

Ready to forget: American attitudes toward the right to be forgotten

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ABSTRACT

This study uses an experimental design to examine whether and under what circumstances Americans support the so-called “right to be forgotten”—a legal right that allows citizens to petition to have information about them taken down from the Internet. Findings indicate people are most concerned about who will be in charge of executing such a right. Framing effects are also found for opinions regarding age of information and whether the law should apply only to minors. The results offer insights to help scholars, national policymakers, and international relations organizations to understand public attitudes in a dynamic sociotechnical policy landscape.

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Users in information societies produce extraordinary amounts of information about themselves and others.¹ Sensors collect and track users as they move through physical and virtual environments. Search engines and databases organize and index this information to make it easily retrieve, analyze, and utilize. Users rely on digital information sources to shop, navigate, job hunt, date, communicate with everyone from friends to government entities, get the news, and house memories.

Along with the development of new information technologies comes the need for new ways of understanding and protecting privacy (Jasanoff 2011; 2004), as they enable new modalities of communication and action that blur the foundational boundary between private and public information (Ohm 2014; Cohen 2013; Nissenbaum 2010; Solove 2004). The right to be forgotten, which obligates others to obscure or delete personal digital information upon request of the data subject, in the midst of this flux, has emerged as legal remedy in many information societies (Koops 2011; Ausloos 2011).

This controversial right has been established in a particular way in the European Union. It was incorporated into the proposal for a Data Protection Regulation (“DP Regulation”) in 2010, which was adopted in April 2016 and is slated to replace the 1995 Data Protection Directive (“DP Directive”) in May 2018 after a 2-year transition period (Ambrose 2013; Rosen 2012). The controversy reached a new level of public awareness in May 2014, when the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) handed down an opinion that had ripple effects around the world (Gilbert 2014; Travis and

Arthur 2014). The CJEU ruled that Google was obligated to recognize European citizens’ data protection rights to address inadequate, irrelevant, or excessive personal information in accordance with the 1995 DP Directive (*Google v. AEPD* 2014). In the year since the decision was handed down, Google received 254,271 requests to eliminate 922,638 URLs from search results and has removed 322,601 URLs, a rate of 41.3% of total requests made.²

In light of the staggering number of Europeans asking Google to remove their information, questions arose about whether Americans wanted and should have such a right (Falkenberg 2014; Luckerson 2014; Sidhu 2014). This question is particularly germane in the American information policymaking context, as Congress and the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) regularly cite public opinion research when drafting legislation and policy (e.g., Baker 2014; FTC 2012, 12, 18, c-6; H.R. 3481 2013). However, little is known about public opinion on this issue.

A handful of surveys (Software Advice 2014, online; Benson Strategy Group 2014, online; Survey Monkey 2014, online) on American attitudes toward the right to be forgotten have been conducted before and after the *Google v. AEPD* case but their results have not been published in full detail. Moreover, the surveys have not been directed at informing the policymaking process. For instance, a survey performed by Software Advice asked 500 American adults whether they believed search engines should be obligated to stop returning “old or irrelevant results about individuals if those individuals

complained” (Software Advice 2014, n.p.). The term “irrelevant,” however, does not have any specific legal meaning in American information policy.

To ascertain a more granular understanding of Americans’ stance with regard to a new right to be forgotten, we conducted an experimental study. The participants were presented a potential right to be forgotten law similar to the European version³ but with four elements varied: (1) entity authorized to determine the legitimacy of a right to be forgotten claim—the website where the information resides, the search engine directing users to the information, or a governmental agency, (2) extension of the right to only certain categories of individuals (children) or to everyone, (3) inclusion or exemption of criminal information, and (4) age of information before it is eligible for a take-down request—less than 1 year, 1 to 3 years, 4 to 10 years, or more than 10 years.

The rest of the article proceeds as follows. We start by providing an overview of the relevant research and presenting our hypotheses. We then explain our methodology. Thereafter we present our results and discuss them.

The right to be forgotten

The longevity of digital data has been thoroughly examined by Viktor Mayer-Schönberger in his 2009 book *Delete*. He argued that, to their detriment, information societies have moved from a world where forgetting was the default and remembering the challenge to a world where near-perfect memory is easy and important forms of forgetting are difficult (Mayer-Schönberger 2009). Although Mayer-Schönberger discouraged reliance on law to shift us back to a default of forgetting, the right to be forgotten was placed firmly on the political agenda shortly after.

The right to be forgotten has an established history in many European countries, most commonly understood to prevent someone from referencing another in relation to her criminal past (Ambrose and Ausloos 2013). The right is tied not only to social goals of rehabilitation, but also to cultural ideas of informational self-determination and privacy (Ambrose and Ausloos 2013). It is important to note that the right to be forgotten is distinct from defamation laws, which are contingent on the inaccuracy of the information; the right to be forgotten is a right that specifically addresses information that is accurate.

The development of a digital right to be forgotten was explicitly stated as a goal of the European Commission when it declared intentions to update the 1995 European Union Data Protection Directive (DP Directive) with the Data Protection Regulation (Reding 2010). Subsequently, the right to be forgotten was considered in Article 17 of the 2012 draft regulation and later adopted and retitled

“the right to erasure” (European Parliament 2013). The language of the law and its exceptions are vague and engender a great deal of uncertainty.

In May 2014, the CJEU made determinations that clarify the relevant articles in the directive (Article 14(a) allows data subjects to object to the processing of data relating to her and Article 12(b) allows data subjects to access their data). Google’s search engine was declared a data controller, because it determines the purpose and means of processing personal data by finding, indexing, temporarily storing, and making available Web content (*Google v. AEPD* 2014). As such, Google must comply with the Directive (*Google v. AEPD* 2014). Personal information that is “inaccurate, inadequate, irrelevant, or excessive” for the purposes of the data collection does not comply with the directive, so a data subject may request that such information be addressed (*Google v. AEPD* 2014).

Meanwhile in the United States, laws with regard to data protection are sparse (Solve and Hartzog 2014, 600; Cohen 2013; Newman 2008; 2013). Without a designated data protection agency like those created by the DP Directive, the Federal Trade Commission is the main venue for most privacy policymaking. The courts mainly rule on the constitutionality of regulations, legislation, and government actions (Solove and Hartzog 2014; Bamberger and Mulligan 2010). The FTC has managed to play an active role, even though its authority is limited. It engages in privacy policymaking on the basis of section 5 of the FTC Act, which prohibits “unfair or deceptive practices” (Solove and Hartzog 2014; Bamberger and Mulligan 2010). The agency therefore is limited to enforcement of unfair or deceptive data practices, generally tied to the terms of service drafted and published by the data collectors and controllers, and drafting policy recommendations and reports (Solove and Hartzog 2014; Bamberger and Mulligan 2010).

Americans can utilize one of the following four torts when an invasion of privacy occurs or information is inappropriately shared: intrusion upon seclusion, public disclosure of embarrassing private facts, publicity that places a person in a false light, and appropriation of name or likeness (Prosser 1960; American Law Institute 1977, § 652B, § 652D, § 652E, § 652C). Weakened by the freedom of expression, none of these torts addresses the problem that the right to be forgotten is intended to solve—the damage done by information that is properly collected and distributed but that has dwindling public value (Ambrose 2013; Richards 2011). Individuals injured by false information may bring a defamation claim, which requires a false statement of fact about another made to an unprivileged third party (American Law Institute 1977, § 558). Notably, though, in American

law injunction relief for a speech-related claim is considered an unconstitutional prior restraint, meaning remedies for a speech claim are solely monetary (Ardia 2013). The Second Circuit's January 2015 decision is the most clarifying decision to date. The court found no right to have information taken down (*Martin v. Hearst* 2015). In short, it is very challenging to bring a claim against another individual or entity for sharing truthful personal information in the United States.

However, there has been legislative activity on right to be forgotten-like laws. Nationally, Senator Edward Markey introduced a bill in 2013 called the Do Not Track Kids Act that would have created an “eraser button” for children age 15 years and under (H.R. 3481 2013). California's legislature was the first legislative body to pass a right to be forgotten statute, which allows minors in the state to delete information they themselves have published (SB-568 2013). A number of states have enacted laws that make charging of fees by “mugshot” websites for removal of booking photos and arrest information illegal. Other states are considering similar laws (Ward 2014).

The United States has long provided for second chances and extends special forms of informational forgiveness in the context of credit scoring, bankruptcy, and criminal history. Limited speech and data practices concerning children and invasions of privacy over time are available as well (Ambrose, Friess, and Van Matre 2012). This background and also legislative efforts so far suggest that some limited version of the right to be forgotten is possible in the United States.

Whether Americans want a right to be forgotten and what version they prefer are key questions. To get an informed reading on American public opinion on these questions, we focus on four different aspects of the law.

First, we consider who should be in charge of considering and executing a take-down request in the United States. In the European Union, the recent ruling applies to search engines, and the directive and regulation extend the right to be forgotten to other data controllers, such as websites. However, others have proposed that in the United States empowering a governmental agency might be a more appropriate means by which to resolve take-down questions (Jones 2015; House of Lords 2014; Masing 2014). Generally, American trust in the government has gone down over the last several decades (Pew Research Center 2014), which suggests that Americans would prefer private entities to handle this. For this reason, we hypothesize: *The support for the right to be forgotten will be higher when either websites or search engines are in charge of execution, rather than a government agency (H1).*

Second, we consider who should be protected. As mentioned earlier, the legislative efforts in the United

States have focused on minors (H.R. 3481 2013; S.B. 568 2013). Furthermore, historically privacy laws in the United States have had narrow focus and apply to classes of individuals (e.g., children, victims, nonpublic figures) and situations (e.g., credit information older than 7 years, court documents that have been sealed, family information during employment interviews). For this reason, we hypothesize: *The support for the right to be forgotten will be higher if it focuses on the rights of children (H2).*

Third, we consider whether criminal information should be covered. This warrants close attention because, unlike European countries, the United States does not have an established history of placing restrictions on referencing someone's criminal record. On one hand, individuals are likely to want to exercise the ability to take down old or embarrassing criminal information. On the other hand, as a public, we have a desire to know about the presence of dangerous or deviant individuals in our community (Levenson, Brannon, Fortney, and Baker 2007). This is, of course, true in all societies, but each balances these demands differently. Given the history in the United States and the much broader appeal of excluding criminal information, whereas the desire to rid oneself of old criminal information is limited to those who have a criminal record at all, we hypothesize: *The support for the right to be forgotten will be higher if it excludes criminal information (H3).*

Fourth, we consider the age of the information before it is eligible for a take-down request. Because information can be uploaded instantaneously on the Internet and can stay accessible for varying and often long periods of time (Ambrose 2013), the age of the information to which the right to be forgotten is applicable might also be a factor. We hypothesize: *The support for the right to be forgotten will be higher if there is no limit with regard to age of the information for which a take-down request can be made (H4).*

An additional consideration, often overlooked in the discussion of the right to be forgotten, and new laws more broadly, is the extent to which framing the law in a particular way is likely to affect support (Chong and Druckman 2007). Frames help people to make sense of an issue—they “organize everyday reality” (Tuchman 1978, 193). They can also influence public opinion on that issue, especially when the media, elected officials, and other elites offer a consistent frame (Zaller 1992). The impact of elites, and of information more broadly, tends to be especially strong for new or novel issues on which people have limited information (Zaller 1992; Bode and Vraga 2015). The right to be forgotten is just such an issue. We highlight this general point because elites are the only ones currently discussing the right to

be forgotten (Powles and Larsen 2015). For this reason, we anticipate the way that the law is framed—which elements of it are highlighted—will impact people’s opinions of not only the law, but also the specific attributes of the law they prefer. We therefore hypothesize: *The subjects are more likely to show support for conditions that correspond to the version of the law they were exposed to (H5).*

We do recognize that this hypothesis could come into conflict with the previous four hypotheses. In that case, we settle the competing hypotheses with empirical testing.

Method

To test these expectations, we fielded a fully crossed three (who is in charge: website, search engine, or government agency) by two (applies to children or applies to everyone) by two (includes or excludes criminal information) by two (includes a reference to age of information or does not) experiment.⁴ By experimentally manipulating the text of a potential new law, we get a clearer understanding of what elements actually matter for support (rather than just asking subjects which elements are important to them).

Subjects ($N = 1380$) were recruited from Amazon’s Mechanical Turk service. It recruits workers who receive small amounts of money for completing small online tasks, including participation in online surveys and experiments. Turk samples have been shown to be fairly reliable, particularly for experimental research (Buhrmester, Kwang, and Gosling 2011; Casler, Bickel, and Hackett 2013). However, since this provides neither a representative nor a random sample, results should be interpreted with appropriate caution.

Subjects were restricted to those living in the United States, and to those with at least 500 hits with at least a 95% approval rate (as recommended by Peer, Vosgerau, and Acquisti 2014). In total, 1380 surveys were completed. The sample was relatively diverse (76% Caucasian, 10% African American, 7.5% Asian American, with non-mutually-exclusive race categories) and roughly evenly distributed between genders (52.9% male, 46.3% female; nonbinary gender options were also offered), with a mean age of 36 years old. The sample did skew toward a Democratic tendency—48% of respondents identified as Democrats, and only 19% identified as Republicans.

Subjects gave consent to participate, answered several initial batteries of questions, were exposed to the proposed law (the experimental manipulation), and answered some final questions on their opinions about the law. The text of the manipulation is included in the appendix.

Measures

The key outcome variable of interest is support for the proposed law. Here we are not interested in the overall support for the law, but rather how different manipulated elements of the law affect support for it. This was measured with the following item: “Given what you’ve just read, to what extent would you support or oppose this law?” (1 through 5, strongly oppose to strongly support, mean = 3.70, standard deviation = 1.01).

Other outcomes of interest measured support for specific elements of the law, including measures asking who should be in charge of executing a right to be forgotten, to whom the law should apply, and how old information should be before being eligible for removal.

The variable measuring who should be in charge of executing the law asked, “In your opinion, if a law like this law were passed, who should ideally be responsible for determining whether a claim is valid?” Answer choices (multiple choices were allowed, and the order in which answer choices appear was randomized to prevent any bias associated with which answers are presented first or last; see Ayidiya and McClendon 1990; Salant and Dillman 1994) included “website where the information was found” (35.7%), “government agency designed to handle such claims” (60.1%), “search engine directing users to the information” (24.6%), and “other” (15%).

The measure capturing to whom the law should apply asked, “In your opinion, if a law like this law were passed, ideally who or what should the law apply to? Please read all answer choices before choosing.” Answer choices (again the order in which they were presented was randomized) included “everyone” (38.3%), “everyone except public figures” (13%), “everyone except public figures and criminal information” (28%), “only minors” (15%), and “other” (2.4%).

The measure for age of information eligible for take-down requests asked, “In your opinion, how old should information have to be before it could be requested to be taken down?” Answer choices included “less than one year” (64%), “one to three years” (21.8%), “four to ten years” (8.2%), or “more than ten years” (5.9%).

Findings

Analysis of the experimental manipulations was done through use of one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA).⁵ For the main effects of the experimental conditions, the outcome variable is the overall support for a law instilling the right to be forgotten, with the independent variable reflecting the type of manipulation to which the subject was exposed.

Table 1. Analysis of variance: Support of the law by condition.

	<i>F</i>	Partial eta squared	Significance
Who is in charge	7.18	0.01	$p < .01$
Children	0.26	0.01	$p < .61$
Criminal information	0.73	0.01	$p < .40$
Time frame	0.78	0.01	$p < .38$

Main effects

We first looked at each main manipulation—who should be in charge, whether it applies to children or to everyone, whether criminal information is included or excluded, and whether the age of information is mentioned—independently. Results are shown in Table 1

Interestingly, although it was expected that each of these manipulations would affect opinions about the right to be forgotten, only one actually did so in the case of our sample. Subjects did not vary in their support of the law depending on their exposure to manipulations that included or excluded children (H2), included or excluded criminal information (H3), or included or excluded age of information (H4). The only manipulation that produced effects on support for a law instilling the right to be forgotten was the one affecting who would be in charge of executing take-down requests (H1). Subjects exposed to a condition in which a government agency was in charge were less likely to support the law than those exposed to versions that placed either search engines or websites in charge (there was no difference in support for the law between those exposed to the search engine and website conditions). Differences in mean support of the law between these conditions can be seen in Figure 1

This is particularly interesting, given that, as indicated in descriptive statistics earlier, subjects were overall most likely to prefer that a government agency be in charge of executing the law (at 60.1%, this was far more than support for websites or search engines). However, when

exposed to this preferred situation, support for the law goes down. Needless to say, this is a fascinating paradox that is discussed further in the following.

Framing effects

Beyond determining the main elements of the law that people seem to care about most, to what extent are specific opinions on the law subject to framing effects? That is, are people more likely to think about the law in the terms in which it was framed to them (H5)?

The answer is a resounding yes (see Table 2). In almost every case, the framing of the law matched subject preferences for the law. People who see a law reflecting old or outdated information think information should be older in order to be eligible for take-downs. People who see a law where a website is in charge are more likely to say the website should be in charge, people who see a law where a search engine in charge are more likely to prefer that, and people who see a government agency in charge are more likely to want the agency in charge (though again, they are also less likely to support the law in general). People who see a law that applies only to children are more likely to prefer a law that applies only to children. Indeed, the only exception we found was for the inclusion of criminal information, where it did not matter whether the law the subjects read about included or excluded criminal information—either way, fewer than 30% of subjects wanted a law that explicitly excluded criminal information.

Discussion

Previous surveys have not tested how the right to be forgotten should be formulated and implemented, focusing instead on whether the right should be limited to certain categories of people like nonpublic figures and children.

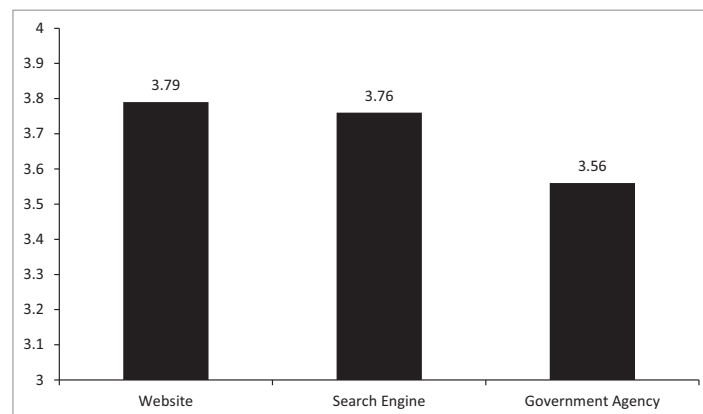
**Figure 1.** Mean support for the law by condition.

Table 2. Framing effects – Analysis of variance: Support of specific aspects of the law by condition.

	<i>F</i>	Partial eta squared	Significance
Website	13.34	0.02	$p < .01$
Search engine	59.76	0.08	$p < .01$
Government agency	11.58	0.02	$p < .01$
Children	136.86	0.09	$p < .01$
Criminal information	1.00	0.01	$p < .32$
Time frame	91.89	0.06	$p < .01$

We similarly found that those sampled did not believe that the right should be limited to particular groups. There was also greater support for a European-style take-down system that relies on search engines to make determinations, rather than putting a government agency in charge. Since trust in the government in the United States has declined substantially over the last several decades (Jones 2014; Pew Research Center 2014), this finding is understandable. If people do not trust the government, they do not trust its agent to handle this important task. Future research might consider what individual elements, including trust in government and trust in corporations, predict this outcome.

However, there is also a paradox presented by this finding. Overall, respondents want a governmental agency to make the determinations, but when presented with a law including that language, we found less overall support for the law. This suggests that, ideally, government agencies would not be involved in determination of the legitimacy of a right to be forgotten claim. It is worth noting, however, that this is a relatively small change in support—only about 5%—so policymakers should tread carefully, and not base an entire course of action on this finding. The small change, combined with overall support for the role of government agencies, suggests public ambivalence. In general, the public prefers the government to take charge, but when the government does so (at least hypothetically), it turns the public off to the law.

We considered the possibility that the majority of respondents selecting “government agency designed to handle such claims” might be due to a left-leaning sample, as 48% of our sample identified as Democrat. There is a partisan difference in terms of preference of who should be in charge—Democrats (67.5%) are more likely than Independents (61%) and Republicans (55.8%) to prefer a government agency ($\chi^2 = 11.69, p < .01$). When we estimate the analysis considering the effect of who is in charge while holding partisan identification constant, though, the effect remains. Both Democrats and Republicans are less likely to support a law when a government agency is in charge of it.⁶

There is also no doubt that framing plays an important role in influencing responses. With only one exception (criminal information), we found powerful effects of framing for all of our different manipulations. It is possible that criminal information has too much preexisting emotion associated with it, preventing this framing from being effective. Emotion might further explain the null finding in terms of support for the law—people’s preferences regarding criminal information may just not be very malleable.

While the European model has largely framed the American discussion on the right to be forgotten, we point to other elements worth considering. American policymakers wishing to implement a different variation of the right to be forgotten could use the findings of this study as a starting point for a national conversation.

Though these findings are important, this study is admittedly limited. First, we are relying on a convenience sample. Although this has been shown to be a reasonable choice, particularly for experimental studies as we have pursued here (Buhrmester, Kwang, and Gosling 2011; Casler, Bickel, and Hackett 2013), our sample does raise issues. Mechanical Turk workers are likely to be heavier users of the Internet and more aware of disclosing personal information online, given that many of them do so on a daily basis as part of their Mechanical Turk tasks. We also cannot speak to certain personal characteristics (whether respondents have children, whether they have a criminal record) that could influence their opinions about the law. Future research should retest our study with additional measures on representative samples to ensure that our findings are robust.

It is also possible that our stimuli were somewhat weak. We chose to make the description as realistic as possible, and thus refrained from heavy-handed alterations that would have strongly emphasized the manipulations multiple times. As shown in the appendix, our manipulations were relatively subtle. It is worth noting that the manipulation for which we do find support—who is in charge of executing the law—was perhaps the strongest, featuring three separate mentions of who was in charge, whereas other conditions included only one or two. However, given the consistency of our framing effects, we are confident that the manipulations were noticed⁷—they just did not affect overall support for the law.

We also lacked a pure control condition, which would have allowed greater confidence in the extent to which the manipulations affected opinion about the law. Although we are able to compare across conditions, giving us a great deal of understanding about the differences between the different versions, we have less to say about

how any exposure to a proposed law affects opinion about the right to be forgotten more broadly.

Still, this is an important step in better understanding the possibilities of the right to be forgotten in the American context. This is the first study to go beyond simple measures of support or opposition, and to determine what elements actually matter to Americans when considering such a right. We add both nuance—a better understanding of specific factors in the law’s framing—and practicality—this gives concrete information about American public opinion to policymakers who are currently struggling with whether and how to adopt such a law.

However, public opinion is not the only important element for policymakers to consider when examining different possible implementations of a right to be forgotten. Although public attitudes are important in the area of privacy laws, which are based on societal expectations, norms, and conflicting interests, policymakers must also consider the constitutionality of any potential law. Even if a large portion of the population wants to obligate another party to engage in certain information practice, other Constitutional rights and interests like freedom of expression and access to information may prevent legislators from offering such a legal claim. Each condition poses different constitutional challenges.

The conditions related to who should be fielding requests and making decisions are procedurally vital and have various benefits and limitations. However, in the United States, intermediaries like search engines and platform operators have an extraordinary amount of protection from liability for content placed on the Web, based on Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act (47 USC § 230). Section 230 protects online intermediaries hosting or republishing content from an array of legal claims ranging from defamation (*Batzel v. Smith* 2003) to child trafficking (*Doe No. 1 v. Backpage.com* 2015) that might otherwise create legal liability and stall or prevent innovation. Thus, platform operators would likely not be held liable for ignoring the right to be forgotten claims. Instead, platforms like Google currently direct injured parties to bring claims against the speaker herself, which is often problematic in light of anonymous online communication (Citron 2009). When a site produces and publishes its own content, it does not receive immunity under Section 230 and making requests directly to the site would be possible, but would run into political oversight problems and constitutional hurdles that generally prevent injunctive relief for information claims.

Section 230 serves as an important distinction between American and European Union (EU) law; EU

law holds intermediaries liable for the content posted by users. Two reasons to allow users to go directly to sites and search engines are that requests made by users to a government agency are cumbersome and can serve as a further invasion of privacy. Moreover, use of a government agency may circumvent Section 230, but obscuring access to information could trigger strong First Amendment challenges, and there is also no obvious agency for taking on this task.

People’s preferences, as understood by this study, conflict somewhat with established American law, particularly the First Amendment. Whether these preferences will move political players to disrupt established principles and institutions will be a matter of politics and Constitutional interpretation.

Notes

1. Every second, Facebook users share around 41,000 pieces of content (Internet Live Stats 2015), Twitter users tweet 9,306 times, Instagram users post 2,161 photos, YouTube users view 101,738 videos and upload over an hour of video, email users send 2,399,165 messages, and Google performs 49,060 searches (Salzman 2015).
2. As of May 13, 2015, according to Google’s report European Privacy Requests for Search Removals (retrieved from <https://www.google.com/transparencyreport/removals/europeprivacy/?hl=en>).
3. Note that the same right is proposed to Americans, but other similar versions are also presented because of the differences in U.S. and EU regulatory systems. For reasons discussed in the next section, the EU version is not easily implementable in the United States without significant changes to the legal system. The EU version is quite broad, and understanding American attitudes toward specifics within the EU version will be important to crafting any such right within the United States.
4. See appendix for a full list of each condition and the manipulated text.
5. We also tested for interactions between conditions using two-way ANOVA. Because none of the interactions were significant, they have been omitted from this article but are available upon request from the authors.
6. We also tested for differences by gender and by age. Gender is positively related to support for the law, $t = -3.98$, $p < .01$ —the mean for females (3.82) is slightly higher than for males (3.60) (we also offered transgender and other options, but these were too small to allow confidence in interpreting results: 8 and 2 respondents, respectively). Age is not related to support for the law ($r = .046$, $p = .09$). When we analyze differences in conditions while also accounting for age or gender, the results persist, with no observed interactions. These additional analyses are withheld for space reasons, but are available from the authors upon request.
7. Manipulation checks confirm this—strong majorities in most cases accurately recalled the substance of the law. Details of manipulation checks are available upon request.

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Appendix

List of all 24 conditions

1. Search engine, everyone, criminal information, time
2. Search engine, everyone, criminal information, no time
3. Search engine, everyone, no criminal information, time
4. Search engine, everyone, no criminal information, no time
5. Search engine, kids, criminal information, time
6. Search engine, kids, criminal information, no time
7. Search engine, kids, no criminal information, time
8. Search engine, kids, no criminal information, no time
9. Website, everyone, criminal information, time
10. Website, everyone, criminal information, no time
11. Website, everyone, no criminal information, time
12. Website, everyone, no criminal information, no time
13. Website, kids, criminal information, time
14. Website, kids, criminal information, no time
15. Website, kids, no criminal information, time
16. Website, kids, no criminal information, no time
17. Agency, everyone, criminal information, time
18. Agency, everyone, criminal information, no time
19. Agency, everyone, no criminal information, time
20. Agency, everyone, no criminal information, no time
21. Agency, kids, criminal information, time
22. Agency, kids, criminal information, no time
23. Agency, kids, no criminal information, time
24. Agency, kids, no criminal information, no time

Text

Please read the following text about a proposed law carefully. To ensure you have time to read the whole thing, the “next” button will not display for 35 seconds.

The US Congress is considering passing a law to address negative impacts of [children’s] personal information found online.

The law would require the operator of a [site/search engine] to delete or otherwise prevent public access to [old or outdated] personal information [of a minor under 18] when the subject of the information informs the operator of his or her objection, except when the individual is a public figure (celebrities, politicians, etc.), [including/excluding] information related to criminal activity.

Under the law, individuals who object to their personal information being available online will submit their objections to the [site/search engine/new government agency in charge of executing this law] to assert their claim, where the validity of the objection will be assessed. If the [site/search engine/new government agency in charge of executing this law] determines the objection is valid, the [site/search engine] must take the information in question down. If the user disputes the [site’s/search engine’s/ government agency’s] determination, the claim may be pursued in state court.

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