

More Canadians & Britons view Edward Snowden as “hero” than “traitor”, Americans split

Three country survey reveals support for Snowden’s leaks, but mixed feelings on government surveillance overall

[October 30, 2013] – A survey of American, Canadian and British adults shows a majority applaud rather than condemn former CIA analyst and Edward Snowden’s leaks of mass government electronic surveillance, though the verdict is a very narrow one in his home country.

The three-country survey, which asked respondents about their attitudes towards Snowden’s actions, as well as their views on government surveillance, also indicates people distrust their national leaders to be good guardians of the information gathered or to restrict its use to national security purposes.

At the same time, respondents appear to accept the notion that security concerns justify some infringement on civil liberties.

In each country polled, at least 75 per cent of respondents described the issue of government surveillance of the public’s internet communications as “very” or “quite” important to them. (US: 77%, Canada: 78% UK: 82%).

Snowden is a highly controversial figure in his own country, with Americans split 51% to 49% when asked whether he is “*something of a hero who should be commended for letting the public know that our governments are running electronic surveillance programs that threaten people’s privacy*” or “*more of a traitor who should be condemned for publicizing security activities and threatening western intelligence operations*”. In Canada, 67% and in the UK, 60% of respondents say Snowden should be commended for his actions.

Asked to assume their national government is routinely conducting electronic surveillance of the general public, 60% of Americans and Canadians described this as “unacceptable”, while Britons were more split, (52% unacceptable versus 48% acceptable).

KEY FINDINGS

- **Neither Americans, Britons or Canadians view their governments as “good guardians” of the personal information they collect**
- **Americans most split on views towards Snowden**
- **Views on government surveillance/privacy cut along political lines**

Full topline results are at the end of this release.

On Oct 23rd 2013, Angus Reid Global conducted an online survey among 4,536 randomly selected American, British and Canadian adults who are members of the Springboard America, Springboard UK and Angus Reid Forum panels. 1,010 were surveyed in the US, 1,519 in Canada and 2,007 in the UK. The margin of error – which measures sampling variability – is +/- 3%.

CONTACT:

Shachi Kurl, Vice President, Angus Reid Global, 604.647.3274, shachi.kurl@angus-reid.com

Safeguarding the Information

When asked whether they trusted their national government to be “*a good guardian of citizens’ personal information*”, 60 per cent of Americans and 64 per cent of Britons and Canadians said they had “*not that much trust*” or “*no trust at all*”.

At the same time, there appears to be public support for the argument that security and anti-terrorism efforts include tradeoffs on civil liberties and personal information privacy. Buy-in for this perspective is highest in the UK where 60 per cent took this view, compared with Americans (54%). Canadian public opinion is most evenly split on the issue (49% vs 51%).

Only one-in-five respondents believe information gathered by governments will be used for “strictly national security/anti-terrorism efforts” (US: 21%, UK: 19%, Canada: 18%).

The strong plurality view in each country is that the electronic information gathered via mass government surveillance will ultimately end up being used for “*any purposes the government chooses*”: 49% in the US, 46% in Canada, and 44% in the UK believe this to be the most likely scenario.

Only roughly one-in-five believe the info will be used for “*strictly national security/anti-terrorism efforts*” (21% in the US, 18% in Canada and 19% in the UK), while a larger number (close to a third in each country) believe it would be used for “*that, and also other serious criminal matters (say, major organized crime)*.”

Appropriate use of Information

When asked how mass electronic surveillance information *should* be used by governments, a handful in each country opted for “*any purposes the government chooses*” (US & Canada: 5%, UK 7%). There was also no majority insistence that information gathered by government be used for “strictly security/anti-terrorism” purposes (US: 39% Canada: 31%, UK: 33%).

Strong Political Undercurrents in all three countries

In the US, Republicans are much more wary of mass e-surveillance than those who re-elected the Democrats last fall. Nearly 90 per cent of 2012 Republican supporters say they do not trust the Obama administration as good guardians of information whereas most Democrat voters say they do. Republicans are also much more likely to believe information would be used as the government sees fit.

In the UK, 2010 supporters of David Cameron’s Conservatives are most likely to consider mass e-surveillance activities as acceptable, to trust their government with the information, and to consider Edward Snowden more of a traitor than a hero. Both Labour and Liberal-Democrat supporters,

CONTACT:

Shachi Kurl, Vice President, Angus Reid Global, 604.647.3274, shachi.kurl@angus-reid.com

meanwhile, consider Mr. Snowden more of a hero, and are much more wary of these surveillance activities generally, and much less trustful of their national government as information guardian.

In Canada, political differences are just as profound and are consistently observed across all the survey questions. The overall pattern sees Conservative supporters less wary than opposition party supporters. Those who elected Stephen Harper's Conservatives put more credence on national security, most consider mass surveillance acceptable, and most say they trust this government as information guardian.

The other side of the continuum is New Democrat supporters who voice much more civil libertarian views, including support for Snowden. Those who voted for the Liberals in the 2011 election are in the middle on this debate, closer to NDP supporters than Conservatives supporters in their outlook.

Angus Reid Global is a public affairs practice of Vision Critical, headed by Dr. Angus Reid, Canada's best known and longest practicing pollster. He's spent more than four decades asking questions about what people feel, how they think and who they will vote for. He is supported by a team of practitioners conducting high quality research for corporations, governments and non-profit organizations.

Visit the website: <http://www.angusreidglobal.com>

Learn about our [electoral record](#)

Follow on [Twitter](#)

About Vision Critical®

Vision Critical is a global research and technology firm that creates software and services solutions for over 600 clients, including one third of the world's top 100 brands. The company has offices across North America, Europe and Australia as well as a Global Partner Program that provides other research companies and consultants with access to top-of-the-line technology. Its Sparq™ product is the most widely adopted community panel platform on the planet.

Visit the website: <http://www.visioncritical.com>

Media contacts:

US: Jaideep Mukerji: 212.402.8226/jaideep.mukerji@visioncritical.com

UK: Mike Stevens: mike.stevens@visioncritical.com

Canada: Shachi Kurl: 604.908.1693/shachi.kurl@angus-reid.com

CONTACT:

Shachi Kurl, Vice President, Angus Reid Global, 604.647.3274, shachi.kurl@angus-reid.com

Overall, how important do you yourself consider this whole issue of government surveillance of the public's internet communications to be?			
	USA	Canada	UK
Very important	33%	29%	31%
Quite important	44%	49%	51%
Not that important	18%	18%	12%
Not important at all	5%	4%	5%

Overall, which of the following broad statements is closest to your own opinion of Edward Snowden's actions?			
	USA	Canada	UK
"He is something of a hero who should be commended for letting the public know that our governments are running electronic surveillance programs that threaten people's privacy"	51%	67%	60%
"He is more of a traitor who should be condemned for publicizing security activities and threatening western intelligence operations"	49%	33%	40%

"Let's assume it is a clearly known fact that, as part of overall national security efforts, the (US/Canadian/UK) government is, in fact, routinely conducting electronic surveillance of the general public, and mass monitoring people's internet communications and contact lists, etc. Is this something that you yourself consider to be acceptable or unacceptable?"			
	USA	Canada	UK
Very acceptable	8%	8%	9%
Moderately acceptable	32%	33%	39%
Moderately unacceptable	27%	27%	26%
Very unacceptable	33%	33%	26%

CONTACT:

Shachi Kurl, Vice President, Angus Reid Global, 604.647.3274, shachi.kurl@angus-reid.com

“And, thinking generally about the issue of government monitoring personal information and communications on the internet....To what extent do you personally trust the government of (US President Barack Obama/Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper/UK Prime Minister David Cameron) to be a good guardian of citizens’ personal information?”			
	USA	Canada	UK
A great deal of trust	12%	8%	6%
A fair amount of trust	28%	29%	30%
Not that much trust	26%	32%	34%
No trust at all	34%	32%	30%

“What, for you, is the MOST important consideration in thinking about this whole issue of governments monitoring people’s personal information from the internet?”			
	USA	Canada	UK
“Security and anti-terrorism efforts mean we may sometimes have to infringe on civil liberties such as personal information privacy”	54%	49%	60%
“Security and anti-terrorism concerns do not justify weakening civil liberties such as personal information privacy”	46%	51%	40%

“If you had to speculate, what would you say is the most likely ultimate use for this electronic information gathered via mass government surveillance? Would you say this information will most likely end up being used for:			
	USA	Canada	UK
Strictly national security/anti-terrorism efforts	21%	18%	19%
That, and also other serious criminal matters (say, major organized crime)	26%	30%	30%
Other purposes such as catching tax evaders	4%	6%	8%
Any purposes the government chooses	49%	46%	44%

CONTACT:

Shachi Kurl, Vice President, Angus Reid Global, 604.647.3274, shachi.kurl@angus-reid.com

“And, which of the following would you say is the most appropriate use of this information? Would you say it should be used:			
	USA	Canada	UK
Strictly national security/anti-terrorism efforts	39%	31%	33%
That, and also other serious criminal matters (say, major organized crime)	32%	39%	39%
Other purposes such as catching tax evaders	4%	4%	6%
Any purposes the government chooses	5%	5%	7%
Or, none of the above, should be no mass electronic surveillance in the first place	20%	22%	15%

Summary Table of Results by Recent Party Support - USA		
	2012 Democrat	2012 Republican
Issue is important – very or quite	79%	79%
Snowden is a “hero” versus “traitor”	49% vs. 52%	48% vs. 52%
Mass e-surveillance is unacceptable	46%	70%
Do not trust this government as information guardian	32%	89%
Security justifies some infringement	61%	56%
Information will be used for anything the government chooses	32%	58%

CONTACT:

Shachi Kurl, Vice President, Angus Reid Global, 604.647.3274, shachi.kurl@angus-reid.com

Summary Table of Results by Recent Party Support - UK

	2010 Conservatives	2010 Liberal Democrats	2010 Labour
Issue is important – very or quite	85%	88%	82%
Snowden is a “hero” versus “traitor”	46% vs. 54%	74% vs. 26%	62% vs. 38%
Mass e-surveillance is unacceptable	37%	55%	54%
Do not trust this government as information guardian	45%	70%	72%
Security justifies some infringement	73%	59%	57%
Information will be used for anything the government chooses	31%	48%	44%

Summary Table of Results by Recent Party Support - Canada

	2011 Conservatives	2011 Liberals	2011 NDP
Issue is important – very or quite	77%	85%	76%
Snowden is a “hero” versus “traitor”	52% vs. 48%	67% vs. 33%	78% vs. 22%
Mass e-surveillance is unacceptable	42%	65%	75%
Do not trust this government as information guardian	38%	79%	84%
Security justifies some infringement	65%	44%	35%
Information will be used for anything the government chooses	34%	54%	59%

CONTACT:

Shachi Kurl, Vice President, Angus Reid Global, 604.647.3274, shachi.kurl@angus-reid.com