FY85b	3.60 (41,325)	50.50 ( 579,372)	45.90 ( 526,656)
FY86	1.98 (24,207)	53.42 ( 652,290)	44.60 ( 544,613)
FY87	1.22 (24,870)	50.95 (1,034,723)	47.82 ( 971,177)
FY88	0.73 (18,369)	30.94 ( 776,201)	68.33 (1,714,123)
FY89	2.33 (11,692)	49.09 ( 246,354)	48.58 ( 243,748)
FY90	2.92 (14,344)	52.21 ( 256,329)	44.87 ( 220,302)
FY91	3.65 (18,692)	57.34 ( 293,508)	39.01 ( 199,668)
Sum	2.02% 242,740	42.39% 5,105,712	55.59% 6,695,946
Mean	22,067	464,156	608,722
<u>STD</u>	8,453	263,965	427,587

\*Ns were derived from whole (rounded) percentages.

Table 4

Derivative Classifications by Security Level and Fiscal Year

Year	Top Secret	Secret	Confidential
FY82	3.06% ( 504,035)	30.36% (4,993,817)	66.58% (10,951,606)
FY83	3.06 ( 523,997)	29.90 (5,124,333)	67.05 (11,492,723)
FY84	2.45 ( 459,385)	29.51 (5,525,987)	68.04 (12,740,729)
FY85a	2.37 ( 510,179)	30.43 (6,539,860)	67.20 (14,442,215)
FY85b	2.60 ( 363,005)	48.02 (6,709,721)	49.38 ( 6,900,219)
FY86	13.64 (1,302,016)	60.89 (5,814,277)	25.47 ( 2,432,245)
FY87	15.17 (1,490,643)	56.35 (5,536,899)	28.47 ( 2,797,586)
FY88	10.74 ( 850,750)	58.17 (4,607,738)	31.09 ( 2,462,204)
FY89	14.17 ( 892,055)	69.21 (4,356,619)	16.62 ( 1,046,033)
FY90	8.53 ( 538,011)	73.24 (4,618,798)	18.23 ( 1,149,936)
FY91	7.71 ( 508,660)	73.71 (4,861,357)	18.58 ( 1,225,132)
Sum	5.92% 7,942,736	43.71% 58,689,406	50.38% 67,640,628
Mean	722,067	5,335,401	6,149,148
<u>STD</u>	371,766	776,704	5,275,672

derivative classifications in FY82 and FY83 were approximately equal to the numbers reported in FY90 and FY91, confidential classifications in the early nineties accounted for less than one-fifth of all derivative classifications. In the early eighties, the number of reported confidential derivative classifications was twice as great as the number of reported secret derivative classifications. By the early nineties, reported secret derivative classifications outnumbered reported confidential derivative classifications by more than three to one.

Comparing Figure 5 with Figure 6 reveals the effects of the changes in original and derivative classifications reported over the FY81 - FY91 interval by security level. The reported number of original secret and confidential classifications began to increase in the mid-eighties and peaked in FY87 and FY88, respectively. The reported number of derivative secret and confidential classifications peaked in FY85 and fell during the period of growth in original secret and confidential classifications.

The cumulative effects of the different changes in original and derivative secret and confidential classification decisions over the FY81 - FY91 interval can be seen by comparing Figure 7 with Figure 8. After peaking in FY88, cumulative reported original secret and confidential classifications assumed roughly parallel linear



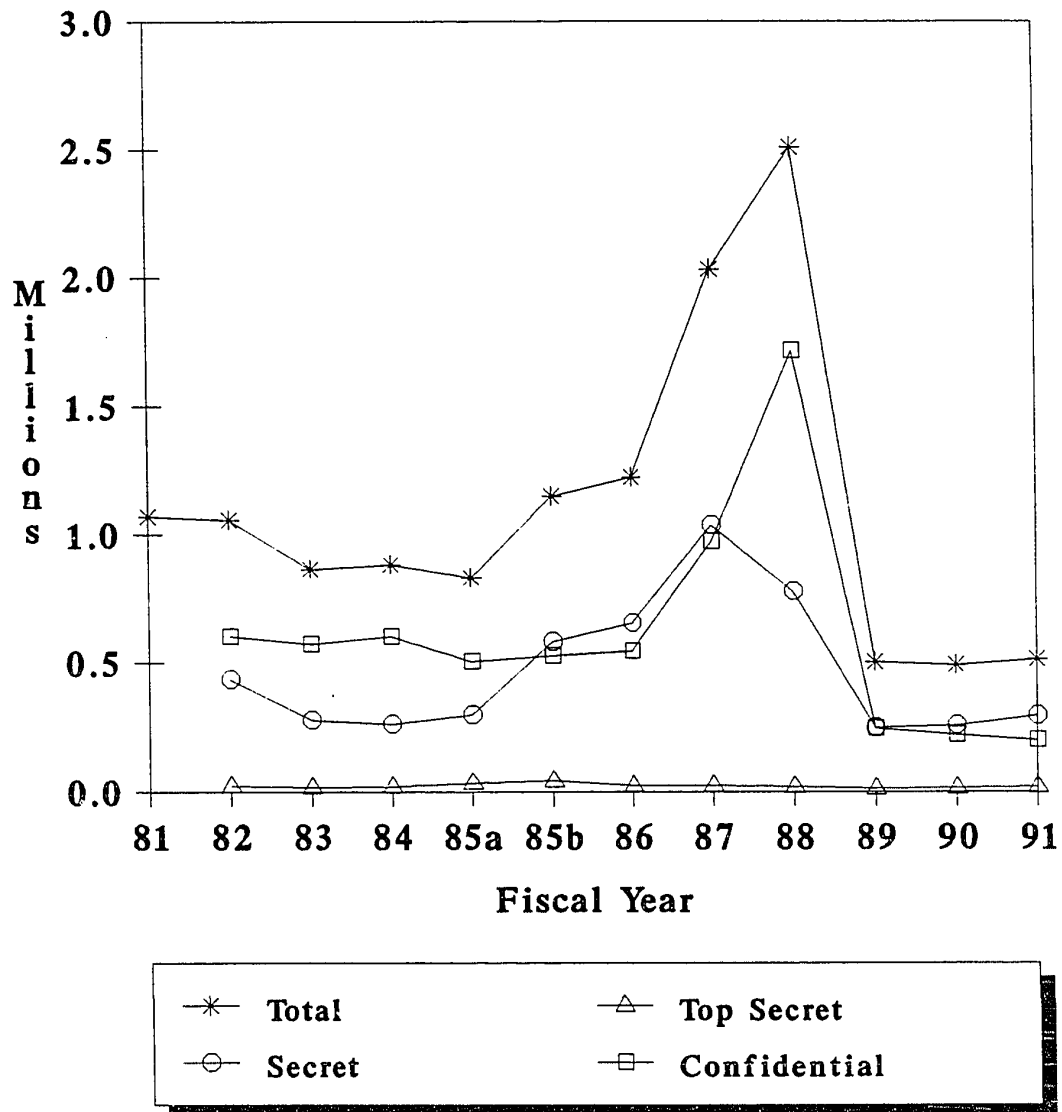
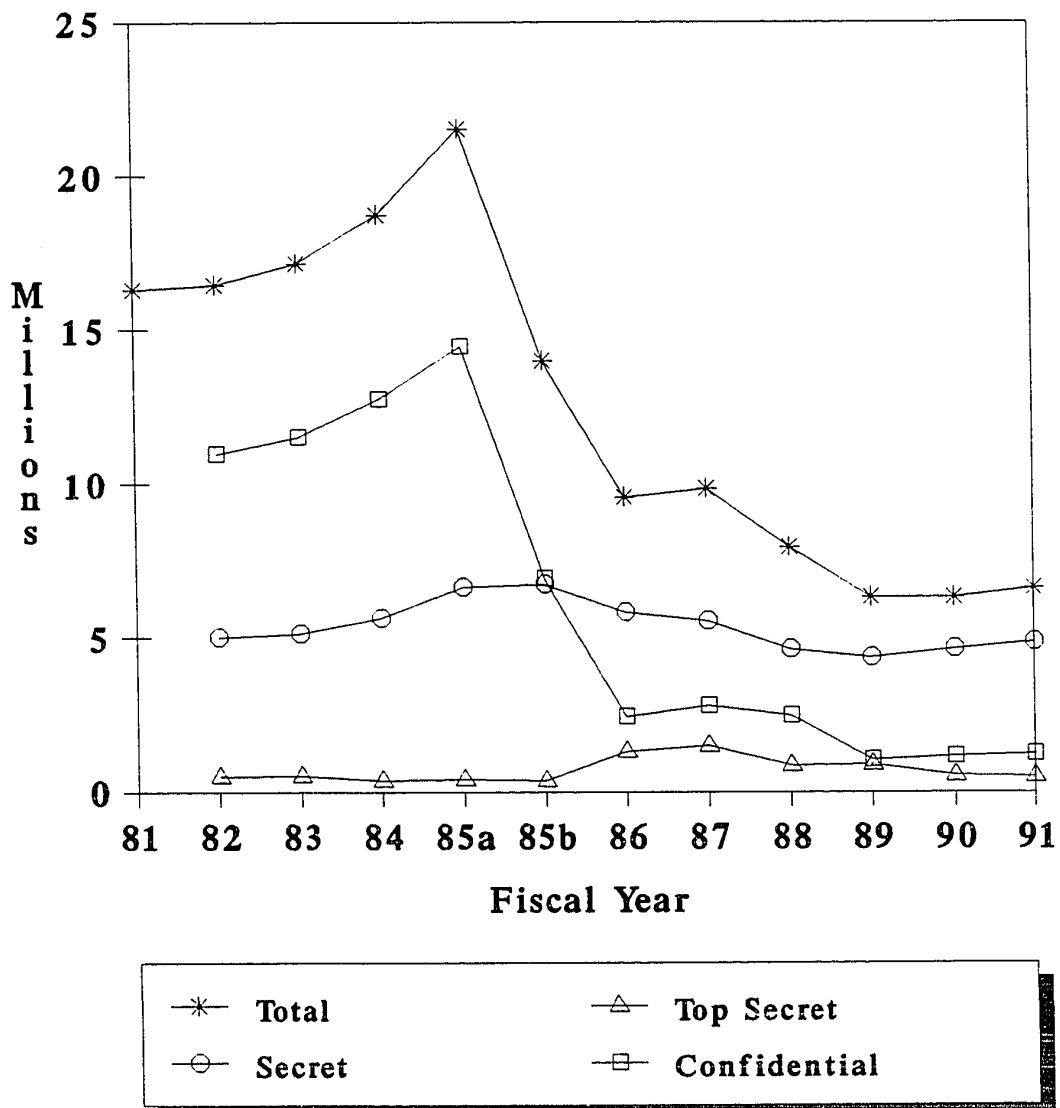


Figure 5.  
Original Classifications by Security  
Level and Fiscal Year



**Figure 6.**  
**Derivative Classifications by Security**  
**Level and Fiscal Year**

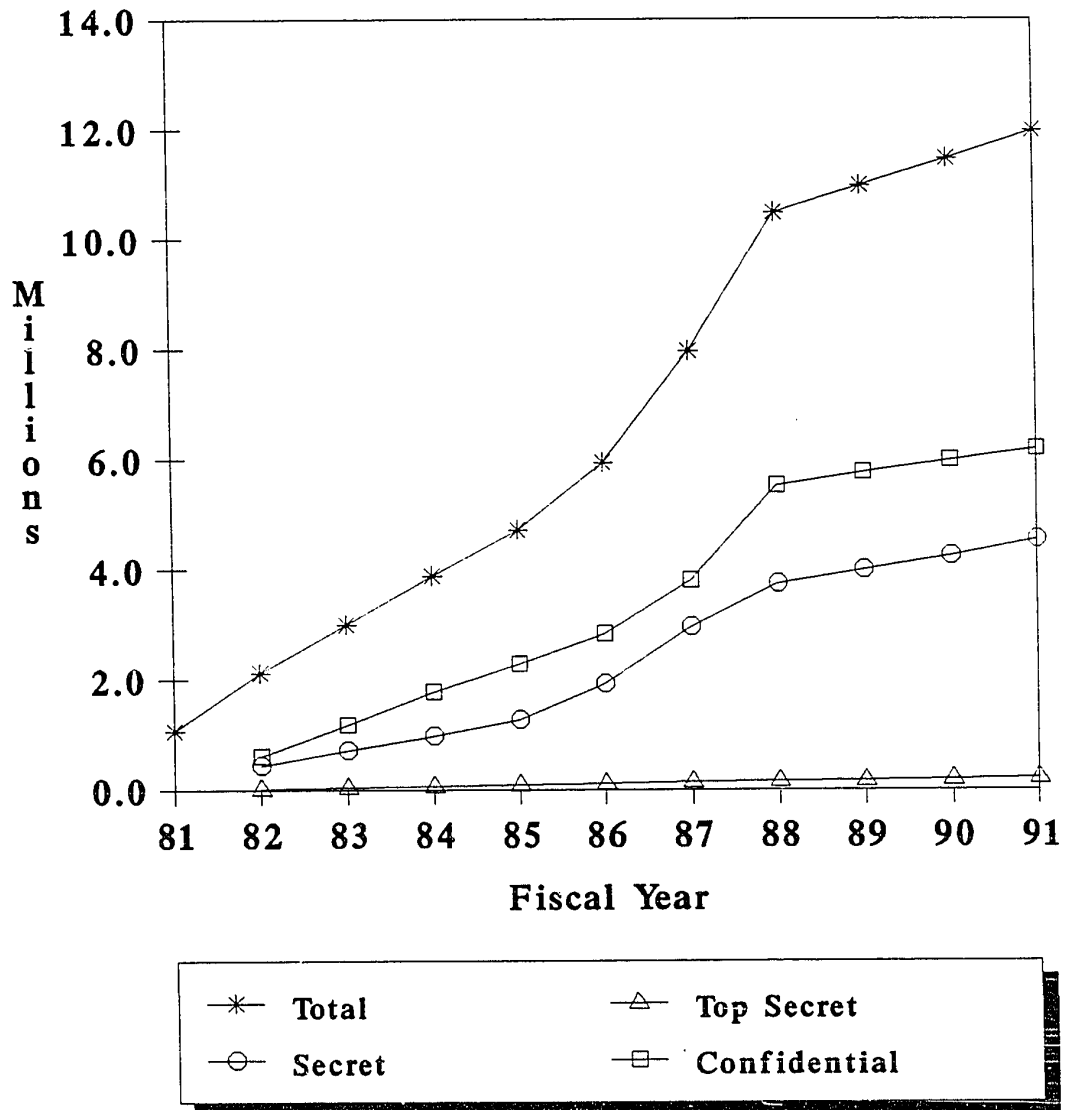
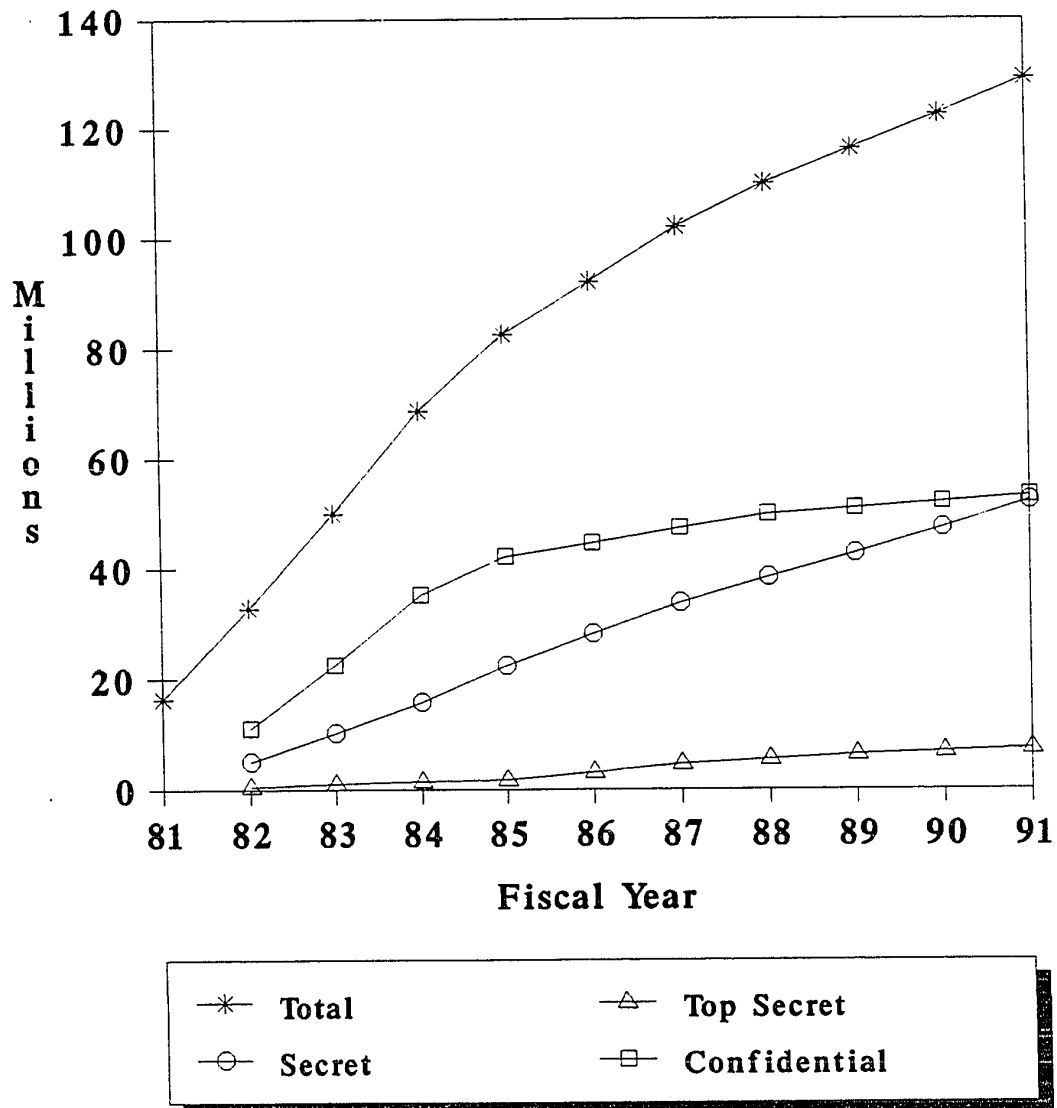


Figure 7.  
Cumulative Original Classifications  
by Security Level (1981 - 1991)



**Figure 8.**  
**Cumulative Derivative Classifications**  
**by Security Level (1981 - 1991)**

rates of growth. However, growth curves for cumulative reported derivative secret and confidential classifications converged due to a linear increase in the cumulative number of reported secret derivative classifications during a period when the increase in the cumulative number of reported confidential derivative classifications decreased.

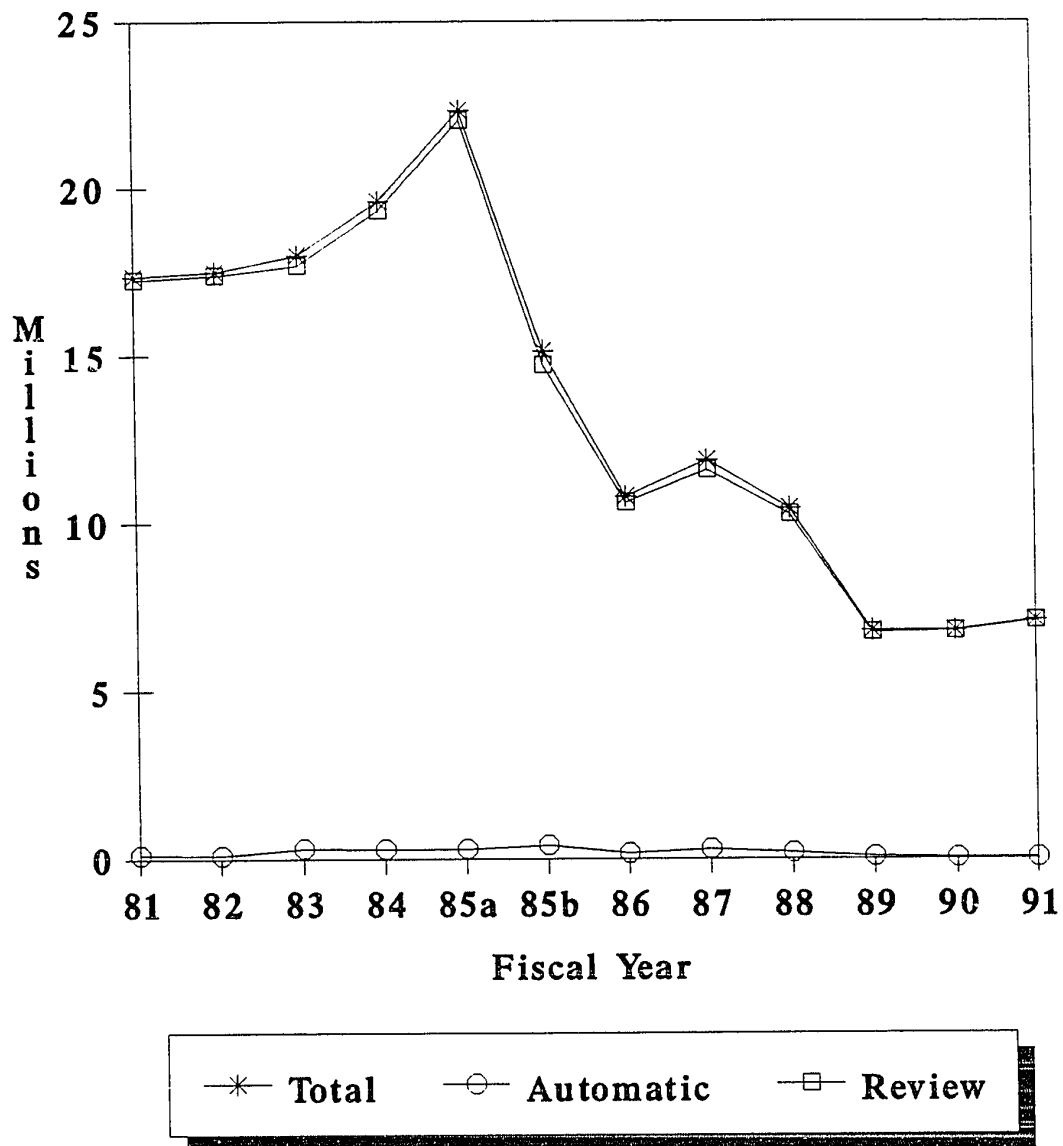
The percentage of original classifications scheduled for automatic declassification upon a date or event, shown in Table 5, varied widely over the FY81 - FY91 interval, from a high of 35% to a low of 5%. These changes do not appear to correspond to changes in the number of reported original classifications. Because original classifications account for a relatively small percentage of total classifications, these large variations in the percentage of original classifications scheduled for automatic declassification had little effect on the percentage of total classifications scheduled for automatic declassification. The percentage of total classifications scheduled for automatic declassification, rounded to the nearest whole percent, fluctuated between 0% and 2%.

The relationship between the number of documents classified each year and number of documents requiring review for declassification is dramatically portrayed in Figure 9. Changes in the number of original classifications scheduled for automatic declassification had minimal effect

Table 5

Documents Scheduled for Automatic Declassification

Year	n	Percentage of classifications	
		Original	Total
FY81	106,906	10%	1%
FY82	105,515	10	1
FY83	302,435	35	2
FY84	282,221	32	1
FY85a	290,724	35	1
FY85b	N/A	—	—
FY86	158,744	13	1
FY87	284,308	14	2
FY88	175,609	7	2
FY89	55,197	11	1
FY90	29,459	6	0
FY91	25,593	5	0
Sum	1,816,711		
Mean	165,156	15%	1%
<u>STD</u>	109,361		



**Figure 9.**  
**Total Classifications by Method of**  
**Declassification and Fiscal Year**

on the total number of documents requiring review prior to declassification. What measurably reduced the number of documents requiring review prior to declassification was a reduction in the total number of document classifications. The cumulative effect since FY88, shown in Figure 10, is a parallel increase in the total number of documents classified and the total number of documents requiring review prior to declassification.

The greatest variation over the FY81 - FY91 interval, as shown in Table 6, occurred in the number of reported confidential derivative classifications. The least variation occurred in the number of reported secret derivative classifications. Because the number of reported derivative classifications is considerably larger than the number of reported original classifications, great variation in the number of reported original secret classifications had little effect on the variation of original and derivative secret classifications combined. Overall, the number of reported secret classifications had the least variation and the number of confidential classifications had the most variation. Because the number of reported secret classifications surpassed the number of reported confidential classifications half way through the study period, the variation in the total number of reported classifications was dampened.



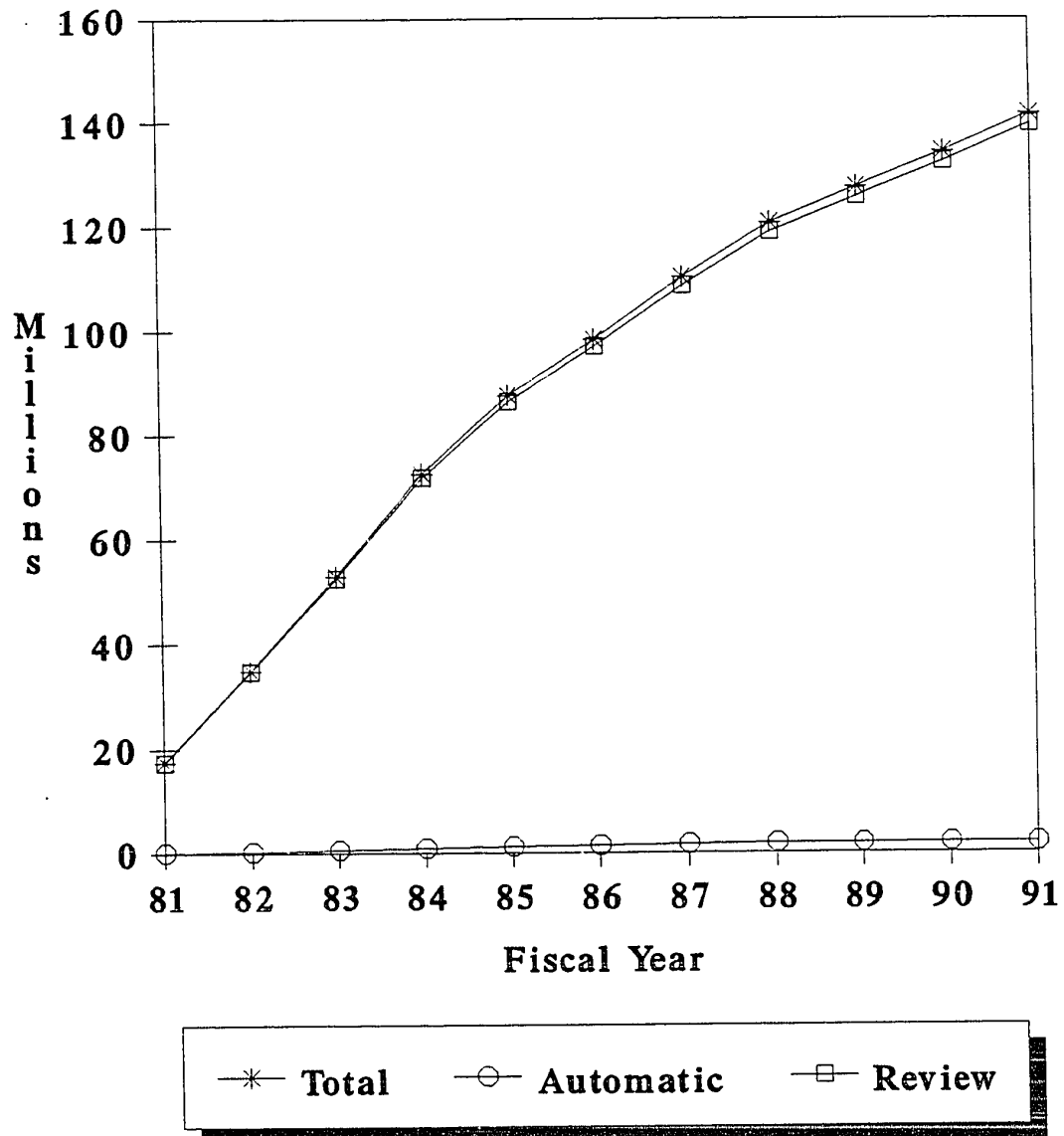


Figure 10.  
Cumulative Classifications (1981 - 1991)  
by Method of Declassification

Table 6

Coefficients of Variation, 1981 - 1991

Type	Classification level			
	Top Secret	Secret	Confidential	Combined
Original	.38	.57	.70	.56
Derivative	.51	.15	.86	.43
Combined	.47	.15	.73	.39

Automatic declassification = .66

As might be expected, Table 7 shows that reported derivative classifications at each level were highly and significantly ( $p < .001$ ) correlated with reported total classifications at each corresponding level. More interesting is the observation that at no level are reported original classifications correlated with the corresponding level of reported derivative classifications, although reported derivative secret classifications are highly and significantly correlated with reported original top secret classifications.

Of the 66 federal executive branch departments and agencies listed in Appendix A, 51 generated classified national security information between FY79 and FY90. These departments and agencies are listed in Table 8 according to the highest number of original and derivative classifications they reported in a single fiscal year. The primary producers of classified national security information are the Central Intelligence Agency and the Departments of Defense, Justice, and State. The contributions of each of these organizations to the total are documented each year in the ISCO annual report. The most interesting information in Table 8 is the list of second tier classifiers of national security information. These include the Transportation, Commerce, Treasury, and Interior departments, as well as the Vice-President's office.

Table 7

Document Classification and Declassification Correlations

	Combined				Original				Derivative				Declass
	Total	Top	Sec	Con	Total	Top	Sec	Con	Total	Top	Sec	Con	Auto
Total	1.00												
Top Sec	-.33	1.00											
Secret	.43	.13	1.00										
Confident	.98**	-.43	.27	1.00									
Original	.02	.53	.31	-.07	1.00								
Top Sec	.47	-.10	.94**	.34	.20	1.00							
Secret	-.14	.74	.47	-.27	.88**	.33	1.00						
Confident	.11	.34	.17	.06	.95**	.07	.70	1.00					
Derivative	.99**	-.39	.39	.99**	-.09	.45	-.24	.00	1.00				
Top Sec	-.37	1.00**	.14	-.48	.53	-.12	.73	.34	-.43	1.00			
Secret	.62	-.07	.95**	.50	.06	.93**	.19	-.05	.61	-.10	1.00		
Confident	.98**	-.50	.35	1.00**	-.14	.34	-.33	-.02	.99**	-.51	.50	1.00	
Automatic	.70	.13	.71	.62	.38	.55	.28	.40	.65	.14	.68	.67	1.00
Review	1.00**	-.33	.46	.99**	.01	.59	-.16	.11	.99**	-.37	.69	.98**	.69

\*p<.01. \*\*p<.001. Note. Correlations were calculated using pairwise deletion.

Table 8

Agencies Categorized by Number of Document Classifications

	Original					
	10,000+	1,000-9,999	100-999	10-99	1-9	0
10,000+	CIA DOD JUSTICE	DOE	NASA	DOT		
1,000 to 9,999		ACDA COMMERCE FEMA NSC TREASURY	VP			INTERIOR
D e r i v a t i v e	100 to 999		NRC TRADEREP	OMB OSTP	GSA	AG FCC LABOR POSTSERV
	10 to 99			EPA OPIC FIA	IOB	FED HHS ITC NARA PEACCORP TVA VA
	1 to 9	AID INFO		EXIMBANK OMSN	CEA ISCO	BIB CAB ED FCA FMC HUD ICC MMC NSF OPM
	0	STATE*	ICA			all other

\*The State Department categorizes all classifications as original.

### Discussion

The largest single drop in the total number of classifications reported between FY81 and FY91 occurred not between years, but within FY85 as a result of changes in Department of Defense sampling procedures. This clearly indicates the need for cautious interpretation of results. In fact, despite annual improvements in the data collection process each year following the major revision in sampling procedures instituted in FY85, in FY88 the Navy reported to the Department of Defense that "results of sampling are not considered valid for meaningful statistical analysis" (U.S. Information Security Oversight Office, 1989, p.6). By FY89, however, most of the sampling problems had been resolved and the total number of classifications reported appeared to represent fairly accurately the total number of classification decisions made.

Reported derivative confidential classifications were most affected by the change in sampling procedures and therefore should be considered the least reliable data. Yet it was precisely this category of information which experienced the greatest variation over the FY81 - FY91 interval. Furthermore, decreases in the number of reported derivative classifications were most responsible for the decreases in the total number of reported classifications. Thus, despite the huge decrease in the reported total number

of classifications over the FY81 - FY91 interval, the actual total number of classifications may not have decreased significantly, if at all.

The number of original classifications reported rose each year for four years following the introduction of the revised sampling plan in FY85, and then plummeted in FY89. Despite the fact that the bulk of the changes can be accounted for by changes in numbers reported by the Department of Defense, these changes do not appear to be mere artifacts of changes in sampling procedures. Sampling error may have exaggerated the effect, but an actual increase in the number of original classifications appears to have occurred during the FY85 - FY88 period, followed by an actual decrease in the number of original classifications in FY89. For FY89 the ISOO reported that "DOD's reported decrease of almost 2 million original classifications should not overshadow significant reductions reported by two of the other three major classifying agencies, CIA and State, especially since their numbers have not been affected by sampling methods" (U.S. Information Security Oversight Office, 1990, p.5).

One possible explanation for the increase in the number of reported original classifications from FY85 through FY88 and the subsequent decrease in FY89 is based on the distinction between original and derivative classification

authority. Original classification authority is generally granted to political appointees while derivative classification authority is given to bureaucrats. The classification decisions made by political appointees might differ between a president's first and second terms, or they might have risen during Reagan's second term for specific reasons. The greatest increase in the number of reported original classifications occurred during FY87 and FY88. The agency with the greatest increase in original classifications during this period, in both real and relative terms, was the Department of Defense. However, the number of original classification decisions made by both the State and Justice departments also jumped considerably between FY86 and FY87. The Iran-Contra affair was being made public during this time and the scandal may have caused political appointees to overclassify information in an effort to protect the president. The subsequent decrease in FY89 could have been due in part to a new administration entering the White House.

The explanation for changes in the number of reported original classifications offered above may not be the sole, or even principle, explanation. The number of reported original classifications decreased again in FY90. The ISOO attributed the FY90 decrease "to a better understanding within classifying units of the difference between original



and derivative classification" (U.S. Information Security Oversight Office, 1991, p.4). While this can explain at least part of the decrease in FY89, it cannot explain the increase between FY85 and FY88. The increase could, however, be explained by a psychological shift among political appointees. Such an explanation would be consistent with Halperin's observation that "senior officials are usually not familiar with the criteria and procedures for classification contained in the executive order on classification and, on the whole, do not follow them" (Halperin, 1984, p.121).

The apparent decrease in derivative, confidential, and total classifications between FY81 and FY91 appears to be largely due to a change in sampling procedures. The variation in the number of original classifications seems to be accounted for by political factors. The number of secret and top secret classifications appears remarkably stable, with decreases in one category being offset by increases in the other. From these observations it appears little meaningful progress has been made in reducing the number of documents classified as national security information despite a 14 year effort to meet this policy objective. Any progress which may have been made occurred at the lowest level of classification. Because the political and administrative costs of classifying

information at the confidential level are much lower than the costs associated with higher levels, the reduction in the total number of documents is less meaningful than it might have been.

The cumulative number of classified documents continues to grow relatively unchecked, creating an administrative nightmare for future generations of records declassification staff at the National Archives and Records Administration and a research problem for political scientists, historians, journalists, and politically active citizens.

This study is a beginning. It demonstrates that the information asymmetries which led, at least in part, to the development of the imperial presidency persist. Neither Congress nor the people can expect to exert much influence over U.S. foreign policy decision-making and implementation until these asymmetries are meaningfully reduced. The definition of what constitutes a meaningful reduction and the setting of specific targets should now be debated by normative political theorists, guided by an awareness of the trends described herein. The results of this study indicate that the normative discussion held to date has yielded little if any result. It is time to begin setting specific goals and, as the sampling procedures stabilize, measuring progress toward those goals. This will ensure asymmetries are reduced while protecting the national security.

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## Appendix A

Agency Acronyms or Abbreviations

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ACDA	Arms Control and Disarmament Agency
ADMIN	Office of Administration (Executive Office of the President)
AG	Department of Agriculture
AID	Agency for International Development
BIB	Board for International Broadcasting
CAB	Civil Aeronautics Board
CEA	Council of Economic Advisors
CEQ	Council on Environmental Quality
CFTC	Commodity Futures Trading Commission
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
COMMERCE	Department of Commerce
DOD	Department of Defense
DOE	Department of Energy
DOT	Department of Transportation
ED	Department of Education
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
EXIMBANK	Export-Import Bank of the United States
FCA	Farm Credit Administration
FCC	Federal Communications Commission
FCSC	Foreign Claims Settlement Commission
FED	Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
FHLBB	Federal Home Loan Bank Board
FIA	Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board
FMC	Federal Maritime Commission
GSA	General Services Administration
HEW	Department of Health, Education, and Welfare

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## Appendix A

Agency Acronyms or Abbreviations

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HHS	Department of Health and Human Services
HUD	Department of Housing and Urban Development
ICA	International Communication Agency
ICC	Interstate Commerce Commission
INFO	U.S. Information Agency
INTERIOR	Department of the Interior
IOB	Intelligence Oversight Board (Executive Office)
ISOO	Information Security Oversight Office
ITC	International Trade Commission
JUSTICE	Department of Justice
LABOR	Department of Labor
MMC	Marine Mammal Commission
MSPB	Merit Systems Protection Board
NARA	National Archives and Records Administration
NASA	National Aeronautics and Space Administration
NCUA	National Credit Union Administration
NLRB	National Labor Relations Board
NRC	Nuclear Regulatory Commission
NSC	National Security Council
NSF	National Science Foundation
NTSB	National Transportation Safety Board
OMB	Office of Management and Budget
OMSN	Office of Micronesian Status Negotiations
ONDCP	Office of National Drug Control Policy (Executive Office)
OPIC	Overseas Private Investment Corporation
OPM	Office of Personnel Management
OSTP	Office of Science and Technology Policy

Appendix A  
Agency Acronyms or Abbreviations

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OTS	Office of Thrift Supervision
PEACCORP	Peace Corp
POSTSERV	Postal Service
SBA	Small Business Administration
SEC	Securities and Exchange Commission
SSS	Selective Service System
STATE	Department of State
TRADEREP	U.S. Trade Representative (Executive Office of the President)
TREASURY	Department of the Treasury
TVA	Tennessee Valley Authority
VA	Veterans Administration
VP	Office of the Vice President of the United States

## Appendix B

Standard Form 311s Collected, by Agency and Fiscal Year

Agency	Fiscal Year												Total
	79*	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	
ACDA	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	11
ADMIN		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	11
AG	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	11
AID	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
BIB	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
CAB	X	X	X	X	X	X							6
CEA	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
CEQ					X								1
CFTC	X												1
CIA	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
COMMERCE	X		X			X		X	X	X	X	X	8
DOD	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
DOE	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
DOT	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
ED			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	10
EPA		X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	10
EXIMBANK	X	X		X	X			X	X	X	X	X	9
FCA	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X		X	9
FCC	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
FCSC	X	X											2
FED	X	X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	10
FEMA		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	11
FHLBB	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			10



## Appendix B

Standard Form 311s Collected, by Agency and Fiscal Year

Agency	Fiscal Year												Total
	79 <sup>a</sup>	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	
FIA					X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	8
FMC	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
GSA		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	11
HEW	X												1
HHS		X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	10
HUD	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
ICA		X	X										2
ICC	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
INFO				X				X	X	X	X	X	6
INTERIOR	X	X	X	X		X	X	X		X	X	X	10
IOB			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	10
ISOO			X	X						X			3
ITC			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	10
JUSTICE	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
LABOR	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
MMC	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	11
MSPB											X	X	2
NARA	X					X	X	X	X	X	X	X	8
NASA	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
NCUA	X												1
NLRB	X				X								2
NRC	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	11
NSC	X		X	X		X	X	X	X	X		X	9

## Appendix B

Standard Form 311s Collected, by Agency and Fiscal Year

Agency	Fiscal Year												Total
	79*	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	
NSF	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
NTSB	X	X	X	X	X								5
OMB	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
OMSN	X	X			X	X	X	X					6
ONDCP												X	1
OPIC		X	X		X		X	X	X	X	X	X	9
OPM	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
OSTP		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	11
OTS											X	X	2
PEACCORP			X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	9
POSTSERV	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
SBA	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	11
SEC	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	11
SSS	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
STATE	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	11
TRADEREP		X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	10
TREASURY	X	X	X	X		X		X	X	X	X	X	10
TVA	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
VA	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
VP	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	11

Number of agencies = 66                      Mean years completing SF311 = 9.00

\*Data for 1979 cover the period May 1 through September 30.