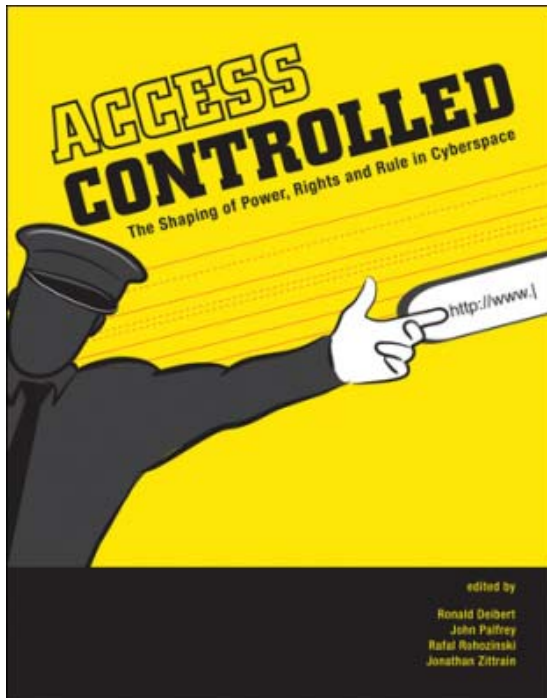


Reviews

Access Controlled: The Shaping of Power, Rights and Rule in Cyberspace, by Ronald Deibert, John Palfrey, Rafal Rohozinski, and Jonathan Zittrain (eds), Cambridge, MA; London, England: The MIT Press, 2010. Paperback, pp. 617, £18.95/\$25.00, ISBN: 0-262-51435-4. Language: English.

The volume under review is part of the MIT series on Information Revolution and Global Politics and belongs to the general strand of studies of political communication in the global perspective. *Access Controlled* is a result of a collaboration between the Citizen Lab at



the Munk Centre for International Studies, University of Toronto, the Berkman Centre for Internet and Society at Harvard University and the SecDev Group (Canada) as part of the OpenNet Initiative (ONI). The current volume is a significant elaboration of the scholars' previous work entitled *Access Denied: The Practice and Policy of Global Internet Filtering*, also published by the MIT Press in 2008. The aim of *Access Controlled* is to theorize new forms of internet control and map global patterns thereof, at a time when internet censorship and surveillance are on the rise in both authoritarian and democratic states and now employ such sophisticated techniques as targeted malware, take down notices and denial of access attacks, among other measures.

The book has three distinct sections. The first contains six chapters authored by different scholars and focusing on the theoretical concerns surrounding the issue of internet filtering. The second—largest—part provides country profiles that are grouped together geo-politically (Europe, North America, Asia, etc.) and not alphabetically (Commonwealth of Independent States opens the section, followed by Europe and North America, with Middle East and North Africa—predictably—concluding the list). Finally, the third section includes a glossary of technical terms (there are such entries as SMS and GSM) and index.

The short theoretical introduction contains some information on methodology. The reader learns that ONI uses complex research methodology that 'combines field investigations, technical reconnaissance, and data mining, fusion, analysis, and visualization' (p. 5). On

close inspection, however, it transpires the methodology breaks down to running word searches, monitoring media and comparing internet accessibility across countries. Research is generally outsourced to local specialists, different methodology is used in different regions, word searches are not always run in local languages and the authors never explain how they compile high-impact URLs and keywords as they differ from country to country. Country profiles are not structured in a similar manner which only proves that disparate research tools were used across regions and that presented data serves established (political) goals and follows a traditional top-down investigation of a country's social and cultural life. Finally, the country-specific form of research and presentation of data appears somewhat outdated at a time when nation-states are in flux and the internet serves as one of the major tools reshaping the social map of the world.

The introduction also has an overview of chapters and a discussion of various types of control of internet. The authors distinguish between different generations of control, with next-generation techniques employing 'the use of legal regulation to supplement or legitimize technical filtering measures, extralegal and covert practices, including offensive methods, and the outsourcing or privatizing of controls to "third parties"' (p. 6). Specifically, these include such methods of control as exploitation of computer systems by targeted viruses, use of denial-of-service attacks, surveillance, legal take-down notices, and other techniques.

The first section of the book commences with a chapter entitled 'Control and Subversion in Russian Cyberspace'; in real terms the chapter discusses internet filtering in the former republics of the USSR and not solely in the Russian Federation or of the Russophone internet, as the title suggests. Although the authors eventually make a distinction between various Russian web spaces in the chapter, they structure their argument in such a way that 'Russia' becomes an umbrella term—and a finite model of analysis—for all CIS countries and largely excludes internet activity in national languages from consideration (the authors, of course, fail to recognize that Georgia is not part of CIS; similarly they never explicate why, while considering the legacy of the Soviet regime, they exclude the experience of the Baltic states from the discussion). The main argument of the chapter is a distinction between different generations of internet control implemented in Russia and former Soviet republics; the authors conclude by suggesting that indirect forms of control will be implemented in the future because of technological, strategical and military concerns. As the authors use 'CIS' and 'Russia' as interchangeable terms, they put forward one model of development of internet policing for the whole region, which includes such diverse entities as Turkmenistan and Ukraine. In general, the authors seem to be too preoccupied with Russia, with the opening paragraph linking contemporary communication usage to Stalin (understood, by the way, as a person not as a type of regime), which, to me, evidences the persistent continuation of thinking in cold-war terms.

The book proceeds with four theoretical chapters that interrogate separate issues, namely, EU legislation regulating internet surveillance, protection of minors, intermediary censorship, and finally, the contradictory concerns of privacy and expression online. These four chapters provide nuanced analyses of the main issues, thus, outlining accumulated findings and signposting perspectives for further research. Each of these chapters makes a significant contribution to the study of internet in relation to freedom of speech, democracy and development.

However, these chapters do not inform the following section of the book, i.e., the country profiles. There is a notable imbalance between the rigour of the theoretical chapters and the elasticity of ensuing country profiles, resulting in simplified visions of internet use in specific regions.

While providing a peculiar manual of global internet use, the researchers occasionally operate with and present data that should appear problematic to anyone with a little common sense. For example, according to *Accessed Controlled*, Russia enjoys a striking 100 percent literacy rate whereas in the UK it is only 99 percent (I am confident members of the British Nationalist Party would be extremely happy to see such statistics as it proves their claims of illiterate Russian migrants putting an unnecessary strain on the British educational system). At the same time, according to *Accessed Controlled*, Russia has a lower rate of transparency than Burma, a country described by the BBC as 'ruled by a military junta which suppresses almost all dissent and wields absolute power in the face of international condemnation and sanctions' (http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/country_profiles/1300003.stm; accessed 15 May 2010). Moreover, is it really fair to judge a country's web savvy on the basis of the internet habits of its leaders as the authors of *Access Controlled* do: 'Putin admittedly has never sent an e-mail in his life <...> Dmitry Medvedev has demonstrated familiarity with Internet communications' (p. 211)? Or is it productive to speculate about the power of Korean cyberspace by examining the digital fate of the country's four celebrities (p. 505)? If this is not enough, how about the following 'inconsistency': on page 537 the authors claim that there is no evidence of internet filtering in Egypt, and on page 538 we come across a statement that reads thus: 'Egypt was listed by the Committee to Protect Journalists as one of the top ten worst countries to be a blogger, because the authorities monitor Internet activity on a regular basis and have detailed a large number of active bloggers'. Finally, there is a conspicuous absence of information on internet use in South America, which only proves that the argument is structured around the familiar east-west axis rather than the north-south one.

The book is linked to ONI's splendid website <<http://opennet.net/>>, providing up-to-date information on internet access around the world. The purpose of the website is 'to investigate, expose and analyze internet filtering and surveillance practices in a credible and non-partisan fashion'. In fact, the project participants claim that they 'intend to uncover the potential pitfalls and unintended consequences of these practices, and thus help to inform better public policy and advocacy work in this area' <<http://opennet.net/about-oni>> (accessed 15 May 2010). In addition to various reports, the research team has produced an interactive map of global internet filtering that enables the user to access country profiles and regional overviews (Fig. 1). The grey areas on the map do not indicate the absence of internet filtering; rather, they signal a lack of data on this subject. This is puzzling especially because it concerns countries such as the United States and United Kingdom where an absence of data on internet filtering seems highly unlikely. Additionally, the ominous-looking swathes of yellow in the map signify the absence of evidence proving internet filtering and accordingly suggest that there is no internet filtering in Russia. In this regard, the online map is out of sync with *Access Controlled*, which clearly suggests that there is selective internet filtering in the Russian Federation (p. 209). To me, this map is a fantastic symbol of neo-liberal paradigms of knowledge production that continuously recycle cold-war-style assumptions about distribution of power and proliferation of democracy around the world, whereby the more yellow

and red sections represent low levels of democratic development as well as our own (western) insecurities and inadequacy of interpretative models.

Figure 1. A screen grab of OpenNet Initiative website displaying an interactive map of global internet filtering.

Blog


Facebook Blocked in Pakistan Following "Draw Mohammad Day" Competition

Following the creation of a Facebook page called "Everybody Draw Mohammad Day," a Pakistani court ordered the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) to block the page until 31 May.

Blocked or Not Blocked? Lessons from an Intriguing "Filtering" Instance

Determining whether a Web site is blocked by a state filtering regime is sometimes a complicated issue that goes beyond finding out whether the site is simply accessible or inaccessible, and requires a multi-disciplinary approach, which ONI has been uniquely employing in its research.

Global Internet Filtering



View Country Profiles

Select a Country

View Regional Overviews

Select a Region

Source: <http://opennet.net/> (accessed 10 June 2010)

Access Controlled is not a definitive and comprehensive overview of internet filtering across the globe; rather, it is a dynamic model of internet use based on established assumptions, collected data and anticipated trends of development. In spite of its flaws, the book provides an important tool to scholars of media and new media, political communication and area studies, journalists and social scientists. It encourages further debate on existing theoretical frameworks about the internet (its various sections, zones and units), where millions of opinions are simultaneously articulated using discrete and complex media platforms.

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