



DO CANADIANS CARE ABOUT FREE EXPRESSION?

FOR OUR FIFTH ANNUAL *Review of Free Expression in Canada*, CJFE, in partnership with Nanos Research, polled Canadians to find out their thoughts on access to information practices, government openness and digital surveillance—the first poll of its kind. Canadians are passionate about access to information, with 75 per cent either agreeing (54%) or somewhat agreeing (21%) that federal employees should be required to create records of their communications. Furthermore, 89 per cent either agreed (75%) or somewhat agreed (14%) that federal employees should be punished if they destroy communications records.

“It speaks to an appetite to take a hard line on people who try to suppress or cover up information,” says pollster Nik Nanos, chair of Nanos Research. He adds that, to Canadians, “that type of behaviour is unacceptable.”

Along the same vein, more than half of those polled either disagreed (36%) or somewhat disagreed (18%) with the current federal government’s assertions that it’s the most open in Canadian history.

“It’s difficult for governments to reconcile the desire to be open and accountable with the pressures of governing and managing political risks,” says Nanos. “Considering the Tories’ initial call for accountability when first elected in 2006, it must be disappointing for some to observe how accountability and transparency has unfolded in Canada.”

On the other hand, Canadians seemed less reactive about the government secretly gathering their information. A full 60 per cent said they wouldn’t change the content of their communications if they suspected those communications were being monitored by government. The response is notably different in the U.S., where a similar survey from Harris Interactive found 47 per cent of adults had changed their behaviour following revelations of NSA snooping, and about a quarter of those polled said they reduced their amount of online banking, shopping and email usage.

“People are increasingly conditioned to have less privacy, and [be subject to] more surveillance now,” says Nanos, adding that “the U.S. flare-ups on this issue have been more sensational. There hasn’t been, in Canada, a galvanizing Canadian event to wake people up.”

Canadians were asked for their response to the following questions:

Federal employees should be required by law to create a permanent, retrievable record of their deliberations and decision-making at work, even when these take place using non-written forms of communication.

Agree **54%**
Somewhat agree **21%**
Somewhat disagree **8%**
Disagree **13%**
Unsure **5%**

There should be penalties for federal employees who destroy work-related emails and other records of government deliberations and decision-making.

Agree **75%**
Somewhat agree **14%**
Somewhat disagree **6%**
Disagree **5%**
Unsure **1%**

Which of the following actions would you take if you suspected the government was monitoring your telephone calls, social media, emails or other communication?

I would dramatically change the content of my communications **20%**

I would slightly change the content of my communications **17%**

I would not change the content of my communications **60%**

Unsure **3%**

As you may know, the current federal government has said it has a priority to be open and accountable. Would you agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or disagree that Canadians have more access to government information, such as how and why decisions were made, now than they ever had before?

Agree **22%**
Somewhat agree **21%**
Somewhat disagree **18%**
Disagree **36%**
Unsure **4%**

Nanos Research conducted a national random telephone survey of 1,000 Canadians between March 6 and 12, 2014. The sample included both land lines and cellphone lines across Canada. The margin of error for a random survey of 1,000 Canadians is ±3.1 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding.