



Written by [Staff](#) on January 7, 2022

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Inside Track

Canada Admits It Tracked 33 Million Phones Amid Lockdown



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The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) has now admitted that it accessed 33 million mobile devices (in a country of 38 million people) to monitor citizens' movement amid the lockdown.

"Due to the urgency of the pandemic, (PHAC) collected and used mobility data, such as cell-tower location data, throughout the COVID-19 response," a PHAC spokesperson told the *National Post* December 24, 2021.

PHAC said it used the data to determine the effectiveness of public lockdown protocols and allow the agency to "understand possible links between movement of populations within Canada and spread of COVID-19."

The agency in March awarded a contract to the Telus Data For Good program to provide "de-identified and aggregated data" of movement trends in Canada. According to the PHAC spokesperson, the contract expired in October and PHAC no longer has access to the location data.

Yet the agency still has plans to track public movement over the course of the next five years for the purpose of addressing other public-health issues, such as "other infectious diseases, chronic disease prevention and mental health."

Privacy advocates raised concerns about how the program might affect Canadians' rights in the long term.

"I think that the Canadian public will find out about many other such unauthorized surveillance initiatives before the pandemic is over — and afterwards," David Lyon, author of *Pandemic Surveillance* and former director of the Surveillance Studies Centre at Queen's University, told *National Post* in an e-mail.

The PHAC spokesperson argued that mobility data analysis "helps to advance public health objectives." The PHAC's conclusions are shared with provinces and territories via a special advisory committee to "inform public health messaging, planning and policy development," according to the spokesperson.



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Lyon urged a need for greater information “regarding exactly what was done, what was achieved and whether or not it truly served the interests of Canadian citizens.”

By Luis Miguel

Russia Slaps Google, Facebook With Massive Fines



Maksym Kapliuk/iStock/GettyImagesPlus

A Moscow court on December 24, 2021 said it was fining Google 7.2 billion rubles (\$98 million) for what it described as a repeated failure to delete 2,600 pieces of content classified as illegal by the Russian government. The move marks the first revenue-based fine of its type in Russia.

Moscow last year placed greater pressure on Silicon Valley in a campaign that critics say is an attempt by Russian authorities to more tightly control the Internet, which they argue threatens the freedom of individuals and corporations.

Later on that day, the court also fined Meta Platforms, which owns Facebook, a sum of two billion rubles (\$27.15 million) on the same basis. According to Russia’s communication watchdog, Roskomnadzor, Facebook and Instagram did not remove 2,000 pieces that violate Russian law.

Russia had placed small fines on foreign-technology firms earlier in 2021, but the new penalties were the first time it exacted a percentage of the companies’ annual Russian revenue, increasing the sum of the fine.

Russia has mandated that companies delete posts that promote drug abuse and pastimes considered dangerous, along with information about weapons and explosives and content from groups deemed to be terrorists, and the Russian government has demanded Google restore access to the German-language channels of state-backed broadcaster Russia Today.

Google paid over 32 million rubles in fines over content violations in 2021.

Following a 2019 law, Russian authorities upgraded systems they say would allow the country to completely cut itself off from the Internet if needed.

Here at home, Google, Facebook, and other major tech companies have faced scrutiny from lawmakers and citizens who say the firms exhibit a left-wing bias and use their platforms to suppress conservative views.



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By Luis Miguel

Census Bureau: Migration to Red States Continues



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The latest report from the U.S. Census Bureau, released December 21, 2021, confirms an ongoing trend: Citizens are escaping Democrat-run blue states and moving to more friendly — and lower tax — Republican-run red states.

California, New York, and Illinois suffered the largest “domestic migration” losses in 2021, while Texas, Florida, and Arizona reaped most of the harvest of newcomers. New York lost so many citizens that, despite natural growth, its population dropped below 20 million for the first time in years. California lost the most: 367,000 fled the state last year.

Texas enjoyed the largest increase — more than 350,000 new residents moved there in 2021 — while Idaho came in second, with more than 60,000 relocating there in the past year. New York, on the other hand, lost more than 365,000 residents, dropping the state’s population to 19,835,000.

Idaho saw its population increase by nearly three percent in 2021, while Utah’s and Montana’s each grew by 1.7 percent. South Carolina’s grew by 1.2 percent, while Florida’s population increased by one percent.

While many factors likely contribute to such moves, high crime and high taxes rank among the most important to those relocating. As Andrew Stiles wrote at the Washington Free Beacon, “It’s probably not a coincidence that the states Americans are fleeing have some of the highest tax rates in the country, while the states to which they are flocking have some of the lowest.”

The U-Haul migration index reflects the out-migration from high-tax, high-crime, high-cost-of-living states such as New York and California. According to its most recent study, “U-Haul customers made Texas and Florida their top two destinations from 2016-2019.... California ranks last by a wide margin ... [that] state has ranked 48th [on our list] or lower since 2016. Illinois has been 49th or 50th since 2015.”

The top five most-popular states in 2020 were Tennessee, Texas, Florida, Ohio, and Arizona; while Maryland, Massachusetts, and New Jersey joined Illinois and California at the bottom of the list.



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By Bob Adelman

Beijing-endorsed “Patriots” Sweep Hong Kong Elections



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Chinese President Xi Jinping on December 22, 2021 gave an endorsement of the first legislative elections held in Hong Kong under new laws that stipulate only “patriots” who have demonstrated loyalty to Beijing may run.

Politicians backed by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) swept the elections for the 90-seat Legislative Council on December 19. Only 20 seats were directly elected, and the 30.2-percent turnout was the lowest seen since the British returned Hong Kong to Beijing in 1997.

All of the candidates were vetted by a pro-Beijing committee before they could be nominated.

Xi told Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam in Beijing on December 22 that he is certain Hong Kongers will join in “realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.”

“The execution of the new election system adheres to the ‘one country, two systems’ principle,” Xi said, in reference to the gradually eroding framework under which Hong Kong was supposed to retain its own political, social, and financial institutions for 50 years after being transferred from British rule.

“Our fellow Hong Kong citizens will promote the glorious tradition of loving their country and Hong Kong,” said Xi.

Elections had been postponed for a year under the guise of COVID-19 cases after the opposition swept district counselor elections.

This came after anti-government protests in 2019 that prompted Beijing to impose a sweeping National Security Law on Hong Kong, followed by a reorganization of the electoral process and transformation of the makeup of the Legislative Council to stack it with pro-Beijing loyalists.

The opposition criticized the December 19 elections, and Hong Kong’s Democratic Party did not field candidates — the first time it failed to do so since 1997.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said December 20 there were “multiple reasons” for the drop in voter turnout.



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“It is not only the impact of the pandemic, but also the disruption and sabotage of anti-China elements in Hong Kong and external forces,” Zhao said at a daily briefing.

By Luis Miguel



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