

# Facebook's ban of third-party researchers 'deeply concerning' | The Verge

By James Vincent

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Facebook is being criticized by politicians and researchers for banning the accounts of academics who analyzed political ads and misinformation on the social network.

In press statements, Senator Mark R. Warner (D-VA) said the company's actions were "deeply concerning," while Senator Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) said she was "deeply troubled" by the news. Creator of the Firefox browser, Mozilla, which conducted a privacy audit of the academics' work, said Facebook's justification for banning the researchers was "wrong."

"Facebook claims the accounts were shut down due to privacy problems with the Ad Observer," wrote Mozilla's chief security officer Marshall Erwin in a blog post. "In our view, those claims simply do not hold water."

The academics banned by Facebook worked with the NYU Ad Observatory, creating a browser plug-in called Ad Observer that Facebook users could install to collect data about what political ads they were shown and how they were targeted. Facebook does not provide equivalent information, says the NYU Ad Observatory, not least because, as the researchers have shown, the company sometimes fails to label political ads at all.

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