Data Privacy: Are You Concerned?

Insights from a survey of US consumers

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In light of recent data scandals and the implementation of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in the European Union, SAS conducted an online survey in July 2018 of 525 adult US consumers. The goal? To better understand their opinions on data privacy and how it affects their behaviors and trust toward companies.

Respondents from across the United States represented a broad range of socioeconomic levels. They shared views on government regulation regarding data privacy, their internet attitudes and behaviors regarding data privacy, and their level of trust in organizations to keep data safe.
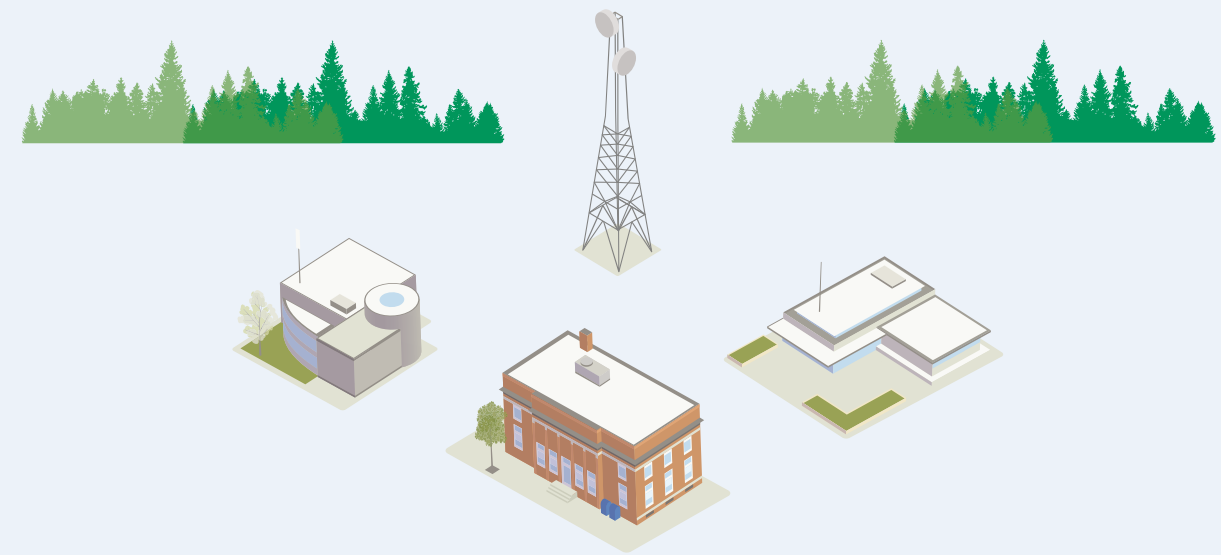
" It's clear that in this age of increased data privacy concerns – even without a more stringent data privacy law in the US – organizations that treat their customers' data with care will be rewarded, and those that don't risk the loss of reputation and customers. "

- Todd Wright, Global Lead for GDPR Solutions at SAS

Expressing Concern

Almost three-fourths (73 percent) of survey participants said they are more concerned about their data privacy now than they were a few years ago. And 64 percent said they feel their data is less secure today than it was a few years ago.

Baby boomers (ages 55 and up) exhibited the most concern about their data privacy (78 percent), compared to 66 percent of millennials (ages 18-34) and 72 percent of Gen Xers (ages 35-54).

When it comes to data privacy, participants are most concerned about identify theft, followed by financial fraud, personal data being sold or shared without consent, misuse or inappropriate use of personal data, and government surveillance.
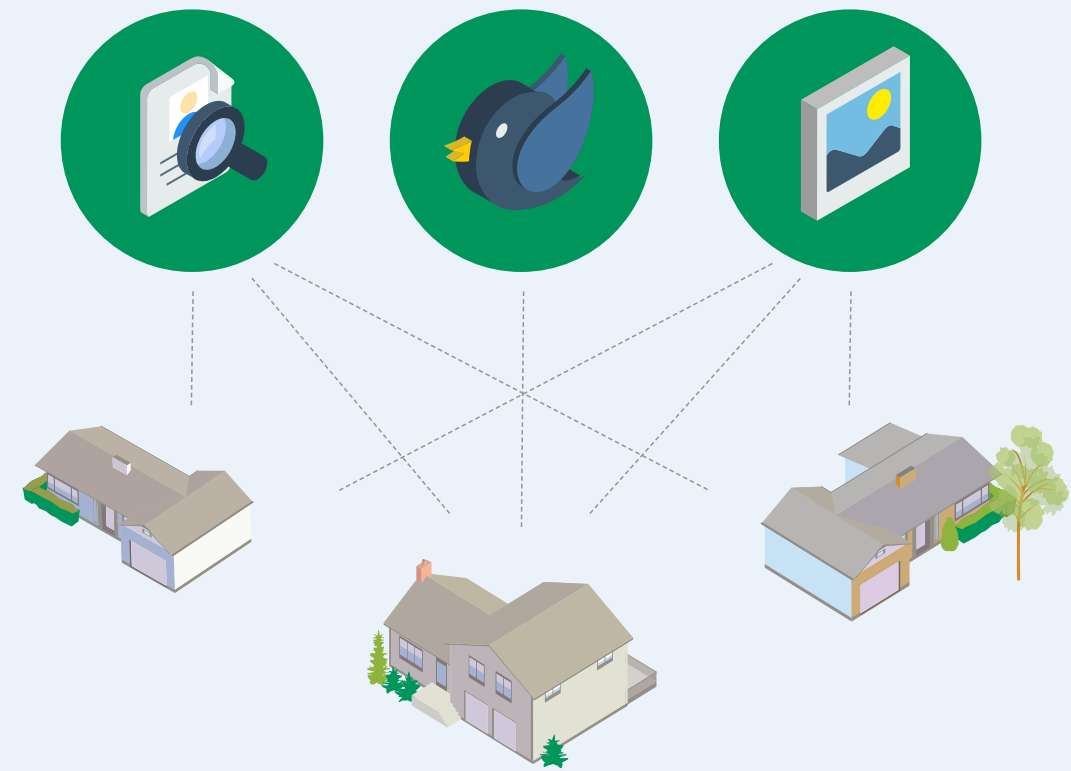
78% Baby Boomers

66% Millennials

72% Gen Xers

Does the US want GDPR?

The GDPR took effect May 25, making organizations that gather data on European Union (EU) residents accountable for personal data protection. GDPR also gives EU residents significant new rights over their personal data. These include the rights to access, query and erase personal data held by organizations.
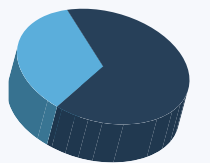
Do US consumers want these rights?

According to the survey, 67 percent of participants think the US government should do more to protect data privacy.

Perhaps they want more government intervention because they don't feel they have much control over their personal data. Twenty-four percent

of respondents feel they have no control over their data and 61 percent feel they have just some control. Just 15 percent of participants say they have complete control over their personal data.

Of those who think the US needs more data privacy regulation, a large majority (83 percent) would like the right to tell an organization not to share or sell their personal information. Most of these consumers (80 percent) also want the right to know where and to whom their data is sold. Seventy-three percent said they would like the right to ask an organization how their data is being used, and 64 percent said they would like the right to have their data deleted or erased.

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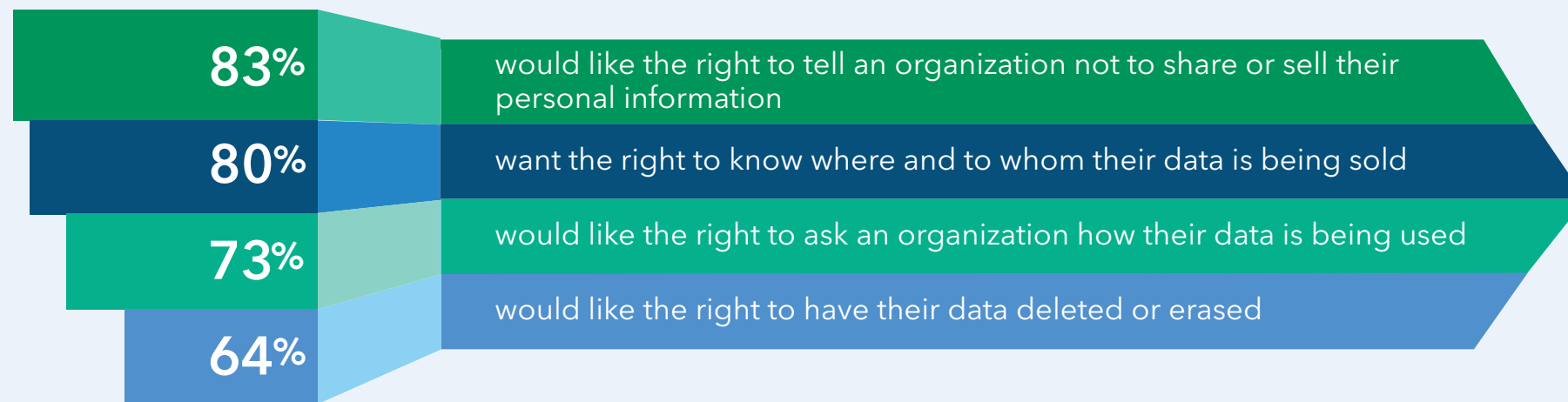
67% of US consumers think the government should do more to protect data privacy.

Taking Action

Though consumers think the US government should do more to protect data privacy, the majority (66 percent) of respondents also said they are primarily responsible for the security of their own data.

And they're taking action. Sixty-six percent of survey participants have taken steps to secure their data. Those include:

- Changing privacy settings (77 percent).

- Changing or not accepting cookies (67 percent).

- Declining terms of agreement (65 percent).

- Deleting an app from a mobile device (56 percent).

- Removing a social media account (36 percent).

Additionally, more than one-third of survey participants (38 percent) reported using social media less often because of data privacy concerns. Thirty-one percent said they were "not at all confident" social media companies would keep their data secure. Twenty-seven percent of respondents also had reduced their online shopping habits because of data privacy concerns.

When it comes to marketing, the SAS research showed that baby boomers were the least willing to provide personal information in exchange for something, such as a discount or fewer ads (36 percent). Millennials were the most willing (45 percent), and the Gen Xers fell in the middle (42 percent).

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31% of respondents were "not at all confident" social media companies would keep their data secure
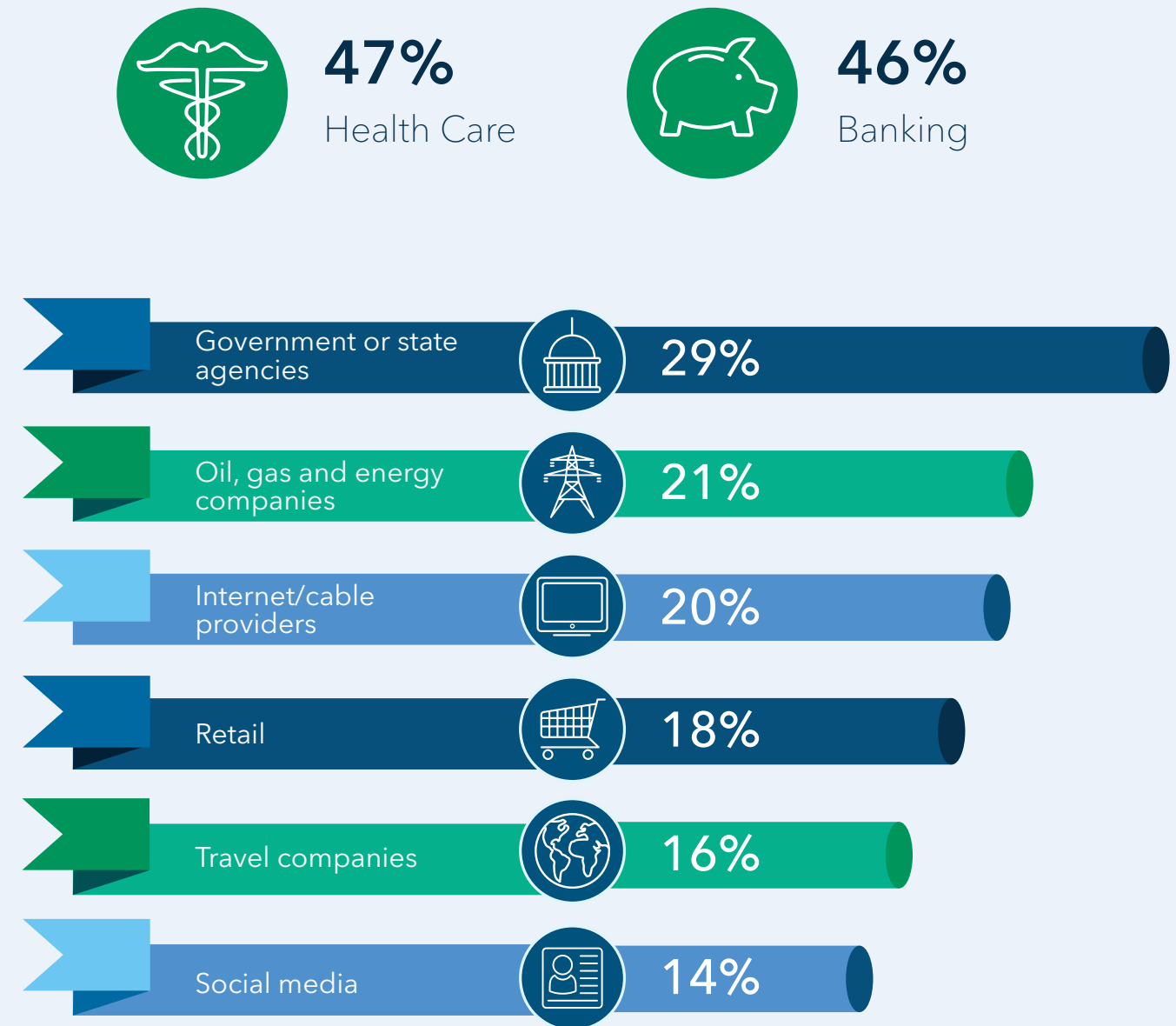
Trust in organizations?

Although consumers acknowledge their own responsibility for their personal data, 73 percent of participants believe that organizations are collecting their personal information without their knowledge.

And yet, many still trust these organizations with the security of that information.

Forty-two percent of respondents said they trust organizations to keep their personal information secure. And 43 percent said they felt that most companies make their best efforts to do just that.

When it comes to the industries people trust most to protect their data, health care and banking are at the top. Almost half of participants reported they were very confident or extremely confident that organizations in these industries are keeping their data secure.

Social media was the least trusted, with only 14 percent expressing the same confidence. Travel companies (16 percent), retail (18 percent), internet/cable providers (20 percent), energy companies (21 percent), and government agencies (29 percent) were also rated low.

47% Health Care

46% Banking

Government or state agencies		29%
Oil, gas and energy companies		21%
Internet/cable providers		20%
Retail		18%
Travel companies		16%
Social media		14%

Next steps

Reassure customers that you are protecting their data privacy and gain long-term benefits for your organization with **SAS® for Personal Data Protection.**

SAS for Personal Data Protection includes industry-leading data management and analytics software that help organizations achieve compliance and privacy goals while building a trusted data governance framework.

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