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Honors World Literature and Composition

19 May 2023

Internet Censorship

Around the world, censorship runs rampant. Authoritarian governments restrict access to information without any provisions to keep citizens safe or informed. This problem affects people in and out of these countries— citizens, journalists, and other individuals alike. Internet censorship must be stopped. Those who are free from suppression must speak out against it and must stop aiding other countries in their censorship. Authoritarian governments are censoring a wide array of information on the internet. This must be put to an end because people deserve to know what is happening in the world around them and be able to rise up and make informed decisions in and about their country.

Government bodies started censoring the web as soon as it became widely available— or even available at all. For example, the only internet connections ever established in China that the public can use are through several large computers; these computers scan internet packets passing through them. They can then reset TCP connections that contain information or content that the Chinese Government has decided to bar from their citizens (Clayton). As The Economist puts it, “Regulators around the world are grappling with how to deal with potentially harmful internet content. But Mr. Xi [Jinping]’s drive for a more orderly internet is as extreme as it is swift”, explaining how China’s censorship is much more extreme than that of other countries (“Communist Party cancel culture targets internet celebrities; Internet censorship in China”). Other countries, like India, have not been blocking content for as long. In India, the decision to remove offensive material from the internet was only announced in 2011 (“India’s Techies Angered Over Internet Censorship Plan”).

In censoring internet content, the China Communist Party (or CCP) intends to quell any movements against their ideals, and also generally discourage internet use by blocking highly-stimulating content (“Communist Party cancel culture targets internet celebrities; Internet censorship in China”). While they do claim to be blocking harmful content, only 7% of the top 100 search results for pornography are blocked by the CCP’s Great Firewall—compared to 70% of the top 100 results for Fulan Gong, and 80% for searches regarding the China Democracy Party (Zhang). Indian censorship, in contrast, is used to remove types offensive content that may cause civil unrest or internal conflicts (“India’s Techies Angered Over Internet Censorship Plan”). As a minister from their government stated, “We will defend any citizen's right to freedom of speech till our last breath. But we don't want this kind of content to be on the social media.” (Sibal). This demonstrates how India does want freedom of speech, but is unwilling to allow complete internet freedom.

This censorship affects both those under censorship, and those who have free internet access. Primarily, the billions of people in China can only access the internet through censored connections (Zhang). Figures outside of these countries are also affected. On Chinese television the Government practices another form of censorship referred to as “Fogging” where they blur or sometimes completely erase certain actors and celebrities. One individual, Huo Zun, had been fogged for simply breaking up publicly (“Communist Party cancel culture targets internet celebrities; Internet censorship in China”). China also blocks a myriad of other things, including pro-democracy content, the online encyclopedia “Wikipedia”, the Falun Gong movement, and information considered threatening to the CCP—including content that mentions human rights, religious freedom, freedom of the press, and free expression (Zhang). Censorship has also been used by, “Individuals, governments, and corporations [who] have attempted to censor the press throughout history in efforts to influence the public's perception.” (“Censorship of the Press”). This demonstrates how large groups in power, like governments, censor online publishing to put themselves in a better light.

Currently, the China Communist Party still practices censorship in this way (“Communist Party cancel culture targets internet celebrities; Internet censorship in China”), with some other countries following similar techniques. Websites are being taken down or blocked, and people in many countries still cannot access the web freely. Still, “[the CCP’s] objective is to stop China's internet groups using highly-stimulating content to ramp up internet traffic” (“Communist Party cancel culture targets internet celebrities; Internet censorship in China”); these current actions are not slowing down in any way. xisting censorship has not lessened in many other states. While some outside groups have stopped providing for censorship, it still continues to be practiced within these countries.

Citizens need to be informed about what is going on in the world around them, and cannot do so without the information the government blocks. This censorship is also causing harm to individuals, because outside companies are supplying private information being posted on the internet to help arrest people (Zhang). Other countries are seeing how censorship is used in countries like China, and how the rest of the world seems to be generally okay with it, and implementing it themselves. For example, India recently decided it wanted to start censoring certain content on the internet that it deemed could cause “Ethnic or inter-communal conflict” (“India’s Techies Angered Over Internet Censorship Plan”). Citizens know censorship is bad, in 22 of 24 countries that Gale surveyed, the majority of people agreed it was important to have uncensored internet access. As they stated, “There is widespread opposition to internet censorship in emerging and developing nations.” (“Emerging and Developing Nations want Freedom on the Internet”). Even countries with little to no internet access know how important it is to not be repressed by their government.

One possible solution to this issue is to sanction countries that practice censorship, in order that they might see that it is unacceptable. These countries are not recognizing for themselves the need to halt their practices, and so they need outside pressure to be convinced to do so. Sanctions would aptly provide this pressure, as after a while they may cause large economic impacts that may be irrevocable. There would be no way to circumvent or deny this because, “Sanctions threaten to undermine the stability of a targeted state's economy, its leaders are not likely to sit passively without responding” (Lektzian). Authoritarian governments would have to do something—they would have no other option than to comply. However, this approach may harm citizens more so than censorship itself. Sanctions are harmful in nature and would cause detrimental economic results if authorities took too long to comply. Diplomacy would encourage China and others to stop censorship of the internet without crashing economies. This way, censorship could be championed safely and with no harm to individuals under it. Nations and groups today have large political power over other countries, and could, with enough time and effort, open the web to all.

But there is no guarantee that a diplomatic mission would convince the likes of Xi Jinping and his communist bureaucracy. If we were to place additional sanctions on these authoritarian governments that hinder the web and free speech, they would effectively have noroute other than to comply. Previous diplomatic efforts have not been effective, and another one would be unlikely to succeed. Many countries depend heavily on other countries’ exports to survive, without which they would fall. Ceasing trade with these states is the only way to stop censorship.

Governments around the world that censor the internet must be stopped, as their citizens have the right to know what is happening in and around them— without it being hidden by the government. In order to effectively stop this censorship, we must place sanctions on countries and governments that practice it. As explained in the New York Times’ book “Censorship: The Motives for Suppression”, censorship is everywhere. It must be put to an end, and we must be the ones to do it.

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