



Office of the
Privacy Commissioner
of Canada

2018-19 Survey of Canadians on Privacy

Narrative Executive Summary

Prepared for the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada

Supplier Name: Phoenix SPI
Contract Number: 2R008-180131-001_CY
Contract Value: \$66,185.51 (including HST)
Award Date: 2018-10-10
Delivery Date: 2019-03-11

Registration Number: POR 055-18

For more information, please contact: publications@priv.gc.ca

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March 2019

This public opinion research report presents the results of a telephone survey conducted by Phoenix SPI on behalf of the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada. The research study was conducted with 1,516 Canadians aged 16 and older February 6-20, 2019.

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Phoenix Strategic Perspectives Inc. (Phoenix SPI) was commissioned by the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada (OPC) to conduct a telephone survey of Canadians on privacy-related issues.

Background and Objectives

The OPC is an advocate for the privacy rights of Canadians, with the powers to investigate complaints and conduct audits under two federal laws; publish information about personal information-handling practices in the public and private sectors; and conduct research into privacy issues.

The Privacy Commissioner of Canada is mandated by Parliament to act as an ombudsman and guardian of privacy in Canada. Among other things, the OPC oversees compliance with the *Privacy Act*, which covers the personal information-handling practices of federal government departments and agencies, and the *Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act* (PIPEDA), Canada's federal private-sector privacy law.

The OPC's mandate to protect and promote privacy rights includes promoting awareness and understanding of privacy issues by the Canadian public. In support of this, the OPC conducts public opinion research with the general population every two years. This year's research was designed to explore privacy issues that fall under the OPC's four strategic privacy priorities:

1. Economics of personal information;
2. Government surveillance,
3. Reputation and privacy; and
4. The body as information.

These priorities were established in 2015 to focus the OPC's efforts and direct discretionary resource allocation decisions in order to increase the OPC's chances of making a real difference for Canadians.

The main objective of the research was to explore Canadians' awareness, understanding and perceptions of privacy-related issues. The findings will be used to inform and guide the OPC's outreach efforts to Canadians.

Methodology

A 13-minute random digit dialling (RDD) telephone survey was administered to 1,516 Canadian residents, 16 years of age or older between February 6th and 20th, 2019. An overlapping dual-frame (landline and cell phone) sample was used to minimize coverage error. Interviewing was conducted by Elemental Data Collection Inc. (EDCI) using Computer Aided Telephone Interviewing (CATI) technology. The results can be considered representative of the population of Canadians aged 16 and older.

The sample frame for the survey was geographically disproportionate to improve the accuracy of regional results.

Strata	Completed Interviews
Atlantic	204
Quebec	350
Ontario	400
Prairies (and Nunavut and the Northwest Territories)	360
British Columbia (and the Yukon Territory)	202
Total	1,516

Based on a sample of this size, the overall results can be considered accurate within $\pm 2.5\%$, 19 times out of 20. The margin of error is greater for results pertaining to subgroups of the total sample.

Survey data have been weighted by region, age and gender to ensure results that are representative of the Canadian population. Population figures from Statistics Canada – 2016 Census were used to construct the weights.

The table below presents information about the final call dispositions for this survey, as well as the associated response rates¹. The overall response rate was 5% (7% for the landline sample and 4% for the cell phone sample).

	Total	Landline	Cell
Total Numbers Attempted	81,041	18,319	62,722
Out-of-scope - Invalid	50,207	7,966	42,241
Unresolved (U)	16,480	5,023	11,457
<i>No answer/Answering machine</i>	16,480	5,023	11,457
In-scope - Non-responding (IS)	14,354	5,330	9,024
<i>Language barrier</i>	383	171	212
<i>Incapable of completing (ill/deceased)</i>	133	73	60
<i>Callback (Respondent not available)</i>	2,698	864	1,834
<i>Refusal</i>	10,837	4,098	6,739
<i>Termination</i>	303	124	179
In-scope - Responding units (R)	1,682	808	874
<i>Completed Interview</i>	1,516	749	767
<i>Quota Full</i>	82	38	44
<i>NQ - Industry</i>	58	21	37
<i>NQ - Age</i>	26	0	26
Response Rate	5%	7%	4%

The potential for non-response bias was assessed by comparing the characteristics of respondents through unweighted and weighted data. As is generally the case for general population telephone surveys, older individuals (those aged 55 and older) were overrepresented in the final survey sample and individuals under 35 years of age were underrepresented. This was corrected with weighting.

¹ The response rate formula is as follows: $[R=R/(U+IS+R)]$. This means that the response rate is calculated as the number of responding units [R] divided by the number of unresolved [U] numbers plus in-scope [IS] non-responding households and individuals plus responding units [R].

Highlights

Canadians feel they are knowledgeable about their privacy rights but are still concerned about privacy protection.

Roughly two-thirds of Canadians rated their knowledge of their privacy rights as good (50%) or very good (14%). Knowledge of privacy rights is virtually unchanged since 2016 (64% in 2018 versus 65% in 2016). In addition, just over half of Canadians rated their knowledge of *how* to protect their privacy rights as good (46%) or very good (11%) and nearly half (48%) feel confident that they know enough information about how new technologies might affect their personal privacy (down from 52% in 2016).

Despite feeling knowledgeable about their privacy rights, the vast majority (92%) expressed some level of concern about the protection of their privacy. Among those concerned, 37% are *extremely* concerned (unchanged from 2016, but up from 34% in 2014). Furthermore, a significant minority (45%) do not feel that businesses in general respect their privacy rights. In contrast to Canadians' perceptions of how businesses respect their privacy rights, the majority (55%) feel that the federal government respects their privacy rights.

Canadians are concerned about how their online information will be used and take security measures to protect their personal information.

Among Canadians that use the Internet, most expressed concern about how their online personal information could be used. The vast majority are at least somewhat concerned about people using their online information to attempt to steal their identity (90%), about companies or organizations using this information to make decisions about them (88%), and about social media platforms gathering their personal information to create detailed profiles about them (87%).

Given these concerns, it is not surprising that most Canadians who use a mobile device have taken measures to protect their personal information. Specifically, 75% have adjusted settings to limit personal information that is shared on their mobile device and 74% have not installed or uninstalled apps because they were concerned about the personal information they were being asked to provide

Canadians are also concerned about the collection and use of information from their body for non-medical reasons.

When asked about specific scenarios involving the collection of information from their body, the majority of Canadians expressed some level of concern. Specifically, approximately eight in 10 said they are at least somewhat concerned about providing saliva for genetic testing to determine their likelihood for developing future health conditions (83%), about allowing information about the number of steps they have taken, calories burnt and their heart rate to be collected by a fitness tracker, analysed and used for commercial offers (81%), and about providing saliva for genetic testing for ancestry (80%). Fewer, but still a strong majority, have some concern about iris scans to speed up border crossings into Canada and the United States (75%). Compared to 2016, a greater proportion of Canadians expressed at least some concern about providing information about their body in all of these scenarios.

Canadians' willingness to do business with a company would be affected by the introduction of financial penalties for the misuse of personal information and by a company's privacy practices. Half or more of Canadians would probably or definitely be more willing to do business with a company that collects their personal information if any of the measures tested were in place. Canadians were most likely to be influenced by financial penalties, with 40% saying this would definitely increase their willingness to do business with a company. In contrast, fewer felt this way about easy to understand privacy practices (26%), a seal of approval (22%), and a menu of options (19%).

News stories on security breaches still have a large impact on Canadians' willingness to share personal information. This is reflected, in part, in the steps taken by Canadians to protect personal information.

The majority of Canadians have refused to provide an organization or business with their personal information (76%) and have not traded their personal information for discounts or incentives on a good or service (70%). However, at this time, fewer than one in five (16%) have made changes to their travel plans because of privacy concerns related to border crossings. Underscoring these behaviours, more than eight in 10 (84%) Canadians said that news reports about privacy breaches have affected how willing they are to share personal information. These results are virtually unchanged from 2016.

Canadians lack a clear understanding of the Government of Canada's collection of personal information about citizens. Despite limited knowledge, most Canadians would be at least somewhat comfortable with the Government of Canada sharing their personal information with another federal department with their consent.

Three in 10 (29%) surveyed Canadians said they have a good understanding of what the Government of Canada does with the personal information it collects from citizens. Slightly more Canadians said they have a good understanding of the sources that the Government of Canada uses to collect personal information about individuals that is available online (33%) and of how their personal information is treated as part of intelligence-gathering activities (35%).

The majority of Canadians expressed discomfort with the Government of Canada sharing their personal information with foreign governments or authorities (75%), with another federal department *without* their consent (64%), or with another federal department for some purpose that they are not aware of (60%). Conversely, 81% said they would be at least somewhat comfortable with the Government of Canada sharing their personal information with another department of the Government of Canada *with* their consent.

Canadians feel they lack control over how their personal information is being used and want government to be responsible for helping them to protect their personal information.

Most Canadians feel they have little to no control over how their personal information is being used by companies (67%) or by government (61%). Not surprisingly, the large majority of Canadians (86%) disagreed that companies should be able to share their personal information for purposes other than to provide them services. Underscoring the view that they lack control, two-thirds of Canadians said that government should be responsible for helping them protect their personal information.

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Original signed by

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