

Austrian Post Office to delete customers' political data

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Austria's postal service said Thursday it would delete data about their customers' assumed political allegiances after privacy campaigners likened the practice to the Facebook data-sharing scandal.

Austrian Post head Georg Poelzl told the APA news agency that a database of the likely political affinities of around 2.2 million customers would be deleted "as soon as is legally possible."

The company's board "made a decision yesterday that the entire database will be established along new lines," Poelzl said, arguing that the product in its current form "has become outdated, anyway."

Austrian Post is publicly listed but still majority-owned by the government.

It has compiled the names, addresses, age and gender of around three million Austrians—or around one third of the population—and regularly sells that information to advertisers as part of its direct mailings business.

The division generates annual revenues of around 200 million euros (\$230 million) for the company.

Privacy campaigners were up in arms when it emerged that Austrian Post also made educated guesses about the political affinities of its customers and sold that information to political parties.

The privacy campaign group, Epicenter Works, argued that this breaches EU [data protection](#) rules. Consumer [protection](#) group VKI also raised questions about the legality of the practice.

Austrian Post argued that the assumptions were based on [opinion polls](#) and voting statistics in specific geographical areas, in the same way that exit polls are calculated after elections.

It said the data cannot be extrapolated to reveal the voting behaviour of specific individuals.

Campaigners nevertheless drew comparisons to the series of scandals concerning data protection and [privacy](#) that have engulfed Facebook, the world's largest social network, in a number of countries after user data were hijacked in the 2016 US election campaign.

The Austrian Data Protection Authority also said it would look into the affair.

Poelzl told APA on Thursday that his group would work closely with the authority in the destruction of the data.

"We don't want to be accused of trying to hide anything," he said.

But the Austrian Post would continue to collect and hold address data, Poelzl insisted.

"Our advertising customers and the entire population expect the Post Office to have the correct addresses," he said.

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