

Ms. Courtney Gregoire  
Chief Digital Safety Officer  
Email: [courtneq@microsoft.com](mailto:courtneq@microsoft.com)

May 10, 2022

Dear Ms. Courtney Gregoire,

The Citizen Lab, an interdisciplinary laboratory based at the Munk School of Global Affairs & Public Policy, University of Toronto, is currently researching censorship in Microsoft Bing's autosuggestion system. We summarize our findings as follows:

- We analyzed Microsoft Bing's autosuggestion system for the censorship of people's names, finding that, outside of names relating to eroticism, the second largest category of names we discovered censored from appearing in autosuggestions were those of Chinese party leaders, dissidents, and others politically sensitive in China.
- We consistently found that Bing censors politically sensitive Chinese names over time, that their censorship spans multiple Chinese political topics, consists of at least two languages, English and Chinese, and applies to different world regions, including China, the United States, and Canada.
- Using statistical techniques, we preclude politically sensitive Chinese names being censored in the United States purely through random chance. Rather, their censorship must be the result of a process disproportionately targeting names which are politically sensitive in China.
- Bing's Chinese political autosuggestion censorship applies not only to their Web search but also to the search built into Microsoft Windows as well as DuckDuckGo, which uses Bing autosuggestion data.
- Aside from Bing's Chinese political censorship, many names also suffer from collateral censorship, such as Dick Cheney or others named "Dick".

We would appreciate a response from Microsoft to the following questions by May 17, 2022:

1. Which laws, regulations, or policies (internal to Microsoft or external to Microsoft) govern or apply to the content filtering of Bing autosuggestions in China, the United States, and Canada?
2. Do there exist public facing documents published by Microsoft that explain how Microsoft applies content filtering to Bing autosuggestions in China, the United States, and Canada? If so, where? If not, why not?
3. Has Microsoft received directives on what keywords to filter from mainland Chinese government agencies or individuals? If so, from which agencies and individuals, and how often? Were they followed and why?

4. Were Microsoft's rules for filtering autosuggestions in China determined entirely proactively by Microsoft, or have some rules been informed by law enforcement requests?
5. Do Microsoft developers in China make content filtering decisions applied to mainland Chinese users? Do Microsoft developers in China make content filtering decisions applied to users outside of China?
6. What technologies does Microsoft use to filter Bing's autosuggestions? Do these technologies include the use of regular expressions or substring searching?
7. Why did the following queries have no autosuggestions in the United States in December 2021: "Li Wenliang", "Xi Jinping", "Tank Man", "张高丽" (Zhang Gaoli), and "胡锦涛" (Hu Jintao)?
8. Why are autosuggestions for "Hillary Clinton" and "Alex Jones" only followed by punctuation such as apostrophes?

We plan to publish a report reflecting our research. Provided we receive your response by May 17, 2022, we will publish your response in full alongside our research report.

Sincerely,



Professor Ronald J. Deibert  
Director of the Citizen Lab  
Munk School of Global Affairs & Public Policy  
University of Toronto