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Brookings survey finds 50 percent of people are unfavorable to facial recognition software in retail stores to prevent theft

Darrell M. West Monday, October 8, 2018

Fifty percent percent are unfavorable to the use of facial recognition software in retail stores to prevent theft, according to a survey undertaken by researchers at the Brookings Institution. Forty-four percent are unfavorable to using this software in airports to establish identity, 44 percent are unfavorable to it in stadiums as a way to protect people, and 38 percent are unfavorable to its use in schools to protect students.

	Unfavorable	Favorable
In Retail Stores to Prevent Theft	50%	27%
In Airports to Establish Identity	44	31
In Stadiums to Protect People	44	33
In Schools to Protect Students	38	41

There are differences in unfavorability by gender and age. Women (46 percent) are more unfavorable than men (40 percent) to the use of facial recognition software in stadiums. The same is true for young people for all the venues compared to senior citizens.

	Retail Stores	Schools	Airports	Stadiums
Gender				
-male	49	38	42%	40
-female	51	37	46	46
Age				
-18-34	58	44	54	52
-35-54	50	38	43	42
-55+	40	28	35	35
Region				
-Northeast	50	38	37	39
-Midwest	49	34	45	46
-South	49	36	46	42
-West	52	40	45	45

The Brookings survey was an online U.S. national poll undertaken with 2,000 adult internet users between September 23 to 27, 2018. It was overseen by Darrell M. West, vice president of Governance Studies and director of the Center for Technology Innovation at the Brookings Institution and the author of The Future of Work: Robots, AI, and Automation. Responses were weighted using gender, age, and region to match the demographics of the national internet population as estimated by the U.S. Census Bureau’s Current Population Survey.

Limits on use by law enforcement

Fifty percent believe there should be limits on the use of facial recognition software by law enforcement, 26 percent do not, and 24 percent are unsure.

There are differences by age. Young people (55 percent) were more supportive of limits on law enforcement than senior citizens (46 percent).

Does facial recognition software invade personal privacy?

The survey asked whether facial recognition software invades personal privacy. Forty-two percent think it does, 28 percent do not, and 30 percent are unsure.

Views of video cameras in public places

Nineteen percent say having video cameras in public places makes them nervous, 36 percent claim it calms them, and 45 percent are unsure.

Views of government regulation and government data bases

Thirty-five percent think the government should regulate facial recognition software very much, 34 percent say officials should somewhat regulate, 11 percent should not regulate very much, and 20 percent are unsure. Forty-nine percent believe the government should not compile a data base of people's faces, 22 percent think they should, and 29 percent are unsure.

Survey Questions and Answers

1. How favorable are you to using facial recognition software at airports to establish your identity?

- 31% very unfavorable
- 13% somewhat unfavorable
- 13% somewhat favorable
- 18% very favorable
- 25% don't know or no answer

2. How favorable are you to using facial recognition software in stadiums as a way to protect people?

- 29% very unfavorable
- 15% somewhat unfavorable
- 14% somewhat favorable
- 19% very favorable

- 23% don't know or no answer

3. How favorable are you to using facial recognition software in retail stores as a way to prevent theft?

- 33% very unfavorable
- 17% somewhat unfavorable
- 11% somewhat favorable
- 16% very favorable
- 23% don't know or no answer

4. How favorable are you to using facial recognition software in schools to protect students?

- 26% very unfavorable
- 11% somewhat unfavorable
- 16% somewhat favorable
- 25% very favorable
- 21% don't know or no answer

5. Do you think there should be limits on the use of facial recognition software by law enforcement?

- 18% definitely no
- 8% possibly no
- 16% possibly yes
- 34% definitely yes
- 24% don't know or no answer

6. Do you think the use of facial recognition software invades your personal privacy?

- 12% possibly no
- 15% possibly yes
- 27% definitely yes
- 30% don't know or no answer

7. Does having video cameras in public places make you feel:

- 9% very nervous
- 10% somewhat nervous
- 18% somewhat calm
- 18% very calm
- 45% don't know or no answer

8. How much should the government regulate facial recognition software?

- 11% not very much
- 34% somewhat
- 35% very much
- 20% don't know or no answer

9. Should the government compile a data base of pictures of people's faces?

- 31% definitely no
- 18% possibly no
- 10% possibly yes
- 12% definitely yes
- 29% don't know or no answer

Gender:

- 54.5% male, 45.5% female in sample
- 47.9% male, 52.1% female in target population

Age:

- 6.3% 18-24, 17.3% 25-34, 19.0% 35-44, 19.3% 45-54, 21.4% 55-64, 16.7% 65+ in sample
- 13.9% 18-24, 19.4% 25-34, 17.8% 35-44, 18.3% 45-54, 16.4% 55-64, 14.2% 65+ in target population

Region:

- 14.8% Northeast, 26.5% Midwest, 35.1% South, 23.6% West in sample
- 18.0% Northeast, 22.0% Midwest, 36.4% South, 23.6% West in target population

Survey Methodology

This online survey polled 2,000 adult internet users in the United States September 23 to 27, 2018 through the [Google Surveys](#) platform. Responses were weighted using gender, age, and region to match the demographics of the national internet population as estimated by the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey.

In the 2012 presidential election, Google Surveys was the [second most accurate poll](#) of national surveys as judged by polling expert Nate Silver. In addition, the Pew Research Center undertook a [detailed assessment of Google Surveys](#) and found them generally to be representative of the demographic profile of national internet users. In comparing Google Survey results to its own telephone polls on 43 different substantive issues, Pew researchers found a median difference of

about three percentage points between Google online surveys and Pew telephone polls. A 2016 analysis of Google Surveys published in the peer-reviewed methodology journal *Political Analysis* by political scientists at Rice University replicated a number of research results and concluded “GCS [Google Consumer Surveys] is likely to be a useful platform for survey experimentalists.”

This research was made possible by Google Surveys, which donated use of its online survey platform. The questions and findings are solely those of the researchers and not influenced by any donation. For more detailed information on the methodology, see the Google Surveys Whitepaper.

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