



**Markkula Center**  
for Applied Ethics  
*at Santa Clara University*

**Student Opinion of Personal Data Collection**

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Hackworth Fellowship Project

Markkula Center for Applied Ethics

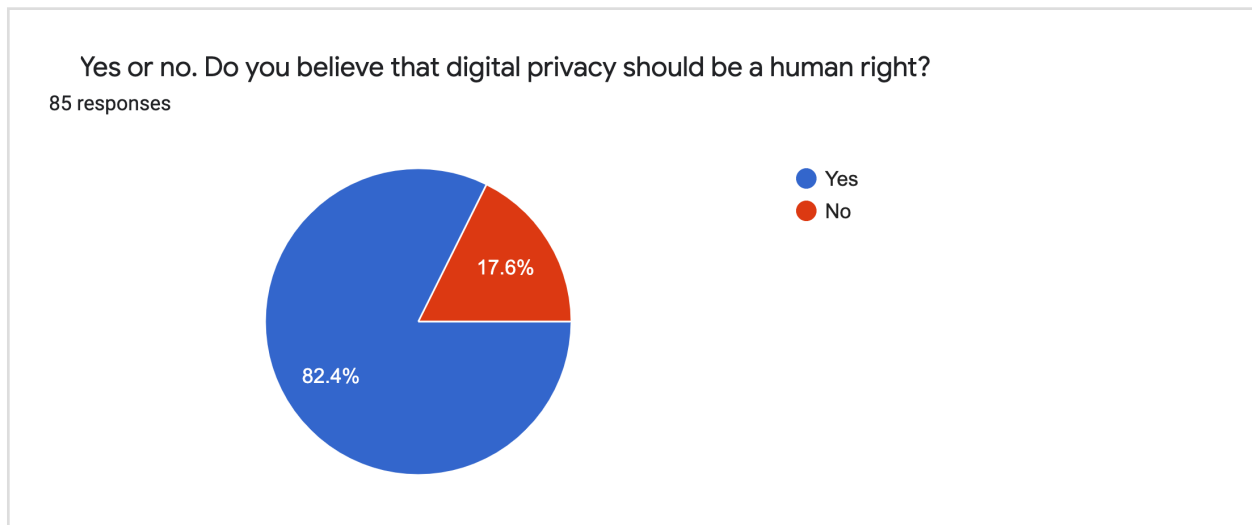
Santa Clara University

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More so than anytime before, the topics of digital identity and personal data are on the forefront of people’s minds. Over the course of the 2020-2021 academic year I gathered Santa Clara students’ opinion of the collection, sale, and usage of personal data. With sixteen survey questions and a free response area, I aimed to measure what Santa Clara students thought in regard to whether or not digital privacy should be a human right, what role the federal government should or shouldn’t play in the personal data marketplace, their comfort level with how their personal data is currently collected, and what steps they take in order to protect their personal data online.

A total of 87 students completed the survey representing all three colleges and four years of undergraduate study. The data represented in this document are a selection of important questions and answers that are organized into five categories. Each category includes a visual representation of survey responses followed by a written analysis and explanation.

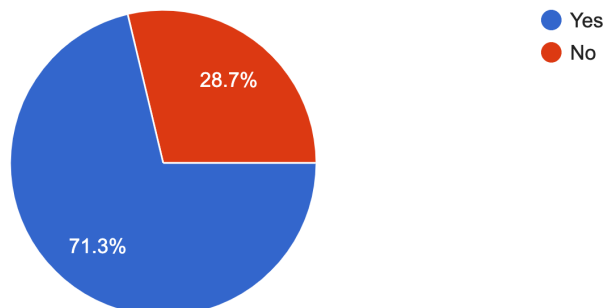
### **Right to Privacy?**



- 82.4 % of respondents believe that digital privacy should be a human right.

Yes or no. Do you believe that your digital privacy online should mimic the privacy that you feel at home?

87 responses

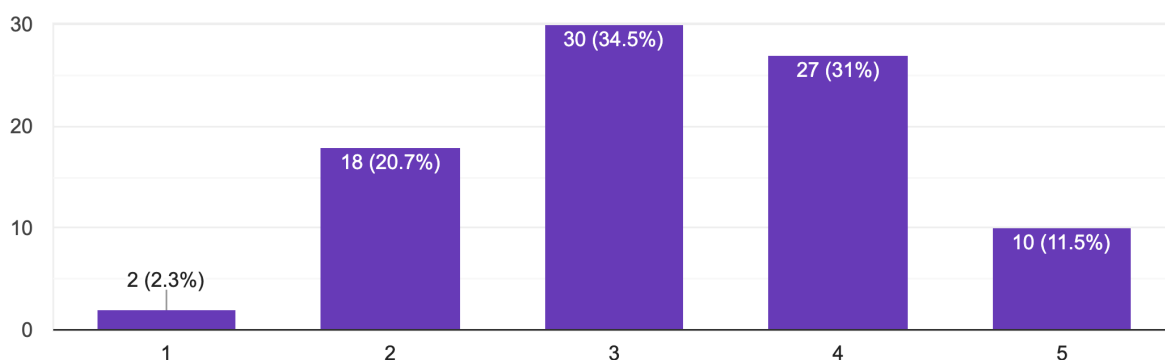


- 71.3% of respondents believe that digital privacy online should mimic the privacy that one feels at home.

### Step Taken to Preserve Privacy?

On a scale of one to five, one being the lowest and five being the highest, how often do you consider your personal privacy while online?

87 responses

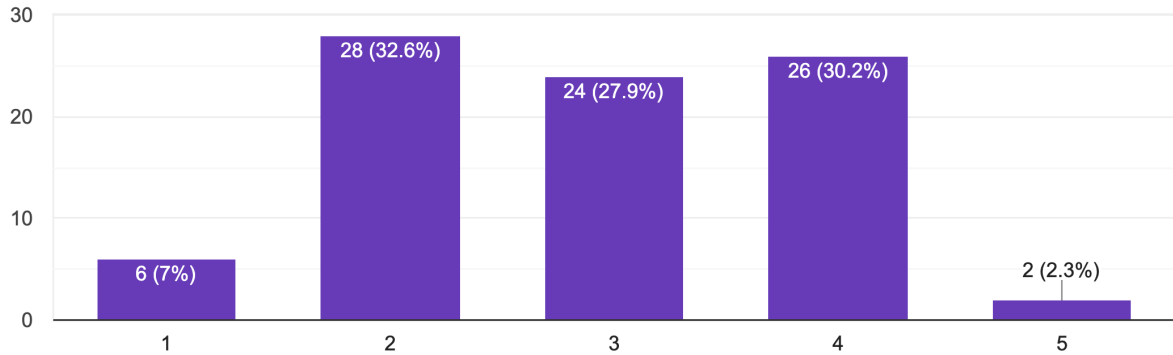


- When considering their personal privacy online, 42.5% do so with a high level of frequency, 34.5% of respondents do so with a medium level of frequency, and 23% do so with a low level of frequency.

Student Opinion Personal Data Collection

On a scale of one to five, one being the lowest and five being the highest, to what degree do you take steps to ensure that your personal data are protected and your digital privacy remains high?

86 responses

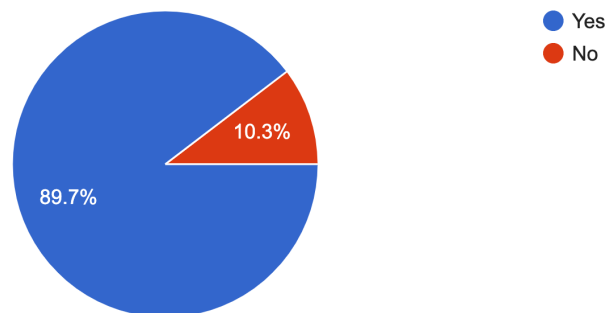


- 39.6% of respondents take few steps to ensure that their personal data and digital privacy are protected. 27.9% take some steps, and 32.5% take many steps.

### Alarmed at Rate of Collection?

Yes or no. Do you find the collection, use, and sale of your personal data alarming?

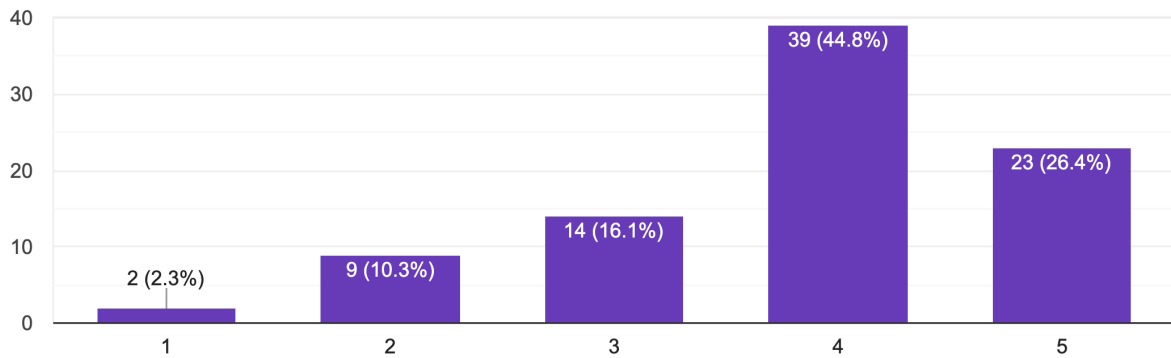
87 responses



- 89.7% of respondents find the collection, use, and sale of their personal data alarming.

On a scale of one to five, one being the lowest and five being the highest, to what degree do you feel that you are being tracked while online?

87 responses

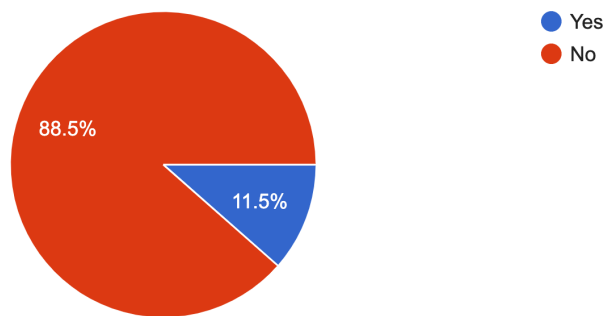


- Most respondents, 71.2%, feel that to a high degree they are being tracked online, only 16.1% feel so to a medium degree, and 12.6% feel so to a low degree.

### Trust in the Federal Government in Relation to Personal Data?

Yes or no. Should the US federal government and state government have the right to surveil your digital activity while at home?

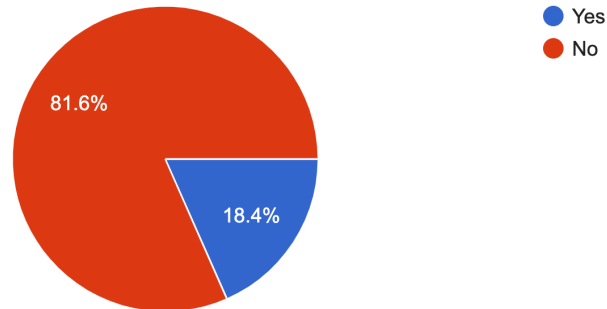
87 responses



- 88.5% of respondents believe that the US federal government and state governments should *not* have the right to surveil their digital activity while at home.

Yes or no. Do you trust the US federal government when it comes to matters of personal data, the internet, and digital privacy?

87 responses

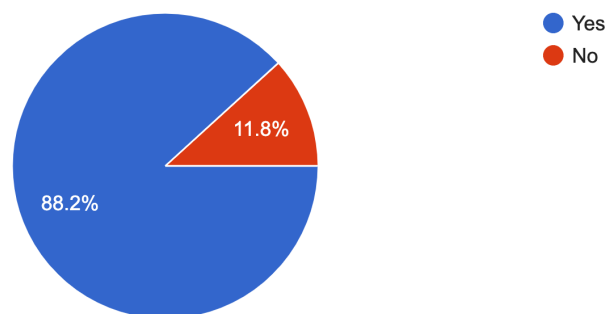


- 81.6 % of respondents don't trust the US federal government when it comes to matters of personal data, the internet, and digital privacy.

### Should the Federal Government protect citizens' Personal Data?

Yes or no. Is the collection, use, and sale of personal data something that you believe that the US federal government should regulate?

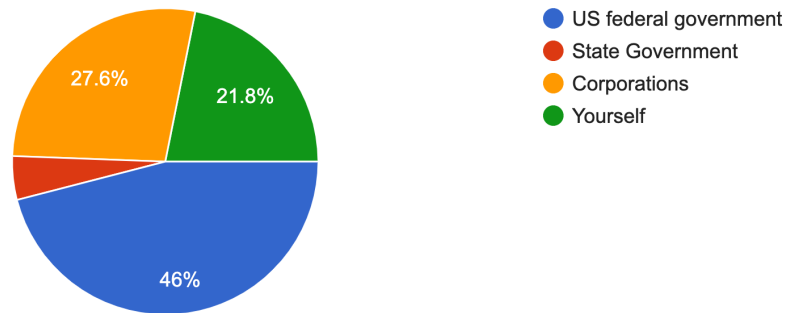
85 responses



- 88.2% of respondents believe that the US federal government should regulate the collection, use, and sale of personal data.

Whom do you believe has the greatest duty to protect your personal data and ensure digital privacy? The US federal government, the state government, corporations, or yourself? Choose only one answer.

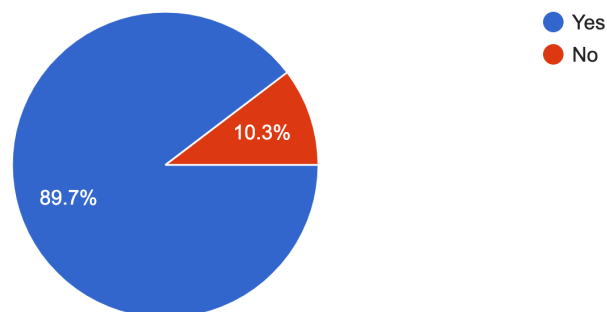
87 responses



- 46% of respondents believe that the US federal government has the greatest duty to protect individual's personal data and ensure their digital privacy, while 27.6% believe that corporations should have that responsibility, 21.8% believe the individual has that responsibility, 4.6% believe that it should be the responsibility of state governments.

Yes or no. Do you wish the US federal government would do more to protect your personal data while online?

87 responses



- 89.7% of respondents wish that the US federal government would do more to protect their personal data while online.

### **Analysis:**

The first clear take away from these data is that students place a large importance on digital personal privacy and the protection of their personal data. A vast majority of students believe that digital privacy should be a human right alongside the right to life and freedom. This sentiment is echoed by students' free responses to my question “what is your greatest concern regarding the collection of personal data?” Many students touched on the idea of governmental overreach or being punished for what one says online. That being said, one respondent did note that they were unconcerned with the government collecting their personal data so long as it was used in important national security measures.

Related to the importance of digital privacy is the privacy paradox. While student’s acknowledge their concern with the current personal data marketplace, a minority take high degree of actions to protect their personal data. In their free responses, students noted that they are concerned about corporations buying their personal data (most commonly respondents were concerned about location data). There was also much concern voiced about being the target of personalized ads and even personalized misinformation. More practically, there were concerns of data leaks, hacking, identity theft, financial crimes, and being induced into purchasing more goods than necessary.

Another interesting conclusion drawn from these data is students’ mixed opinions of what the federal government ought to do in regard to personal data and simultaneously how trustworthy the federal government is in matters of digital privacy. On one hand, a large majority



of students believe that the federal government should regulate the personal data marketplace. A similarly large majority of students also wish that the federal government would do more to protect their personal privacy while online. At the same time, those same students do not trust the federal government when it comes to matters of personal data, the internet, and digital privacy and believe that the federal government should not have the right to surveil citizens' digital activity while at home.