Final Year Project Plan

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Title: 'Compare censorship experienced in Ireland with another country'
Advisor: Stephen Farrell
SCSS

Background:
Internet users across the globe experience varying levels of censorship, reflecting cultural norms, local customs and tradition, and government policy. For this project our concern is focused on the suppression of information at a government level. The project is not concerned with CSAM or similar illegal content, but rather how, (and to what extent), a government influences the content consumed by individuals in the jurisdiction. The goal of the project is to compare the censorship situation faced in Ireland against another country.

Analysis of the censorship experienced in Ireland will be conducted in collaboration with another student assigned the same project, Griffin Steinman (steinmag@tcd.ie).

My supervisor and I have agreed that Israel would be a compelling comparison. Reasons for this include the country's complex ongoing international relations, an interesting overlap in cultural norms when compared to Ireland and a detailed history of conducting censorship on the internet. The country's uniqueness and distinct abundance of neighbouring adversaries have made national security an issue that Israel must always stay ahead of. Israel ranks quite poorly in the World Press Freedom Index (WPFI) at 88, further evidence that it would make for an interesting comparison.

Though some censorship is widely considered appropriate, (for example explicit content), there are far reaching consequences on free speech and an individual's capacity to seek out 'undesirable' information when this is commonplace. In the worst of cases, information can be weaponised and used as propaganda. For reasons such as this, it is important to hold governments accountable to the internet experience given to their users.

The data collection will be done using the Open Observatory of Network Interference (OONI) primarily. OONI, originally launched under the TOR project, is a free software that measures censorship globally. Each probe runs a litany of internet connectivity tests to do this, and thus the project is community driven. Once a large enough set of data has been collected, a comparative analysis will be conducted. This comparative analysis strives to highlight the different targets, methods, and extents of censorship in the two countries.

Ethical considerations will be paramount due to the sensitive nature of the thesis. Running these tests in certain regions could pose significant risk so care must be taken to adhere strictly to ethical and legal frameworks highlighted by my advisor or otherwise. GDPR and privacy considerations will also be critical to the project's successful completion.

The presentations will occur between the 17th and the 21st of March and the dissertation/report deadline is the 18th of April.

Goals:

- Conduct a literature review to identify and evaluate existing censorship measurement tools with a focus on OONI.
- Understand how and why censorship is conducted in these countries and how it can be measured.
- Collect data using OONI and other sources for both countries. Use historical datasets as well as rerunning tools for up to date data.
- Conduct a comparative analysis between the two countries' datasets.
- Consider ethical implications of the research early so as to ensure compliance.
- Set up VMs in Israel in order to establish ground truth.
- Present high-level findings about the two countries approach to censoring the experience of their internet users, make conclusions about the attitudes and values present in each locale based on the data collected.
- Understand more about the unique situation of Israel, and how censorship is used by the state in light of this.

Plan:

17/11/24 -> 12/12/24 (Meeting 3)
- Planning stage, research into viable country

12/12/24 -> 01/25
- Research stage, commit to a country and actively looking at data (Israel)
Create research proposal at end of it
- Install OONI probe.
- Gather research and background on Israel, Ireland, censorship, +the internet, etc.

January
- Literature Review.
- Outline of Research Methodology

February
- Start writing report in LaTex
- More serious analysis of OONI probe.

March
- Set up VM in Israel to acquire ground truth.
- Data collection & analysis
- Formalise results in Tex.
- Presentation on the project.
Presentation Period: March 17-21, 2025

April
- First draft ready for feedback.
- Report/Dissertation Submission Deadline: (Friday, April 18, 2025)