

Wikipedia Administrator Recruitment, Retention, and Attrition

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Administrators (or “admins”) are users with extra rights who do work beyond editing, such as settling disputes and preventing repeated vandalism.¹ Across all Wikipedia editions, there are more than 3,500 administrators.² Tens of thousands (sometimes hundreds of thousands) of administrative actions are performed each month.³

Since 2008, there have been reduced editing rates on Wikipedia and only recently have we turned our attention to administrators as a distinct body of editors. English Wikipedia in particular has been concerned about administrator attrition for a long time, having published multiple Signpost articles about it.⁴ We know that administrators are vital to the healthy operation of any language version of Wikipedia.

This report aims to close this knowledge gap; this project investigated patterns of administrator retention and attrition and explored reasons administrators come, stay, and leave the role. We obtained baseline metrics of admin in/outflow and activity with unified definitions, and conducted a mixed method, cross-comparative study of potential, current, and former administrators, allowing us to produce a comprehensive study of administrator experiences across three major milestones of the administrator lifecycle. Our research included multiple components: quantitative

¹ [Help:Sysops and permissions - MediaWiki](#)

² See [Wiki comparison \[public\]](#) monthly active administrators for Jan 2024.

³ Per [Logging table](#) data (Note: admin actions are performed by human admins, [bots](#), and [AbuseFilter](#).)

⁴ e.g., [2015 Editorial](#), [2023 Special report](#)

* Listed alphabetically by last name. We'd also like to thank Diego Saez-Trumper, Leila Zia, and Sam Walton for their contributions, as well as members of the Movement Communications, Human Rights, and Research teams for their close review and feedback.

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analyses of admins and admin activity across 21 shortlisted Wikipedias;⁵ surveys of more than 2,000 current and potential admins across 6 Wikipedias; and interviews with 12 former admins across 5 Wikipedias.

How to read this report? For a quick read, we suggest reading the [Section 1 'Key Findings'](#) headlines and short explanatory text, and then proceeding to [Section 2 'Recommendations'](#). For a deeper understanding, the reader will find that the Key Findings section text contains links to corresponding sections in [Section 3 'Full Reporting'](#). This is where significant expansions can be found, including additional analyses, figures, and tables.

1 Key findings

Please see [background, definitions, methods, and limitations](#) for more information about how we arrived at these findings, including how we defined key terms such as administrator. You can also read more about [what a Request for Adminship \(RFA\) is](#) and [how de-sysopping \(removing admin rights\) works](#).

1.1 General state of administrators on Wikipedia

1.1.1 The number of monthly active administrators on large Wikipedias has been declining since 2018, with some exceptions. For smaller Wikipedias, administrator numbers are mostly stable or increasing since 2018.

Declining adminship may be more of a “large Wikipedia problem.”⁶

From the sampled group of 21 (larger) language versions ([see selection rationale](#)):

- over half show declining numbers of unique monthly active administrators since 2018 (e.g. English, Russian, Portuguese)
- a third show stable numbers (e.g. Swedish, Czech, Norwegian Bokmål)
- a few show rising numbers (e.g. Italian, Indonesian, Ukrainian)

This confirms past reports of declining active administrators on projects such as English Wikipedia. It also points to some notable counterpoint trends. In order to understand admin patterns in the broader context, we also examined 234 additional

⁵ Additionally, for some analyses we included all Wikipedias (with relevant data available), in order to provide additional context to our findings.

⁶ Note that use of “large” here refers specifically to the [criteria](#) used to arrive at the shortlist of 21 Wikipedias, which were the focus of this study. As this is an admin-specific definition, it may not reflect other definitions of “large wiki” used elsewhere outside of this study.

Wikipedias.⁷ This analysis shows that all but one (i.e., Telugu, which has decreasing admin numbers) have had increasing or stable admin activity since January 2018. ([Read more](#))

1.1.2 Admin inflow has been decreasing yearly since 2018 for most of the shortlisted 21 Wikipedias.

Though many Wikipedias show admin outflow to be decreasing yearly as well, the outflow has still eclipsed inflow, resulting in decreasing yearly net change. Exceptions include Italian (has had steady inflow), as well as Catalan, Ukrainian, and Indonesian, which saw inflow spikes between 2020-2022. Unsurprisingly, these four Wikipedias have also had an increasing number of monthly active admins since 2018. ([Read more](#))

1.1.3 Yearly admin net change (i.e., admin inflow minus admin outflow) varies across the 21 shortlisted Wikipedias, and the majority of Wikipedias show the biggest period of inflow between 2007 and 2015.

Among various Wikipedia editions since 2018, yearly net change has been:

- Mostly positive: e.g., Persian, Indonesian, Ukrainian
- Relatively stable (i.e., either consistently close to zero or fluctuating evenly): e.g. Norwegian Bokwal, Polish
- Mostly negative: e.g., English, Spanish, Portuguese

During which periods are Wikipedias experiencing the highest inflow?

- 2007 - 2015: for majority of Wikipedias, including English, French, Spanish, Russian, and Polish
- 2013 - 2018: for a few Wikipedias, including Persian and Portuguese
- 2019 - present: Wikipedias such as Indonesian and Ukrainian

([Read more](#))

1.1.4 Admins on the shortlist of 21 Wikipedias are less likely than admins of other (smaller) Wikipedias to be a sysop on more than one Wikimedia project.

From the shortlisted group of 21 Wikipedias, there are currently 2,063 members of the administrator user group; of those, 174 (8%) have admin status on more than one

⁷ Wikipedias that didn't have admin activity happening by January 2018 were excluded, and slopes were normalized before plotting to enable comparison across projects with widely varying numbers of administrators.

Wikimedia project.⁸ In contrast, when we look at population data across all Wikipedias, we find that there are currently 4,063 members of the sysop user group; of those, 661 (16%) are a sysop on more than one Wikimedia project.⁹ ([Read more](#))

1.1.5 Administrative actions and responsibilities are dispersed or concentrated differently across Wikipedias.

The basic assumption that ‘administrators do administrative work’ is much more nuanced and complicated in reality. Not all administrative rights are associated solely with the sysop user group, and therefore some user groups other than sysop can perform administrative actions. Some Wikipedias (and other Wikimedia projects) allow other user groups to have some of these rights in addition to sysops; on Russian, Japanese, and Persian Wikipedias, for example, about a third of users performing administrator actions are not in the sysop user group.

This points to some degree of dispersal within these Wikipedias, where administrative responsibilities (and therefore, the user rights needed to take on those responsibilities) normally associated with sysops, are extended to other user groups. This has strong implications for approaches to lighten administrator workloads, as well as research into administrative workflows. ([Read more](#))

1.1.6 The priorities ranked highest by English Wikipedia survey respondents include recruiting new administrators and support in conflict, with policies for common conflicts and automation nearly equally ranked as a third priority.

There’s remarkably little variation in the priorities of English Wikipedia admins, aside from less interest in providing admins the ability to focus on specific tasks. ([Read more](#))

1.2 Administrator recruitment

1.2.1 Administrator candidacy guidelines vary substantially across language versions of Wikipedia.

This summary of [administrator candidacy requirements](#) for the 21 Wikipedias studied as part of this project shows that candidacy guidelines based on editing history vary substantially. For example, account age guidelines range from none stated, to “a few months”, to a full 2 years. Factoring in both formal and informal guidelines, main

⁸ For these calculations we are not including [Global Sysops](#) or [Stewards](#). These are roles that functionally give editors some admin privileges on all projects, and so admins in the larger wikis might take on those more general roles (as opposed to specifically being admins on multiple projects).

⁹ These numbers do not include non-sysop admins.

namespace edit guidelines for administrator candidacy similarly range from none stated, to 100, to 10,000. Language versions may also list additional formal or informal guidelines, such as membership in a user group (e.g., patroller, rollbacker, autopatrolled), presence of an email address, or evidence of participation in anti-vandalism work. ([Read more](#))

1.2.2 While multiple Wikipedias seem to recognize significant declines in administrator inflow, this does not always produce speedy interventions aimed at increasing administrator inflow.

Spanish and English Wikipedias have both long acknowledged major issues in administrator inflow; English Wikipedia has a decade-long history of Signpost articles to that effect.¹⁰ However, major reforms to the English Wikipedia RFA process, and administrator role removal policy, have only come about in 2024¹¹. Spanish Wikipedia, to our knowledge, has not significantly changed aspects of its RFA or de-sysopping process, despite single-digit RFA successes in the last six years.

1.2.3 The RFA process is routinely characterized by administrators as stressful, opaque, and something to be endured.

Interview and survey respondents from across all surveyed Wikipedias consistently characterise the RFA process as highly stressful and difficult to understand. Beyond formal written standards, which can vary significantly across Wikipedia editions, every Wikipedia that we studied has unwritten rules that are critical to determining a candidate's success. These informal expectations are related to a candidate's social recognition and standing with the existing group of administrators or eligible RFA voters. Survey results show that English Wikipedia administrators regard the unofficial RFA requirements as the biggest barrier to a successful adminship candidacy. They often necessitate finding an existing administrator in good standing as a nominator for the RFA process, maintaining a positive reputation among the existing administrator body, and enduring intense scrutiny of one's entire on-wiki history. ([Read more](#))

1.2.4 Current English Wikipedia administrators say it is too difficult to become an administrator; more think the RFA process is unfair than fair.

A majority of English Wikipedia admins surveyed believe that "It is too difficult to become an administrator on English Wikipedia" (57%; n=184), as compared with 6% who believe it is too easy. Similarly, 36% (n=118) of current English Wikipedia admins

¹⁰ e.g., [2015 Editorial](#), [2023 Special report](#)

¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Requests_for_adminship/2024_review

surveyed consider the RFA process to be unfair, 25% (n=82) consider the process fair, 22% (n=70) are neutral on the question, and 16% (n=52) are unsure.

1.2.5 Most potential English Wikipedia administrators say they are familiar with adminship; fewer are familiar with formal RFA requirements or the RFA process.

Most (68%) potential English Wikipedia admins say they are moderately (29%, n=177) or very familiar (39%, n=237) with the role of admins on English Wikipedia. Only a comparative few say they are not at all (3%, n=18) or slightly familiar (11%, n=68). About half (49%) of potential English Wikipedia admins are moderately (22%, n=136) or very familiar (27%, n=163) with the formal requirements for an editor to become an English Wikipedia admin. Conversely, about one-third (33%) say they are not at all familiar (18%) or only slightly familiar (16%) with these requirements. Potential English Wikipedia admins are relatively less familiar with the RFA process. Twenty-seven percent (n=164) say they are very familiar with the process, 19% say they are moderately familiar with it, while about two of five (38%) say they are either not at all familiar (21%, n=130) or slightly familiar (17%, n=104) with the RFA process.

1.2.6 Interest in adminship is particularly low among potential administrators on English and Polish Wikipedias, but appears stronger among those from other Wikipedias.

Overall, interest from potential admins in becoming an administrator varies across Wikipedia language editions. Interest is particularly low among potential admins on English and Polish Wikipedias, with over 60% and 58% respectively expressing little to no interest. In contrast, about half of potential admins on Spanish, French, and Russian Wikipedias are interested to some degree in becoming an admin on their respective Wikipedias. The potential admin sample from Indonesian Wikipedia is small (n=14 answering this question), but only one respondent reported no interest. ([Read more](#))

1.2.7 Potential administrators are most likely to cite a desire to focus on their work as an editor as a reason for lack of interest in adminship.

In all six surveyed Wikipedias, potential admins were most likely to cite their desire to focus on editing as a reason why they were not interested in becoming an admin. The second most common reason was viewing admin work as too time-consuming (English, Spanish, Indonesian, Polish, Russian) or the potential for conflicts with editors (French). These three reasons were very prevalent across all six Wikipedias. However, 19% of English Wikipedia potential admins cited fear of harassment as reason for their lack of interest in adminship. Comparatively few potential English

Wikipedia admins cited any aspect of the RFA process as a reason for a lack of interest in adminship.

1.2.8 Potential admins interested in adminship most frequently cite a desire to improve and support Wikipedia; few cite friendship with current admins as a reason for interest.

Among potential English Wikipedia admins who are at least “moderately” interested in adminship (n=193), the overwhelming majority (86%, n=166) cited an opportunity to help improve English Wikipedia as a reason, followed by a belief that admin tasks are essential (72%, n=139). Although half of current English Wikipedia admins said they had a friend or mentor who was an admin prior to pursuing adminship, few potential admins (7%, n=13) cited this as a reason for doing so. Potential admins on French, Polish, and Russian Wikipedias are also most likely to cite improving Wikipedia as the top reason for pursuing adminship.

Potential Spanish Wikipedia admins are relatively less likely to cite improving Wikipedia (31%, n=68) compared to admin tasks being essential (45%, n=98) and mentoring other editors (41%, n=89). Potential Polish Wikipedia admins are most likely to cite improving Wikipedia (78%, n=56), but are relatively less likely to cite admin tasks being essential (42%, n=30). Potential Polish Wikipedia admins are also relatively more likely to cite “intrinsic” motivations such as adminship being the next step on their editor journey (56%, n=40) and adminship being a validation of their accomplishments as Wikipedians (35%, n=25). Our sample of potential Indonesian Wikipedia admins was very small for this question (n=7), but these respondents were least likely to cite friendship with current admins (n=2) as a reason to pursue adminship.

1.2.9 Current and potential admins strongly resemble each other in aspects of gender, primary spoken language, and education level.

Survey results suggest that potential and current administrators share key demographic characteristics. A comparison of gender identification among potential and current administrators suggests that gender-based participation disparities may be both large and pervasive among admins of Wikimedia projects. Similarly, potential and current admins are overwhelmingly likely to say that the project language is their primary or native language. Both groups are also highly-educated. One differentiating demographic factor was age. Current admins tend to be older than potential admins, and younger cohorts (such as 18-29) may be underrepresented in current admin groups.

Many of these demographic traits mirror those of Wikipedia readers and editors, such as the gender gap¹² and in education.¹³ These disparities may be downstream of the same demographic disparities among Wikimedia contributor communities; that is, gender gaps among current Wikipedia admin respondents in the projects we studied do not appear systematically greater than those present in the corresponding potential admin respondents. ([Read more](#))

1.2.10 Current administrators may be longer-tenured and older than potential administrators.

When we compare current admin respondents to potential admins across each of the surveyed projects, it becomes clear that admins are disproportionately likely to be long-serving editors and conversely, proportionally less likely to be newer editors. For example, current English Wikipedia admins are nearly three times as likely to have first started editing in 2001-2004 when compared to potential English Wikipedia admins (33% of current admins vs. 12% of potential admins). This disparity appears even starker in other surveyed projects (57% of Spanish Wikipedia admins began editing in 2005-2008 vs. 17% of potential Spanish Wikipedia admins). ([Read more](#))

1.2.11 More on factors positively and negatively affecting recruitment.

In our full reporting section, you can read more about [factors positively affecting potential administrator recruitment](#), and [factors negatively affecting potential administrator recruitment](#).

1.3 Administrator retention

1.3.1 Administrators are motivated by a strong sense of purpose and are proud of the work they do on Wikipedia.

Participating administrators in this study identify a sense of purpose in their work as their primary motivation. Many interview participants expressed that they view their role as a responsibility and feel a strong sense of duty to fulfill it. Very few interviewees reported negative sentiments related to their time as an administrator, even among those who had no interest in pursuing adminship again.

“It’s fun, and I’m contributing to something great.” —Former Administrator, English Wikipedia

¹² See eg, Collier, B. and Bear, J. 2012, Johnson, I., et. al 2021

¹³ [Research: Knowledge Gaps Index/Measurement/Readers Survey 2023#Reader Education](#) and [Community Insights/Community Insights 2023 Report - Meta](#)

The survey data echoes sentiments from our interviews with current and former administrators. Eighty-five percent (n=261) English Wikipedia admins are proud of the work they do (42% strongly agree; n=129). Virtually none (2%; n=5) disagree. Most English Wikipedia admins (54% total agree; n=167) agree that the broader English Wikipedia community appreciates their work as an admin.

1.3.2 Most administrators see themselves staying for the next two years.

According to the survey, an overwhelming majority of English Wikipedia admins expect to still be serving as admins two years from now, while only 3% disagree or strongly disagree. Seventy-one percent (n=218) of English Wikipedia admins say they “never” consider quitting their roles, and English Wikipedia admins are more likely to say they have considered reducing or pausing their work as admins, than quitting.

Across all other surveyed Wikipedias, clear majorities anticipate staying over the next two years; however, compared to English Wikipedia, there is more variance across responses of admins for other Wikipedias, suggesting comparatively more uncertainty about the future of their role. ([Read more](#))

1.3.3 Admin activity is largely performed by a small subset of highly-active, human moderators. Many Wikipedias utilize bots with administrative rights to sporadically handle one-off, high-volume administrative tasks.

Each month, the majority of administrative actions are generally done by humans. For most of the 21 shortlisted Wikipedias—with few exceptions—each Wikipedia’s top 15% most active admins performed the majority of administrative actions each month, over the past year. Bot-performed admin actions spike in non-regular intervals, which suggests we should understand bot-performed admin actions as primarily an event-based or for-purpose phenomenon. These one-off events are accompanied by (some) Wikipedias having low “ambient” levels of bot-performed admin actions, from tools such as AbuseFilter or custom anti-vandalism bots.¹⁴ ([Read more](#))

1.3.4 English Wikipedia has the highest percentage of administratively inactive admins¹⁵ over a 30 day period. ‘Inactive’ admins appear less common on other Wikipedias.

A substantial proportion (38%) of current English Wikipedia admins self-report as not having conducted any admin actions in the past 30 days. Queried data suggests

¹⁴ Examples include Arabic and Persian Wikipedia, where bots had more activity than humans for one month, or Russian and Spanish where bots are used to perform proxy IP blocks and mass page protections.

¹⁵ “Administratively inactive admins” are administrators who have not made one or more administrative actions during a specified period of time, in this case 30 days. ([Definitions](#)).

about 60% of English Wikipedia admins were administratively inactive during the month of November 2024.

Survey data suggests that administratively inactive admins appear to be somewhat less common for Spanish, French, Indonesian, Polish, and Russian Wikipedias. This aligns with patterns in our queried data, suggesting that inactivity among administrators may be a more prominent issue on some Wikipedias, such as English Wikipedia, than others.

It is important to consider that there may be seasonal variations that influence both the survey and queried data, as the timeframe for activity was limited to “over the past 30 days” in the survey.

1.3.5 Experiencing some interpersonal conflict as a part of their work as an admin appears nearly inevitable for English Wikipedia admins. Moreover, many have occasional or frequent experiences with interpersonal conflict that could result in potentially serious harm.

More than 99% of English Wikipedia admins say they have experienced some interpersonal conflict due to their work as admins and they report a relatively high incidence of conflict with editors. In contrast, they are less likely to experience interpersonal conflict with other admins. Nearly half have faced abuse or harassment occasionally or frequently. These incidents sometimes involve serious psychological and physical safety issues such as doxxing, personal attacks in both on-wiki and off-wiki virtual spaces, and in-person harassment. ([Read more](#))

1.4 Administrator attrition

1.4.1 Reasons for resigning from administrator roles are multiple and largely individualistic.

Insights into attritional factors were drawn primarily from interviews with former administrators (n=7), who shared personal experiences about why they left their administrative role. Those reasons were:

- **Inactivity on-wiki**, falling short of self-perceived acceptable boundaries for an administrator, often as a result of changing life circumstances such as increased schoolwork or jobs.
- **Interpersonal conflict** with other administrators or experienced editors.
- **Loss of intrinsic motivation** for participation, often as a result of the two reasons above.

([Read more](#), including [Secondary factors influencing administrator attrition and motivation](#))

1.4.2 Among all the Wikipedia language editions surveyed, positivity is highest and burnout is lowest among English admins.

Across the different Wikipedias surveyed, admins report varying levels of positivity and burnout related to their work. On English Wikipedia, only 9% (n=41) of admins surveyed report being “almost always” or “frequently” emotionally drained by their work, and 52% (n=266) of English Wikipedia admins report feeling positive about their contributions to English Wikipedia. French Wikipedia admins report low burnout, and relatively less frequent positive feelings about their work. Spanish Wikipedia admins report higher burnout levels and less positivity. Indonesian and Polish respondents fall between Spanish and English— reporting less frequent positive feelings and somewhat more frequent feelings of emotional drain. Conversely, Russian admins report high positivity, but also relatively high burnout levels.

1.4.3 Harassment and abuse drive English Wikipedia admins to reduce their roles or quit.

Our interview and survey data both confirm that harassment in all of its forms and conflict take a significant toll on the admin population, leading many to reduce their administrative roles or consider quitting. While fewer consider quitting outright than reducing their time, those who do consider quitting are more likely to have experienced abuse, harassment, doxxing, personal attacks in both on-wiki and off-wiki virtual spaces, and conflicts with other users. Notably, 5 of 7 former admins (across multiple Wikipedias) interviewed cited conflict with other admins as reasons for resigning, and nearly all of the 12 admins interviewed, both current and former, spoke about interactions with other “toxic” users as demotivating forces that impact their work. ([Read more](#))

2 Recommendations

We have grouped our recommendations into three sub-categories, based on their relevancy to key groups.

2.1 Recommendations for the Wikimedia Foundation

2.1.1 If the WMF provides communities with better access to data that can be used to assess the impact of administrator policies on recruitment and activity levels, communities will be better enabled to measure the impact of their policy changes.

One gap uncovered in our study of administrator recruitment and attrition is the lack of effective evaluative mechanisms, and even key basic metrics. Few administrator bodies have the capacity to undertake effective auditing, for current or proposed practices; such efforts often depend on the motivation and availability of a single volunteer. Adoption of policies in administrator circles tends to follow a “do first, fix later” model as a result of this lack of information. Therefore, by providing better, consistent and cross-wiki metrics on administrators, the WMF may be able to provide communities with the data they need to make informed decisions about their own governance. Relatedly, the Foundation can pursue the following, which are important because they can affect general data accuracy:

- A central place user groups and admin rights can be tracked and updated, including *which* user groups have admin rights per Wikimedia project (e.g. [these user groups](#));
- Updates to the mediawiki.org pages for [logging table](#), [log actions](#), and other admin-related data documentation;
- Proposing a software change (and/or creating a processed dataset or variable) that would help to distinguish between administrative actions made by humans, bots, and AbuseFilter.

2.1.2 If the WMF provides financial and planning support for admin-focused cross-wiki exchanges, the current communities of policy makers will be able to learn from each other’s efforts around admin support and recruitment.

This involves facilitating potential knowledge-sharing between administrator bodies. We know that this already happens in the sense that policies cross-pollinate between projects, but these generally rely on personal connections and social relationships that individual, influential editors make with each other. We propose that the Foundation might be able to facilitate such exchanges through support for regional events (both online and offline) with a specific focus on administrator knowledge-sharing across different Wikipedia projects. There may also be opportunities to support grant-funded work that shares these goals. As this type of work advances, there will likely be opportunities for the Foundation to help develop ‘support packages’ or strategy toolkits that can be offered to communities with needs such as one to grow the number of admins. Finally, there are also

opportunities for the Foundation to support communities as they seek to evaluate the effectiveness of their efforts aimed at supporting current admins.

2.1.3 If the WMF improves automation of repetitive tasks performed by administrators, they can more evenly distribute, and even reduce, the admin workload.

The WMF should continue current efforts aimed at automation of admin tasks. The Foundation should also consider taking on the maintenance burden of widely-replicated tools (compare Automoderator's relationship with third-party anti-vandalism bots).

Relatedly, the WMF Product and Technology department should explore ways of integrating administrator tasks with current editing workflows; by making administrator tasks feel more like editing, admin work in general may be more accessible and appealing to a larger pool of editors.¹⁶

2.1.4 If the WMF better understands the nature of conflict faced by administrators, it will be better poised to offer effective, meaningful and equitable support.

Our findings seem contradictory: administrators may report facing severe forms of harassment and abuse, yet such abuse (or the possibility of it happening) does not seem to deter them from continuing in their roles. While there is a positive correlation between experiencing more severe forms of harassment and intentions of quitting, even these admins are still more likely than not to say they wish to continue being an admin. At the same time, our interviews suggest that interpersonal conflict between administrators is simultaneously less likely to be severe (or pose a threat to personal safety), yet is significantly more demotivating to administrators.

In line with research done on effective anti-harassment remedies¹⁷, we ought to understand this finding in several directions. The ability to report their experiences to a perceived authority such as the WMF, whether by survey or interview, validates administrators' experiences of harassment. Letting the WMF know that conflict, harassment, and abuse exist is different from expecting support for every potential case of conflict that happens over the course of adminship. Finally, different forms of conflict produce different forms of harm, which in turn may be best remedied by a wide variety of actions; this will require the broad participation of multiple groups within the Movement as a whole.

Empathetic, effective support of admins will likely require deep consideration of the following:

¹⁶ One of the most common reasons offered by potential admins for not wanting to pursue this work is the feeling that it would take time away from their editing activities.

¹⁷ Blackwell et. al 2017, Shoenebeck et al. 2021, Shoenebeck et al. 2023

- Heuristics of harassment incidents
- Decisions about whether to address the issue of conflict and harassment at a systemic level, or at an individualized level in the case of severe harassment or abuse, especially by well-resourced actors (such as states)
- The needs of the group being addressed, whether this is individual or at a community level
- Resource and time considerations on the types of support that can be provided

2.1.5 The WMF should improve visibility and ease of access to support in cases of major threats to safety.

The WMF should prioritize greater support for admins who are threatened with physical harm, and improve expanded outreach to administrator groups for better visibility of these options.

2.1.6 The WMF should avoid the lure of one-size-fits-all solutions, and acknowledge areas that are not well-suited for WMF efforts.

A recurring theme from our study is that, even among Wikipedias that share several characteristics on paper, the challenges faced by their administrators are very specific and sensitive to local contexts. In addition, there are certain areas where effort is not advisable; for example, primarily focusing on minimizing administrator outflow is not advised. All of our data points towards administrator outflow and attrition linked to factors that are beyond the ability of any given volunteer community to seriously influence (e.g. school, work). On the topic of conflict and adminship, it is unclear if it is either possible to avoid conflict as an administrator, or if such conflict avoidance would even significantly impact administrator outflow. **From a values-driven perspective, it makes sense to try to support people targeted for serious abuse, but doing so is unlikely to be a solution to admin outflow.**

2.1.7 If the WMF continues efforts to increase representation and diversity of editors, there's a good chance this will have a downstream effect of increasing representation present among administrators.

While the acquisition of administrator rights comes with its own set of norms that may filter out certain types of individuals, increasing demographic diversity of editors upstream will increase the odds of improving representation among admins. One potential exception may be age—while we do not observe consistent demographic gaps between current and potential administrators by gender, educational attainment, or primary language—younger users (age 18-29) do appear to be generally

underrepresented among current administrators across the studied projects relative to the sample of potential administrators. This suggests that there may be some specific challenges to recruiting younger administrators that are distinct from those in attracting younger readers or editors. This is particularly notable given previous research indicating that [readers](#) and [editors](#) of Wikipedia either match or skew younger than the age distribution of the global population.

2.1.8 If, in close coordination with communities, the WMF Product and Technology department explores ways of surfacing the opportunities and benefits of adminship, more potential admins will discover these opportunities earlier and present stronger RFA applications.

Helping editors identify these opportunities earlier, and then learn what editing histories and characteristics are prioritized in RFA processes may also help improve the RFA experience for incoming admin candidates. In part, because understanding what characteristics are emphasized for administrator candidates will help those individuals prepare stronger cases. For example, efforts aimed at making community-building opportunities and locations of on-wiki village pumps (especially if active) more visible for potential admins, may help serve future admins and underrepresented groups.

2.2 Recommendations for community-adopted policies

2.2.1 Distributing (unbundling) administrator rights may help disperse the admin workload while providing more opportunities for potential admins to learn and succeed with admin work.

Several of the Wikipedias we analyzed distribute administrator workloads more broadly across multiple user groups, such as Portuguese Wikipedia allowing rollbackers to block vandals for 24 hours.¹⁸ The suggestion of distributing (namely unbundling) administrator rights was also explicitly named as a potential improvement by multiple interview participants on multiple Wikipedias. This could potentially have numerous helpful effects, such as:

- In the short term, distribute workload for the simplest administrator tasks
- Increase the visibility of simple administrator tasks
- Longer-term, provide a clear on-ramp to administrator work without requiring individuals to start with the full RFA process

¹⁸ [Wikipédia:Reversores – Wikipédia, a enciclopédia livre](#)

- Allows individuals who might not want to “give up” editing or other non-administrator work, to help reduce maintenance burdens without feeling obligated to focus entirely on administrative tasks

Communities would have to decide on which user groups would fit an expansion of user rights, and the subsequent mechanisms for ensuring that they were not misusing these potentially more consequential rights.

2.2.2 Lowering the barriers to de-admining can be explored as an enabling factor to help make the RFA processes less prohibitive.

Interviewees from English Wikipedia generally stated that part of the reason for English Wikipedia RFA's strictness was because it can be quite difficult to remove admin rights involuntarily. The rationale was that, if it's difficult to remove admin rights, then the community wants to impose very high standards on incoming admins. If it were less difficult to remove admin rights when appropriate, the bar to entry for admins could – as a result – be lowered slightly, allowing an increased inflow and opportunity for more potential admins to try out this type of work.

2.2.3 Consider adoption of programming and policy that has been used elsewhere to support current administrators and increase inflow of new administrators

There are examples of support efforts that can serve as inspiration for thinking about types of support that admin communities may want to consider a model for their own efforts. Multiple communities have identified the opportunity to support current admins in various ways; there are various examples of support programs for admins, including on [Polish](#), [German](#), and [French](#) Wikipedias. For example, in 2020, Wikimedia France set up a psychological support and assistance program, and in 2021 decided to continue this experiment by offering a broader and more comprehensive service to all its stakeholders.¹⁹ This idea is supported via interviews from the current project with English admins as they discussed the need for more community support to encourage collaboration and camaraderie among admins to help foster support and kindness.

2.2.4 Establishing better means of support for administrator candidates can help reduce the frequent extreme stresses of the RFA process and improve the number of successful candidates.

Administrators relayed to us that emotional and mental support through the RFA process was more important than any advice about how to perform in the RFA, per se. Thus, support aimed at coaching potential candidates through the stresses of RFA

¹⁹ [Wikimédia France/Soutien/Ligne d'écoute - Meta](#)

attempts could increase the rates of successful RFAs, or potentially reduce the amount of voluntary withdrawals. In addition to current efforts aimed at supporting new administrators, such support could also include a proposal to try to match each RFA candidate with a current admin who could serve as a contact point and coach for them. The goal of this contact point person would *not* be to try and directly influence the result of the RFA, but instead ensure the candidate has basic support throughout the process.

2.3 Recommendations for future research

This project has addressed various foundational questions around the current state of Wikipedia administrators. Nonetheless, there remain a number of open questions, especially as they pertain to research opportunities. We offer a generous (but non-exhaustive) list of them here for other researchers to consider; there are opportunities for:

- Evaluative research into the effectiveness of administrator support programs. Any such research should consider close partnership with affiliates or organized on-wiki bodies.
- More thorough investigation of the support that administrators would find most effective and desirable.
- Development of methodologies for tracking admin activities might change over time (e.g. policy changes).
- Development of models for predicting admin retention and/or attrition.
- Closer investigation of the relationship between administrator inflow and outflow rates. An important question in this space is whether the difficulty of removing adminship (“de-sysopping”) affects administrator *inflow* rates in addition to administrator outflow. Relatedly, there is an opportunity to better survey cross-wiki de-sysopping processes.
- Understanding what impacts, if any, the 2024 English Wikipedia RFA and de-sysopping reforms will have on the administrator body.
- Evaluating which policies seem effective at attracting new administrators, both in the short and long term.
- A deeper investigation into burnout of admins on-wiki. How prevalent is it? How severe is it? Are communities aware of this as a present problem?
- Focused inquiry into the topic of how people not only become admins, but become *good* admins. What are effective ways for administrators to learn how to use the tools available for them? What ways currently exist? Are they effective? And, moreover, how do they affect knowledge equity, given the highly skewed demographic makeup of administrators?
- Comparing metrics on admin activity, retention, RFAs, and overall sentiment between Wikipedias that have administrator “term limits” or re-election

procedures (such as German Wikipedia), versus those that allow administrators to retain rights indefinitely by default (such as English Wikipedia)

- Using mediawiki/product data: investigate, using baseline counts, admin editing-experience over time in the population data, to compare to what we see in the survey data.
- Using production data, in conjunction with structured and unstructured data on RFA pages: investigate what types of users become candidates for RFA, and which candidates are successful
 - Look at these trends over time
 - Compare the qualitative and quantitative aspects of RFA data, such as voting numbers and comment type or sentiment, etc.

2.4 More on product and policy implications

In our full reporting section, you can [read more about product and policy implications](#). This includes topics related to policy-based influences on recruitment, the clash between the reality and perception of administrator workloads, as well as the lack of direct market economic concerns on attrition.

3 Full Reporting

This section of the report contains full reporting, expanding on the key findings in section 1. As such, we suggest beginning at [section 1 key findings](#). The reader may have already noted that, for reading ease, many of the sections below are indexed via the key findings section.

3.1 Background, definitions, methods, and limitations

3.1.1 Background

At the start of this project, we conducted a very focused [annotated literature review](#). The topic of this review was the same as the project title, Wikipedia administration recruitment, retention, and attrition. These sources included independent research, WMF-sponsored research and metrics. The goal of this work was to both ground the investigating group in a survey of past work, and it may also serve as a resource for others studying similar topics.

For this project, we selected a [shortlist of Wikipedia editions](#), using 1000 weekly non-bot edits and more than 20 monthly active admins as cutoff points (as captured by the [Wiki Comparison](#) data). Very small Wikipedias have significantly different moderation pressures, which we infer would also affect administrator push/pull factors. Moreover, very small numbers of administrators also would mean that data would be very granular, increasing the risks associated with publishing it. Finally, since the genesis of this project came from issues expressed by members of the largest Wikipedias, we believed it was appropriate to also focus on higher-activity Wikipedias for this project. So, while most reporting will focus on this shortlist of Wikipedias, we do offer some insights into whether admin numbers are increasing, decreasing, or remaining stable across all Wikipedias ([see summary here](#)).

We utilized a combination of quantitative metric analysis, interviews, and mixed methods approaches (surveys) to better understand patterns of administrator retention and attrition. For each component, we established a set of [guiding questions](#) to shape the work. The metric analysis allowed us to examine broad trends at play, while the interviews and surveys helped us to examine more deeply topics such as which factors affect administrator retention.

For interview and survey²⁰ work, we took a comparative approach, further narrowing from the initial shortlist to an even more purposely targeted list of Wikipedias. This list included the following six language versions: English, French, Spanish, Russian, Indonesian, and Polish. To arrive at this [list for inclusion in survey](#)

²⁰ We approximate that through our survey of current admins, we reached between 53-92% (67% on average) of current admins on the surveyed projects.

[and interview work](#), we researched and examined a number of factors, including [administrator candidacy requirements](#), RFA success rates, monthly pageviews, monthly active administrators, median administrator actions, total sysops over time (January 2018 to present), ratio of sysops to monthly active administrators, analyses from the [risk observatory](#), as well as geographic distribution and some basic consideration of external factors and influences on projects, such as [government censorship of Wikipedia](#).

To highlight a few of our considerations in arriving at the list of focus language versions for the surveys and interviews:

- We deliberately included Wikipedias with both short (≤ 6 month)(English, Russian, Indonesian) and longer (Spanish, French) account age requirements for administrators.
- The list includes Wikipedias for which there's a range of edit requirements for administrator candidacy. From the most extreme case of English (10k) to the moderate requirements of French (3k) to either low (100 for Russian, 500 for Indonesian) or none stated (Spanish).
- We also include a few Wikipedias for which there are other explicit candidacy requirements, such as English (member of the extended-confirmed user group).
- We have a relatively wide geographic distribution of the administrators who participate in these Wikipedias, and examples of languages that have both wide geographic distribution (e.g., across many countries: English, Spanish) and more narrow distribution (spoken more primarily in one country or region).
- Through the inclusion of Russian, we have at least one example of a Wikipedia for which there are meaningful external factors that may affect administrators, such as the role of censorship of Wikipedia (currently partial).
- We compared the ratio between monthly active administrators, and the number of sysops. The two projects with the lowest ratio (meaning, a large number of sysops relative to monthly active admins) were English and Chinese Wikipedia, while the two with the highest ratio were Portuguese and Russian. A high ratio suggests that there are very many active admins - for these two projects, the ratio was high enough that it suggested there were more monthly active admins than there were sysops. Therefore, this short list includes Wikipedias that fall into both the high and low ratio groups through the inclusion of English and Russian.
- Looking at RFA success rates for 2013-2023, the two highest are French and Dutch, whereas the two lowest are Chinese and Spanish. As such, we've ensured we include one from each of these groups, French and Spanish.

- The selected Wikipedias exhibit a range of median actions per admin, from English on the low end with a median of <20, and Spanish on the high end with a median of >300.
- In the process of beginning to collect and analyze data, we decided to include Polish Wikipedia, a language edition for which admin numbers have fluctuated but remained overall somewhat steady (vs. increasing or decreasing, as is the case with some of the other surveyed language editions).

3.1.2 Definitions

In order to study administrator patterns and provide a unified basis for comparison across language versions, we first had to arrive at some [primary definitions](#). This included definitions for both roles and actions. Some key terms we defined included *administrator*, *active administrator*, *administrative actions*, *inactive administrator*, *former administrator*, and *prospective/potential administrator*. For example, for most language versions administrator means membership in the *sysop* user group. However, even arriving at a definition for administrator proved complicated as some language versions have additional user groups with admin rights, such as *eliminator*, *closer*, and *botadmin*. In short, administrative actions may be distributed in different ways across language versions and projects.

In figures and tables, we use abbreviations to refer to Wikipedia projects in different languages, in the form of “two-letter ISO language code” and “wiki”, short for Wikipedia. As an example, six of the Wikipedias we focused on were:

- enwik (English Wikipedia)
- eswiki (Spanish Wikipedia)
- frwiki (French Wikipedia)
- idwiki (Indonesian Wikipedia)
- plwiki (Polish Wikipedia)
- ruwiki (Russian Wikipedia)

As a reference for the full report, here’s a summary of key definitions.

Term	Definition
Administrator or “admin”	User with rights to make at least one administrative action.
Sysop	User in the <i>sysop</i> user group. By our definition, all sysops are administrators, not all administrators are sysops.
Administrative action or “administrator action”	Changes to user blocks, page protection levels, page deletion status, or the rights of other users. The associated log actions are <i>block</i> , <i>protect</i> , <i>delete</i> , <i>rights</i> .
Active administrator	Administrator who made 1 or more administrative actions

	during the specified period of time.
Potential administrator	Users who meet criteria for adminship as set by their Wikipedia edition, but who are not currently an administrator.

Under our definitions, “administrator” does not neatly overlap onto “sysop”, and different wikis may have other user groups which allow their users to take administrative actions. Therefore, even if these users are not sysops, they would be considered administrators in our study. Please refer to the key finding, [‘Administrative actions and responsibilities are dispersed or concentrated differently across Wikipedias’](#) for more on this topic.

3.1.3 Interview methodology

For the interview portion of the project, we conducted 12 interviews with Wikipedia administrators, including five current and seven former administrators. Participants represented English, French, Spanish, Indonesian, and Russian language communities. Recruitment was done through two channels: direct outreach to recommended users²¹ and participants who had opted into interviews through the survey. We intentionally excluded individuals who were completely inactive on-wiki, as they were unlikely to respond, and avoided recruiting participants who explicitly left due to conflicts with the Wikimedia Foundation to mitigate potential bias and risks, which would require modifications to methods and timeline.

Interviews were semistructured and lasted approximately 60 minutes. Language interpretation services were offered for participants who preferred them, and some interviews were conducted with language interpretation. To acknowledge their time and contributions, participants were offered a monetary research reward on completion of the interview.

3.1.4 Survey methodology

We defined two broad populations of eligible survey respondents:

- First, currently serving administrators on English, French, Spanish, Indonesian, Polish, and Russian Wikipedias. Currently serving administrators were defined as all editors in the administrator user group on that project (e.g., sysops).
- Second, potential administrators on English, French, Spanish, Indonesian, Polish, and Russian Wikipedia. Potential administrators were defined as

²¹ Recommended users were forwarded via consultation with Movement Communications.

editors who qualified as of October 2024 for RFA candidacy according to the formal rules defined by the relevant community.

All currently-serving administrators across the studied projects (as of October 2024) were contacted to take part in the survey. In addition, all potential administrators on French, Indonesian, and Russian Wikipedia were contacted to take part in the survey. A random sample of potential administrators on English Wikipedia (1650 / 4884 total), Spanish Wikipedia (1780 / 13694 total), and Polish Wikipedia (1530 / 2544 total) were contacted to take part in the survey. Surveys were hosted on Limesurvey and users were contacted using the [MassMessage](#) tool.

Surveys of current and potential administrators on English, French, Spanish, and Indonesian Wikipedia were fielded beginning on October 23, 2024. Surveys of current and potential administrators on Polish and Russian Wikipedia were fielded beginning on November 8, 2024. All surveys were closed on November 22, 2024. IP addresses were collected for English, French, Spanish, Indonesian, and Polish Wikipedia respondents for the purposes of country-level geographical categorization, but were not collected for Russian Wikipedia respondents due to security and privacy concerns.

3.1.5 Limitations

Due to our use of a survey, we require larger populations in order to come up with representative results. Smaller Wikipedia editions tend to have very few administrators (the median number of monthly active admins across all projects is 2), and surveys with such few participants are not capable of producing generalizable results. In addition to considerations of generalizability, such small numbers of admins also means that this data would be extremely granular, which increases the risks associated with publishing it. As such, we are aware that the shortlist of candidates and our final selected Wikipedias for the survey and interviews are skewed towards languages with European origins (though they are spoken across many countries and regions) and languages with large speaker populations.

Due to the relatively small populations of interest in this research (the number of current administrators ranged from a low of 47 on Indonesian Wikipedia to 838 on English Wikipedia and potential administrators from 24 on Indonesian Wikipedia to 4884 on English Wikipedia), [statistical power](#) presents a substantial challenge. We attempted to address this by attempting to contact all current administrators on each of the studied Wikipedias and all of the potential administrators on French, Indonesian, and Russian Wikipedia. Potential administrators on English (1650/4884), Spanish (1780/13694), and Polish Wikipedias (1530/2544) were randomly sampled and contacted. Nonetheless, given that response rates among contacted current and

potential administrators did not reach 100%, survey responses should be interpreted with some caution for two primary reasons.

First, for smaller populations (current administrators for projects other than English Wikipedia, potential administrators, potential Indonesian Wikipedia and French Wikipedia), estimates are likely to be noisy simply due to random error in, for example, sampling and respondent choice. Our presentation of survey results for these projects attempts wherever possible to reflect this—both through indicators of uncertainty due to sampling error ([margin of error](#)) and by expressing results as frequencies rather than proportions.

Second, there is likely to be systematic [heterogeneity](#) in non-response—that is, survey [selection bias](#)—among both current and potential administrators across all of the studied projects. For example, administrators who are inactive may be less likely to 1) see a notification on their talk page, and 2) be interested in responding to a survey for current administrators. In addition, we have reason to think that there may be substantial selection bias among Russian Wikipedia administrators in particular due to security concerns, especially among those residing inside the Russian Federation. This type of bias is intrinsically unobservable and our current research design does not allow us to fully address this. We may, for example, employ [weighting](#) to improve the representativeness of our sample with respect to admin tenure or activity levels, but as this is a type of “adjustment on observables”, this relies on the (strong and untestable) assumption that what we can observe is strongly correlated with the causes of potential selection bias.

With regards to interviews, since we limited interviews to former administrators who were still active on Wikimedia projects, this is not necessarily representative of the experiences of former administrators. In particular, a common refrain we heard from our participants was that they thought it was more common to lose administrator rights through inactivity and then completely stop on-wiki involvement.

As part of this research we conducted a review of the formal and informal barriers to entering the administrator group, in the form of looking at RFAs. Over the course of data collection, though, it became clear that this was only half the story, as real or perceived difficulties in *removing* administrators appears to be part of the reason it is so difficult to admit new administrators. The ways in which administrators can be removed (as opposed to voluntarily stepping down) have received less attention than RFAs to date. Seeing if there is any correlation between de-sysopping policies, rate of admin outflow, and rate of admin inflow would put us on much more stable foundations for future interventions.

3.3 Administrator lifecycles

3.3.1 Gaining administrative rights

The [request for adminship \(RFA\) process](#) is the name for the general process by which an individual can gain entry into the administrator user group. It begins when a user is submitted as an RFA candidate, either by themselves or through nomination by another contributor. RFAs generally occur in a dedicated page within Wikipedia's community space, though the exact nature of its structure differs from project to project. In their RFA, the candidate (or their nominator) is generally expected to present a statement outlining their qualifications, experience, and an explanation of why they seek adminship. In practice, well-prepared candidates may consciously engage in certain activities in order to bolster their credentials and demonstrate willingness to engage in admin activity, as well as practicing or even rehearsing anticipated questions. .

Different Wikipedias have different set lengths for an RFA, with no universal standards for duration. RFAs on English Wikipedia (prior to the [2024 RFA reforms](#)) ran for seven days, while on Spanish Wikipedia a full RFA may run for 14 days. During an RFA, any other user may ask questions and give input on the candidate's suitability for adminship.²² They may express their support, opposition, or neutrality, and often provide a reason for their stance. RFAs may also be closed early according to various rules (the most frequent being some rule around the RFA being highly unlikely to succeed, therefore being open to premature and involuntary closure), and candidates can generally also withdraw their participation at any point in the process.

To determine the outcome of an RFA, Wikipedias generally go by consensus or explicit voting. English Wikipedia operates by consensus²³, but the majority of the surveyed 21 Wikipedias judge the outcome of the RFA through voting. At the conclusion of the RFA, the community tallies up expressions of support (or official votes), against expressions of opposition (or votes against). The question of *who* closes the vote also varies among different Wikipedia editions. For example, English Wikipedia allows bureaucrats to close successful RFAs, while non-bureaucrats can close unambiguously unsuccessful RFAs.²⁴ Meanwhile, smaller wikis without local bureaucrats rely on stewards to add successful RFA candidates to the admin group in their respective wiki. .

²² Across our 21 Wikipedias, we found no formal barriers to commenting in the RFA process, though in practice being aware of the process and the venue for RFAs is its own soft barrier. Contrast this to voters, who generally must meet formal requirements to vote.

²³ Though several English Wikipedia interviewees made mention of a soft 70% threshold for an RFA to be considered an uncontroversial pass.

²⁴ Unambiguously unsuccessful RFAs include RFAs where the candidate voluntarily withdraws, or where there is overwhelming opposition to the RFA.

Different Wikipedias have different thresholds for success, though in our survey a rough two-thirds majority is generally the minimum required for a successful RFA across Wikipedias where we can obtain this data. If the RFA is successful, a local bureaucrat or a steward on Meta-Wiki then grants the candidate the administrator user role on their project. If the RFA is unsuccessful, candidates are generally discouraged from immediately re-applying for RFA, either informally or through formal rules that determine the grace period between RFA attempts.

Successful candidates are typically experienced contributors who have a track record of positive contributions, minimal conflicts with other editors, and an understanding of Wikipedia's policies and guidelines. Unsuccessful candidates typically return to editing and their other areas of contribution, and some may decide to reapply at a later time.

In some Wikipedia editions, administrator status is indefinite, and users with it retain it unless something happens to cause it to be revoked (such as a de-sysopping or removal for inactivity). In others, administrators have terms or must go through re-election procedures at set intervals. English Wikipedia is an example of a project with indefinite administrators²⁵, while German Wikipedia and Polish Wikipedia are examples of projects with administrator terms.

3.3.2 Removal of administrator rights

Just as the community grants adminship through the RFA process, it can revoke access to administrative tools and responsibilities in a process referred to as "de-sysopping". De-sysopping can occur voluntarily, often when current admins cannot or no longer wish to actively fulfill their administrative duties. Communities may or may not have a formal process for de-sysopping, either at the administrator's request, or against their will. De-sysopping practices seem more diverse than RFA practices across our studied Wikipedias, although we did not focus on them as closely as RFAs.

Voluntary de-sysopping, sometimes characterized as administrators "stepping down", is done unilaterally by the administrator requesting their de-sysopping. There is no suggestion that Wikimedia communities have measures to prevent admins (who wish to step down) from requesting a voluntary de-sysopping.

Involuntary de-sysopping, or de-sysopping "for cause", can be very complicated. Some projects, such as French or German Wikipedias, have systems whereby other administrators can call for a user's de-sysopping, provided there are enough admins in

²⁵ [Wikipedia:Administrators](#)

support of this de-sysopping who can provide evidence (generally in the form of diffs²⁶) to initiate a de-sysopping vote. These votes generally mimic the same procedures as RFAs: there is a set duration to the re-election vote, voters must fulfill certain criteria for participation, and there is a set threshold for successful re-election. For example, French Wikipedia allows administrators to face a desysop vote if:

- Six other current administrators publicly support the de-sysopping,
- All relevant information provided by those supporting the recall relates to activity done by the target of the recall, within the last six months

In practice, administrators may voluntarily resign rather than face the stresses of a public re-election.

Other places have more difficult de-sysopping procedures. Prior to the 2024 reforms, on English Wikipedia, only the [Arbitration Committee \(ArbCom\)](#) could revoke an administrator's rights against their will,²⁷ whether by bringing a recall to bear or by requiring an ArbCom clerk to sign off on a community-created petition for recall. This was a notably higher bar than the formal requirements for an RFA.

After the 2024 reforms,²⁸ a process more similar to that of German Wikipedia was adopted, where any [extended-confirmed](#) editor can start a petition to recall an active administrator. This petition requires twenty-five signatures within 30 days to pass, and cannot be made within a year of an admin's successful RFA. If it passes, the named administrator is obligated to make a re-request for adminship to retain their administrator rights.

Most Wikipedias we surveyed also had inactivity thresholds for administrators, where admins who were not sufficiently active can have their rights removed. The specific threshold (and definition of "active") varies across different language Wikipedias. For instance, English Wikipedia defines an inactive administrator as one "with no edits or logged actions for at least one year, or fewer than 100 edits in the past five years".²⁹ Spanish Wikipedia requires that their administrators carry out at least 50 actions that require admin rights, within the last two years. These definitions are generally less stringent than the definition of "inactive administrator" used by this study. Inactive administrators generally seem to be able to request an expedited form of RFA, provided they were not in poor standing at the time of the de-sysopping procedure.

²⁶ "Diff" here means a link to a specific revision of a page, which is normally used to highlight a specific edit to a page. In this context, this means providing links to specific edits made by the target of the de-sysopping.

²⁷ [Wikipedia:Guide to Community de-adminship](#)

²⁸ [English Wikipedia: Requests for adminship/2024 review/Phase II/Administrator recall](#)

²⁹ [English Wikipedia:Former administrators/reason](#)

3.4 General state of administrators on Wikipedia

3.4.1 [The number of monthly active administrators on large Wikipedias has been declining since 2018, with some exceptions. For smaller Wikipedias, administrator numbers are mostly stable or increasing since 2018.](#)

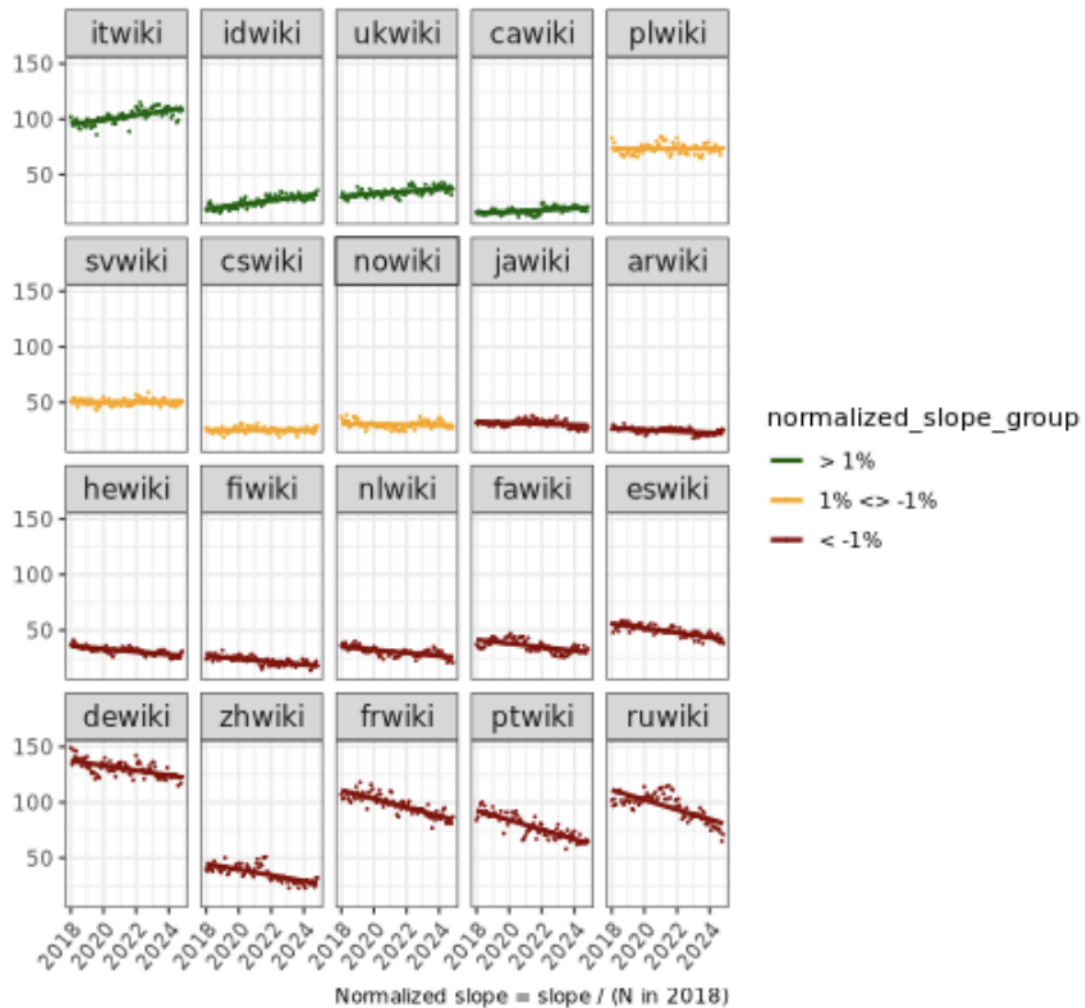


Figure 1a. Monthly active admins: 2018-present (with regression lines), 21 shortlisted Wikipedias sans English Wikipedia

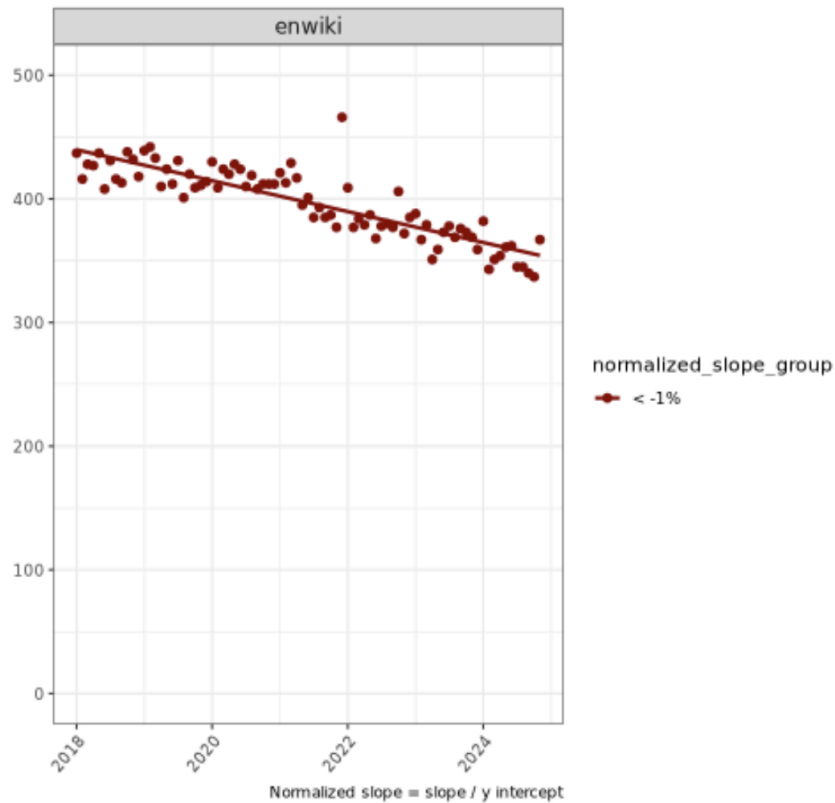


Figure 1b. Monthly active admins: 2018-present (with regression lines), English Wikipedia only

In determining whether adminship was increasing, decreasing, or stable during the period January 2018 to October 2024, we use the following definitions:

- Active admins **increasing**: linear regression slope normalized³⁰ by y-intercept is greater than 0.01
- Active admins **stable**: linear regression slope normalized by y-intercept is between 0.01 and -0.01
- Active admins **decreasing**: linear regression slope normalized by y-intercept is less than -0.01.

Through the use of the period beginning in January 2018, we're able to align with data at [Wiki Comparison \[public\]](#); moreover, this starting point helps omit a large and incorrect spike in active admin count between Aug and Nov 2016, which cannot be corrected.³¹

³⁰ Normalized by dividing the slope by the y-intercept, to account for very different Ns across Wikipedias

³¹ Before Aug 2016, no deletion log event was generated when moving a page on top of a redirect. When the [event was added](#) in Aug 2016, it used the same `log_action` as regular deletions ('`delete`'). In Nov 2016, the '`delete_redirect`' action was created to allow the two types of events to be distinguished. As a result, the [active admin](#) definition and query produces incorrect results between Aug and Nov 2016. See also: [this \(gerrit\)](#), [this \(gerrit\)](#), and [T145991](#).

The table below contains administrator data for *all* Wikipedias, from January 2018 to November 2024. The overwhelming majority show stable or increasing slopes; one (Telugu Wikipedia) shows a decreasing slope. Wikipedias that did not have admin activity logged by January 2018 were excluded from the table.

Table 1. List of all Wikipedia's regression slopes for monthly active admins Jan 2018-Nov 2024.

wiki_db	slope	normalized_slope	normalized slope group	interpretation
acewiki	0.1397550017	0.06987750086	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
akwiki	0.09773029084	0.09773029084	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
alswiki	-0.02493598086	-0.01246799043	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
angwiki	0.2641635425	0.06604088563	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
anwiki	-0.1294655976	-0.0323663994	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
arcwiki	0.03368730969	0.03368730969	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
arwiki	-0.7092901222	-0.02728038931	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
astwiki	-0.2138449267	-0.05346123169	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
atjwiki	0.00109444342	5.47E-04	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
azbwiki	-0.01618277429	-0.008091387146	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
azwiki	0.310566307	0.02070442047	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
barwiki	-0.1657361152	-0.05524537173	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
bat_smgwiki	0.01345268471	0.01345268471	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
bawiki	-0.03475924604	-0.01158641535	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
bclwiki	0.2045254187	0.04090508375	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
bewiki	0.2511229587	0.03139036984	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
bgwiki	-0.8556315856	-0.0777846896	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
biwiki	0.02162236768	0.01081118384	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
bjnwiki	-0.002306082768	-0.001153041384	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
bnwiki	-0.00277066454	-2.52E-04	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
bowiki	0.09309261827	0.09309261827	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
bpywiki	0.09741864318	0.09741864318	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
bswiki	0.06498467739	0.01083077956	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
bugwiki	-0.07068235241	-0.0353411762	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
cawiki	0.7573989337	0.04733743336	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
cbk_zamwiki	-0.07449878252	-0.02483292751	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
cewiki	0.1287099618	0.0643549809	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
chrwiki	0.1281202874	0.04270676246	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
chywiki	-0.02263307082	-0.01131653541	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
ckbwiki	0.1710255657	0.08551278284	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
cswiki	-0.00780823643	-2.89E-04	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
cywiki	0.0458419042	0.01528063473	0.1 <> -0.1	stable

dawiki	-0.5385164351	-0.03590109567	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
dewiki	-2.20242643	-0.01478138544	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
dsbwiki	0.01523321985	0.00507773995	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
dtwiki	0.003284516542	0.001642258271	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
dvwiki	0.07551657302	0.07551657302	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
elwiki	-0.1443264347	-0.01030903105	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
enwiki	-12.50627597	-0.02861848049	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
eowiki	-0.04181184669	-0.01045296167	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
eswiki	-2.065656354	-0.0368867206	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
etwiki	-0.7009781285	-0.03689358571	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
euwiki	-0.136014441	-0.02720288821	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
extwiki	0.03181965145	0.03181965145	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
fawiki	-1.637462743	-0.04425574981	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
fiwiki	-1.319591957	-0.05498299819	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
fjwiki	-0.07753425652	-0.03876712826	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
fowiki	0.1205500022	0.06027500108	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
frpwiki	0.01246579697	0.003116449242	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
frrwiki	-0.0590473724	-0.0590473724	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
frwiki	-3.844674867	-0.03593154081	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
fywiki	0.1566684858	0.07833424289	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
ganwiki	0.049144047	0.049144047	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
gawiki	0.1697661727	0.08488308635	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
gdwiki	-0.001180699067	-0.001180699067	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
glwiki	-0.003024330124	-0.001008110041	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
glwiki	-0.7485831829	-0.09357289786	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
gnwiki	0.06601064293	0.06601064293	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
gotwiki	0.03850827372	0.01925413686	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
guwiki	0.1440745561	0.07203727803	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
gvwiki	-0.07996263162	-0.07996263162	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
hakwiki	0.03092970785	0.01546485393	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
hawwiki	0.177821427	0.0889107135	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
hewiki	-1.292389068	-0.03492943428	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
hiwiki	0.2901641409	0.03627051761	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
hrwiki	0.1589353931	0.01222579947	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
hsbwiki	0.0498334479	0.0498334479	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
huwiki	-0.6254145502	-0.02719193696	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
hywiki	-0.3566600898	-0.03962889887	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
iawiki	0.1713785992	0.05712619975	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
ikwiki	-0.0240804317	-0.0240804317	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
ilowiki	0.0940290753	0.0940290753	0.1 <> -0.1	stable

iowiki	0.09823265186	0.04911632593	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
iswiki	-0.001763150162	-3.53E-04	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
itwiki	2.157340162	0.02115039375	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
jamwiki	0.1967393125	0.06557977085	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
jawiki	-0.4934301667	-0.01541969271	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
jbowiki	0.01474502999	0.01474502999	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
kaawiki	0.194356098	0.09717804901	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
kabwiki	-0.08967488831	-0.02241872208	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
kbdwiki	0.04359161827	0.01453053942	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
kbpwiki	0.06216491606	0.02072163869	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
kgwiki	0.01625714153	0.01625714153	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
kiwiki	0.1611034497	0.08055172483	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
kkwiki	-0.0460937828	-0.006584826114	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
klwiki	0.05265235437	0.02632617718	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
kowiki	0.1390369842	0.007724276899	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
krcwiki	0.08569658638	0.02856552879	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
kuwiki	0.1254355401	0.02508710801	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
kwwiki	0.03777565999	0.03777565999	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
ladwiki	8.45E-04	4.22E-04	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
lawiki	-0.2161118341	-0.05402795852	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
lbewiki	0.02669511806	0.02669511806	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
lbwiki	0.06523655598	0.03261827799	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
lezwiki	-0.007934449204	-0.002644816401	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
lgwiki	0.02701756215	0.01350878107	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
lijwiki	0.2204912302	0.07349707673	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
liwiki	0.09977392789	0.04988696395	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
lmowiki	0.1667436296	0.08337181479	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
loginwiki	0.01610275089	0.01610275089	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
lowiki	0.03897301495	0.01299100498	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
ltwiki	-0.690147349	-0.09859247843	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
lvwiki	0.08614247932	0.009571386592	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
maiwiki	0.007102275847	0.007102275847	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
map_bmswiki	-0.01086974991	-0.005434874957	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
mkwiki	-0.2763108182	-0.02763108182	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
mlwiki	-0.2060366903	-0.02575458629	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
mrwiki	0.24910793	0.08303597666	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
mwiki	0.08311993619	0.0138533227	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
mtwiki	-0.07279291382	-0.02426430461	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
myvwiki	0.0579028686	0.0579028686	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
mywiki	0.1674992654	0.08374963268	0.1 <> -0.1	stable

mznwiki	0.07099805714	0.07099805714	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
nahwiki	0.1448265801	0.07241329007	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
napwiki	0.09243944419	0.04621972209	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
nawiki	0.03733878184	0.03733878184	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
nds_nlwiki	0.1282498898	0.0641249449	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
ndswiki	-0.1139029045	-0.03796763484	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
newiki	-0.3765584988	-0.0418398332	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
nlwiki	-1.37273834	-0.03813162056	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
nnwiki	-0.1463414634	-0.0487804878	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
novwiki	-0.08555105941	-0.04277552971	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
nowiki	-0.2309726712	-0.006242504626	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
nsowiki	0.07838086477	0.07838086477	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
nvwiki	-0.01486083708	-0.01486083708	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
nywiki	0.02855827476	0.01427913738	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
omwiki	-0.0221875706	-0.0110937853	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
orwiki	-0.05138323328	-0.01284580832	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
oswiki	-0.03150200456	-0.03150200456	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
pamwiki	0.1858617791	0.04646544478	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
papwiki	0.04882364193	0.02441182096	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
pawiki	0.1231686327	0.06158431636	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
pcdwiki	-0.03622381331	-0.01207460444	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
pflwiki	-0.05317220544	-0.05317220544	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
plwiki	0.03072918853	3.70E-04	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
pmswiki	0.1628995517	0.08144977584	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
pntwiki	0.06964394408	0.06964394408	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
ptwiki	-4.334578733	-0.05160212777	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
rmwiki	0.01614475536	0.01614475536	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
rmywiki	0.06349627429	0.03174813715	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
rnwiki	-0.02377960321	-0.02377960321	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
roa_rupwiki	0.01449978975	0.007249894876	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
roa_tarawiki	0.07744752958	0.07744752958	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
rowiki	0.1856345242	0.01325960887	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
ruwiki	-4.39603711	-0.04309840304	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
scowiki	-0.08916502246	-0.08916502246	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
scwiki	0.08598796025	0.08598796025	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
sewiki	0.07491703576	0.02497234525	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
simplewiki	0.1188866966	0.01320963296	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
skwiki	0.01863901599	0.003106502666	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
slwiki	0.3619495403	0.05170707719	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
smwiki	-0.02132180973	-0.01066090486	0.1 <> -0.1	stable

sqwiki	0.1916796104	0.03833592209	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
srnwiki	0.04826860928	0.04826860928	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
srwiki	0.237269636	0.01581797574	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
suwiki	0.06642870798	0.06642870798	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
svwiki	0.01964653037	3.85E-04	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
tawiki	0.4045170228	0.04494633587	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
tcywiki	0.02369989273	0.02369989273	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
tetwiki	0.0650361023	0.0650361023	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
thwiki	0.1493640065	0.02133771522	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
tkwiki	0.1040258595	0.05201292977	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
tlwiki	-0.07959363587	-0.02653121196	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
towiki	0.03470104453	0.03470104453	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
tpiwiki	0.07296095251	0.07296095251	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
trwiki	0.477058058	0.05963225725	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
tumwiki	0.1218756109	0.06093780543	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
twwiki	0.1417492613	0.07087463063	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
tywiki	0.08706720206	0.08706720206	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
ukwiki	1.145795726	0.03819319088	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
urwiki	-0.321145208	-0.040143151	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
vecwiki	0.01316547441	0.004388491469	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
vepwiki	0.009491495718	0.004745747859	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
viwiki	0.5052684606	0.03609060433	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
vlswiki	0.05835100862	0.05835100862	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
warwiki	0.110574703	0.02764367575	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
wawiki	0.05837285888	0.02918642944	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
xmfwiki	0.05029427501	0.02514713751	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
yowiki	0.2211463255	0.0442292651	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
zh_classicalwiki	0.0367742748	0.0183871374	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
zh_yuewiki	0.3790772847	0.07581545695	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
zhwiki	-2.601402124	-0.0650350531	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
zuwiki	0.2244238277	0.07480794257	0.1 <> -0.1	stable
tewiki	-0.5216405692	-0.1043281138	< -0.1	decreasing
abwiki	0.4297048822	0.4297048822	> 0.1	increasing
afwiki	0.4649678855	0.1162419714	> 0.1	increasing
amwiki	0.6976928496	0.6976928496	> 0.1	increasing
arwiki	0.3035137064	0.1011712355	> 0.1	increasing
aswiki	0.4627009781	0.2313504891	> 0.1	increasing
aywiki	0.1012657441	0.1012657441	> 0.1	increasing
be_x_oldwiki	0.2468410226	0.2468410226	> 0.1	increasing
bhwiki	0.2586793166	0.2586793166	> 0.1	increasing

bxrwiki	0.1280173015	0.1280173015	> 0.1	increasing
cdowiki	0.1079930278	0.1079930278	> 0.1	increasing
cebwiki	0.6140800134	0.3070400067	> 0.1	increasing
chwiki	0.1948586253	0.1948586253	> 0.1	increasing
cowiki	0.1511612649	0.1511612649	> 0.1	increasing
crhwiki	0.1642946702	0.1642946702	> 0.1	increasing
crwiki	0.3164267128	0.3164267128	> 0.1	increasing
csbwiki	0.2099189544	0.2099189544	> 0.1	increasing
cuwiki	0.1920454373	0.1920454373	> 0.1	increasing
cvwiki	0.2045755309	0.2045755309	> 0.1	increasing
diqwiki	0.1089141554	0.1089141554	> 0.1	increasing
dzwiki	0.2190036452	0.2190036452	> 0.1	increasing
emlwiki	0.1120554143	0.1120554143	> 0.1	increasing
ffwiki	0.2474903454	0.2474903454	> 0.1	increasing
fiu_vrowiki	0.1438006015	0.1438006015	> 0.1	increasing
hawiki	1.057134461	0.3523781537	> 0.1	increasing
hifwiki	0.2214012846	0.2214012846	> 0.1	increasing
idwiki	1.983040175	0.1043705355	> 0.1	increasing
igwiki	0.2256832207	0.1128416103	> 0.1	increasing
iuwiki	0.1255422345	0.1255422345	> 0.1	increasing
jywiki	0.2375215146	0.2375215146	> 0.1	increasing
kawiki	0.3355022879	0.111834096	> 0.1	increasing
kmwiki	0.759833679	0.253277893	> 0.1	increasing
knwiki	0.2050291759	0.2050291759	> 0.1	increasing
kswiki	0.1328837114	0.1328837114	> 0.1	increasing
kywiki	0.2534424746	0.1267212373	> 0.1	increasing
mgwiki	0.1255317302	0.1255317302	> 0.1	increasing
mhrwiki	0.1350031883	0.1350031883	> 0.1	increasing
minwiki	0.2332395785	0.2332395785	> 0.1	increasing
miwiki	0.1170455228	0.1170455228	> 0.1	increasing
mnwiki	0.4176147097	0.4176147097	> 0.1	increasing
mwlwiki	0.2528453289	0.2528453289	> 0.1	increasing
olowiki	0.1168643473	0.1168643473	> 0.1	increasing
pagwiki	0.2534411736	0.2534411736	> 0.1	increasing
pdcwiki	0.1223584441	0.1223584441	> 0.1	increasing
pihwiki	0.2146757427	0.2146757427	> 0.1	increasing
piwiki	0.1351090413	0.1351090413	> 0.1	increasing
pnbwiki	0.37555086	0.37555086	> 0.1	increasing
pswiki	0.2818521473	0.2818521473	> 0.1	increasing
quwiki	0.2458867077	0.1229433539	> 0.1	increasing

sahwiki	0.162928702	0.162928702	> 0.1	increasing
scnwiki	0.1187855845	0.1187855845	> 0.1	increasing
sdwiki	0.2593205403	0.2593205403	> 0.1	increasing
sgwiki	0.1535172428	0.1535172428	> 0.1	increasing
shwiki	0.3775660132	0.1258553377	> 0.1	increasing
siwiki	0.5427983712	0.2713991856	> 0.1	increasing
sowiki	0.3012625294	0.1506312647	> 0.1	increasing
sswiki	0.255026974	0.255026974	> 0.1	increasing
stqwiki	0.1658447448	0.1658447448	> 0.1	increasing
stwiki	0.2139845707	0.2139845707	> 0.1	increasing
swwiki	0.6239032786	0.3119516393	> 0.1	increasing
szlwiki	0.3375173167	0.1687586583	> 0.1	increasing
tgwiki	0.2889047479	0.144452374	> 0.1	increasing
tnwiki	0.2129781783	0.2129781783	> 0.1	increasing
tswiki	0.149117635	0.149117635	> 0.1	increasing
ttwiki	0.4657346339	0.4657346339	> 0.1	increasing
udmwiki	0.12660325	0.12660325	> 0.1	increasing
uzwiki	2.461105747	0.6152764368	> 0.1	increasing
wuuwiki	0.1686704036	0.1686704036	> 0.1	increasing
xalwiki	0.1153012306	0.1153012306	> 0.1	increasing
xhwiki	0.1515313232	0.1515313232	> 0.1	increasing
yiwiki	0.2967129843	0.2967129843	> 0.1	increasing
zh_min_nanwiki	0.3971050858	0.1323683619	> 0.1	increasing

3.4.2 [Administrative actions and responsibilities are dispersed or concentrated differently across Wikipedia editions.](#)

This study defines “administrator” as any user that is a member of a user group with the ability to carry out one or more of four administrative actions (blocking or unblocking users, deleting pages, changing page protections, or setting user group rights). These administrative actions are *commonly* thought of as the responsibility of [sysops](#), who do have special rights to carry out all of these actions. However, in practice, not all of these activities are performed solely by sysops. Some projects disperse some or all of these rights to other user groups, while others concentrate them within the sysop user role. (See Figure 2, below, for a visualization of user groups with at least some administrative rights).

In this report, we use “sysop” to refer to users in the sysop user group, which is generally synonymous with “admin” in regular usage on-wiki. “Administrator” or “admin” is used when we are referring to any user role that can perform an

administrative action, regardless of whether or not that role is called “admin” on-wiki. For instance, Portuguese Wikipedia allows members of the [rollback](#) group (or “rollbackers”; see Figure 2) to block users; there, the policy is that rollbackers can only block users engaging in clear, unambiguous vandalism, for no more than 24 hours. This policy is socially enforced, as there is no technical mechanism to prevent rollbackers from blocking people outside of those boundaries.

English Wikipedia currently has the most admins, as well as the most sysops. Portuguese Wikipedia has more non-sysop admins (eliminators and rollbackers) than sysops. For Russian, Japanese, and Persian Wikipedias, about a third of their admins are non-sysops. This points to some degree of dispersal within these projects, where responsibilities (and therefore, the user rights needed to take on those responsibilities) normally associated with administrators, are extended to other user groups.

Wikis for which the following User Groups have (some) admin rights

	sysop	botadmin	eliminator	checkuser	closer	event-coordinator	image-reviewer	interface-admin	rollbacker
zhwiki									
ukwiki									
svwiki									
ruwiki					ruwiki				
ptwiki			ptwiki						ptwiki
plwiki									
nowiki									
nlwiki				nlwiki					
jawiki			jawiki				jawiki		
itwiki		itwiki							
idwiki									
hewiki									
frwiki									
fiwiki									
fawiki		fawiki	fawiki				fawiki		
eswiki		eswiki							
enwiki						enwiki			
dewiki									
cswiki									
cawiki									
arwiki									

Figure 2. For the 21 shortlisted Wikipedias, which user groups have (at least some) administrative rights

3.4.3 Admin inflow has been decreasing yearly since 2018 for most of the of the shortlisted 21 Wikipedias.

Of the 21 shortlisted Wikipedias, show decreasing or stable inflow since 2018.

Exceptions include the following, which have seen recent spikes in inflow:

- Catalan, Indonesian, and Ukrainian had a spike of inflow in 2022 (note: spike in Ukrainian is a result of [large-scale granting of temporary adminship](#) on the project);
- Hebrew and Japanese had a spike of inflow in 2020;
- For Arabic and Persian, inflow increased between 2010-2015 and has been decreasing since 2015.

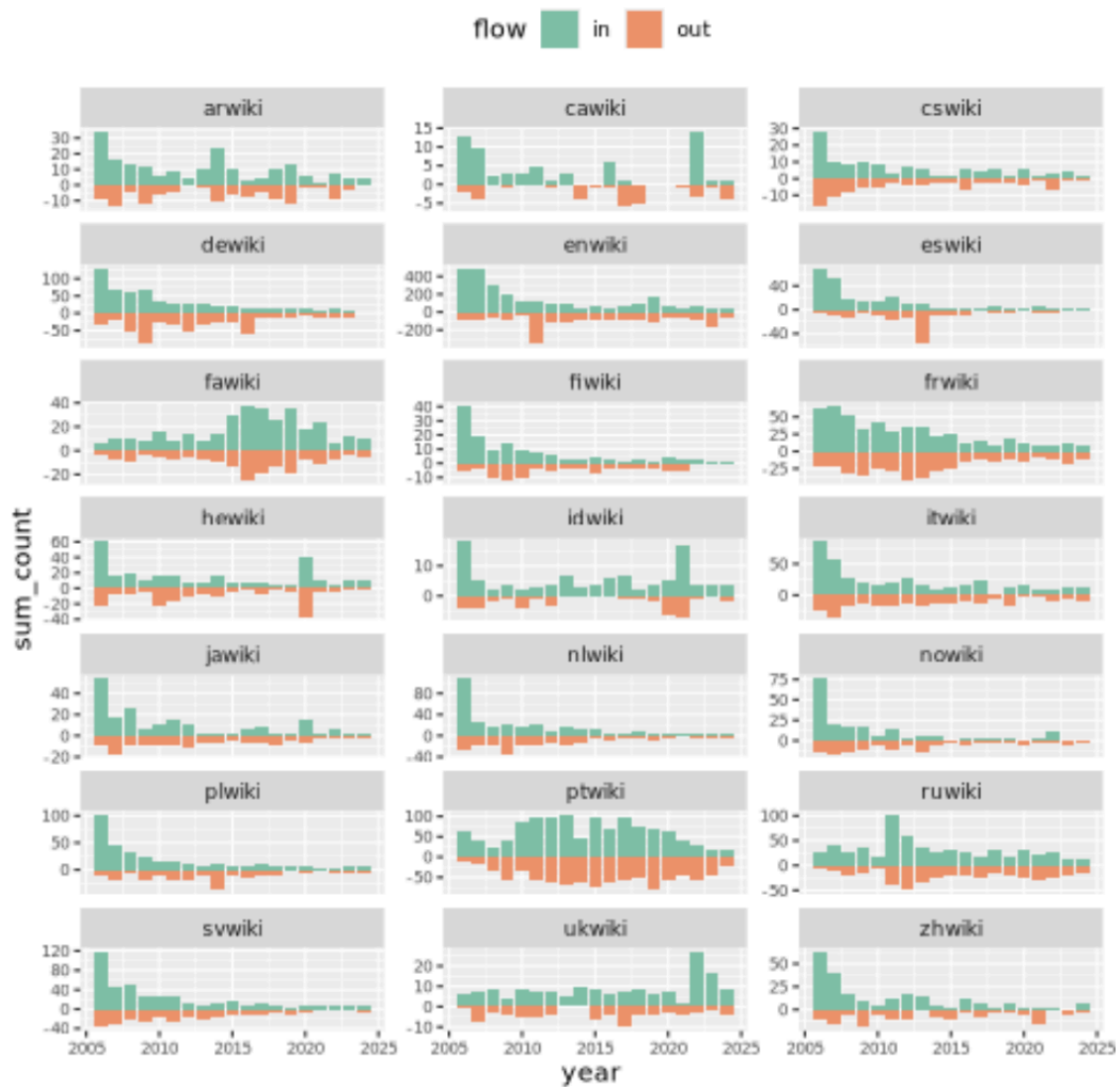


Figure 3. Administrator inflow and outflow from 2006 to present, on the 21 shortlisted Wikipedias. Inflow for 2006 includes all inflow from that Wikipedia's inception.

3.4.4 Yearly admin net change (i.e., admin inflow minus admin outflow) varies across the 21 shortlisted Wikipedias, with most experiencing their largest period of inflow between 2007 and 2015.

Our queried data show that English Wikipedia had massive inflow prior to 2011. Unsurprisingly, the data show that English Wikipedia has many of the 'oldest' admins of the 21 shortlisted Wikipedias. Figure 4 illustrates proportions of admins per tenure grouping, by Wikipedia edition. More than half of the admins on English Wikipedia have an admin tenure of more than 15 years, a higher proportion than any of the other shortlisted Wikipedias.

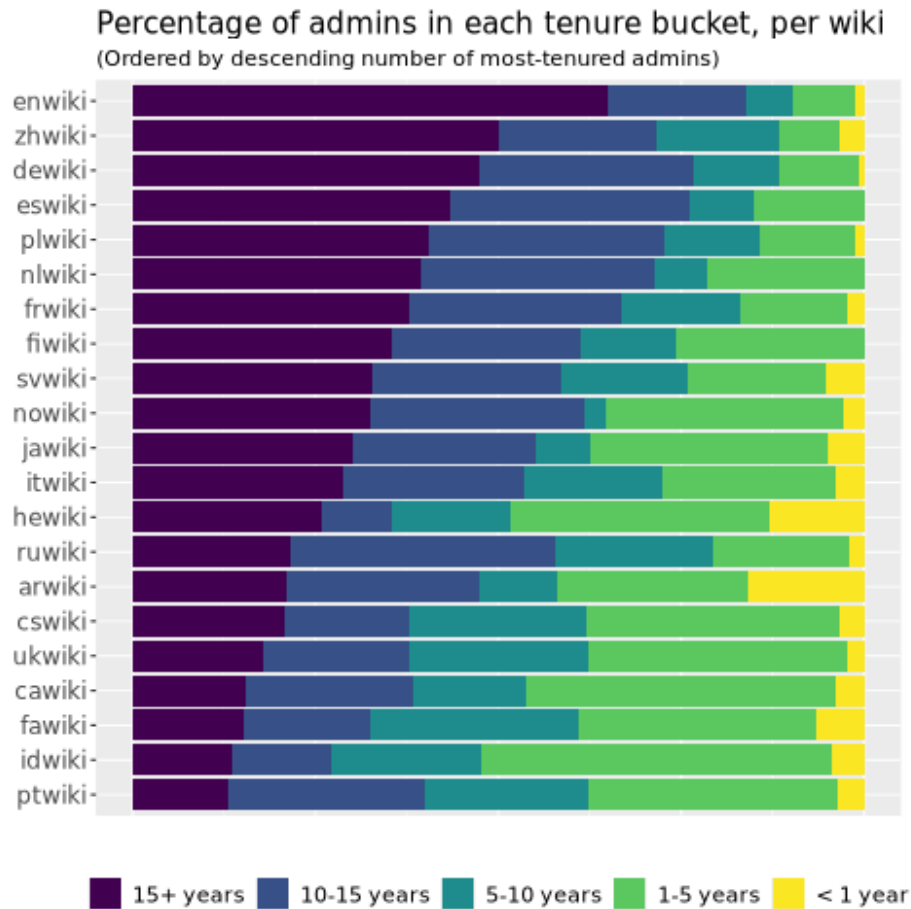


Figure 4. Admin tenureship buckets for the 21 shortlisted Wikipedias, arranged in descending order of most-tenured admins.

Unsurprisingly, Wikipedias with a higher proportion of lower-tenure admins in Figure 4, such as Indonesian (id) and Hebrew (he), also tend to show increasing numbers of admins overall (see Figure 1a).

3.4.5 Admins on the shortlist of 21 Wikipedias are less likely than admins of other (smaller) Wikipedias to be a sysop on more than one Wikimedia project.

Figure 5 shows the distribution of the number of Wikimedia projects for which users have sysop rights (looking only at users who have sysop rights on at least one Wikipedia). The mean is 1.2 wikis, with the median just below. As Figure 6 shows, the most common Wikimedia projects for Wikipedia sysops to also have sysop rights on – besides English, German, and French Wikipedias – were [Test Wikipedia](#) and [Wikimedia Commons](#).

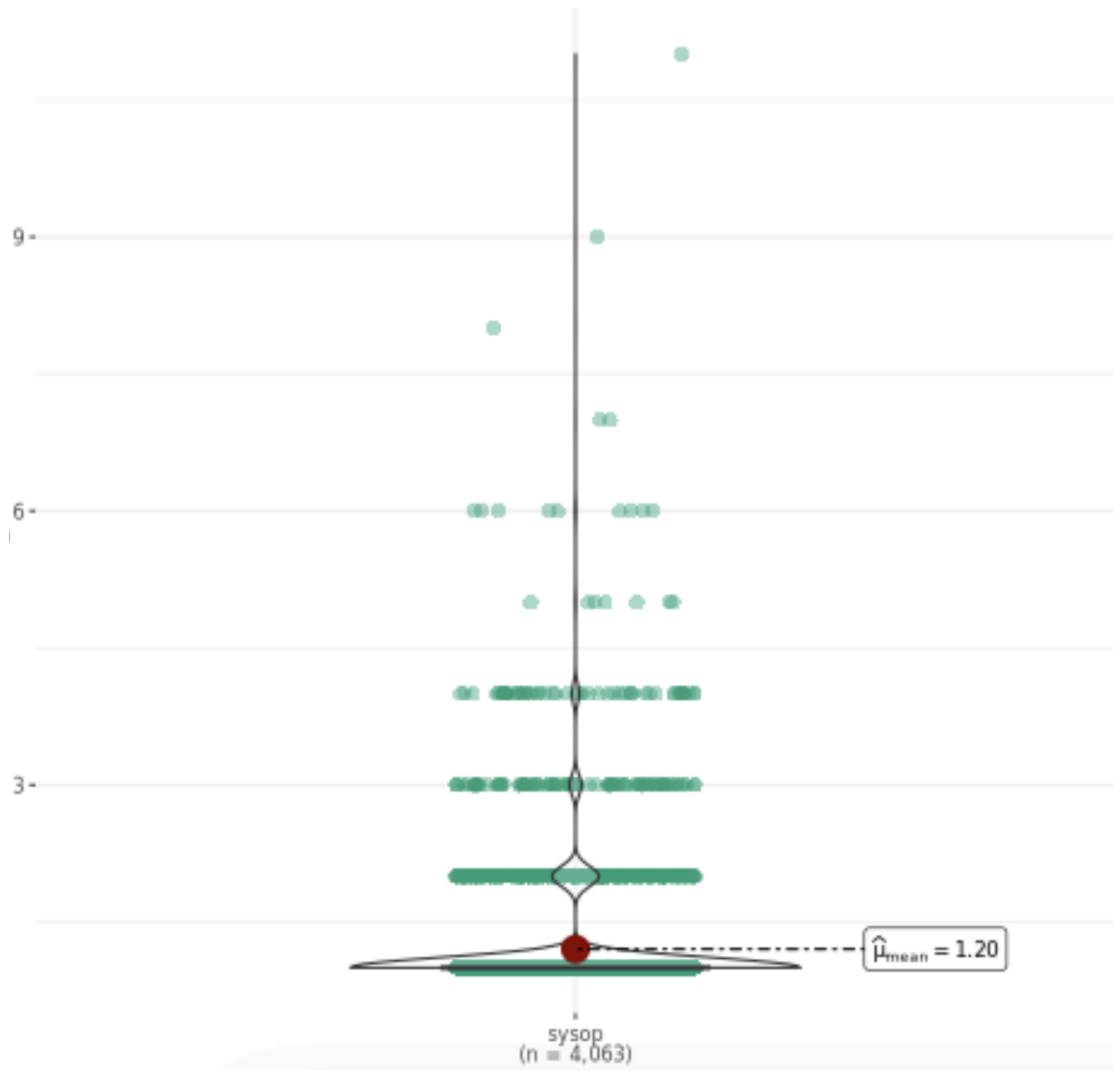


Figure 5. Number of Wikimedia projects for which users have sysop rights (includes only users who have sysop rights on at least one wiki)

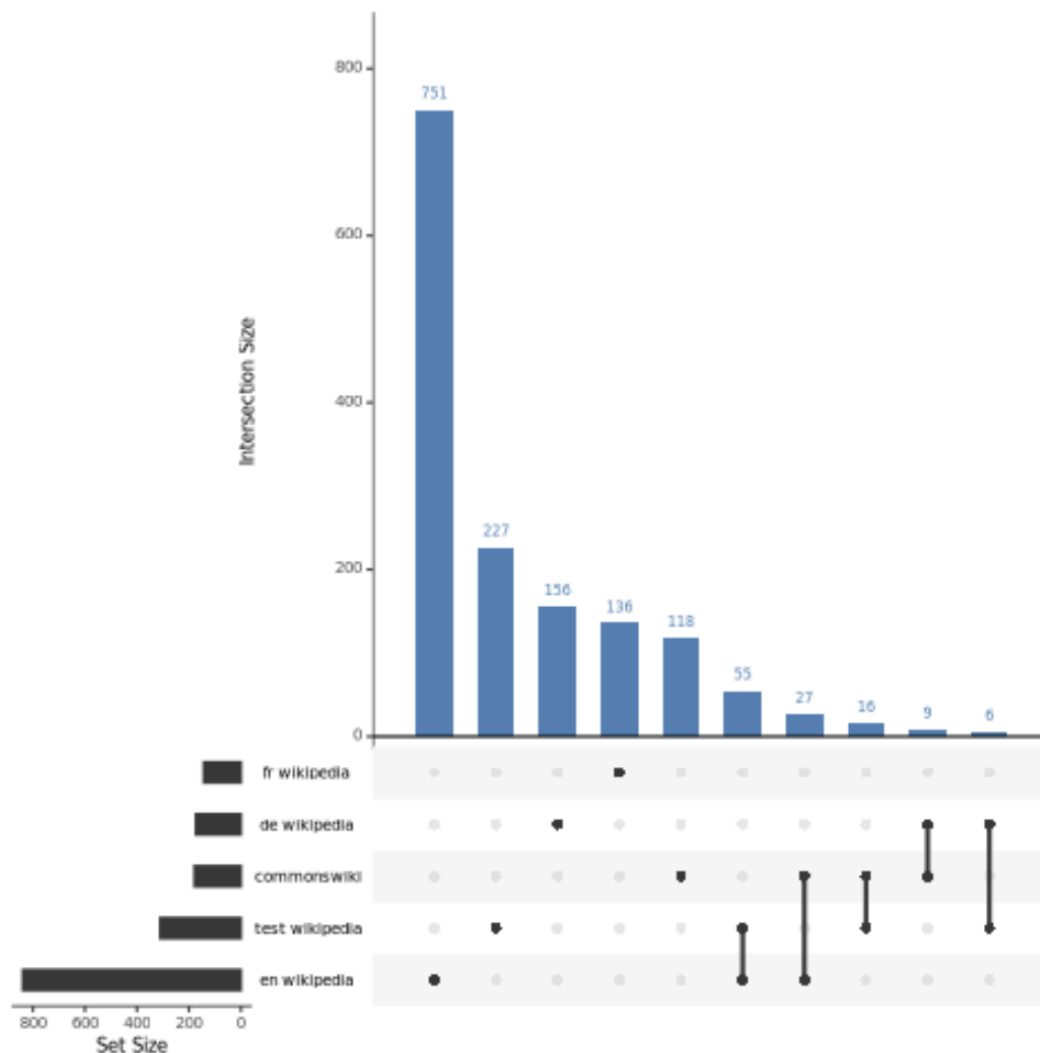


Figure 6. The top 10 most common Wikimedia projects (including single projects and project intersections) for which users have sysop rights

Figures 5 and 6 only include sysops, rather than users in *any* user group with administrative rights. This is because we do not yet have a centralized dataset to tell us which additional user groups on each Wikipedia (outside of the 21 shortlisted Wikipedias) have administrative rights.

[3.4.6 The priorities ranked highest by English Wikipedia survey respondents include recruiting new administrators and support in conflict, with policies for common conflicts and automation nearly equally ranked as a third priority.](#)

There is remarkably little variation in the priorities of English Wikipedia admins, aside from less interest in providing admins the ability to focus on specific tasks. The three priorities ranked

highest by survey respondents include recruiting new administrators and support in conflict, with policies for common conflicts and automation nearly equally ranked as a third priority.

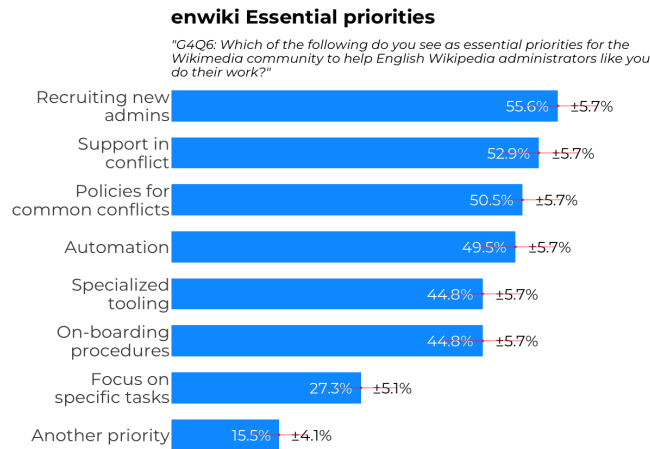


Figure 7. English Wikipedia admin essential priorities

3.5 Administrator recruitment

3.5.1 [Administrator candidacy guidelines vary substantially across language versions of Wikipedia.](#)

To arrive at the summary of [administrator candidacy requirements](#), we read (in the source language or via machine translation) various pages containing guidelines and advice for administrator candidates. Some language versions provide official requirements, some provide recommendations, and some provide both. Language versions that seem to lack formal guidelines should not be understood to be automatically more lenient; they may simply prefer not to have explicit guidelines surrounding aspects such as account age or edit count. Additionally, all these advice pages claim that these are more predictors of successful candidates, but are not strictly necessary for a successful RFA. Conversely, a candidate may meet or exceed all of these requirements and still fail for many other reasons.

Among these advice pages, there were two universal factors that were considered necessary for a successful RFA. These are:

- The candidate needed to be known by the general community, or at least the community of eligible voters.
- The candidate needed to exhibit a willingness to engage in administrator work, or a history of engaging in administrator-like work, on that wiki.

All of these guidelines spend much more time elaborating on important intangible qualities, such as willingness to cooperate, familiarity with local policy, and so on, rather than these more concrete figures. Nevertheless, this allows us to make some basic comparative statements about candidacy across different wiki projects.

This finding is further complicated by the fact that all interview participants stressed that the RFA process is, to some extent, customized for each candidate. Since there are no strong norms of what common candidacy requirements ought to be, only a socially agreed-upon “floor” (which may or may not be accurately reflected by any formal written requirements), any voter or other influential editor may have entirely unique requirements, which does not need to be consistent from RFA to RFA.

Most potential admins say they know what admins do, but are less familiar with the RFA process. Most (68%) potential English Wikipedia admins say they are moderately (29%, n=177) or very familiar (39%, n=237) with the role of admins on English Wikipedia. Only a comparative few say they are not at all (3%, n=18) or slightly familiar (11%, n=68). About half (49%) of potential English Wikipedia admins are moderately (22%, n=136) or very familiar (27%, n=163) with the formal requirements for an editor to become an English Wikipedia admin. Conversely, about $\frac{1}{3}$ (33%) say they are not at all familiar (18%) or only slightly familiar (16%) with these requirements. Potential English Wikipedia admins are relatively less familiar with the RFA process. Twenty-seven percent (n=164) say they are very familiar with the process, 19% say they are moderately familiar with it, while about two of five (38%) say they are either not at all familiar (21%, n=130) or slightly familiar (17%, n=104) with the RFA process.

3.5.2 The RFA process is routinely characterized as stressful, opaque, and something to be endured.

Survey results show that current English Wikipedia administrators regard the unofficial RFA requirements as the biggest barrier to a successful adminship candidacy. Half (n=169) of current English Wikipedia admins surveyed said it was “very difficult” or “somewhat difficult” to meet the requirements. In contrast, the same group thought meeting the official requirements was not very difficult (70% n=236), nor is securing a nomination (61%; n=205). Several interview participants noted that anyone involved in disputes, including the inevitable disagreements that occur when editing controversial topics, are certain to face significant opposition in their RFA.

3.5.3 Interest in adminship is particularly low among potential administrators on English and Polish Wikipedias, but appears stronger among those from other Wikipedias..

Overall, the interest of potential admins in becoming admins varies among language communities. Potential admins from English and Polish Wikipedia show the lowest enthusiasm for becoming admins.

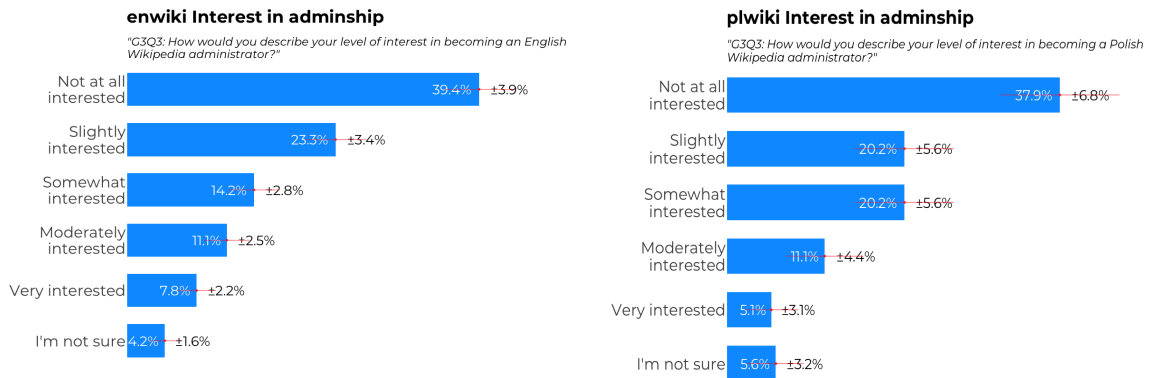


Figure 8. Interest in administrator positions on English and Polish Wikipedia

Interest from potential Spanish Wikipedia admins is strongest, where about half overall are very, moderately, or somewhat interested. Interest in becoming an admin for potential admins on French and Russian Wikipedia is split pretty evenly between having little to no interest having some degree of interest.



Figure 9. Interest in administrator positions on Spanish and French Wikipedia

The potential admin sample from Indonesian Wikipedia is small (n=14 answering this question), but only one respondent reported no interest.

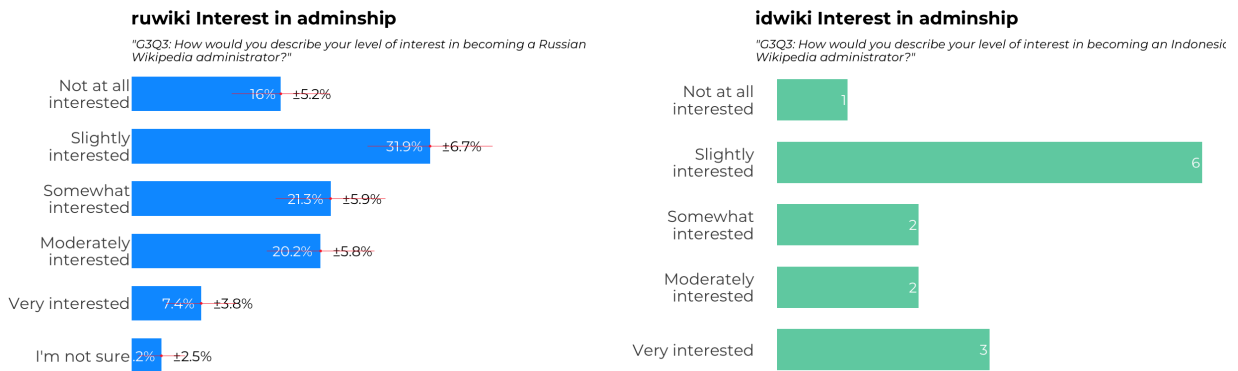


Figure 10. Interest in administrator positions on Russian and Indonesian Wikipedia

3.5.4 Factors positively affecting potential administrator recruitment

Many different factors motivate editors to run for admin. Experienced editors often seek out adminship to get things done without having to make requests and wait for others (i.e. take action), while others are encouraged by peers to run on the basis of their contributions.

Potential administrators who are interested in adminship most frequently cite a desire to improve, support Wikipedia; few cite friendship with current admins as a reason to pursue adminship. Among potential English Wikipedia admins who are at least “moderately” interested in adminship (n=193), the overwhelming majority (86%, n=166) cited an opportunity to help improve English Wikipedia as a reason, followed by a belief that admin tasks are essential (72%, n=139). Although half of current English Wikipedia admins said they had a friend or mentor who was an admin prior to pursuing adminship, few potential admins (7%, n=13) cited this as a reason for doing so.

Potential admins on French Wikipedia, Polish Wikipedia, Russian Wikipedia are also most likely to cite improving Wikipedia as the top reason for pursuing adminship. Potential Spanish Wikipedia admins are relatively less likely to cite improving Wikipedia (31%, n=68) compared to admin tasks being essential (45%, n=98) and mentoring other editors (41%, n=89). Potential Polish Wikipedia admins are most likely to cite improving Wikipedia (78%, n=56), but are relatively less likely to cite admin tasks being essential (42%, n=30). They are also relatively more likely to cite “intrinsic” motivations such as adminship being the next step on their editor journey (56%, n=40) and adminship being a validation of their accomplishments as Wikipedians (35%, n=25). Our sample of potential Indonesian Wikipedia admins was very small for this question (n=7), but these respondents were least likely to cite friendship with current admins (n=2) as a reason to pursue adminship.

3.5.5 Factors negatively affecting potential administrator recruitment

The RFA process is routinely characterized as stressful, opaque, and something to be endured. Interview and survey data from across all surveyed Wikipedias consistently characterise the RFA process as highly stressful and difficult to understand. Beyond formal written standards, which can vary significantly across projects, every Wikipedia that we studied has unwritten rules that are critical to determining the candidate’s success. These informal expectations are related to a candidate’s social recognition and standing with the existing group of administrators or eligible RFA voters. They necessitate finding an existing administrator in good standing as a nominator for the RFA process, maintaining a positive reputation among the existing administrator body, and enduring intense scrutiny of one’s entire on-wiki history. Several interview participants noted that anyone involved in disputes, including the inevitable disagreements that occur when editing controversial topics, are certain to face significant opposition in their RFA.

Current English Wikipedia admins say it is too difficult to become an administrator on English Wikipedia. A majority of English Wikipedia admins surveyed believe that “It is too difficult to become an administrator on English Wikipedia” (57%; n=184), as compared with 6% who believe it is too easy.

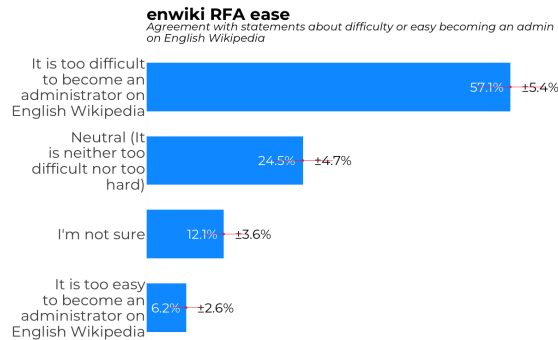


Figure 11. English Wikipedia administrators’ perception of how difficult it is to become an administrator on English Wikipedia

Current English Wikipedia admins regard the “unofficial” RFA requirements as the biggest barrier to a successful adminship candidacy. The unofficial nature of these requirements contributes to a perception that the RFA process is difficult to understand. Half (n=169) of current English Wikipedia admins surveyed said it was “very difficult” or “somewhat difficult” to meet the requirements. In contrast, the same group thought meeting the official requirements was not very difficult (70% n=236), nor is securing a nomination (61%; n=205).

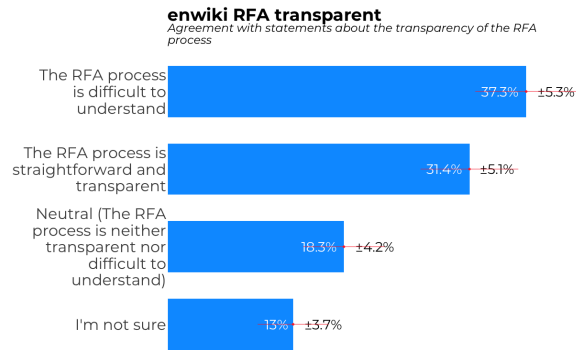


Figure 12. English Wikipedia administrators' perception of the transparency of the RFA process

Half (n=169) of current English Wikipedia admins surveyed said it was “very difficult” or “somewhat difficult” to meet the requirements. In contrast, the same group thought meeting the official requirements was not very difficult (70% n=236), nor is securing a nomination (61%; n=205). Simultaneously, almost half agree more (30%; n=95) or much more (18%; n=59) with the statement that “New RFA candidates are more qualified than in the past”. Just 10% agree more (5%; n=16) or much more (5%; n=16) with the statement that “New RFA candidates are less qualified than in the past”; 18% (n=59) are neutral; 24% unsure (n=77). 48% think new English Wikipedia RFA candidates are more qualified than in the past; just 10% think English Wikipedia RFA candidates were more qualified in the past.

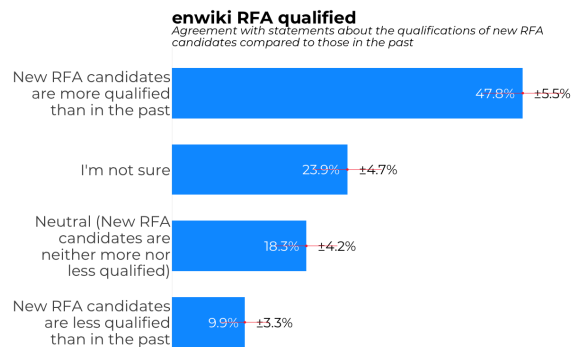


Figure 13. English Wikipedia administrators' perceptions of the qualifications of RFA candidates now, compared to the past

Thus, our survey participants reveal that even though the perceived qualifications of RFA candidates seem to be rising, the requirements for an RFA are also becoming more difficult.

Opinion is divided, but more English Wikipedia admins think the RFA process is unfair versus fair. Thirty-six percent (n=118) of current English Wikipedia admins

surveyed consider the RFA process to be unfair, 25% (n=82) consider the process fair, 22% (n=70) are neutral on the question, and 16% (n=52) are unsure.

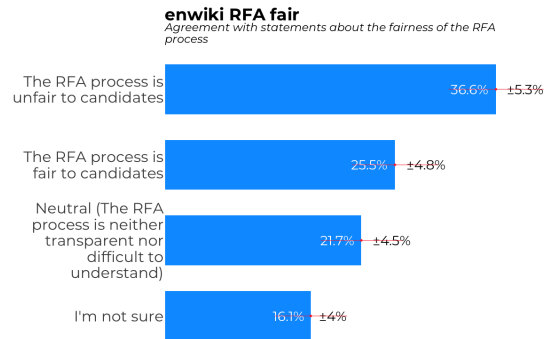


Figure 14. English Wikipedia administrators' perception of the fairness of the RFA process

As Wikipedias grow larger, it becomes harder to become an admin. Our core assumption is that less-active (by most metrics, but importantly by editing activity) Wikipedias have fewer administrative needs, primarily as a result of that lower activity level. This in turn means that the rate of edits that require moderation attention is lower, and even a relatively “inefficient” system of a few human moderators who are not constantly attentive to new edits, are sufficient to keep up with moderation activity.

As Wikipedias grow in size and activity rate, they require more complex moderation attention: new policies must be written or adopted, more people are required to keep pace with the rising rate of edits, and more sophisticated organizational structures are required to dole out the rights and responsibilities needed to facilitate the entirety of moderation work on the project. This gives rise to specialization within moderator work. This can be a way for active editors to build a reputation, by specializing in activities that require specific knowledge or are otherwise useful to the broader community. Specialization can also come about from volunteers with specific expertise or passions who wish to express this within the project.

Hand-in-hand with this increase in necessary moderation work is an increase in the prestige, rights and responsibilities attached to key moderation roles. For this study, we may assume this is synonymous with “administrator”, but to ensure thoroughness, we should also acknowledge a wide array of other user groups with restricted rights, responsible for many specific moderation and maintenance activities.

The standards for what makes a good administrator candidate, is not the same as the standards for what makes a good *administrator*. Gaining permissions required to carry out moderation work, does not align perfectly with the inclination or expertise needed to use them. Administrator candidates are rarely chosen solely based on their demonstrated ability to do specific portions of administrator work, even if that is their stated desire and interest. This is because much of this work is locked away behind administrator rights, and also because participation *as an administrator* changes the experience of interacting with other editors.

Instead, success in an RFA is a constantly moving target that has just as much to do with a candidate's ability to socially fit with the current administrator body, as it does with their ability to participate in moderation work. Early in a wiki's "lifecycle", admins tend to be drawn from the most active editors, regardless of their ability or suitability for administrator work; proven activity and enthusiasm takes precedence. Later on, adminship itself becomes increasingly closed to new candidates, and activity or enthusiasm becomes insufficient to grant one access to admin roles. Candidates are also near-universally required to find a "sponsor" from the existing administrator body, both to guide them through the unspoken complexities of the RFA process but also to bolster their chances of success. One illustrative example from admins on larger projects was that if you nominate yourself for administrator, that is automatically taken as a sign that you are not ready to be an admin.

Interview participants consistently characterised RFAs as tests of mental fortitude, emphasizing their stressful nature, and the importance for candidates to give the appearance of coolheadedness or general "unflappability". However, many descriptions of what current admins learned in the process of doing their work, does not have much to do with unflappability, or being precise in interpreting policies - much more of them emphasize flexibility, and tolerance in dealing with stressful situations, rather than the ability to endure a stressful situation.

After becoming admins, some choose to observe more than embed or engage actively in controversial conversations or conflicts without explicit invitation. This comes from the knowledge that participating in such debates as an administrator changes the ways in which people respond to them, and also increases the chance that they do something that is controversial or not backed up by other administrators. Resolving serious interpersonal disputes was also noted as one of the hardest parts of being an administrator. However, completely avoiding conflict is seemingly impossible: the simple act of enforcing any form of boundary sets administrators up in a position to create disagreement.

In addition, while they are expected increasingly to have deep understanding and knowledge of the rules and norms, they face a difficult balancing act in executing said policies. Strict adherence and enforcement can not only increase hostility and depress engagement overall, but increase negative peer perceptions and

interactions. Looser adherence and enforcement, on the other hand, often leads to increased workload (as each case requires more attention and care) and disputes between administrators (when interpretations of policy differ). These different approaches can be observed not just on an individual basis, but sometimes also in different cohorts of admins based on when they joined.

Admin work is seen as time consuming and potentially mutually exclusive with editing work. Potential English Wikipedia admins were most likely to cite a desire to focus on their work as an editor (76%, n=279) followed by admin work being too time-consuming (57%, n=209) as reasons for a lack of interest in adminship. Consistent with the high level of interpersonal conflict reported by current admins, anticipated conflict with editors was cited by 41% (n=150), although only 19% (n=69) cited fears that admins are targets of harassment as a reason for their lack of interest. Comparatively few potential English Wikipedia admins cited any aspect of the RFA process as a reason for a lack of interest in adminship.

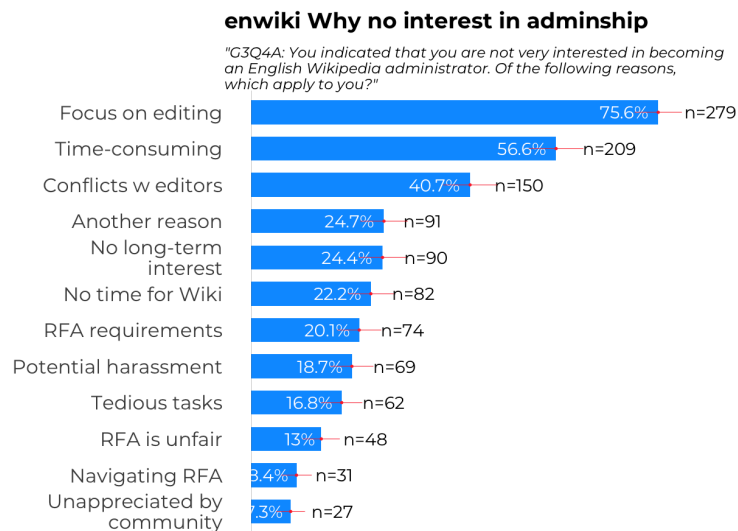


Figure 15. Reasons potential admins are not interested in adminship

Beyond English Wikipedia, we observe some similarity in patterns. However, potential conflict as a concern was more prevalent among potential French Wikipedia admins. Some additional similarities and differences can be observed in these summaries:

- Potential Spanish Wikipedia admins were also most likely to cite focusing on editing (49%, n=96) and admin work being too time-consuming (49%, n=97) as reasons to not be interested in adminship
- Potential French Wikipedia admins were also most likely to name focusing on editing (65%, n=32) as a reason for a lack of interest in adminship, but were

- relatively more likely to cite potential conflicts with editors (55%, n=27) rather than admin work being too time-consuming (41%, n=20)
- While the potential Indonesian Wikipedia admin sample is very small, these respondents were also most likely to cite a desire to focus on editing (n=6), that admin work is too time-consuming (n=5) and a related lack of time for more Wikimedia-related activities (n=5) as reasons for their lack of interest in pursuing adminship
 - Potential Polish Wikipedia and Russian Wikipedia admins also are most likely to cite focus on editing and the time commitment required by adminship

Current and potential admins strongly resemble each other in aspects of gender, primary spoken language, and education level

Across each surveyed project, current and potential admins are much more likely to say the project language is their primary or native language. For example, about 90% of both current (90%) and potential (91%) Spanish Wikipedia admin respondents say Spanish is their primary language, compared to 1% and 2% respectively, who say no.

Gender gaps among administrators appear similar to those among potential administrators. Gender gaps among Wikipedia editors³² and readers³³ are well-known to be a persistent issue. While these surveys are unlikely to be fully representative of current admins in any of the studied projects (particularly outside of English Wikipedia), a comparison of gender identification among current and potential admins across English, French, Spanish, Indonesian, Polish, and Russian Wikipedia suggests that:

1. gender-based participation disparities may be both large and pervasive among admins of Wikimedia projects
2. these disparities may be downstream of well-known gender gaps among Wikimedia contributor communities; that is, gender gaps among current Wikipedia admin respondents in the studied projects do not appear systematically greater than those in the potential admin respondents (editors qualifying for the RFA process under the rules of each project)

Geographic disparities between current and potential administrators are limited, with two prominent exceptions: current English Wikipedia administrators are disproportionately likely to be located in North America (the United States and

³² See eg, Collier, B. and Bear, J., 2012, February. [Conflict, criticism, or confidence: An empirical examination of the gender gap in Wikipedia contributions](#). In Proceedings of the ACM 2012 conference on computer supported cooperative work (pp. 383-392).

³³ Johnson, I., Lemmerich, F., Sáez-Trumper, D., West, R., Strohmaier, M. and Zia, L., 2021, May. [Global gender differences in Wikipedia readership](#). In Proceedings of the International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media (Vol. 15, pp. 254-265).

Canada) compared to potential English Wikipedia administrators; and Spanish Wikipedia administrators in North and Central America (excluding Mexico) are underrepresented relative to potential Spanish Wikipedia administrators in the region.

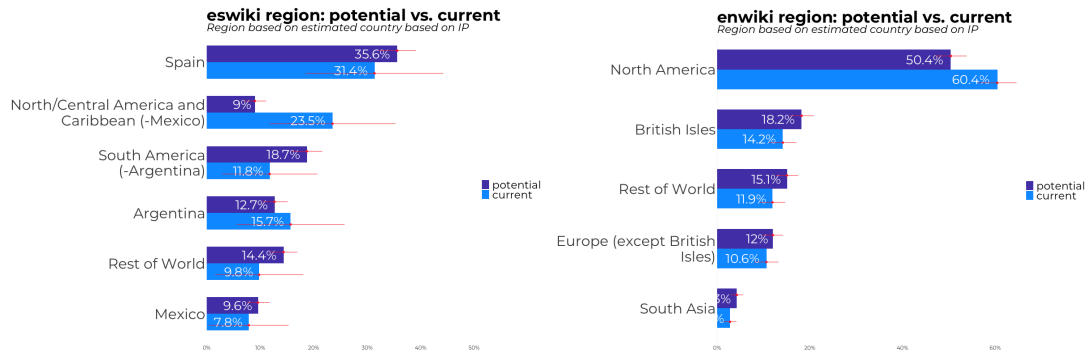


Figure 16. Geographic distribution of current and potential administrators on English and Spanish Wikipedia

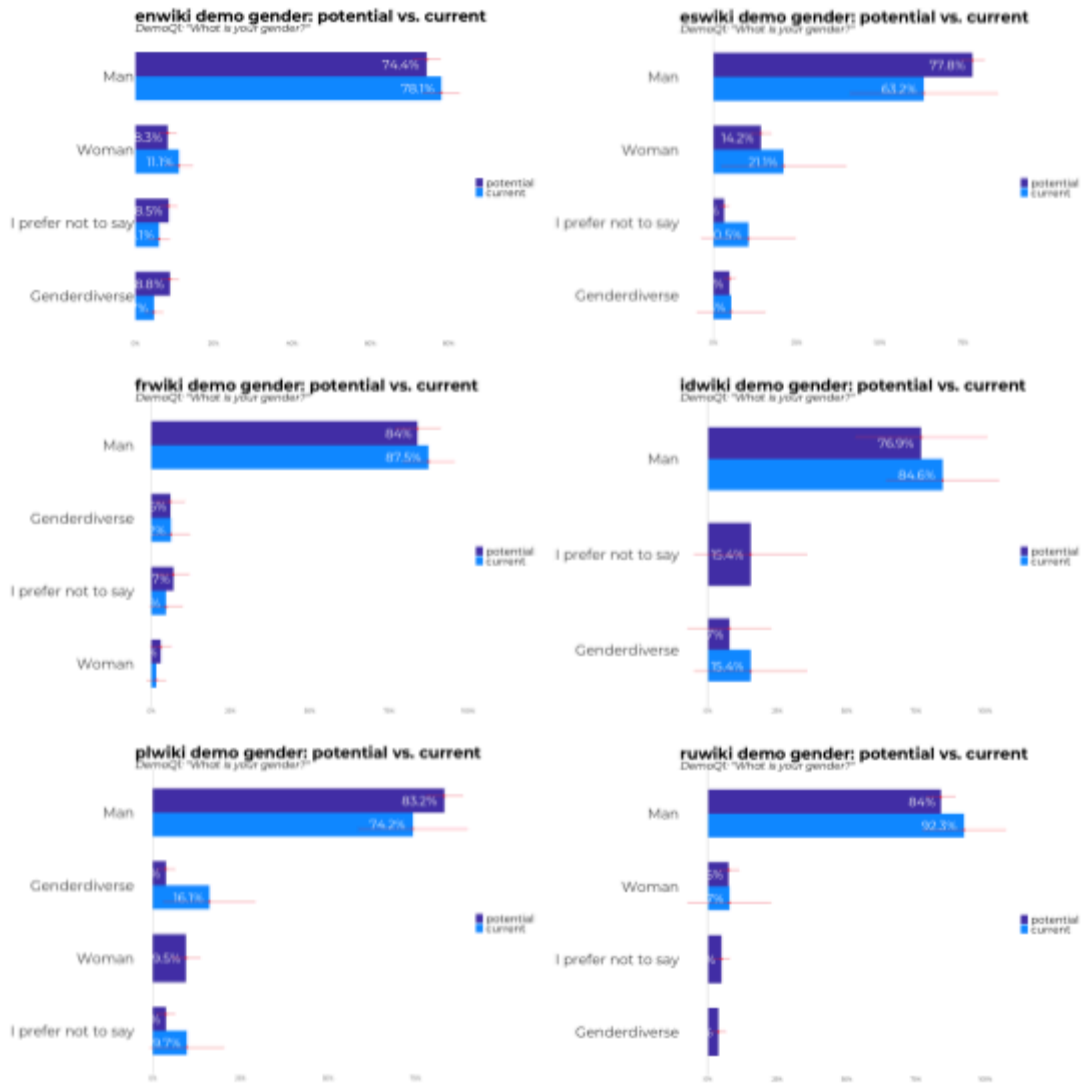


Figure 17. Gender identification among current and potential administrators

Both current and potential administrators are highly-educated. Survey research on Wikipedia [readers](#) and [contributors](#) consistently shows that Wikipedians are highly-educated in comparison to global populations as well as the general population of internet users. Across each of the surveyed projects, we find that current and potential Wikipedia administrators are likely to be similarly-highly-educated. For example, half of all English Wikipedia admins (50%) responding to the survey say they have a postgraduate degree or are currently studying for one, while 40% of potential English Wikipedia admin respondents say the same. By contrast, just 4% of respondents to either English wikipedia survey say they hold a post-secondary vocational degree or are studying for one.

3.5.6 Current administrators may be longer-tenured and older than potential administrators

Reflecting disparities in editor tenure noted in section 1.2.10, younger editors (18-29) may be underrepresented among current admins compared to potential admins across all of the projects in this study. For example, while 18% of potential English Wikipedia admin respondents say they are aged 18-29, just 7% of current English Wikipedia admin respondents say they are aged 18-29.³⁴



Figure 18. Current and potential administrator editor tenure

Additionally, for English Wikipedia, we see lower recruitment of younger editors over time. Figure 19 shows English Wikipedia survey respondents' approximate age at time of becoming an administrator on English Wikipedia.

³⁴ Note that due to the small sample sizes of the non-English Wikipedia current admin surveys, there is quite a lot of uncertainty associated with corresponding estimates for other projects.

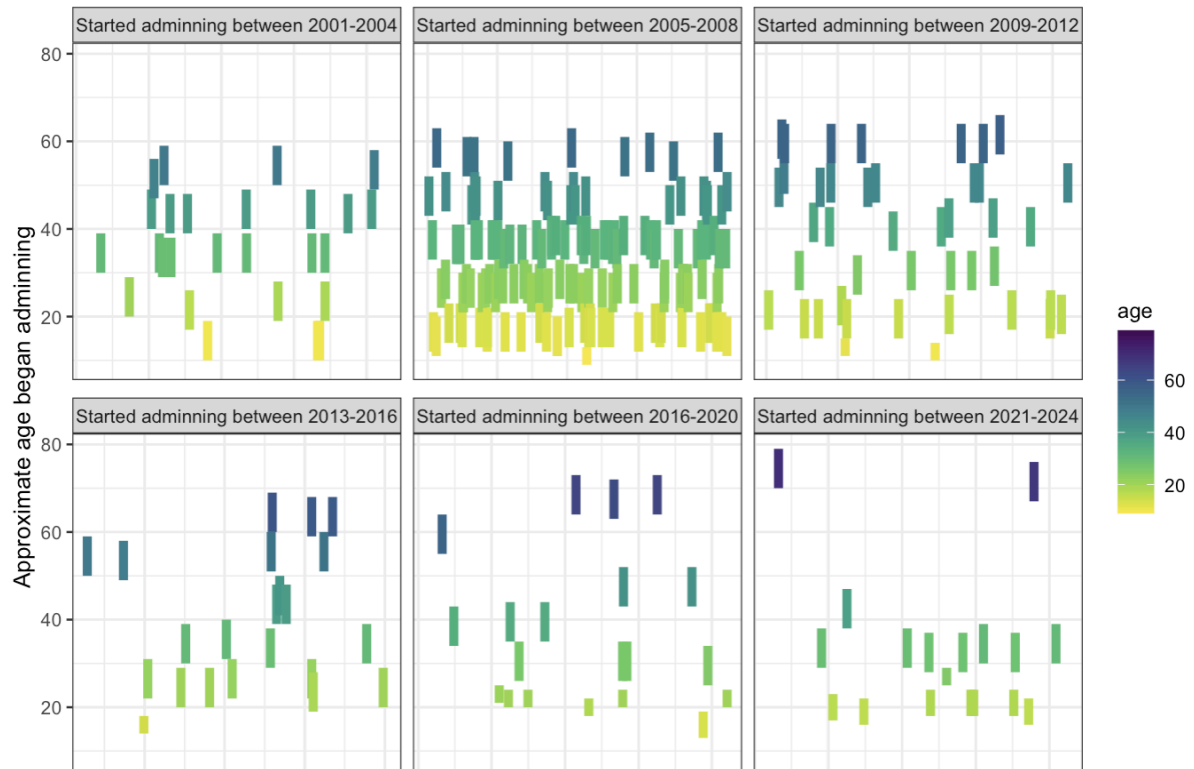


Figure 19. Approximate age of English Wikipedia survey respondents when they began adminning on English Wikipedia (from survey of current English Wikipedia administrators). Each bar shows an age range for an individual survey respondent, since we only have an age range for their current age.

3.6 Administrator retention

3.6.1 [Admin activity is largely performed by a small subset of highly-active, human moderators. Many Wikipedias utilize bots with administrative rights to sporadically handle one-off, high-volume administrative tasks.](#)

Divided about their perceptions of productivity, English Wikipedia Admins spend less than two hours on admin duties; few spend over 8 hours. The majority (58%; n=185) of current admins on English Wikipedia that responded to the survey spend 0-1 hours (42%; n=134) or 1-2 hours (16%; n=51) per week on their work as English Wikipedia admins. Fourteen percent (n=45) spend more than 8 hours per week.

Current English Wikipedia admin respondents are split in their perceptions of productivity. Approximately half reported feeling “moderately productive” (38%; n=121) or “very productive” (9%; n=28) in performing their administrative duties. In contrast,

nearly half describe themselves as “not at all productive” (19%; n=61) or “not very productive” (29%; n=93).

3.6.2 [Motivations for work](#)

It is no surprise that participating administrators in this study identify a sense of purpose in their work as their primary motivation. Commonly cited reasons from interview participants include ensuring the quality of Wikipedia so that internet users have access to accurate information, contributing to the expansion of knowledge in their language, a love for Wikipedia, and the personal satisfaction they derive from these activities. Many interview participants expressed that they view their role as a responsibility and feel a strong sense of duty to fulfill it. None of our interviewees reported negative sentiments related to their time as an administrator, even those who had no interest in running for adminship again.

72% (n=210) of English Wikipedia admins overall either agree (49%; n=152) or strongly agree (19%; n=58) that they would recommend serving as an admin to other experienced editors. English Wikipedia admins are much more divided on whether they would recommend serving as an admin to a friend. The interviews revealed that admins believe only editors with extensive and uncontroversial contribution histories are likely to succeed in being elected, so they would not recommend an editor who does not meet the community's unofficial criteria. This suggests that while administrators recognize the importance of the role and believe it should be undertaken by the right kind of contributor, they also acknowledge the community's stringent criteria for electing admins.

3.6.3 [Short-term retention](#)

The survey shows that an overwhelming majority of English Wikipedia admins expect to still be serving as admins two years from now (43% agree, n=135; 37% strongly agree, n=115). Relatively few disagree (1%; n=3) or strongly disagree (2%, n=6). Seventy-one percent (n=218) of English Wikipedia admins say they “never” consider quitting their roles; the second-largest group says they “rarely” do so (17%; n=51). English Wikipedia admins are more likely to say they have considered reducing (41% never, n=127; 20% rarely, n=60) or pausing (51% never, n=157; 19% rarely, n=57) their work as admins as opposed to quitting.

Across all other surveyed Wikipedias, clear majorities agree or strongly agree that they expect to still be serving as admins in two years. However, compared to English Wikipedia, there is more variance across responses of admins for other Wikipedias when asked about their expectation to be serving as an admin on their Wikipedia in two years. This suggests that admins from other sampled Wikipedias are less certain than English Wikipedia admins about the future of their role.

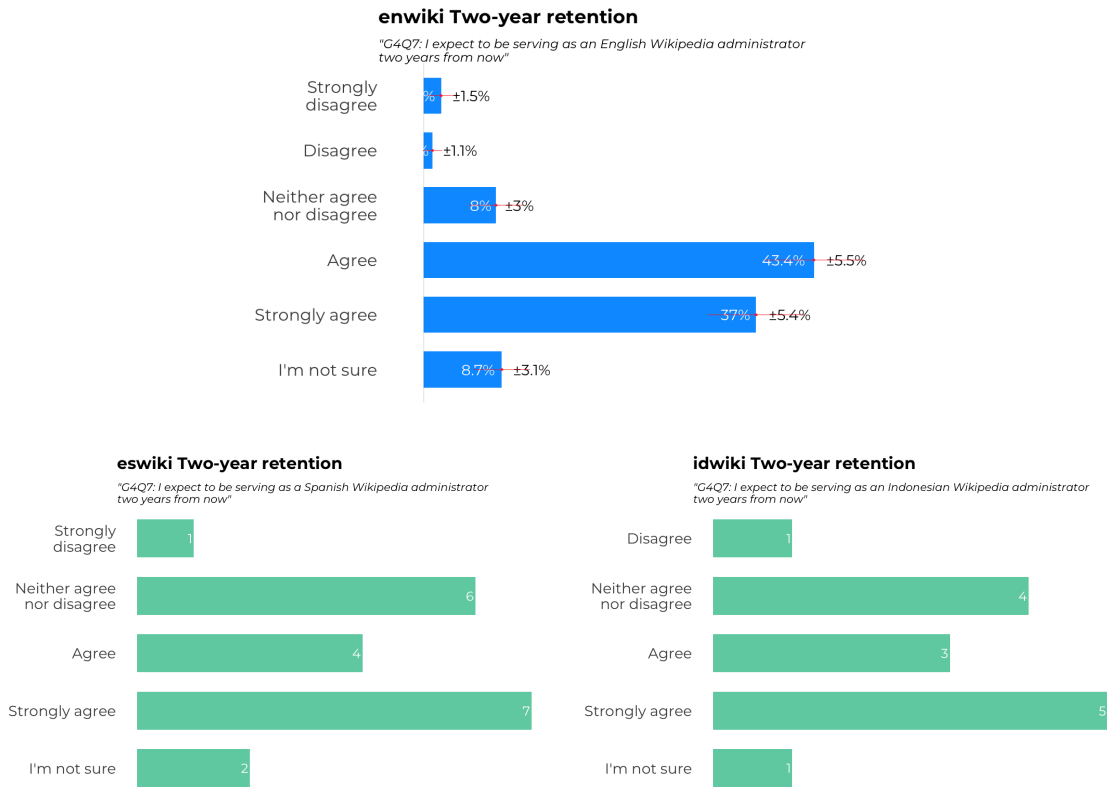


Figure 20. Two-year retention intentions among current English, Indonesian, and Spanish Wikipedia administrators

3.6.4 Activity, productivity, and distributions of work

The majority (58%; n=185) of current admins on English Wikipedia that responded to the survey spend 0-1 hours (42%; n=134) or 1-2 hours (16%; n=51) per week on their work as English Wikipedia admins. 14% (n=45) spend more than 8 hours per week.

Current English Wikipedia admin respondents are split in their perceptions of productivity. Approximately half reported feeling “moderately productive” (38%; n=121) or “very productive” (9%; n=28) in performing their administrative duties. In contrast, nearly half describe themselves as “not at all productive” (19%; n=61) or “not very productive” (29%; n=93).

Consistent with some quantitative findings, 38% of current English Wikipedia admins self-report as not having conducted any admin actions in the past 30 days. However, queried data suggests that administrative inactivity may be higher than reported in the survey: that is, about 60% of English Wikipedia admins were administratively inactive during the month of November 2024. This discrepancy may be partially attributed to selection bias, where more engaged admins are more likely to respond

to the survey, and/or differences in how respondents define “administrative activity” compared to what was used in our query.

“Administratively inactive” admins appear to be somewhat less common among current admin respondents to the Spanish, French, Indonesian Wikipedia, Polish, and Russian Wikipedia surveys. This aligns with patterns in our queried data, suggesting that inactivity among administrators may be a more prominent issue on some projects, such as English Wikipedia, than others.

Consistent with these findings on inactivity, for most of the 21 shortlisted Wikipedias, the majority of monthly administrative actions are performed by a relatively small percentage of administrators.

The uneven distribution of administrative actions, found in our queried data, highlights a significant concentration of work among a smaller group of individuals. For many of the shortlisted Wikipedias, the project’s top 15% most active admins each month did the majority of administrative actions between October 2023 and October 2024.

Several interview participants expressed concerns about the ratio of active and inactive administrators on their projects with respect to their perceived growing workload. This concern aligns with the observed trends in inactivity noted above, and a highly uneven distribution of administrative actions. The dangers implicit in these trends is the risk of burnout among the active administrators and the impact to the quality of the content.

However, we should note that high-quality metrics on activity are absent or rely heavily on a handful of maintainers on most projects, and most focus quite heavily on a binary active/inactive distinction. For example, French Wikipedia’s [Administrator Statistics page](#) is, as of time writing, entirely edited by one user, Jules*. Three statistics pages³⁵ are linked from the bottom of English Wikipedia’s page on Administrators, and each one is a subpage of an individual user page, again suggesting sole authorship and maintenance. Spanish Wikipedia maintains a list of [close-to-inactive administrators](#), though it is unclear where their data comes from³⁶. German Wikipedia links to a [tool to list inactive admins](#). Notably, all three Wikipedia editions use different definitions for “inactive”, tailored to fit their de-sysopping-for-inactivity criteria.

For our own survey and queried data, there may be seasonal variations that influence them, as the time frame for activity was limited to “over the past 30 days”. For

³⁵ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/User:JamesR/AdminStats>
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/User:Widefox/editors>
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/User:Amorymeltzer/s-index>

³⁶ Based on links from other language-edition pages on Administrators, likely XTools

instance, administrators indicate that they may be more active in anti-vandalism work around academic holidays.

Despite this lopsided workload, each month, the majority of administrative actions are generally done by humans. The exceptions are on Russian and Spanish Wikipedias, which have had high bot activity in the past year, primarily doing tasks related to blocking and protecting; and some other Wikipedias had more bot activity than human admin activity for one month of the year, such as Arabic and Persian Wikipedias.

Administrator actions performed by bots spikes in non-regular intervals, which suggests we should understand bot-performed admin actions as primarily an event-based phenomenon. For instance, the extremely high spike in bot-produced admin actions on Spanish Wikipedia was the result of a one-off script, run to block tens of thousands of proxy IP addresses. These one-off events are accompanied by (some) Wikipedias having low “ambient” levels of bot-performed admin actions, from tools such as AbuseFilter or custom anti-vandalism bots.

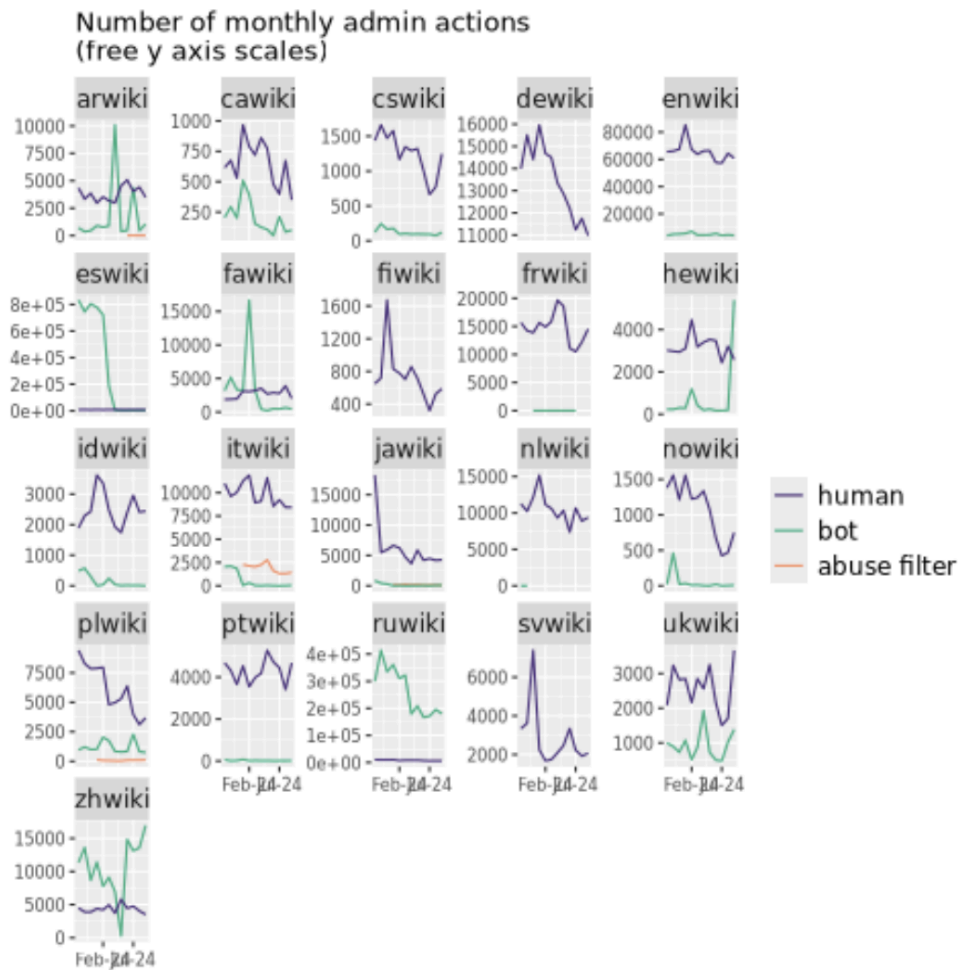


Figure 21. Number of monthly admin actions performed by humans, bots and AbuseFilter, on 21 shortlisted Wikipedias

3.6.5 Conflict, abuse, and harassment

Interpersonal conflict is nearly universal for English Wikipedia admins, with less than 1% (n=2) reporting that they have never experienced conflict as part of their role as an admin, which aligns with findings for other volunteer moderator communities³⁷. Conflict with editors is extremely common, with over 80% encountering conflicts either frequently or occasionally.

Conflict with editors occurs...

- 15% (n=45) frequently
- 66% (n=197) occasionally
- 14% (n=43) once or twice
- 3% (n=8) never

³⁷ Lo 2018, Wohn 2019, Dosono and Semaan 2019, Schöpke-Gonzalez et. al. 2023

In contrast, English Wikipedia admins experience conflict with other admins less often, and notably, 15% report never having experienced conflicts with other admins.

Conflict with editors occurs...

- 4% (n=13) frequently
- 35% (n=105) occasionally
- 43% (n=129) once or twice
- 15% (n=44) say “never”

English Wikipedia admins face significant risk of experiencing abuse and harassment. Almost half (48%; n=142) say they have experienced interpersonal conflict involving abuse or harassment occasionally (34%; n=101) or frequently (14%; n=41); Another 26% (n=77) have experienced it once or twice, and 24% (n=72) have never. Moreover, a substantial number of English Wikipedia admins experience serious psychological and physical safety issues.

- 85% (n=253) experienced personal attacks on-wiki (e.g., on their talk pages).
- 36% (n=107) experienced some form of doxxing
- 34%, n=102) experienced personal attacks on off-wiki messaging platforms (e.g., Whatsapp or Telegram), although few experienced this frequently.
- In open-ended survey responses, some English Wikipedia admins report experiencing death threats, stalking, harassment at in-person Wikipedia events, even targeted harassment through their employers, harassment of family members. Of 61 current English Wikipedia administrators who were shown this item (47 of whom entered a substantive text response)³⁸:
 - Two responses mentioned death threats
 - Five responses mentioned in-person harassment
 - Four responses mentioned harassment at their place of employment
 - Two responses mentioned harassment involving pornography
 - Two responses mentioned harassment of family members
 - Three responses mentioned harassment that eventually involved law enforcement, a criminal investigation, or the court system

Two interview participants, including one current English Wikipedia admin, described alarming incidents involving their safety as a result of their administrative work. The interviews revealed that the potential for harassment seemed more severe

³⁸ It is difficult to quantify data drawn from open-ended survey responses. This is particularly true in this case as this survey item was only shown to respondents who indicated that they had experienced “Another form of interpersonal conflict not listed above (*i.e.*, other than “conflict with other administrators”, “conflict with editors”, “conflict involving abuse or harassment”, “Some form of doxxing”, “Personal attacks on Wikipedia”, or “Personal attacks on off-Wikipedia messaging platforms”). That is, any respondents who felt that the pre-filled answer options adequately described their experiences of interpersonal conflict simply did not have an opportunity to elaborate.

for those administrators who dealt with privileged information, such as those who were also oversighters or checkusers.

We should also note that no interviewee directly indicated that such harassment from non-editors or non-administrators was a significant factor in their decisions to leave. The interpersonal conflicts cited as causes for leaving always originated from people within the administrator body.

3.7 Administrator attrition

3.7.1 Attritional factors were largely expressed as very individualistic motivations, with factors that seem beyond the ability of any given volunteer community to seriously influence.

No participant cited a single factor as their sole cause for leaving their administrator role. All of them pointed to multiple reasons behind their decision to leave, though we should note that the boundaries between these reasons are quite fuzzy and there is significant overlap.

Inactivity. Only three of our former administrator interviewees indicated that they continued to routinely engage in any sort of on-wiki activities. The three who are still active on-wiki are also the three who most recently gave up their administrator status. All others specifically cited their growing inactivity as one of the reasons for them to step down (or slowly fade out) from administrator status.

Growing inactivity, according to our interviewees, had several factors. One major external factor was changing life circumstances leading to a loss of leisure time, or a need to re-prioritize how they spent their time: common life events included graduating college, starting a new job, or starting a serious relationship. Critically, none of our participants named monetary factors as a reason why they pulled back from on-wiki activity; this was always expressed as a lack of free time. Some of our participants also discussed cycles of activity and inactivity, generally corresponding to such major life events, viewing their activity levels as ultimately cyclical in nature.

This inactivity was coupled with a self-perception that an administrator *should be* constantly, actively engaging in administrator duties. When pressed, our interviewees responded that there was no set standard of activity explicitly required of administrators³⁹, but that they felt they were falling short of the level of activity that an administrator *should* achieve. In fact, some relayed to us that other administrators

³⁹ Possibly short of the [global requirement](#) that all users with admin rights, are liable to have them removed for inactivity if they perform no edits of any kind in the past two years. However, it is unclear how frequently administrators are audited.

expressed dismay when they stepped down, even as they told us they felt that they were barely contributing to their home Wikipedias.

Interpersonal conflict within the administrator community. This was the second most common reason cited for leading to voluntary removal of the administrator role. Interpersonal conflict within the administrator community was often milder than the forms of harassment, abuse or conflict that participants seemed to receive from those outside of the administrator community. However, this was the form of conflict that seemed to seriously demotivate administrators.

Some of these conflicts were individually minor, but recurred frequently, such as the case of productive editors whose contributions required significant editing attention or input from more-experienced editors, including administrators. Others involved differences of opinion with other administrators, about interpretations of policy or the “right” or “best” way to be an administrator. Sometimes these conflicts were characterized as generational divides between different waves or cliques of administrators, while other times they were expressed as disagreements between specific administrators.

Loss of intrinsic motivation. Administrator work is often extremely different from the initial contributions that attracted users to their home Wikipedias in the first place. Of our interviewees, only two mentioned performing activities that were similar to the ones they engaged in after gaining administrator rights; the rest described their early contributions as edits to existing articles, translations of other language articles, or creating new pages and uploading new media. None of these activities were common for them after gaining administrator status.

Several participants also spoke of feeling pressured to actively and frequently perform “administrator work”, conceptualized separately from article contributions and largely to do with anti-vandalism or workflow and work-queue maintenance. This pressure seemed to be self-generated, as our interview participants did not discuss any mechanisms (formal or otherwise) for auditing fellow administrators’ contributions.

3.7.2 Secondary factors influencing administrator attrition and motivation

What are factors that drive admins away from staying engaged in the projects? What are on-project phenomena that discourage and/or disengage administrators? These are factors that don’t seem to be of prime importance, but were recurring themes brought up in interviews with administrators (current or former).

Feeling burnt-out, or feeling disheartened at dealing with a never-ending workload. A few interview participants mentioned feeling disheartened at tackling what they felt were insurmountable problems that only ever increased over time,

rather than becoming easier. No specific types of work were mentioned, but the refrain of administrator roles and tasks being “thankless” was a very common refrain.

Burnout levels reported by English Wikipedia admins appear broadly comparable to those reported in an earlier study of German, Farsi, and Polish Wikipedia editors. We adapted survey items utilized by researchers at Cornell’s Citizens and Technology Lab to study burnout among editors of German, Farsi, and Polish Wikipedia in 2019⁴⁰.

Overall burnout levels reported by current English Wikipedia administrators appear broadly similar to those [reported in this previous research](#). The majority of current English Wikipedia admins say they “almost always” (35%; n=179) or “frequently” (17%; n=87) “feel positive about the contributions I am making to English Wikipedia”, corresponding to a 4 or 5 on a 1-5 scale. Conversely, while few respondents say they are “almost always” (3%; n=13) or “frequently” (6%; n=28) “emotionally drained” by their work as English Wikipedia admins, almost 2 in 5 (37%, n=41) say they feel that way “occasionally”.

Across the different Wikipedias sampled, administrators report varying levels of positivity and burnout related to their work. On English Wikipedia, few admin say they are “almost always” (3%; n=13) or “frequently” (6%; n=28) “emotionally drained” by their work, but nearly a quarter (23%; n=119) say they feel that way “occasionally”. The majority of English Wikipedia admins say they “almost always” (35%; n=179) or “frequently” (17%; n=87) “feel positive about the contributions I am making to English Wikipedia”.

Somewhat similarly, French Wikipedia admins also report fairly low overall burnout levels. Simultaneously, though, they report relatively less frequent feelings of being emotionally drained and relatively less frequent positive feelings when compared to English Wikipedia current admins.

Current Spanish Wikipedia admin respondents appear to be somewhat less sanguine, citing positive feelings less frequently and reporting being emotionally drained relatively more often. Indonesian and Polish current admin respondents fall somewhere in between Spanish and English respondents—they report somewhat less frequent positive feelings and somewhat more frequent feelings of being emotionally drained.

Conversely, Russian Wikipedia current admins report high frequencies of positive feelings, but also relatively high frequencies of feeling emotionally drained.

⁴⁰ J. Nathan Matias, Julia Kamin, Reem Al-Kashif, Max Klein, & Eric Pennington. (2020)

3.7.3 Harassment and abuse drive English Wikipedia admins to reduce their roles or quit.

The survey data highlights this sentiment among English admins, revealing a positive correlation between various types of conflict and the frequency with which individuals consider reducing their time as an administrator.

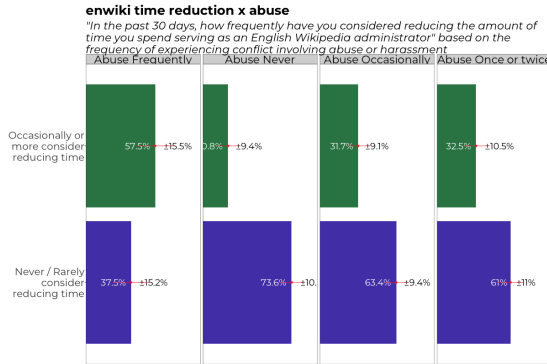


Figure 22. Impact of abuse or harassment on willingness to reduce time spent as admin

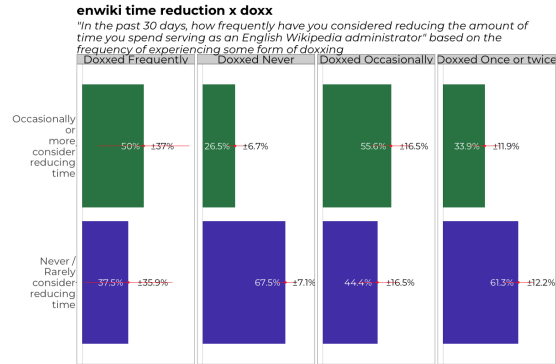


Figure 23. Impact of being doxxed on willingness to reduce time spent as admin

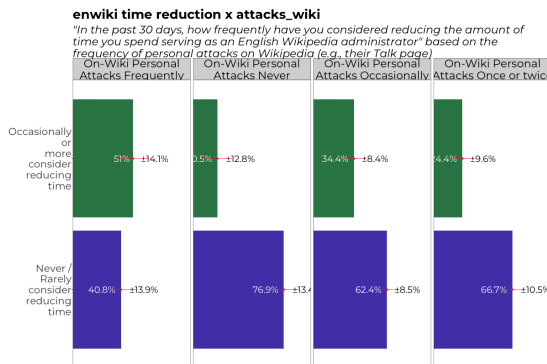


Figure 24. Impact of personal attacks on Wikipedia (e.g., on their talkpage) on time spent as admin

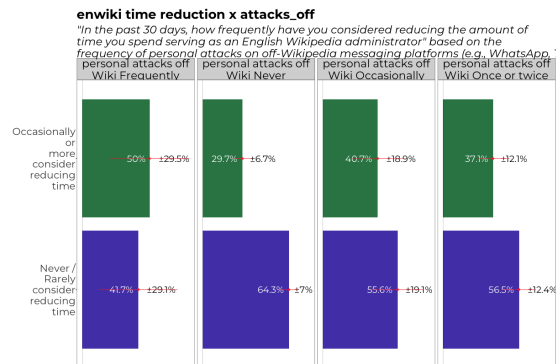


Figure 25. Impact of personal attacks on off-Wikipedia messaging platforms (e.g., WhatsApp, Telegram, etc) on time spent as admin

The same trend is observed among survey respondents who experience conflict with other administrators, and to a lesser degree, editors.

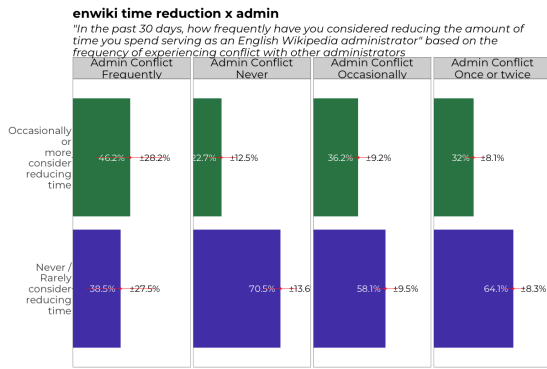


Figure 26. Impact of conflicts with other administrators on time spent as admin.

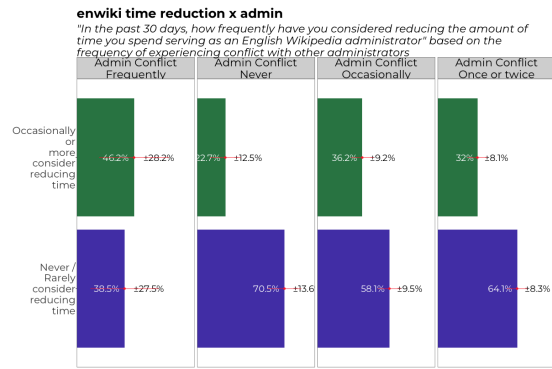


Figure 27. Impact of conflicts with editors on time spent as admin

Fewer English admins consider quitting than reducing their time spent doing admin work. However, they are more likely to quit when they experience abuse, harassment, doxxing, attacks on- or off-wiki, and conflicts with admins and editors.

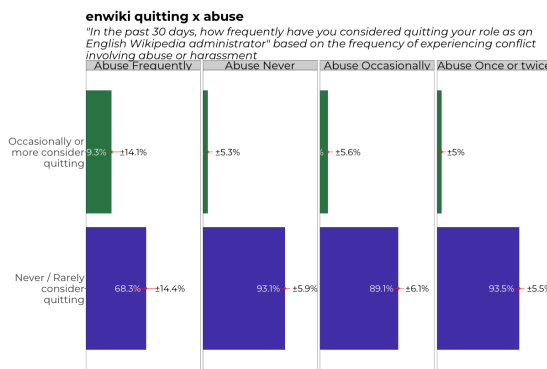


Figure 28. Impact of abuse or harassment on likelihood of quitting

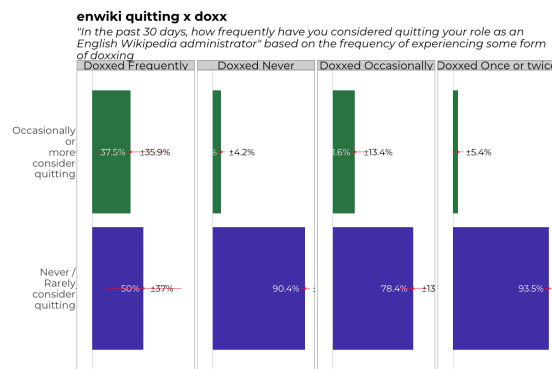


Figure 29. Impact of doxxing on likelihood of quitting

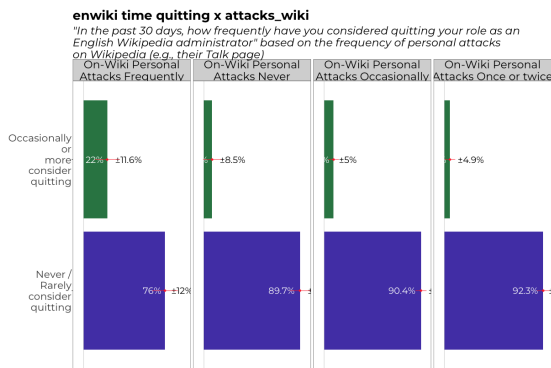


Figure 30. Impact of personal attacks on Wikipedia (e.g., on their talkpage) on likelihood of quitting

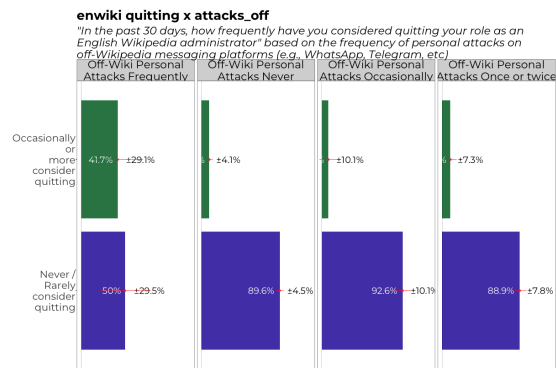


Figure 31. Impact of personal attacks on off-Wikipedia messaging platforms (e.g., WhatsApp, Telegram, etc) on likelihood of quitting

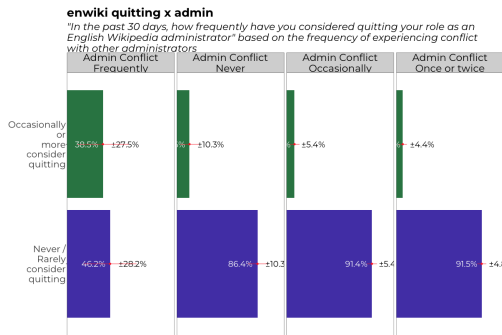


Figure 32. Impact of conflict with other admins on likelihood of quitting

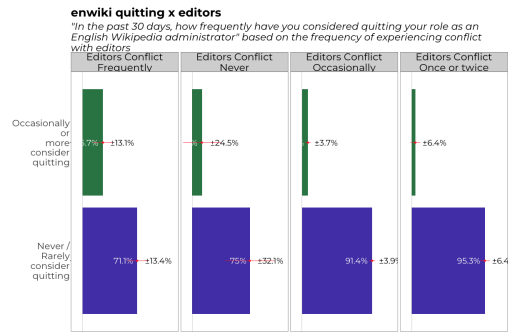


Figure 33. Impact of conflict with other editors on likelihood of quitting

3.8 Predicted effects of admin attrition

Post-adminship on-wiki activities. According to our interviewees, those who remained engaged on-wiki after losing their administrator rights generally continued contributing to their home Wikipedias. This largely took the form of edits to existing articles, or new page creation, in their areas of interest. A few expressed interest in regaining administrator status in order to facilitate their on-wiki contributions, but they were the minority of interviewees. Instead, the majority of former administrators that we interviewed seemed to view their administrator role as “over”, showing very little interest in regaining the role.

On projects where various roles and corresponding rights exist, some former admins find that retaining frequently used rights is easily achieved while avoiding the pressure of full adminship. Additionally, some current and former admins mentioned that they don't often desire or feel the need to exercise rights that are specific to the

admin role, and caution admin candidates to pursue adminship if they intend to work frequently on vandalism patrol.

Inattentiveness to niche workflows. Since moderation activity is largely self-directed and self-motivated, little-known or otherwise niche workflows are at high risk of abandonment or general neglect should the few editors who perform them leave. This is echoed by community essays such as the [“Tip of the iceberg”](#) personal essay, which notes that the de-adminship of a single user can lead to backlogs in multiple workflows. There does not appear to be much of a mechanism for delegating these niche workflows to other, more active administrators. This should be understood as a natural extension of the ways in which administrators are organized, along with personal interest and intrinsic motivators for working, rather than a more top-down or explicitly organized structure.

Predicted impact on new administrator onboarding. Primary method of new admins joining is mentorship which is labor-intensive, candidates require active admins to get through RFAs, fewer current active admins stacks the deck (all else remaining equal) against admin inflow. All else remaining equal, we would also expect a smaller administrator body on large projects to experience an increased average workload, which means less time is available even for already motivated and committed administrators to engage in helping candidates prior to an RFA. Equally, there may be a “chilling effect” where high rates of administrator attrition - especially if caused by observable on-wiki factors such as inter-community conflict - discourages potential candidates from running in RFAs.

Loss of knowledge or expertise. Though administrative histories may be well archived on-wiki, the ability to know where to find them (and the ability to recall what may not have been explicitly written) means that experienced long-tenure administrators comprise the bulk of an admin group’s ability to maintain continuity with past decisions. This is not only true of things like policy decisions, but also retaining patterns for long-term abusers or knowledge of how to use purpose-built tools. Additionally, where the administrator has technical expertise, purpose-built tools made or maintained by that administrator may fall into disrepair over time, even if it is in wide use.

3.9 [Product and policy implications](#)

3.9.1 The most direct influences on administrator recruitment, retention and attrition are policy-based.

For large (over 20 monthly active admin) Wikipedias, it is more common to have steady or declining administrative numbers. However, within the same group, we have examples of rising administrator numbers, coupled with conscious policy efforts

from those Wikipedias to increase administrator recruitment. This suggests that it is possible to increase administrator inflow, through conscious policy adoptions. Encouragingly, the two Wikipedias in question - Indonesian and Ukrainian - have approached this shared problem from two different policy directions. This suggests that there are likely to be many different, applicable policy approaches to increase administrator inflow.

Though we did not study the reasons behind policy adoption and evaluation in this project, we note that both Indonesian and Ukrainian Wikipedias characterize the history of their policy change as a response to crises. However, *recognition* of crises alone seems insufficient for other projects to enact policy changes, such as on Spanish, French and (historically) English Wikipedias.

At the same time, administrator outflow seems to be motivated by factors outside of a given community's ability to control, such as individuals experiencing major life events, or hostility between administrators. To an extent neither problem is "solveable", but the latter may be addressed with policy adoptions such as the ongoing Universal Code of Conduct, and its enforcement mechanisms and execution.

3.9.2 The reality of administrative workloads and the perception of the workload are not aligned, in the minds of prospective and current administrators on English Wikipedia.

We find that English Wikipedia administrators spend, on average, two hours a week on administrative work, and that about a third of administrators self-report not engaging in administrative work in the past month. Simultaneously they self-characterize administration tasks as "endless" or very time-consuming, which may reflect a gap in capacity or various process inefficiencies.

This perception of the administrator workload also has implications on prospective administrators' desire to apply for adminship. Prospective administrators who are not interested in running for administration report that they would rather focus on editing, which implies that they see editing and administrator work as different and mutually exclusive. This view is backed up by our interviews of administrators - after leaving admin work, most of our participants return to editing articles if they remain active on-wiki, and all report feeling pressured to focus heavily on administrative work while an admin. Therefore, becoming an admin would require "sacrificing" or giving up the work that they are personally invested in doing.

3.9.3 Administrator demographics are heavily influenced by the downstream impacts of editor demographics

Potential admins are drawn from the pool of existing editors, so it's unsurprising that we similarly observe gender gaps, and diversity, equity and inclusion concerns. Both

potential and current administrators closely resemble each other demographically, with the exception of age (and to a lesser degree, geography). In turn, these groups resemble a more-homogenous subset of average editor demographics.

Though we did not explicitly ask participants about these factors, we note these additional requirements in order to participate fully as an administrator on any project:

- Access to internet and internet-capable devices, overwhelmingly laptop or desktop browser
- Access to leisure time
- Ability to fit in, linguistically, culturally and socially, with existing editor body

These factors, in addition to the stressful nature of administrative work, makes it likely that administrators may reproduce dominant biases in selecting future administrators. This phenomenon is observed in other online environments with volunteer moderators⁴¹, and will require conscious effort to address. At the present moment, given the lopsided nature of editor demographics across these specific axes, it is difficult to tell if similar gaps in administrator demographics exist solely as a result of downstream impact, or if administrators face additional factors to cause a demographic gap.

3.9.4 The traits and motivation that enable a successful RFA, are not necessarily the same as those involved in being a “good administrator”

Gaining permissions required to carry out moderation work, does not align perfectly with the inclination or expertise needed to use them. Administrator candidates are rarely chosen solely based on their demonstrated ability to do specific portions of administrator work, even if that is their stated desire and interest. Early in a wiki’s “lifecycle”, admins tend to be drawn from the most active editors, regardless of their ability or suitability for administrator work; proven activity and enthusiasm takes precedence. Interview participants consistently characterised RFAs as tests of mental fortitude. However, many descriptions of what current admins learned in the process of doing their work, does not have much to do with unflappability - much more of them emphasize flexibility and tolerance, rather than the ability to endure a stressful situation.

3.9.5 “Adminstrator” is a very overloaded term

Lots of different rights and responsibilities are collapsed under the banner of “administrator”. Some admin rights can be employed in very different ways, ranging from ones with severe consequences for sanctioned users, to relatively minor ones.

⁴¹ Thach, H., Mayworm, S., Delmonaco, D., & Haimson, O. (2024); Gilbert, S. A. (2023)

Administrators are also called upon to act in ways beyond what is formally written, especially when it comes to resolving disputes on-wiki. This does not always map neatly onto what individual administrators' expertise or inclinations are, meaning that the ideal "administrator" is a jack-of-all-trades to an extreme degree.

Therefore, future research on this population should be careful to acknowledge that "administrators" should not be understood as a shorthand for all volunteers engaging in a specific administrator action. Nor should they be used as a proxy for the community as a whole, since the priorities and actions of administrators may differ from the rest of the editing body.

3.9.6 Administrator attrition is not primarily affected by direct market economic concerns, or competition with analogous activities online.

The primary motivations for administrators are altruistic and their attrition does not seem to be driven by monetary concerns. Instead their primary concern was availability of free time. Thus, we might reasonably predict that loss of free time, due to having to change jobs, perform gig work, or do caretaking work (and other such uncompensated labour) to negatively impact an individual's ability to participate as an administrator.

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These references do not include those already included in our [annotated bibliography](#).

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