



Nortal GovTech  
research

# Trust lacking in digital public services

Thanks to consumer expectations driven by a world of one-click commerce, governments will eventually be required to embrace digital technologies in public services. There are of course obstacles to doing so, but they are not technology—the main barrier is trust.



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Thanks to private-sector products and services offered by companies like Uber, DoorDash, Netflix, Amazon, and others, consumers have come to rely on and trust digital-only interactions with product- and service providers. Working with Censuswide, the London-based market research consultancy, 4,000 subjects in the UK and Canada were polled concerning their future expectations for digitally-based government services, the digital perception gap between private- and public-sector capabilities, as well as the amount of time they currently spend engaged getting government services.

Respondents made it clear that they spend too much time obtaining healthcare, registering a car, or paying taxes. And they do expect governments to one day soon embrace digital technology in these public services. This finding was not surprising. However, the barriers identified were. While all respondents knew that technology offers a solution, few felt government could be trusted to offer it. Private companies, they felt, were more trustworthy.

Since Nortal actively develops digital public-sector services for governments around the globe, we were keenly interested to get the facts, which might help us better develop solutions that bridge this trust gap. As a potential partner, we thought you might benefit from seeing them, too.



An aerial photograph of a road intersection in a dense forest. The road is paved and has yellow double lines. The trees are mostly green with some yellowing, suggesting autumn. The text "Fast findings" is overlaid in white on the left side of the image.

Fast findings





# Citizens expect government to go digital within two years—but they trust private companies more

Since we live in a world where many interactions are only a click away, we wondered how people feel about the level of digitalization we are accustomed to from Uber or Amazon applied to healthcare, registering a car, or paying taxes. For the purposes of this research, digitalization was defined as never having to visit a physical office, with services are personalized to your needs and available to you when you need it with just a click of a button.

We also wanted to identify how much time people spend engaging with government services, what governments can learn from private technology companies when it comes to providing user-friendly services that meet expectations digitally, and the expectation around future demand for digital services for citizens in the UK and Canada.

Respondents reported to Censuswide that the fast, efficient, and secure standards for digital interactions that private companies like Amazon or Uber offer are not out of reach for government. A few illustrative numbers:

Two in three  
citizens of the UK



66%

want to see the government deliver a fully digital suite of online public services, with an overwhelming majority (85%) wanting this shift to occur within the next two years.

The vast  
majority of Canadians



70%

want fully digital public services, and 87% expect this within the next two years.

But while the expectations are present, trust is not:

66%

Two thirds of UK citizens polled want fully online public digital services, but

31%

one-third do not trust the government to deliver them.

30%

Almost one-third of UK respondents said they are more likely to share personal data with private sector companies than the government for personalized services.

48%

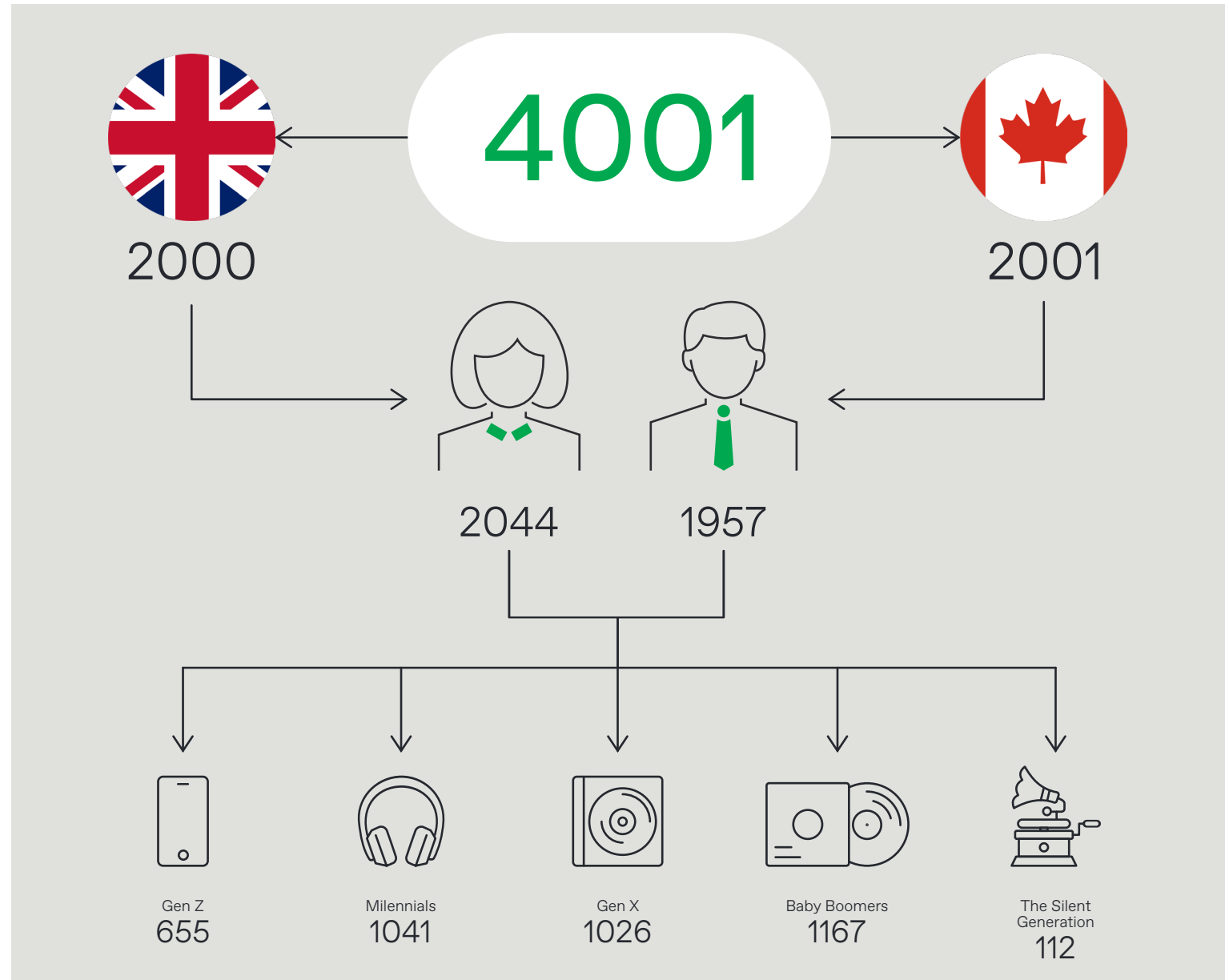
of all Canadians cite security and privacy concerns as their biggest fear in the shift to digital public services.



# Methodology in brief

The research was conducted by Censuswide, the London-based market research consultancy, with 2,001 nationally representative consumers over the age of 16 across Canada, from March 15 to March 19, 2024. Over the same period, survey data was collected from a sample of 2,000 nationally representative respondents in the United Kingdom. Censuswide abides by and employs members of the Market Research Society which is based on the ESOMAR principles and are members of The British Polling Council.

The focus on digital public services, encompasses activities such as accessing benefits, filing taxes, and registering for permits. A fully digital public service was likened to the seamless digital experiences offered by private sector entities like Uber, DoorDash, and Netflix, which entails services devoid of physical visits or paper forms, tailored to individual needs, and accessible with the click of a button.





# Main conclusions

Citizens want digital now, Millennials want them yesterday

# Citizens want fully-digitized public services soon

**85%**

of UK respondents want fully-digitalized public services within the next two years.

**70%**

of Canadians demand fully digital public services, and

**87%**

expect this by 2026.





# Problems currently take too long to resolve

**29%**

of UK respondents believe issues take too long to resolve.

UK respondents reported they spent on average a total of

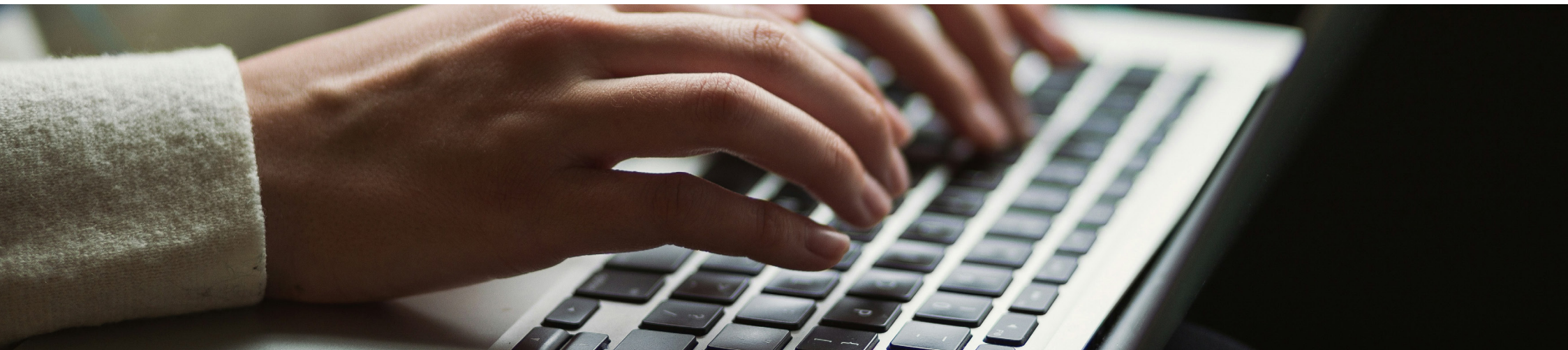
**12 hours**

engaging with government public services in the last year.

The average Canadian spent

**28 hours**

engaging with government services in the last year.





# Younger generations are more critical

Generation Z (born 1997-2012) and Millennials are most critical of government services and need for more modern tech.

In Canada, younger generations are most critical of government service, with 16% of Generation Z finding room for improvement.



# Citizens skeptical of government's ability to deliver

**66%**

of Brits want fully-online public digital services, a full third

**31%**

are not convinced government can deliver.

When it comes to personalized services,

**30%**

of UK respondents say they are more likely to share personal data with private sector companies than the government.

**48%**

of Canadian respondents cite security and privacy concerns as their biggest fear in the shift to digital public services.

UK citizens and Canadians report being

**10 times**

more likely to give their data in exchange for a Netflix recommendation, than for better benefits in a public service.



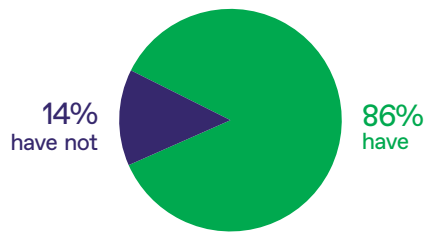


Category-specific  
conclusions



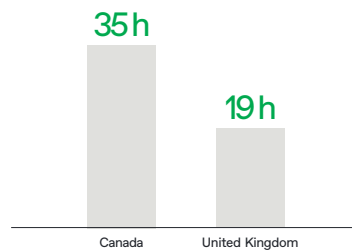
# Engagement

Engagement with the government in the past 12 months



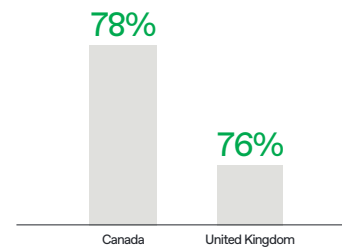
86% of consumers in both countries engaged with government over the past 12 months in connection with taxes, business, car and motor, and benefits.

Time spent using government services



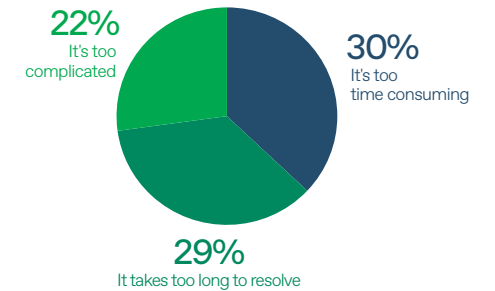
The average Canadian spent 35 hours in past 12 months using government services, the annual equivalent of 99,000 hours\* of lost time. The average UK citizen spent 19 hours in the past 12 months, the annual equivalent of 75,000 years\*\* of lost time.

Citizens spent up to 6 hours dealing with the government



76% of UK citizens and 78% of Canadians spent up to six hours dealing with the government in the past year.

Main dissatisfaction in the current system



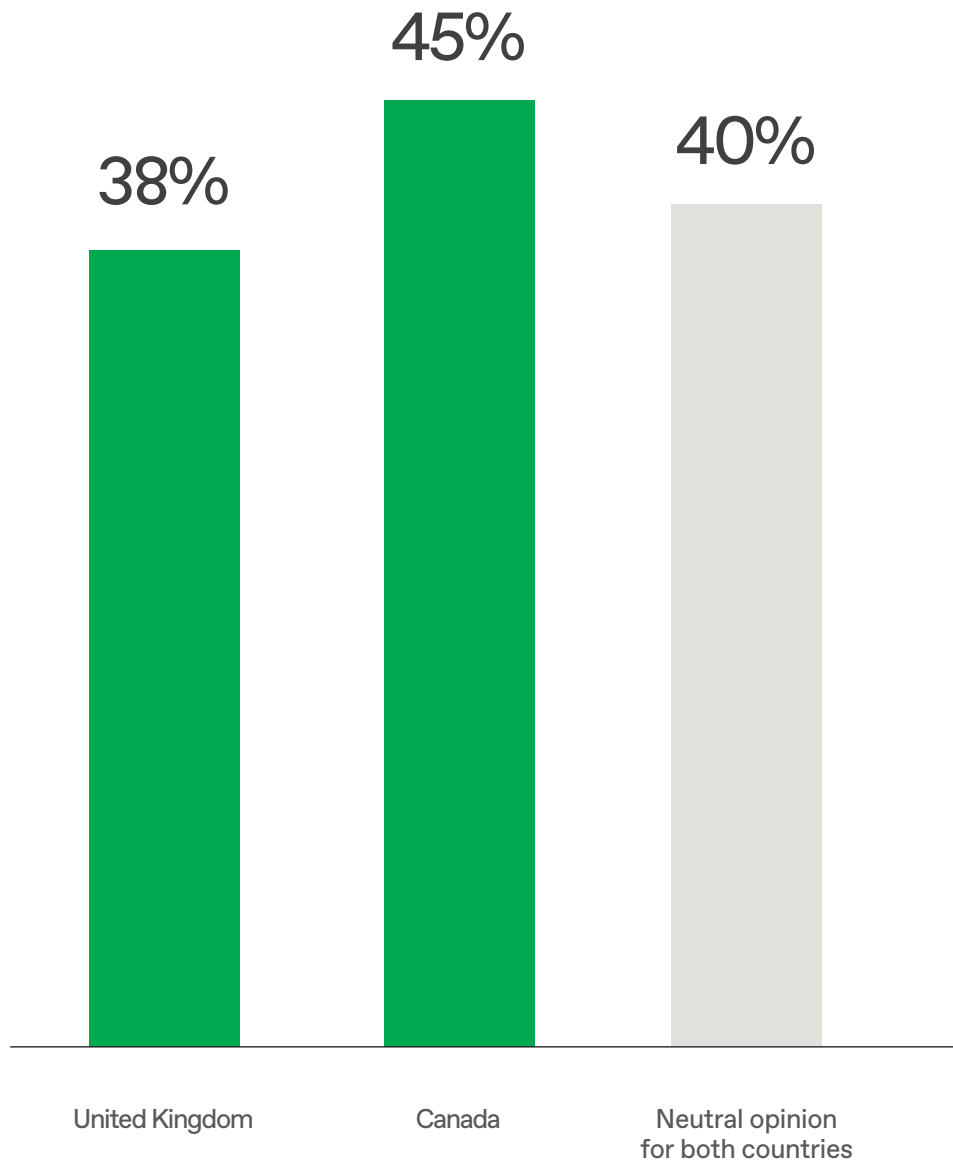
If respondent expressed dissatisfaction in the quality of public services, the main three complaints were:

- too time consuming (30%)
- it takes too long to resolve (29%)
- and it's too complicated (22%).





# Expectations of speed



**38%**

of UK citizens expect the government to adopt speed similar to services offered by Uber, DoorDash, Just-eat, Netflix, and Amazon.

**45%**

of Canadians expect the government to adopt speed. (40% of Canadian respondents have expectations of the government in simplifying services.)

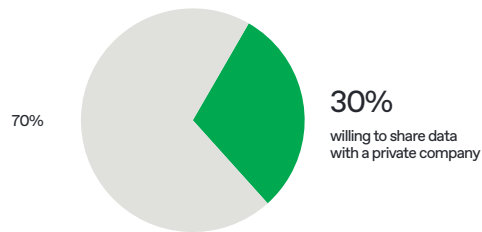
**40%**

of respondents in both the UK and Canada feel neutral at best about government services currently available online.

# Trust in government, private companies

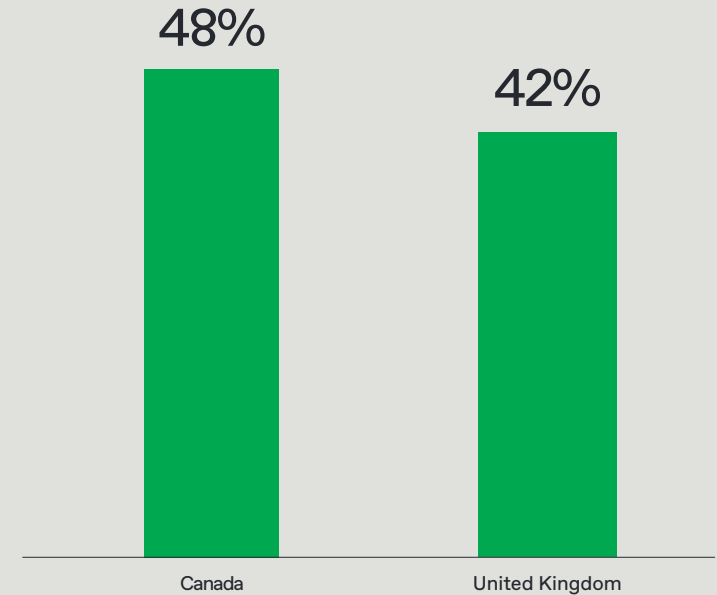
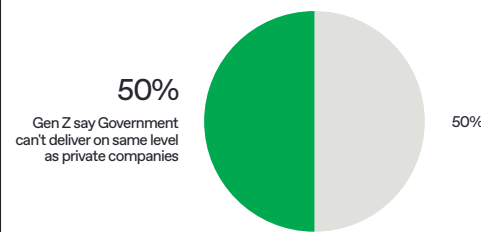
## 30%

of UK citizens say they would be more likely to share data with a private company than with the government.



## 50%

of Gen Z respondents in the UK say government cannot offer same level of digitalization as private companies.



In Canada, concerns over security and privacy were highest

## 48%

Nearly a third (29%) said they do not trust the government to deliver.

In the UK, concerns over security and privacy were highest

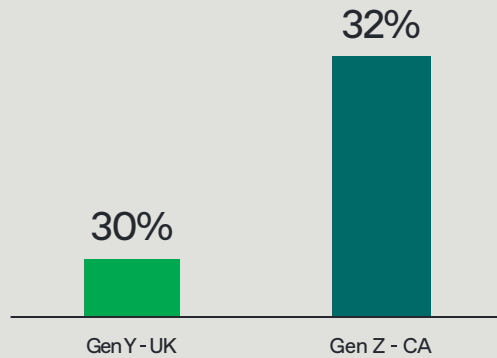
## 42%



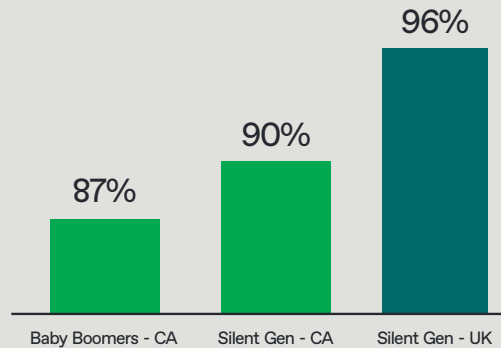


# Generations and expectations

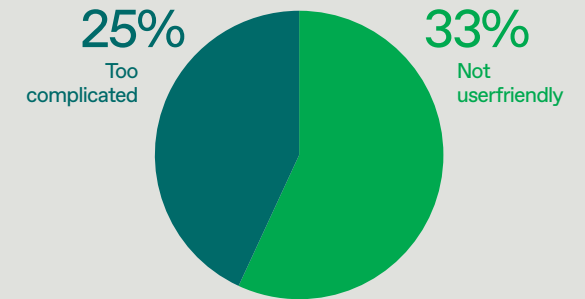
There is a clear call for mobile applications. In the UK, 30% of Generation Y (Millennials) want mobile applications for government services, and in Canada, 32% of Gen Z wants them.



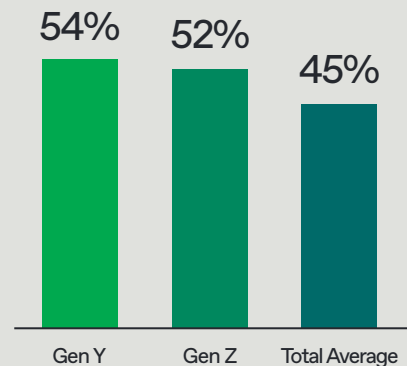
87% of CAN boomers and 90% of the Silent Generation (ages 78+) have spent up to six hours dealing with government services, more than any other generation. In the UK, it's worse for those 78+ years: 96% have spent up to six hours with government services.



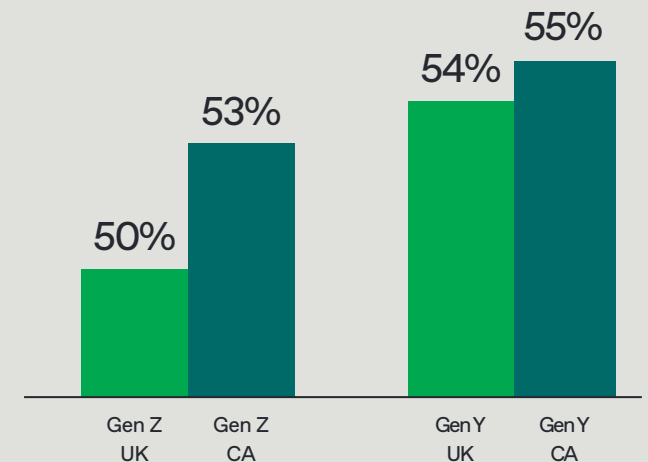
But the Silent Generation isn't strictly opposed to digital. Those who expressed dissatisfaction with government services say they are not user friendly (33% in Canada) and too complicated (25% in Canada).



While 45% of both UK and Canada citizens surveyed say they would be prepared to share more private data with a government agency in exchange for getting more tailored, personalized services as a result, these numbers are even higher with Millennials (54%) and Gen Z (52%).



Over half of young people would share private data with governments for more personalized services: 50% for Gen Z and 54% for Gen Y in the UK; 53% for Gen Z and 55% for Gen Y in Canada.



# Bridging the trust gap

Nortal has been a part of building the most trusted governments in the world, we commissioned this study to better understand the environments in which we work. In an environment with many age groups and their differing expectations, we wanted to gain insight into how our customers can cater to the needs of the aging population while planning and creating services for the future.

It is clear that governments have a mandate to offer public services in a digital format. But this study makes it clear that technology is not enough. The trust gap must be bridged at the same time. Nortal works with governments to make digital services accessible, meaning we guide the user toward digital channels, enabling them to get important tasks done through the channel they prefer.

In our experience, trust is an issue that can be dealt with. If a service is well designed and works well, then citizens can clearly see the value in the state's use of their data. Contact us for case studies of how we've done it successfully.





# Endnotes

\* 99,000 years was calculated using the UN, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. World Population Prospects: The 2019 Revision, which found the number of people over the age of 16 in Canada was 31,081,731.

\*\* 75,000 years was calculated using the 2021 ONS midyear population estimate figures for nationally representative samples which found the number of people over the age of 16 in the UK was 54,711,707.



# Get in touch!

Get in touch if you'd like to learn more  
or have a conversation [govtech@nortal.com](mailto:govtech@nortal.com)