

# Government and Citizen Privacy

## Federal Government Protection of Personal Information

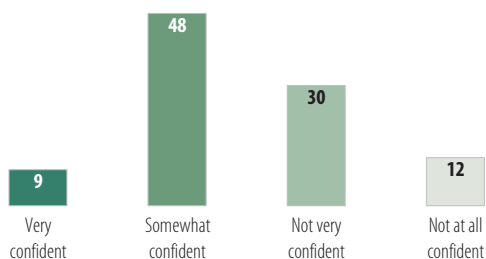
In early 2013 former American intelligence professional Edward Snowden leaked secret documents revealing the existence and scale of global surveillance programs conducted by the United States and other governments. His actions provoked a global public debate that has continued unabated on mass surveillance, government secrecy, national security and information privacy. How much confidence do Canadians have in their government's policies and practices, whether it is about maintaining the confidentiality of Canadians' personal information or ensuring the country's national security?

**PROTECTION OF PERSONAL INFORMATION.** The federal government collects personal information about its citizens in many forms, including when they fill out their taxes, apply for a passport, cross the border, and seek employment assistance. In the modern interconnected world of global electronic communications, this inevitably raises issues of privacy and confidentiality.

On the whole, Canadians express a qualified level of confidence that the information the federal government collects on them is adequately protected. A modest majority say they are very (9%) or somewhat (48%) confident, compared with four in ten who are not very (30%) or not at all (12%) confident in this protection. The fact that almost eight in ten place themselves in the middle two points on this scale reveals that few have strongly held views about the issue.

Opinions are broadly similar across the population, with confidence in government protections somewhat greater among Canadians under 45, those earning top incomes, and Conservative Party supporters. This view is least evident among rural residents, those on the political left and those who do not support any federal party. In no group, however, do more than one in six say they are very confident in the federal government protection of their personal information.

Confidence in federal government protection of your personal information



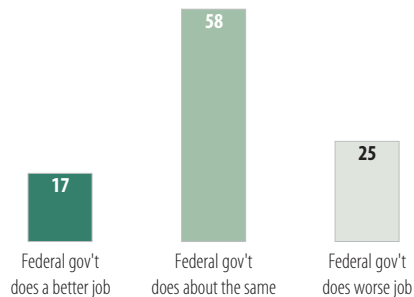
Canadian's confidence in this area is closely linked to their broader attitudes about government and democracy, including belief that citizens' basic rights are well protected, respect the country's political institutions, trust Parliament, trust the Prime Minister, and are satisfied with the way democracy works in Canada.

### COMPARISON WITH PRIVATE SECTOR PROTECTION.

The private sector (banks, cable companies, health care providers) also collect and maintain a considerable amount of personal information on individuals. Are Canadians more or less comfortable with the protections put in place by the companies they choose to do business with, in comparison with the federal government? A majority (58%) of Canadians do not (or cannot) see a difference in the performance of the two sectors on this issue. The remainder are somewhat more likely to believe the private sector does a better job (25%), compared with those who put more faith in the federal government (17%).

There is little variation across the population on this issue, with a majority or plurality in every group making no distinction in the privacy protection provided by the federal government and private sector. In comparative terms, Quebecers, and those on the political right are more likely to believe the federal government does a worse job of protecting personal information than the private sector. Greater confidence in the federal government is expressed by younger Canadians, those without a high school diploma, those high on the civic action index, and the very religious. As would be expected, responses to this question are very closely linked to Canadians' overall level of confidence in the federal government's protection of their personal information.

How well does the federal government protect your personal informational compared to the private sector?

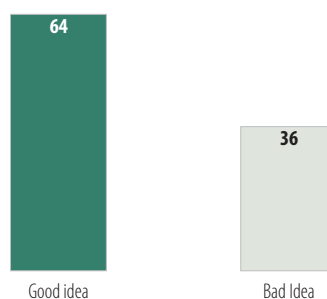


### SHARING INFORMATION ACROSS FEDERAL DEPARTMENTS.

Personal information is collected and maintained by a number of different federal departments and agencies, and currently there is a limited amount of integration of files which sometimes reduces the speed and efficiency of services that Canadians expect from their government, such as employment insurance, pensions and veterans benefits. While greater sharing of citizen information across government entities might potentially entail greater risks to privacy protection, a clear majority (64%) of Canadians think the benefits outweigh the risks, compared to fewer than four in ten (36%) who disagree.

Public support for the concept of greater sharing of personal data across government departments is the majority view across the population, and most widespread among Canadians born in another country and mainline Protestants.

Should federal government departments share personal information to improve service delivery?



## Government Surveillance for Security

In addition to collecting personal information to provide services and benefits, the federal government also gathers data such as telephone records and Internet usage for security purposes. This activity was significantly expanded following the events of 9/11, and the recent attacks by a lone gunman on Parliament and upon two Canadian Forces personnel in Montreal will very likely lead to expanded surveillance powers.

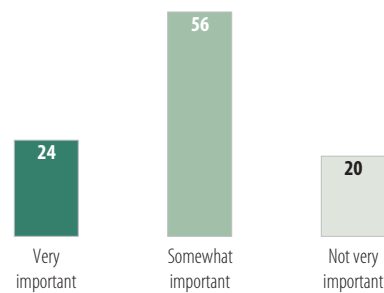
**PRIORITY OF GOVERNMENT SURVEILLANCE FOR SECURITY.** Most Canadians endorse the view that the government needs to collect personal information to protect the country and its citizens from security threats. One in four (24%) say this is very important, with another 56 percent indicating it is somewhat important.

Opinions on this question are largely similar across the country, and vary noticeably only by age and political orientation. Strong importance on government surveillance of its citizens is more evident among Canadians 45 and older (27%) compared with those under 30 (16%). And this view is shared by more than twice as many on the political right (36%) as on the political left (16%; 39% of whom say this is not very important). The priority placed on government surveillance is weakly linked to broader opinions about satisfaction with democracy and respect for the country's political institutions.

On the general question of whether the collection of personal information is beneficial or harmful for the country, a clear majority (62%) of Canadians believe collecting this data is good for the nation's democracy, compared with just under four in ten (38%) who see it as bad for democracy.

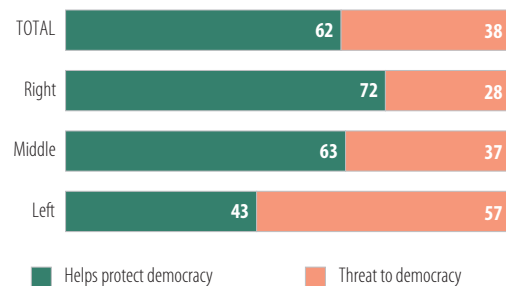
Views on this question are closely tied to the importance placed on this type of government surveillance, and this is reflected in how opinions vary across the country. In particular, such activity is most widely viewed as beneficial to the country among Canadians on the political right (72%), while least apt to be shared among those on the left (43%). This perspective also increases with age (expressed by 54% among those under 30, rising to 68% among those 60 plus).

### Important government collection of personal informational to protect national security



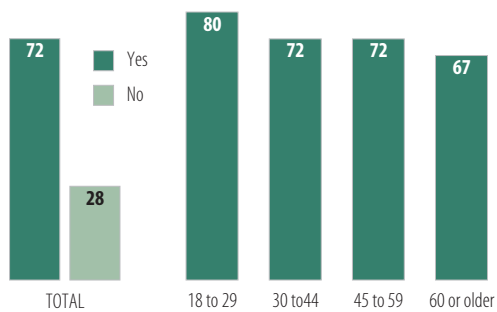
### Government collection of personal information on citizens is good or bad for democracy

By political orientation



## Would government collection of your telephone/web use be a violation of privacy?

By age



### CONCERNS ABOUT VIOLATIONS OF PERSONAL PRIVACY.

While the public expresses general support for government surveillance in pursuit of national security, there are also concerns when it applies to them. More than seven in ten (72%) Canadians say they would feel their personal privacy would feel violated if they knew that the federal government had collected data about their own telephone and Internet activity.

Such concerns about the violation of their privacy is the majority view across the population, and especially so among Quebecers (77%), rural residents (77%), Canadians under 30 (80%), those on the political left (80%) and those civically engaged (80%). This view is least apt to be shared by Conservative Party supporters (57%). Concerns about such violation increases as confidence in the government's protection of personal information declines.