



Data Privacy Habits Survey

2019 Nationally Representative Phone Survey

Prepared by CR Survey Research Department

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INTRODUCTION

In May 2019, Consumer Reports conducted a nationally representative phone survey of 1,006 American adults through SSRS. The purpose of this survey was to assess Americans' data privacy habits.

HIGHLIGHTS

Password Practices

- The majority of Americans (72%) have e-mail accounts. Sixty-five percent have at least one other online account (65%). About three in five say they have a Facebook account.
- The majority of Americans with online accounts (59%) say they use different passwords for all their accounts. However, 13% use the same password for all their accounts.
- Similarly, more than half of Americans (57%) say they never use the same password they use for their e-mail account on any other accounts. On the other hand, about one in ten says they always use their e-mail password for other accounts.
- When asked about their use of two-factor authentication, 39% of Americans who had at least one e-mail or other online account say they do not know what it is, while 29% say they used it only on accounts that require it.

Practicing Data Privacy in Responding to our Survey

- For more general questions, such as "do you have a smartphone" or "do you have an online account other than e-mail," fewer than one percent of respondents refused to answer. This is consistent with responses on other surveys in our experience.
- Refusal rates rose dramatically for information that could be perceived as harmful to reveal. For instance, 6% of respondents refused to answer questions on whether they used the same password for multiple online accounts, whether they used their e-mail password for any other accounts, and how they used or did not use two-factor authentication. This may suggest some Americans are privacy-minded even when responding to surveys.

Signing in through Other Accounts

- About half of Americans who have the accounts in question say that, if given the option, they never use their Facebook (51%) or Google (46%) login to sign on to other accounts.
- Responses were similar for Facebook and Google across the board. Only six percent say they always use the (Facebook or Google) account's login to sign on to other accounts for either type of account, and about two in five (41% for Facebook, 45% for Google) say they "sometimes" do.

Phone Security

- Three-quarters of Americans own a smartphone.
- Forty-three percent of Americans with smartphones believe that their phone is recording what they say even when they do not ask it to. Nearly half believe it does not.
- More than half of Americans who own smartphones (54%) allow apps to track their location only when it is necessary for the function of the app: weather or ride-sharing apps, for instance. More than a quarter (28%) do not allow any apps to track them, and more than one in ten (11%) allows all apps to track them.

Smart Speakers

- One in five Americans owns a smart speaker, like Amazon Echo ("Alexa") or Google Home.
- Over one in four (27%) of those who own a smart speaker say they have changed how they talk around the device. More than two-thirds (69%) say they have not.
- For those who have not changed how they talk around their smart speaker, the most common reason (42%) is that they are not concerned about anyone hearing what they say. Thirty-two percent say they are unconcerned because the smart speaker only listens when activated by a command word. Nineteen percent say they use the mute function when discussing anything sensitive or private.

Router Security

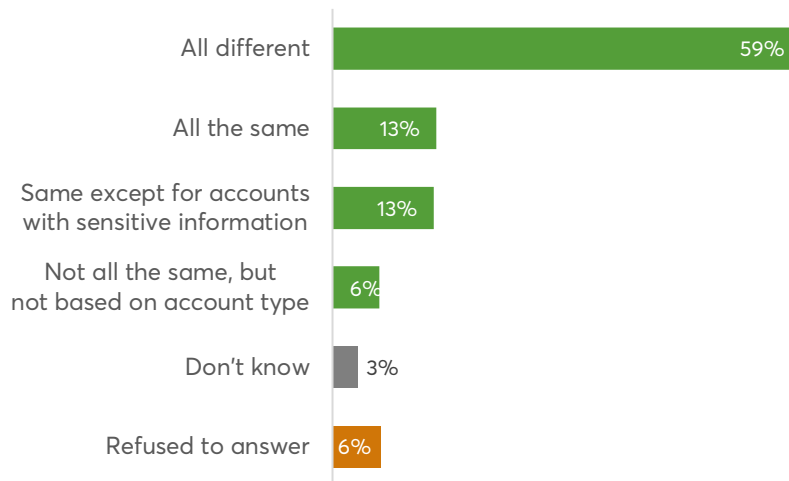
- More than one in five Americans (22%) own a wireless router, as opposed to not having one or renting it from a cable provider.
- Thirty-eight percent of Americans who own a wireless router say they or someone in their household has changed the default password on their router; 31% say they have not; and almost as many (27%) say they are not sure.
- When asked when the firmware on their router was last updated, two-fifths of Americans (40%) said they were unsure. This was the most frequent response.

FINDINGS

Password Practices

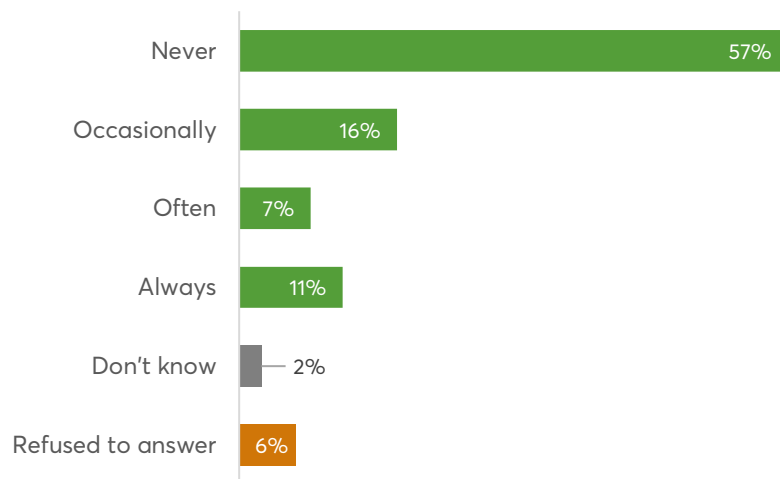
The majority of Americans with online accounts (59%) say they use different passwords for all their accounts. However, one in eight (13%) uses the same password for all their accounts. Interestingly, an unusually high percentage of Americans refuse to answer questions about their passwords (6% vs the more typical 0%-1%). This likely reflects a concern about privacy and data security.

Are your account passwords...



Base: Respondents with at least one online account

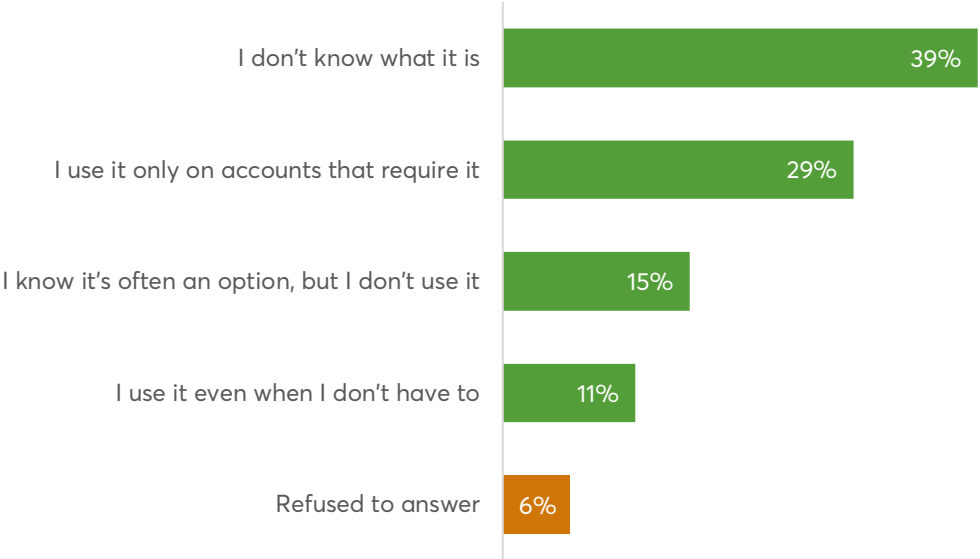
How often do you use your e-mail password as the password for another online account?



Base: Respondents who have e-mail

We asked Americans who had e-mail and/or other online accounts about their use of two-factor authentication, in which an account holder must answer a phone call or enter a code of some kind in addition to a password to sign in to digital accounts. The most common response (39%) was "I don't know what two-factor authentication is." Over a quarter (29%) of account holders use two-factor authentication, but only on accounts that require it. In comparison, just over one in ten (11%) say they use two-factor authentication even if it is not required.

Which best describes your use of two-factor authentication for digital accounts?

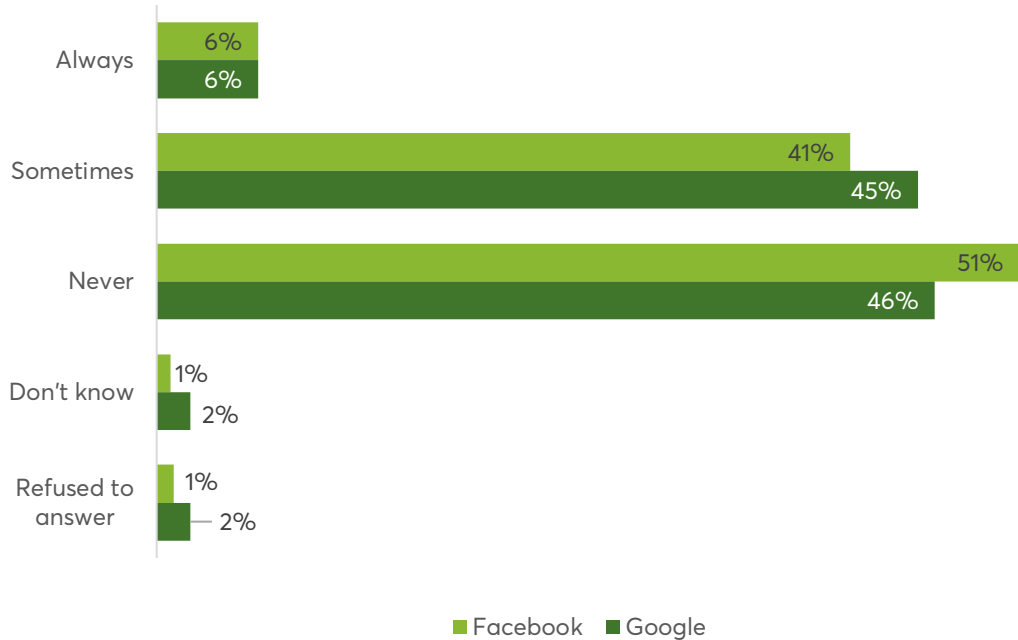


Base: Respondents with at least one online account

Signing in Through Facebook or Google

Responses are very similar for Facebook and Google third-party login services (using your Facebook account to sign in to Words with Friends, for instance): about half of Americans with the relevant accounts never use them to log on to other sites or services. Two in five say they “sometimes” do, and only 6% say they “always” do.

How often do you use your Facebook/Google login to sign in to other accounts?



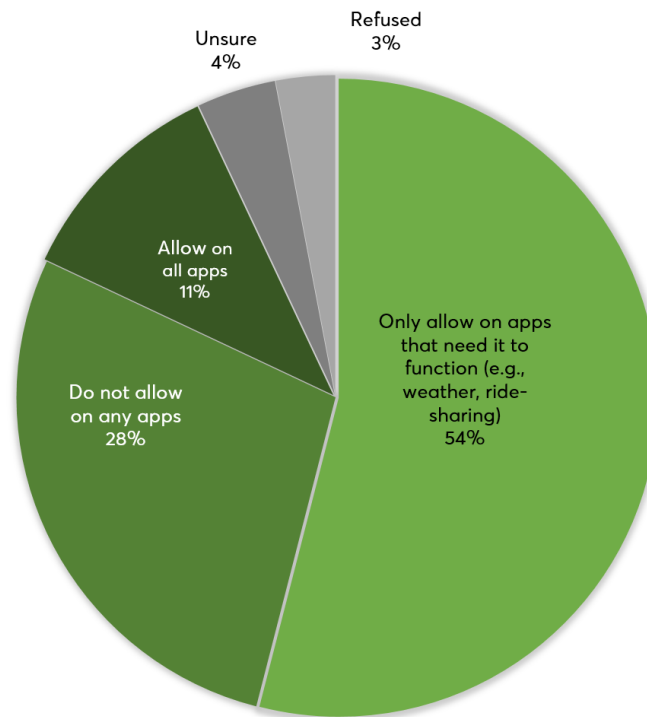
Base: Respondents who have Facebook (light green); respondents who have a Google/Gmail account (dark green)

Phone Security

Three-quarters of Americans own a smartphone. Nearly half of them (48%) say they do not believe their phone is recording them without their permission, but almost as many (43%) believe it is.

More than half of Americans who own smartphones allow apps to track their location only when it is necessary for the function of the app: weather or ride-sharing apps, for instance. More than a quarter do not allow any apps to track them, and one in ten allows all apps to track them.

Do you allow smartphone apps to access your location data?



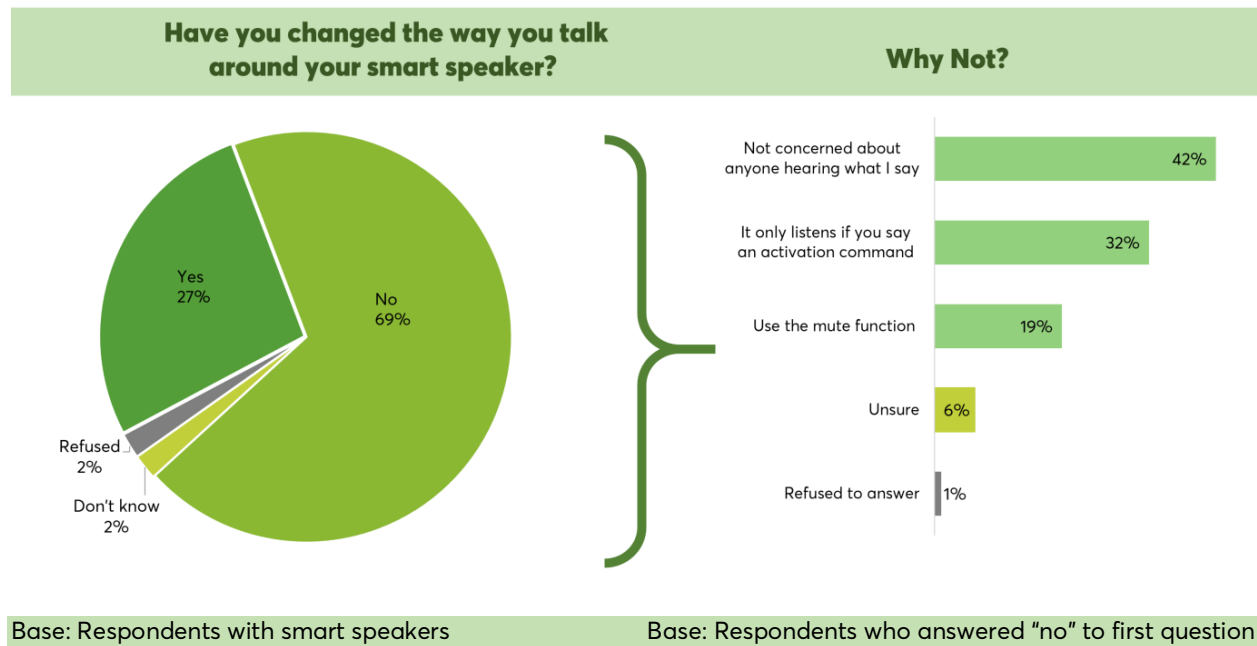
Base: Respondents with smartphones

Smart Speakers

One in five Americans owns a smart speaker, like Amazon Echo ("Alexa") or Google Home.

One in four smart speaker owners (27%) says they have changed how they talk around the device. More than two-thirds say they have not.

For those who have not changed how they talk around their smart speaker, the most common reason (42%) is that they are not concerned about anyone hearing what they say. Thirty-two percent say they are unconcerned because the smart speaker only listens when activated by a command word ("Alexa," "OK Google," etc.). Only 19% (nearly one in five) says they use the mute function when discussing anything sensitive or private.

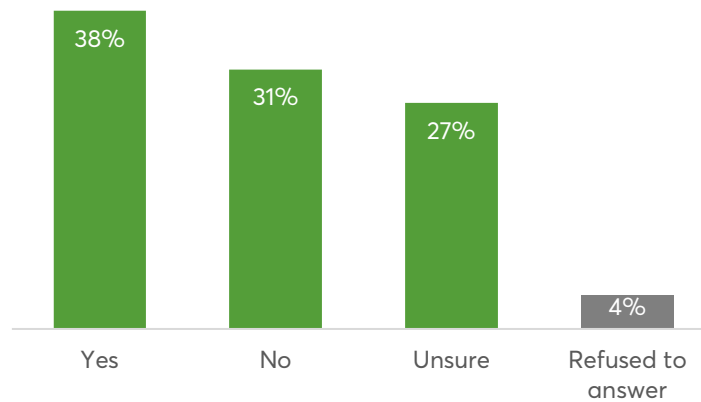


Router Security

About one in five Americans (22%) own a wireless router, as opposed to not having one or renting it from a cable provider.

38% of Americans who own wireless routers say they or someone in their household has changed the default password on their router. Just under a third (31%) say they have not. Twenty-seven percent are unsure if the password has been changed or not.

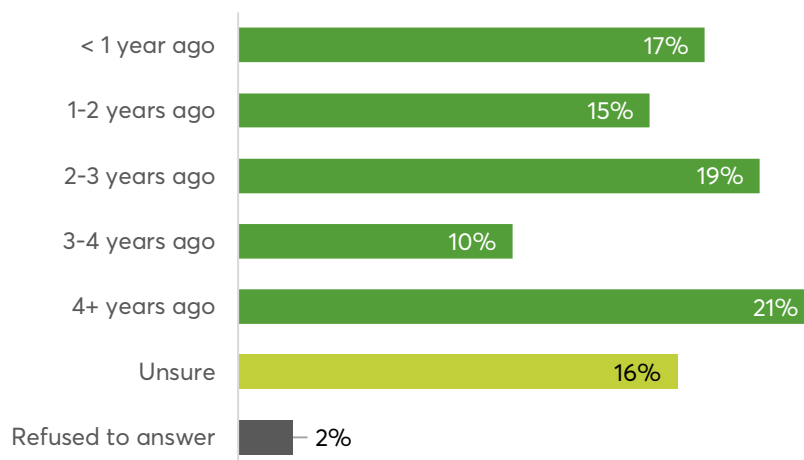
Have you ever changed your router password?



Base: Respondents who own their own router

The age of routers varies greatly. Among Americans who own a wireless router, roughly equal proportions say they bought it less than one year ago (17%), one to two years ago (15%), two to three years ago (19%), and that they are not sure how long ago (16%). Only one in ten says their router is three to four years old, but one in five (21%) says their router is at least four years old.

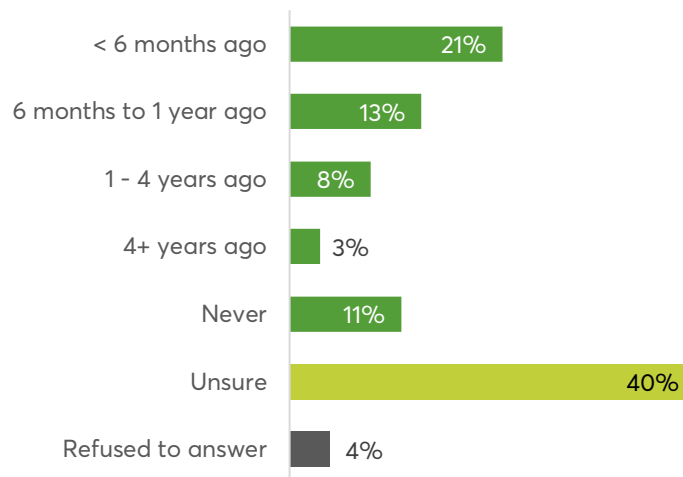
How long ago did you purchase your router?



Base: Respondents who own their own router

When asked when the firmware on their router was last updated, two-fifths of Americans are unsure, the most frequent response. Around a third (34%) say it was less than a year ago, with the majority of those saying less than six months. On the other hand, 11% say it has never been updated.

How long ago was the firmware updated?



Base: Respondents who own their own router

SUMMARY

Three-quarters of Americans have e-mail accounts and smartphones. Most of these people practice commonsense data protection, balancing convenience with privacy. For instance, more than half allow smartphone apps to track their location only when necessary for the app's purpose. **Fifty-nine percent claim they use different passwords for all online accounts, and almost as many (57%) say they never reuse their e-mail password for other accounts.** Also, the refusal rates—respondents telling the phone interviewer that they will not answer the question—are unusually high for these two questions, which could reflect **caution about revealing anything about their password(s).** On the other hand, more than **one in ten people say they use the same password for multiple accounts;** more than one in ten also say they **always re-use their e-mail password.** These people may be especially vulnerable to a data breach; a single piece of information unlocks multiple accounts.

Perhaps for that reason, about **half of Americans with the relevant accounts say they never use their Google and/or Facebook logins to log onto other sites,** choosing caution over convenience. There is no major difference in patterns of caution between the two services—perhaps surprisingly, given that Facebook has had well-publicized breaches and

Google has not. There is also no difference in popularity between Facebook (59% of respondents) and Google (60%) accounts.

Twenty-two percent of Americans have a smart speaker, like Amazon's Echo or Google's Google Home, in their household. **More than two-thirds of those who own one of these internet-connected devices have not changed what they talk about in front of it**, mostly because they are **not concerned about anyone hearing** what they have to say and because they **believe it only "listens" once you say its activation command**. Interestingly, "not concerned" could be interpreted as either "I don't think anyone will hear" or "I don't care if they hear." However, one in five smart speaker owners who has not changed their behavior says they have not changed what they say in front of the smart speaker because they **use the mute function** when discussing sensitive topics. In other words, they change the device's behavior rather than their own.

One in five Americans has a wireless router that they do not rent from a cable company. Forty percent of router owners are unsure whether or when the router's firmware was last updated. While more than **one in three have changed the password on their router from the default**, almost as many have not, and more than a quarter are not sure.

METHODOLOGY

This phone survey was fielded by SSRS on its Omnibus survey platform to a nationally representative sample of both landline and cell phone users. The survey was conducted from May 17 – May 26, 2019. Thirty respondents (approximately 3%) spoke Spanish. The rest spoke English.

A random-digit-dialing approach is used to sample landlines and cell phone numbers are randomly generated by computer. Cell phone interviews are conducted with whoever answered the phone, as cell phones are unlikely to be shared. Within each landline household, the interviewer asks to speak to the youngest adult (male or female, randomly selected for each) at home. SSRS provides a weighting variable that takes into account selection bias due to landline-vs-cellphone characteristics, race, age, sex, education, and region of the country.

After weighting, this sample is:

- 51% female
- Median age of 48 years old
- 62% non-Hispanic White; 12% non-Hispanic Black; 16% Hispanic (White, Black, and Unspecified)
- 28% high school graduate/GED; 20% four-year college graduate; 15% some college, no degree; 13% two-year degree
- Median income of at least \$50,000 but less than \$75,000