

CDT Social Media Shadowbanning Survey
Final version – November 2021

The Center for Democracy & Technology (CDT) promotes the responsible use of data and technology while protecting the privacy and civil rights of individuals. We regularly engage in research to advance this goal. The purpose of the study is to understand people's experiences with content moderation online. We hope that this research can help improve content moderation practices for the benefit of all users.

In order to inform the study, we are conducting this survey in collaboration with Edge Research. We expect that it will take less than 10 minutes to complete. All information will be collected privately and only reported anonymously; none will be associated with your personal information. Any information which would permit identification of the individual will be safeguarded and will be used only by persons engaged in and for the purpose of the survey, except as otherwise required by law. Our analysis will be conducted on an aggregate dataset where all personal identifiers are removed. The analysis will be used in a report to be made public on CDT's website next year.

Participation in the survey is on a voluntary basis only, and you can stop participating at any time. However, your cooperation in obtaining this much needed information is extremely important in order to insure the completeness of the results. There are no expected risks from participating in this study.

By clicking 'Next' you will be indicating your consent to the terms of the survey stated above.

If you have any questions or experience technical difficulties with the survey, please do not hit reply to this email. Instead, please contact respondent manager, Gayle Vogel at vogel@edgeresearch.com, and reference the "CDT-CM" project. Edge Research is a member of the Insights Association (formed by the merger of the Marketing Research Association and the Council of American Survey Research Organizations), and we subscribe to the privacy policies and code of research ethics published by this group.

[NEXT]

NOTE: TEXT IN ALL CAPS = PROGRAMMING INSTRUCTIONS AND WILL NOT APPEAR TO RESPONDENT

SCREENER

1. How frequently, if at all, do you visit social media sites, even if you do not post something or comment? Examples of social media sites include Facebook, Twitter, Reddit, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, LinkedIn, or another social media site.
 - 1 Several times a day
 - 2 About once a day
 - 3 A few times a week
 - 4 Every few weeks

TERMINATE

- 5 Less often **TERMINATE**
6 Never -- I don't use social media **TERMINATE**

CONTINUE IF USE SOCIAL MEDIA A FEW TIMES A WEEK OR MORE (Q1=1-3)

2. And how often do you post, comment, or share content on social media?
- 1 Several times a day
 - 2 About once a day
 - 3 A few times a week
 - 4 Every few weeks
 - 5 Less often
 - 6 Never -- I don't post or comment on social media

ACTIVE ON SOCIAL MEDIA (Q2=1-4)

3. For statistical purposes, what is your age? _____ [RANGE 18-99] **TERMINATE IF AGE 70+**
PROGRAMMER CREATE GENERATIONAL BUCKETS:

- GEN Z
- MILLENNIAL
- GEN X
- BOOMER

4. Which of the following best represents your gender identity? Select all that apply.
RANDOMIZE '3-8'

- 1 Man [ANCHOR AT TOP]
- 2 Woman [ANCHOR AT TOP]
- 3 Agender
- 4 Genderqueer
- 5 Genderfluid
- 6 Non-binary
- 7 Transgender
- 8 Questioning/unsure
- 9 I use another term (please specify: _____) [ANCHOR]
- 10 I'd rather not say [ANCHOR]

ETHNICITY AND RACE (Q5 AND Q6) ON SAME PAGE

5. Are you Hispanic or of Spanish descent?
- 1 Yes
 - 2 No
 - 3 I'd rather not say

6. Which of the following best describes your race or ethnicity?
- 1 Caucasian/ White
 - 2 African American/ Black
 - 3 Asian
 - 4 Native American/ American Indian
 - 5 Multiracial
 - 6 Other
 - 7 I'd rather not say
7. Which social media sites or platforms do you use? Select all that apply. [ALPHA ORDER]
- 1 Frequently (weekly or more often)
 - 2 Sometimes (less than weekly but more than once a month)
 - 3 Rarely (once a month or less)
 - 4 Never
- RANDOMIZE
- a. Discord
 - b. Facebook
 - c. Instagram
 - d. LinkedIn
 - e. Neighbors
 - f. NextDoor
 - g. Pinterest
 - h. Reddit
 - i. Snapchat
 - j. TikTok
 - k. Tumblr
 - l. Twitch
 - m. Twitter
 - n. YouTube
- 7A. What other sites, if any, do you use frequently that are not listed above? [6 OPEN FIELDS]
-
8. Have you experienced any of the following when posting, commenting, or sharing content on social media? Please read each item carefully and select all that apply.
- RANDOMIZE LIST. ASK 4, 5, 6 IN THIS ORDER.**
- 1 A social media “friend” or “follower” unfriending, unfollowing, or blocking you
 - 2 Engaged in a debate or shared a different point of view in response to something posted on social media
 - 3 Experienced verbal abuse from other users directed at you

- 4 Have been **notified or informed** by the social media platform (e.g. either through the platform itself, or by email, text, etc), that your profile or one or more of your posts or comments were being blocked from public view or from other users' feeds **[BLOCKED]**
- 5 Though **not notified or informed** by the platform, you have **known** that your profile or one or more of your posts or comments were being blocked from public view or from other users' feeds by the social media platform, even though it appeared to you that you were still posting as usual **[QUALIFY: PERCEIVED SHADOW BANNED]**
- 6 You cannot be sure, but you have had a **feeling or suspected** that your profile or one or more of your posts or comments were being blocked from public view or from other users' feeds by the social media platform, even though it appeared to you that you were still posting as usual **[QUALIFY: PERCEIVED SHADOW BANNED]**
- 7 None/Have not experienced any of these

IF BLOCKED OR SHADOW BANNED (Q8=4, 5, OR 6):

9. To the best of your recollection, when did you last have the experience described below?
[CAROUSEL]

- 1 In the last 30 days
- 2 In the last 1 to 2 months
- 3 3 to 6 months ago
- 4 6 to 8 months ago
- 5 9 to 12 months ago
- 6 1 to 2 years ago
- 7 More than 2 years ago
- 8 Not sure/Don't remember

RANDOMIZE. BUILD LIST OF THOSE SELECTED Q8=4, 5, 6

- a. Have been **notified or informed** by the social media platform (e.g. either through the platform itself, or by email, text, etc), that your profile or one or more of your posts or comments were being blocked from public view or from other users' feeds
- b. Though **not notified or informed** by the platform, you have **known** that your profile or one or more of your posts or comments were being blocked from public view or from other users' feeds by the social media platform, even though it appeared to you that you were still posting as usual
- c. You cannot be sure, but you have had a **feeling or suspected** that your profile or one or more of your posts or comments were being blocked from public view or from other users' feeds by the social media platform, even though it appeared to you that you were still posting as usual

IF SHADOW BANNED IN LAST YEAR [(Q8=5 OR 6) AND (Q9B OR C = 1-5)]

10. In the last 12 months, what specifically made you know, think, or feel that your profile or one or more of your posts or comments were being blocked from public view or from other users' feeds by the social media platform, even though it appeared to you that you were still posting as usual? Please be specific. OPEN END - REQUIRED. _____

EVERYONE ELSE: IF **NOT** SHADOW BANNED IN LAST YEAR [(Q8=NOT 5 OR 6) OR (Q9B OR C = NOT 1-5)]
SKIP TO INTRO BEFORE Q26 AND CONTINUE.

EVERYONE SHOULD FALL INTO ONE OF THESE BUCKETS:

- SHADOW BANNED IN LAST YEAR [(Q8=5 OR 6) AND (Q9B OR C = 1-5)], QUOTA = 300
- EVERYONE ELSE: NOT SHADOW BANNED IN LAST YEAR [(Q8=NOT 5 OR 6) OR (Q9B OR C = NOT 1-5)]

SHADOW BANNING EXPERIENCE

THIS SECTION: IF SHADOW BANNED IN LAST YEAR [(Q8=5 OR 6) AND (Q9B OR C = 1-5)]

You indicated that, in the last year, you knew or had a feeling that your profile or one or more of your posts or comments were being blocked from public view or from other users' feeds by the social media platform, but it appeared to you that you were still posting as usual. This practice is sometimes called "shadow banning" and is how we will refer to this experience throughout the rest of the survey.

[PROGRAMMER: THROUGHOUT THE REST OF THE SURVEY, ROLLOVER "shadow banned": When a social media user's profile or one or more of their posts or comments are blocked from public view or from other users' feeds by the social media platform, even though it appears to that person that they are still posting as usual.

11. Have you ever heard of shadow banning, either the term or that this practice happens?
RANDOMIZE 1-3
 - 1 Yes, have heard of this happening, but did not know the term
 - 2 Yes, have heard this term, but did not know what it meant or thought it meant something else
 - 3 Yes, I have heard the term and knew what it meant prior to taking this survey
 - 4 No, have never heard of this term or this type of activity
 - 5 Not something I've ever thought about
 - 6 Not sure
12. How many times in the last year do you believe you have been shadow banned? If you are not sure, please give your best estimate.
 - 1 One time
 - 2 Two times
 - 3 Three times
 - 4 Four times
 - 5 Five times
 - 6 6 to 10 times

- 7 11 to 19 times
- 8 20 or more times
- 9 Not sure/Don't remember

13. In the last year, from which social media site(s) have you been shadow banned? Select all that apply.

USE ENTIRE LIST FROM Q7 Other specify: _____

For the rest of the survey, please think about the most recent time when you [KNEW (Q9b=1-5): *knew* / THOUGHT (Q9b=6-8 AND Q9c=1-5): *thought*] you were shadow banned. PROGRAMMER: IF BOTH KNEW AND THOUGHT, INCLUDE VERBIAGE FOR "KNEW" ONLY [INTRO ON SAME PAGE ABOVE NEXT QUESTION]

14. Thinking of the most recent time when you [KNEW (Q9b=1-5): *knew* / THOUGHT (Q9b=6-8 AND Q9c=1-5): *thought*] you were shadow banned, who do you think discovered and flagged your account and/or your post or comment? Select all that apply. RANDOMIZE

- 1 Someone working for the social media platform
- 2 An algorithm or through automated means
- 3 A group administrator or moderator of a private or public group
- 4 Another user on the social media platform who saw your post or comment
- 5 Other, please specify: _____ [ANCHOR]
- 6 Not sure [ANCHOR]

15. Again, thinking of the most recent time, which of the following made you first realize or suspect that you had been shadow banned? Select up to two. RANDOMIZE

- 1 Your social media showed decreased engagement (e.g. fewer 'likes', comments, shares, etc.)
- 2 Your profile, posts, or comments did not appear when you viewed your social media account from another account (e.g., a friend's account or another account you had set up)
- 3 Friends commented or alerted you that content was not appearing
- 4 The social media platform communicated with you that your content had been blocked in some way
- 5 Other, please specify: _____ [ANCHOR]
- 6 Not sure/Don't remember [ANCHOR]

16. To the best of your knowledge, how were you shadow banned? Select one.

- 1 Account was blocked
- 2 One or more specific posts or comments were blocked
- 3 A group page that you run was blocked

- 4 Other, please specify: _____ [ANCHOR; ALLOW 200 CHARACTERS]
- 5 Not sure [ANCHOR]

17. To the best of your knowledge and thinking about the most recent time, why do you think you were shadow banned? Select all that apply.

RANDOMIZE LIST

- 1 My political views
- 2 My content was considered "explicit" (e.g., nudity, pornography)
- 3 My position on social issues (e.g., women's rights, racism)
- 4 My content was considered "health misinformation"
- 5 My content was considered "election misinformation"
- 6 My content was considered "hate speech"
- 7 My content was considered to infringe on someone else's copyright
- 8 My content included someone else's personal information (e.g., doxxing)
- 9 My content could be considered as encouraging violence
- 10 The site/moderator thought I was impersonating someone else
- 11 Advertisers pressure the site to suppress content like mine
- 12 My account was engaged in criminal activity
- 13 I shared content that broke the site's rules
- 14 Other, please specify: _____ [ANCHOR]
- 15 Not sure/don't remember [ANCHOR]

IF SHADOW BANNED FOR TYPE OF CONTENT (Q17=1-14)

18. If this was the way the social media platform classified your account or content, do you agree with the social media platform's assessment of the content? *Please indicate your agreement or disagreement about the classification of your content, regardless of whether you agree or disagree with the action taken by the social media platform.*

- 5 Strongly agree
- 4 Somewhat agree
- 3 Neither agree nor disagree
- 2 Somewhat disagree
- 1 Strongly disagree
- 6 Not sure

19. Listed below are different ways that social media users may be shadow banned. Thinking of the most recent time, to the best of your knowledge, what type of shadow banning did you experience? Select all that apply. If you are not sure, please indicate so. RANDOMIZE

- 1 **[SEARCH]** Your username/profile, posts, or comments did not appear in search results; the social media site did not auto-complete your screen name or "handle" in search results
- 2 **[HASHTAGS]** Your profile, posts, or comments did not appear under hashtags you included and that other people are/were using

- 3 **[FEED]** Your profile, posts, or comments did not appear to others in their social media feeds
- 4 **[NOT APPEARING IN RECOMMENDATIONS]** Your profile, posts, or comments did not appear to others in their “Recommendations”
- 5 **[COMMENTS OR REPLIES NOT APPEARING]** Your profile, posts, or comments did not appear under social media conversations or threads of other users
- 6 Other, please specify: _____ [ALLOW 200 CHARACTERS]
- 7 Not sure/Don’t remember

IF ‘COMMENTS OR REPLIES NOT APPEARING’ (Q19=5):

19A. To your knowledge, were your comments not appearing to specific users or to all users on the social media platform?

- 1 Not appearing to specific users
- 2 Not appearing to all users
- 3 Not sure

20. Thinking of the most recent time, from which social media platform were you shadow banned?

Select one. [SAME LIST AS Q13]

ADD Other specify: _____

21. To the best of your knowledge, were your posts, comments, or content shadow banned indefinitely or for a specified period of time?

- 1 Blocked indefinitely
- 2 Blocked for 24 hours
- 3 Blocked for 2-6 days
- 4 Blocked for 7 days
- 5 Blocked for more than 1 week
- 6 Not sure/Don’t remember

22. Did the social media platform(s) offer ways that you could resolve the situation in order to “unblock” or remove the shadow ban? If so, what option(s) were given? Select all that apply.

RANDOMIZE

- 1 The platform offered an option to report a problem with your account
- 2 The platform offered a form to ask questions or provide information about the content or account that was shadow banned
- 3 The platform offered a contact email to communicate with a platform representative about the shadow ban

- 4 The platform required you to wait a certain period of time before posting again
- 5 The platform required you to read its content policy or Community Guidelines before posting again
- 6 The platform required you to remove the content before the shadow ban was lifted
- 7 Other, please specify: _____ [ANCHOR]
- 8 No options were given [ANCHOR]
- 9 Not sure/Don't remember [ANCHOR]

IF GIVEN OPTIONS TO RESOLVE (Q22=1-7)

23. Did you use any of the options made available to resolve the situation with the social media platform?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No
- 3 Not sure/Don't remember

IF ATTEMPTED TO RESOLVE (Q23=1)

24. Was the situation resolved (i.e., your posts, comments or content was once again appearing to others on the site)?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No
- 3 Not sure/Don't remember

25. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following? [CAROUSEL]

- 5 Strongly agree
- 4 Somewhat agree
- 3 Neither agree nor disagree
- 2 Somewhat disagree
- 1 Strongly disagree
- 6 Not sure

RANDOMIZE

- a. You are less likely to post, comment, or share content on social media since being shadow banned
- b. Since being shadow banned, you have been hesitant to share your true thoughts and ideas on social media
- c. With shadow banning, not all perspectives and points of view are adequately represented on social media
- d. After being shadow banned, you felt isolated and removed from your social group, a community, or society at large
- e. Being shadow banned affected your ability to make a living
- f. Being shadow banned made you feel ashamed
- g. Being shadow banned helped you better understand the rules of the social media site

- h. Shadow banning made you less able to connect with new social groups or communities of interest
- i. Shadow banning unfairly targets certain groups of people more than others
- j. Shadow banning helps to keep social media groups focused on their mission or purpose by removing nay-sayers or trolls
- k. Social media sites should be able to shadow ban users as long as it is done according to their terms and policies agreed to by users
- l. Social media sites should be open and forthcoming to users about whether or not they engage in the practice of moderating their site's content through shadow banning
- m. Being shadow banned made you feel angry

SOCIAL MEDIA USERS (NOT SHADOW BANNED)

IF NOT SHADOW BANNED IN LAST YEAR [(Q8=NOT 5 OR 6) OR (Q9B OR C = NOT 1-5)] OR Q2=5-6

At times, a social media site may engage in “shadow banning” a user. Shadow banning is when someone’s profile or one or more of their posts or comments are being blocked from public view or from other users’ feeds by the social media platform, but it appears to that person that they are still posting as usual. This is sometimes called “shadow banning” and is how we will refer to this activity throughout the rest of the survey.

[PROGRAMMER: THROUGHOUT THE REST OF THE SURVEY, ROLLOVER “shadow banned”: **Shadow banning is when someone’s profile or one or more of their posts or comments are being blocked from public view or from other users’ feeds by the social media platform, but it appears to that person that they are still posting as usual.**

ASK IF NEVER SHADOW BANNED (Q8 NOT 5 OR 6):

26. First, have you ever known or suspected you were shadow banned?
- 1 Yes
 - 2 No

CONTINUE WITH THOSE THAT HAVE NOT BEEN SHADOW BANNED IN THE LAST YEAR:

27. **[SAME AS Q11]** Have you ever heard of shadow banning, either the term or that this practice happens? RANDOMIZE 1-3
- 1 Yes, have heard of this happening, but did not know the term
 - 2 Yes, have heard this term, but did not know what it meant or thought it meant something else
 - 3 Yes, I have heard the term and knew what it meant prior to taking this survey
 - 4 No, have never heard of this term or this type of activity
 - 5 Not something I’ve ever thought about
 - 6 Not sure
28. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following? [CAROUSEL]

- 5 Strongly agree
- 4 Somewhat agree
- 3 Neither agree nor disagree
- 2 Somewhat disagree
- 1 Strongly disagree
- 6 Not sure

RANDOMIZE

- a. Shadow banning makes individuals less likely to post, comment, or share content on social media
- b. Individuals are less likely to be as open and share their unfiltered thoughts and ideas on social media after being shadow banned
- c. Shadow banning results in fewer perspectives and points of view represented on social media
- d. Shadow banning infringes on free speech and the open sharing of ideas
- e. Shadow banning must be applied evenly to all groups and ideas
- f. Shadow banning helps to keep social media groups focused on their mission or purpose by removing nay-sayers or trolls
- g. Shadow banning can help users understand what the rules of a social media site are
- h. Social media sites should be able to shadow ban users as long as it is done according to their terms and policies agreed to by users
- i. Social media sites should be open and forthcoming to users about whether or not they engage in the practice of moderating their site's content through shadow banning

OVERALL POINT OF VIEW ON SHADOW BANNING
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CONTINUE ASKING ALL:

29. Which types of content or behavior, if any, do you feel it is acceptable for social media platforms to moderate through shadow banning? Select all that apply. RANDOMIZE

- 1 Political views
- 2 Explicit content (i.e., nudity, pornography)
- 3 Positions on social issues (e.g., women's rights, racism)
- 4 Health misinformation
- 5 Election misinformation
- 6 Hate speech
- 7 Copyright infringement
- 8 Content that includes someone else's personal information (e.g., doxxing)
- 9 Content that encourages violence
- 10 Someone impersonating someone else
- 11 Content that advertisers have pressured the site to suppress
- 12 Criminal activity
- 13 Content that breaks the site's rules
- 14 Other, please specify: _____ [ANCHOR]
- 15 None: It is never acceptable for social media platforms to moderate content through shadow banning [ANCHOR]

30. Overall, do you favor or oppose sites moderating content by shadow banning users when they feel it is necessary?
- 5 Strongly favor
 - 4 Somewhat favor
 - 3 Neither favor nor oppose
 - 2 Somewhat oppose
 - 1 Strongly oppose
 - 6 Not sure

SOCIAL MEDIA USE

CONTINUE ASKING ALL:

31. How or for what reasons do you use social media? Select all that apply. RANDOMIZE
- 1 Political advocacy and/or support for political viewpoints
 - 2 Organizing events
 - 3 Staying up to date with news and current events
 - 4 Keeping up with celebrities and/or influencers
 - 5 Staying up to date on new music, TV, movies, etc.
 - 6 Connecting with people who share your interests and/or views
 - 7 For business purposes (e.g. finding work, staying up to date about your field, etc.)
 - 8 Keeping in touch with friends and family
 - 9 Posting your own original or personal content
 - 10 Other, please specify: _____ [FORCE RESPONSE]
32. And, what is the *main* reason you use social media? Select one.
BUILD LIST FROM THOSE SELECTED ABOVE, PIPE IN OTHER RESPONSE
33. In what ways do you *primarily* access social media platforms? Select up to two primary.
- 1 PC/Computer or Laptop
 - 2 Tablet (i.e. iPad, Kindle)
 - 3 Smartphone (i.e. iPhone, Android, etc.)
 - 4 Smart Speaker (i.e. Amazon Echo, Google Home)
 - 5 Wearables (i.e. Google Glasses, Fitbit, Apple Watch)
 - 6 Not sure
34. For the social media platforms you use most frequently, do you generally access them through the platform's website or through an app?
ROTATE ORDER TOP TO BOTTOM AND BOTTOM TO TOP
- 1 Almost always through the app

- 2 Mostly through the app, occasionally through website
- 3 About equally through website and app
- 4 Mostly through the website, occasionally through the app
- 5 Almost always through the website

DEMOGRAPHICS

CONTINUE ASKING ALL:

AGE. For verification, what is your age? _____ [RANGE 18-99]

35. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- 1 Less than high school graduate
- 2 High school graduate
- 3 Some college or Associates Degree or technical school
- 4 Bachelor's degree
- 5 Master's degree or higher
- 6 I'd rather not say

36. Are you a veteran of the U.S armed forces or currently serving in the U.S. military?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No
- 3 I'd rather not say

37. What was your approximate annual household income for 2020, before taxes, from all sources?

- 1 Under \$25,000
- 2 \$25,000 to just below \$40,000
- 3 \$40,000 to just below \$50,000
- 4 \$50,000 to just below \$75,000
- 5 \$75,000 to just below \$100,000
- 6 \$100,000 to just below \$150,000
- 7 \$150,000 to just below \$200,000
- 8 \$200,000 or more
- 9 Prefer not to say

38. Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a Democrat, a Republican, an independent, or something else? ROTATE ORDER TOP TO BOTTOM

- 1 Strong Democrat
- 2 Not very strong Democrat
- 3 Independent/lean Democrat
- 4 Strictly independent

- 5 Independent/lean Republican
- 6 Not very strong Republican
- 7 Strong Republican
- 8 Libertarian
- 9 Other
- 10 None/my views cannot be described this way

39. When thinking about social issues, do you consider yourself to be...? ROTATE ORDER TOP TO BOTTOM

- 1 Very conservative
- 2 Somewhat conservative
- 3 Moderate
- 4 Somewhat liberal
- 5 Very liberal
- 6 Other
- 7 Not sure
- 8 Prefer not to answer

[END SURVEY]

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