

Clearview AI under fire for breaking privacy laws in Europe

Article

Privacy groups in Austria, France, Greece, Italy, and the UK have taken legal action against facial recognition company Clearview AI for breaking EU privacy laws **per** Bloomberg.

Clearview AI scraped more than 3 billion personal photos from Facebook, YouTube, Venmo, and millions of other websites. Its permanent searchable database is accessed by over **2,400 police agencies** including the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

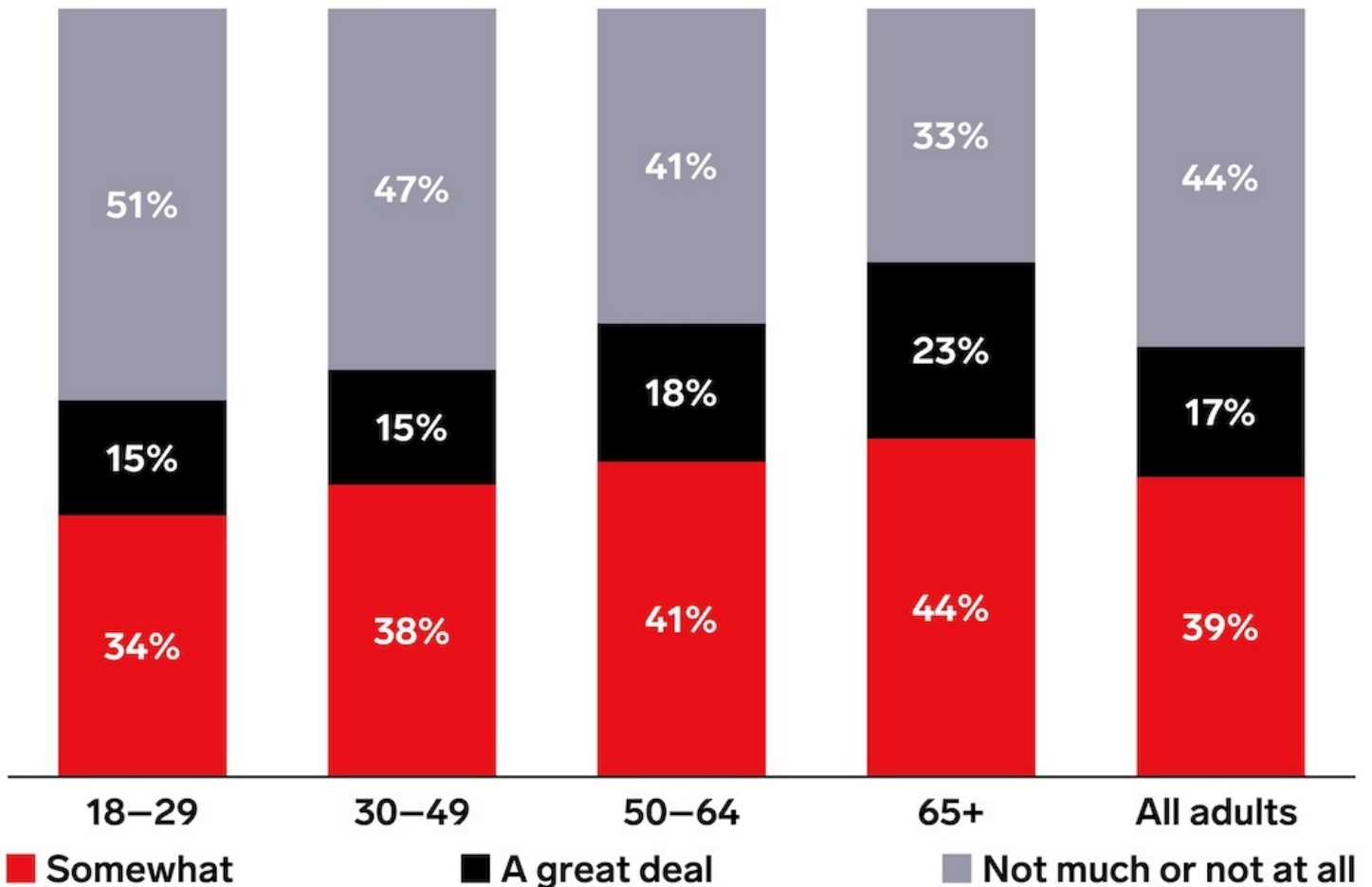
Clearview stated that it “has never had any contracts with any EU customer and is not currently available to EU customers.” While this may be true, **Privacy International** said that Clearview AI saves copies of public photos of people’s faces without their consent. The company uses an algorithm to extract unique features in the human face to create a trackable “faceprint.” The EU has stringent personal privacy standards including the GDPR and the **Right to Be Forgotten**, which are in conflict with Clearview AI’s methods.

The action from European groups builds on Clearview’s history of privacy-focused legal issues. The company pulled its presence from Canada last year after privacy protection authorities **opened an investigation** to assess whether Clearview AI scraped and analyzed personal data without consent. Civil liberties activists in California **filed** a lawsuit in March against Clearview AI, claiming the company “engages in the widespread collection of residents’ images and biometric information without notice or consent.” Similarly, the ACLU **sued** Clearview in Illinois last year for violating that state’s biometric privacy act, leading Clearview AI to **stop selling** its product to private US companies.

Facial recognition technology may be a useful law enforcement tool, but selling access to people’s personal images without their consent is unethical and constitutes an existential threat to personal privacy. Clearview AI argues that its technology has helped law enforcement agencies. The company saw **a 26% spike** in searches after the January 6 attack on the US Capitol. Police used Clearview AI’s service to identify rioters, and made one potential match within the first hour. Facial recognition technology companies like Clearview AI will continue to get pushback from global governments and privacy groups until they either allow people to opt out of their databases or require consent for storing images.

Less Than Half of US Young Adults Trust Law Enforcement to Use Facial Recognition Responsibly

% of US adults' trust in law enforcement to use facial recognition, by age group



Source: Pew Research Center, 2019

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