

Social Credit Scores Are Being Used in the United States to Manipulate Voters

October 29, 2022 - You may have read about social credit scores. They are currently being used by the Chinese Communist Party to monitor the activities of Chinese citizens. If you have a bad score, you may be excluded from things like banking or traveling; even within the borders of China. But if you are a good little communist, you're free to live your life as you see fit. While the US government hasn't implemented such a system here (that we know of, anyway), the same can't be said for actors in the private-sector. And if you live in the United States, there are three things to know about these scores. The first thing is that you have one. The second thing is that it was assembled without your permission by violating your privacy. And the third thing is that it is being used to manipulate you.

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You've probably never heard of a company by the name of Predictwise. It's a small organization - only 10 people at the time of this writing - but if you are voting age they probably have a file on you. The company is focused on turning out voters for liberal causes.

On their website, they have released a white paper that provides some significant insight into what the company does. According to the paper, the company has assembled a digital file on virtually every living American that includes data from their credit files, cell phone tracking data (meaning that they know exactly where you are at any given time) and media consumption data (meaning that they know what websites you visit and what news sources you read).

From all of this data, they can assemble a predictive score that allows them to know if you can be persuaded to vote a specific way on specific issues. They then sell this data to political campaigns so that they can use it to target you.

The paper gives specific examples of how Predictwise data has already been used. For instance, the company used real-time cell phone tracking data during the covid lockdowns to figure out who was complying with the lock downs and who was violating them. That data was then used to target Republicans who were complying with the lockdowns to get their support for the campaign of Senator Mark Kelly in Arizona.

The company ran a similar campaign in 2018 in Ohio to flip a seat on the Ohio Supreme Court. And it assisted a California congressional candidate to secure a seat in congress the same year.

These were likely dry-runs to prove the concept. Now that they company knows that it works, we can expect it to expand

its client base pretty rapidly. The idea that a company can use data in this fashion isn't surprising. But the amount and types of data that Predictwise has been able to assemble is more than a little troubling.

Credit file data isn't supposed to be used in this manner. The Fair Credit Reporting Act is a federal law that limits who has access to credit data and how that data can be used. Yet the company claims in its white paper that it has access to data "sourced through credit files." This brings up a number of both privacy and legal questions.

Equally bothersome is the fact that the company is able to monitor media consumption. Anyone reading news on their phone probably isn't thinking that data on the sites they are visiting is being sold, but it obviously is. This is a good example of the reason why people should consider using VPN services or the TOR browser (which is available for free in both Apple's and Google's app stores).

The fact that the company was able to obtain cell phone ping data and associate that data with individual cell phone users is also bothersome. But it really isn't as surprising as you may think. That's because there are numerous sources for this data other than your cell phone carrier. Google makes no secret of the fact that your location data is tracked. In fact, anyone can go into Google's account settings and look at the data the company stores on them. Other sources include millions of apps available through the Apple App Store or Google's Play Store. Many of these - especially apps that track weather, require used to share their location data. And any such apps that are free to use will likely sell that data to the highest bidder.

The bottom line of all of this is that we are all being monitored every single day, and now we know that this monitoring is being used to assign scores to us as individuals. In the case of Predictwise, these scores are being used to be get people elected and issues passed. But Predictwise is just one company. Other companies are sure to follow and what they will used scoring for is anybody's guess.

It's a brave new world and because congress has failed to pass any meaningful privacy legislation to deal with some of these issues, consumers are pretty much on their own to find ways to protect their data.

by Jim Malmberg

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