



GEORG-AUGUST-UNIVERSITÄT  
GÖTTINGEN

# Internet Blocking in Liberal Democracies

**A Comparative Analysis**

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# Research project

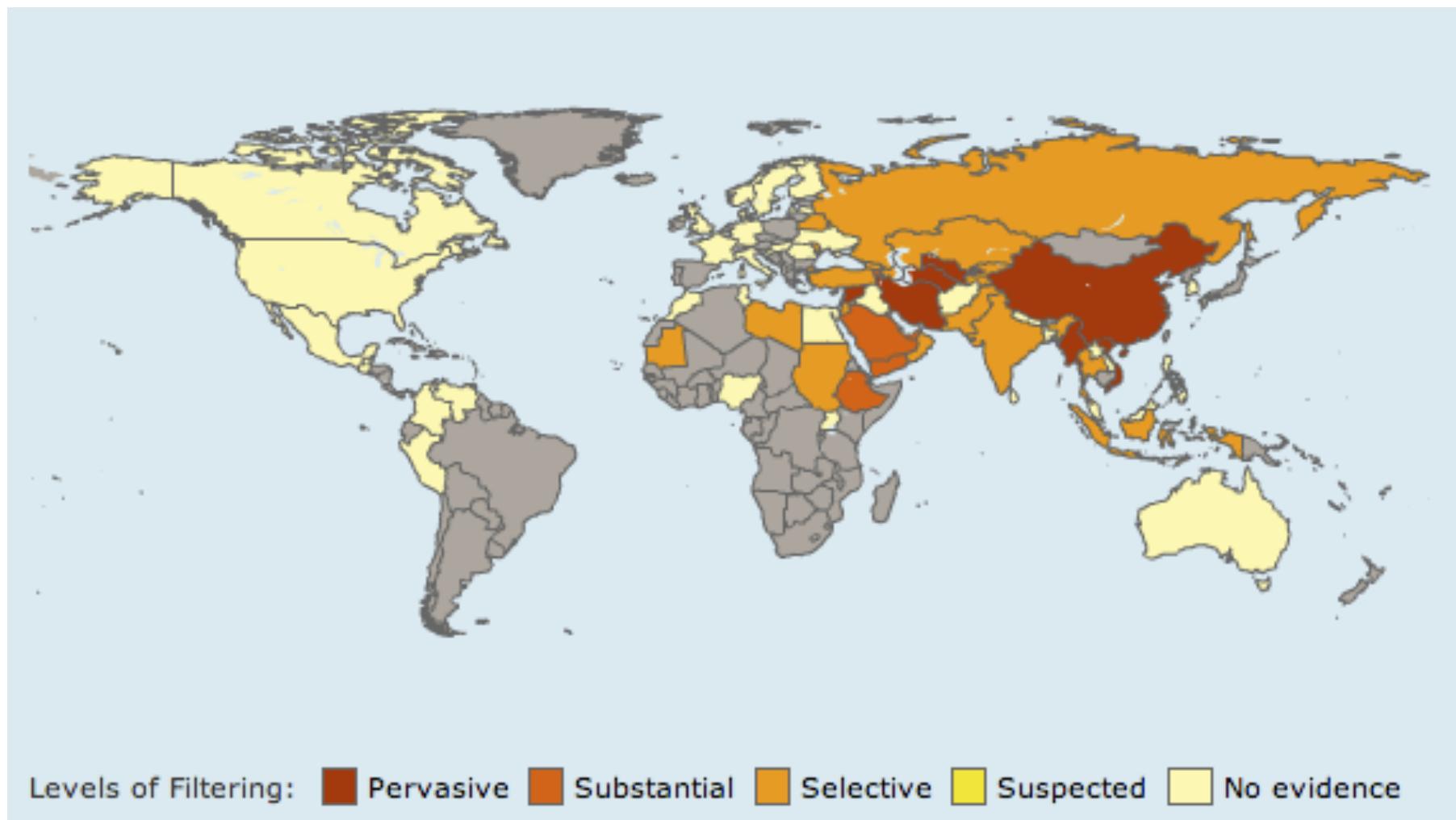
- How do liberal democracies regulate internet content, in particular through access blocking?
- Comparative analysis of ca. 20 liberal democracies
- Focus on institutional arrangements, actor constellations, discourses, technical-regulatory settings

# Outline

- Why liberal democracies?
- Blocking techniques
- Legal, technical and political issues with Internet blocking
- Conclusions

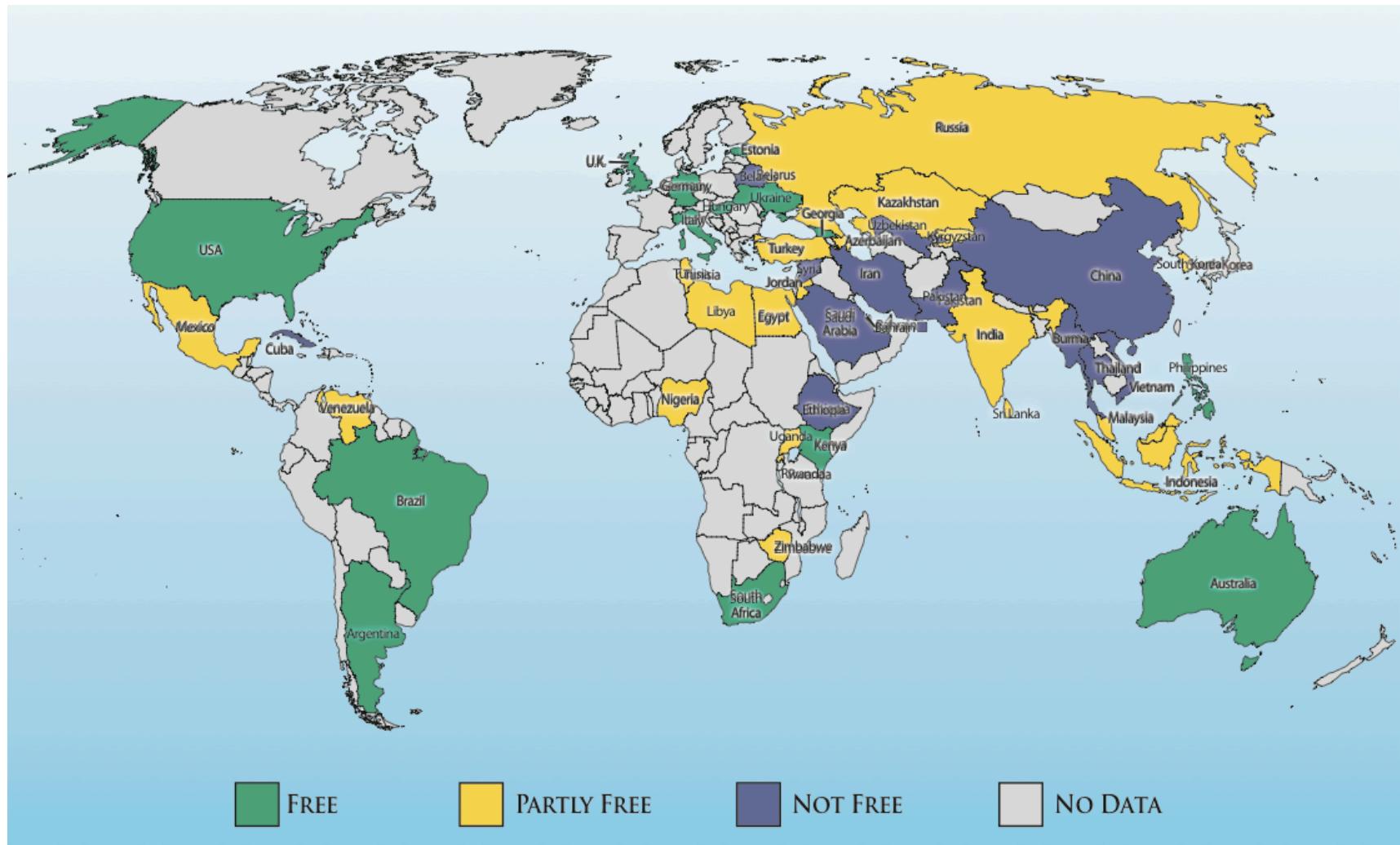
# **WHY LIBERAL DEMOCRACIES?**

# Political filtering



(ONI, 2012)

# Freedom on the Net



(Freedom House, 2012)

# Cyber-censorship



(Reporters Without Borders, 2012)

# Belgian block page



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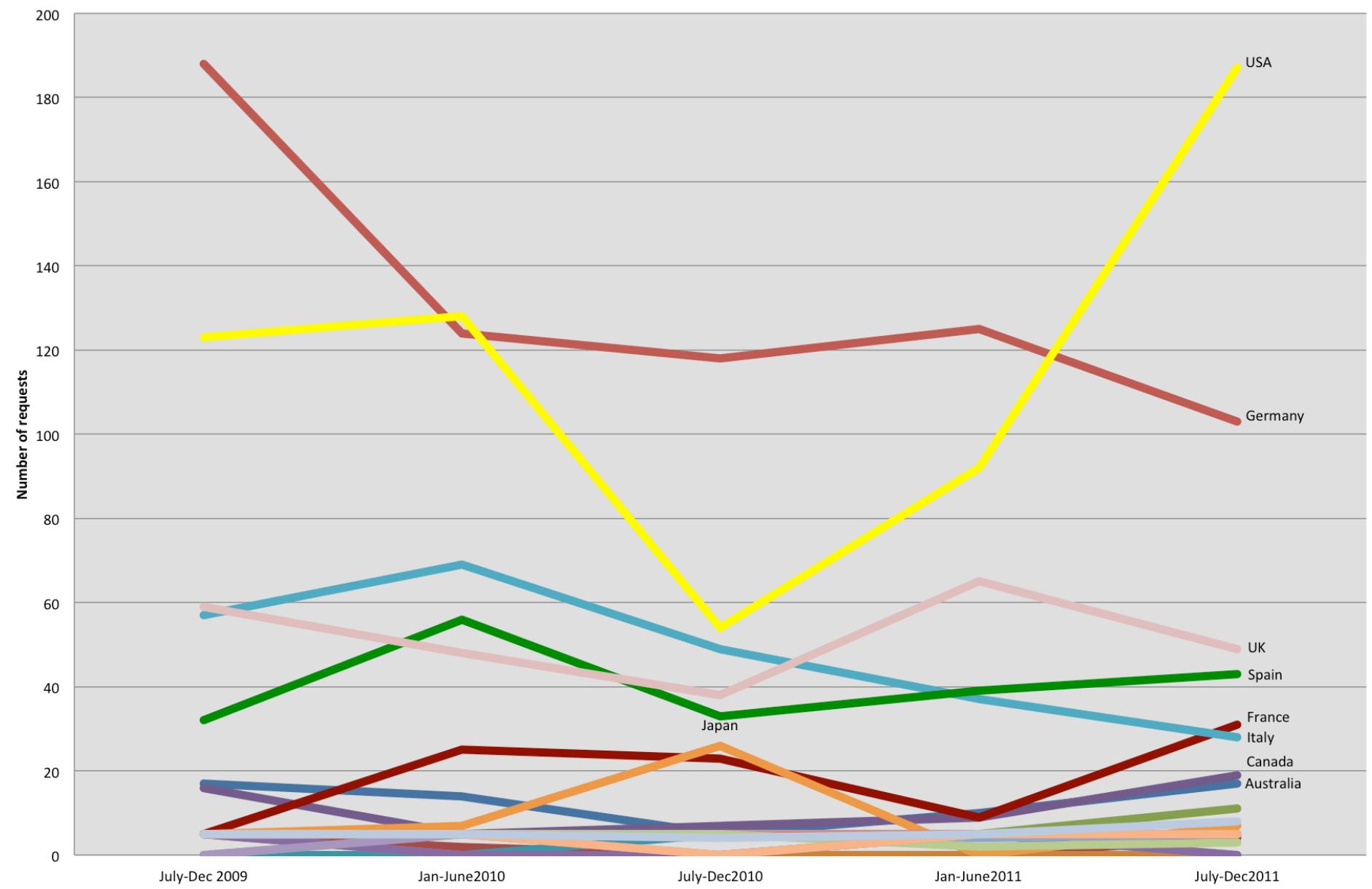
# Copyright requests to Google

**URLs requested to be removed from Search per week**

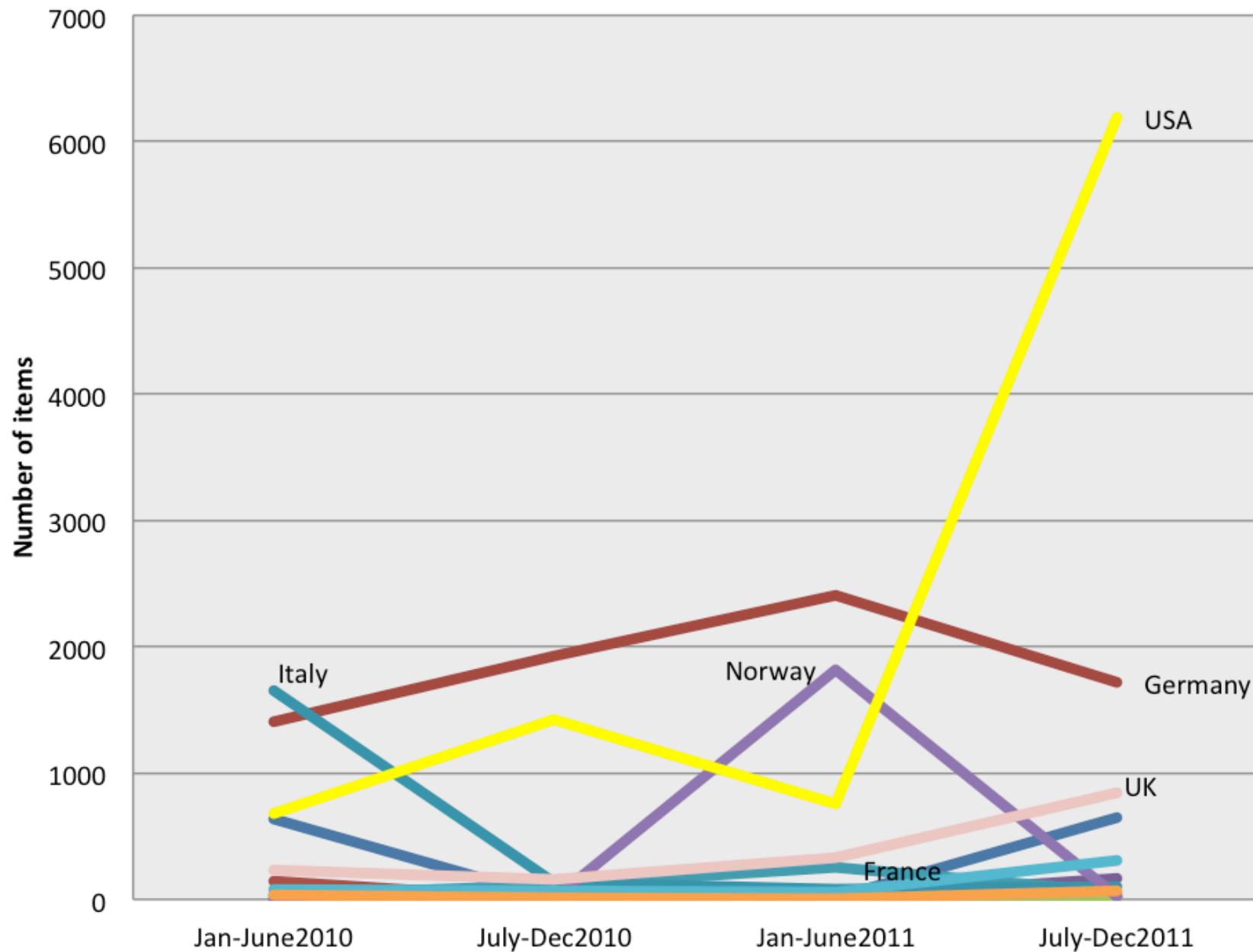


(Google Transparency Report, 2012)

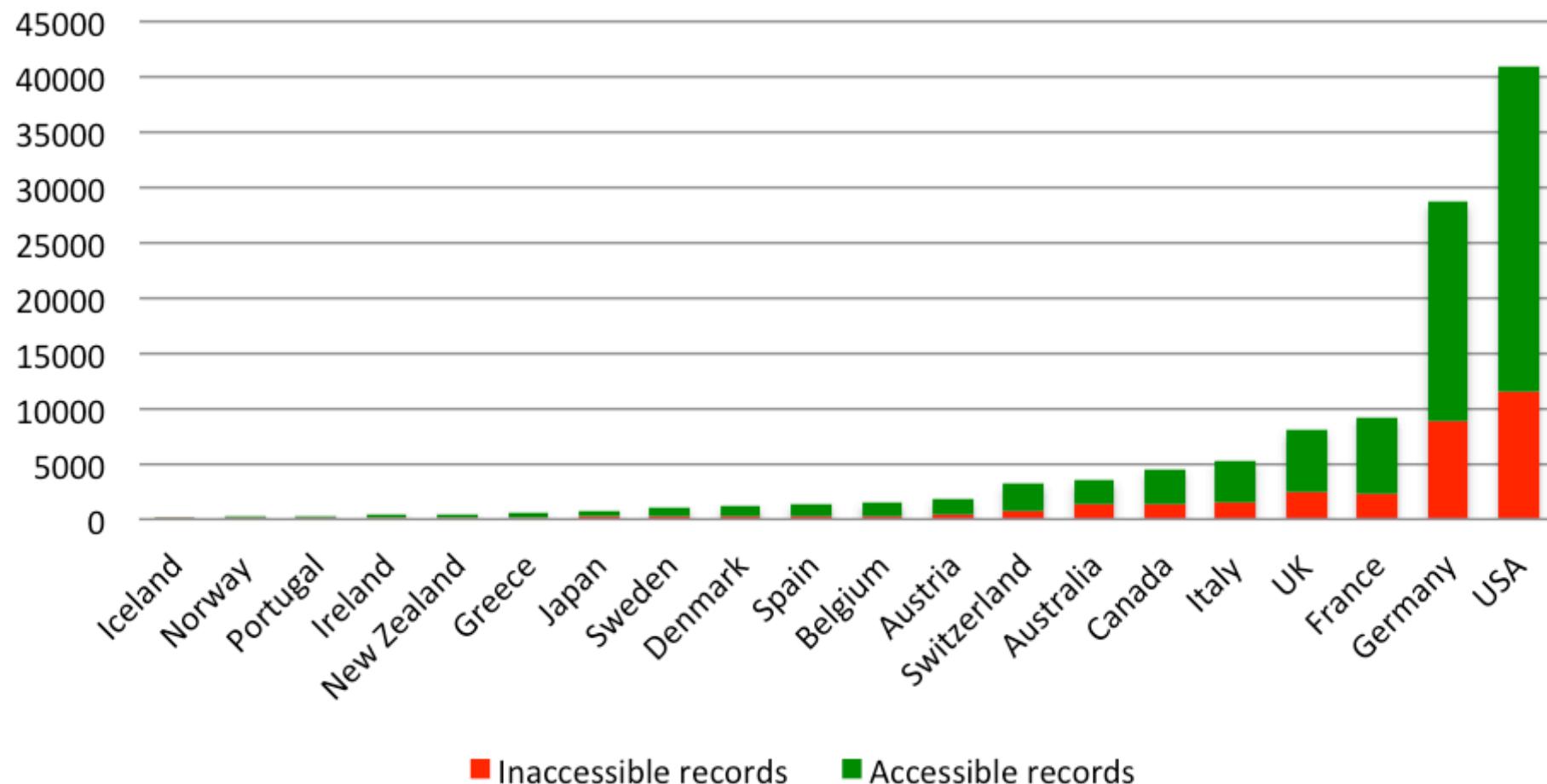
## Gouvernement requests to Google



## Items requested to be removed



## Herdict reports



*States differ not in their intent to censor material [...] but in the content they target, how precisely they block it, and how involved their citizens are in these choices.*

(Bambauer, 2009: 3)

# **BLOCKING TECHNIQUES**

# Internet (content) regulation

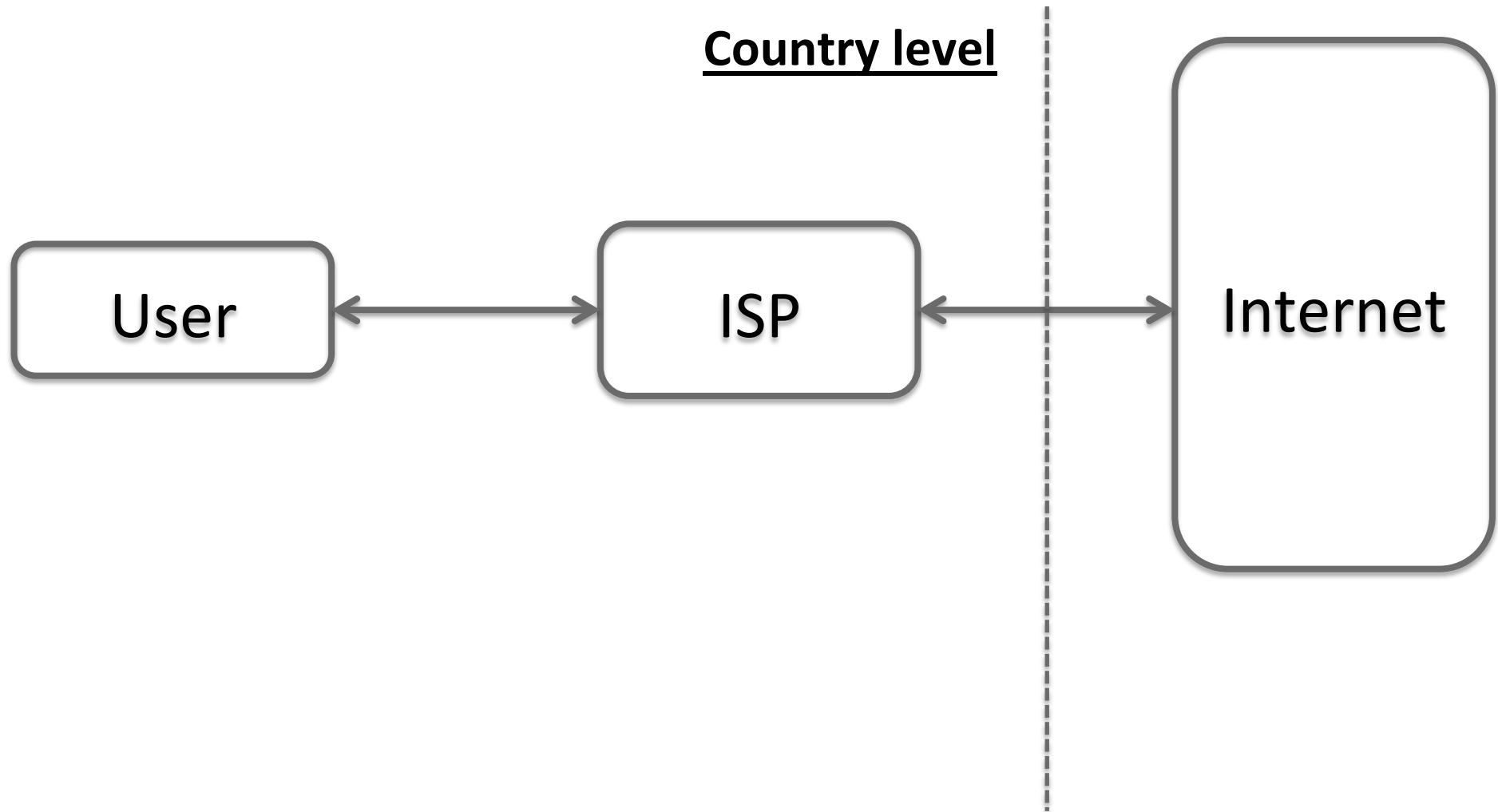
1990s: No (state) regulation of cyberspace

- But enforcement through courts and attempts to introduce content classification systems

1999: Lessig's “Code as law” - regulation through:

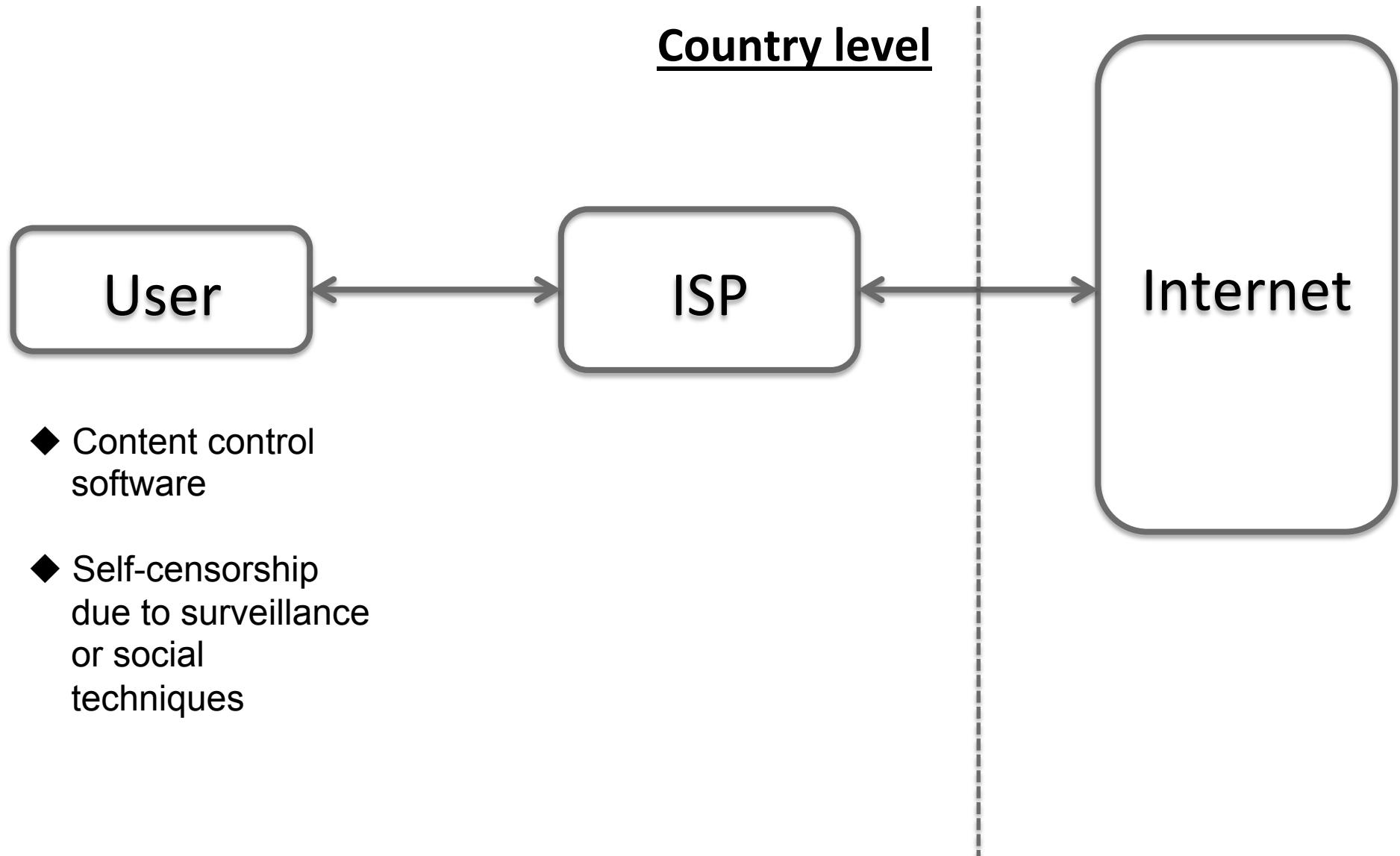
- Law
- Market
- Social norms
- Code (Block lists, DPI)

# Web browsing

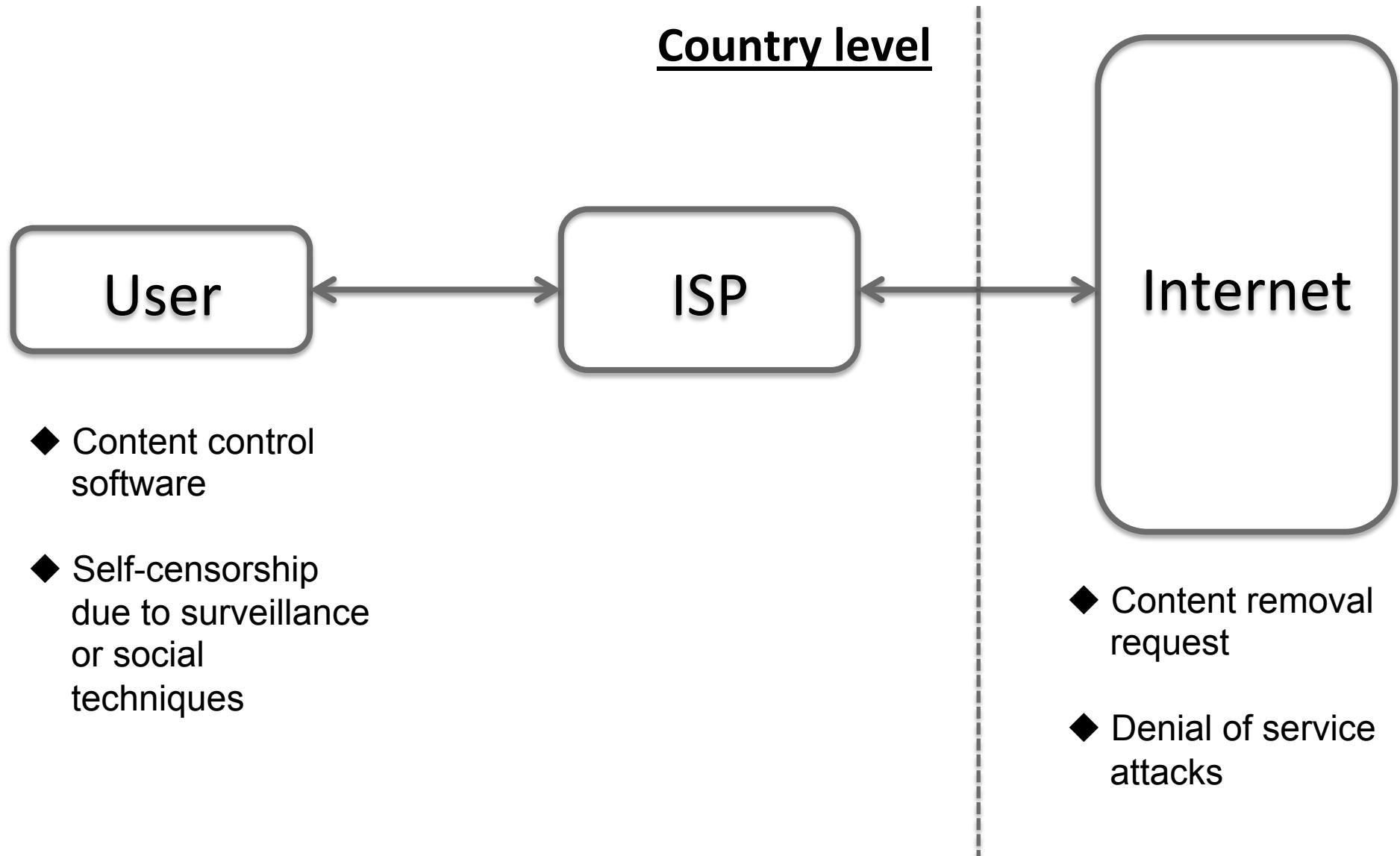


(Adapted from Murdoch & Anderson, 2008)

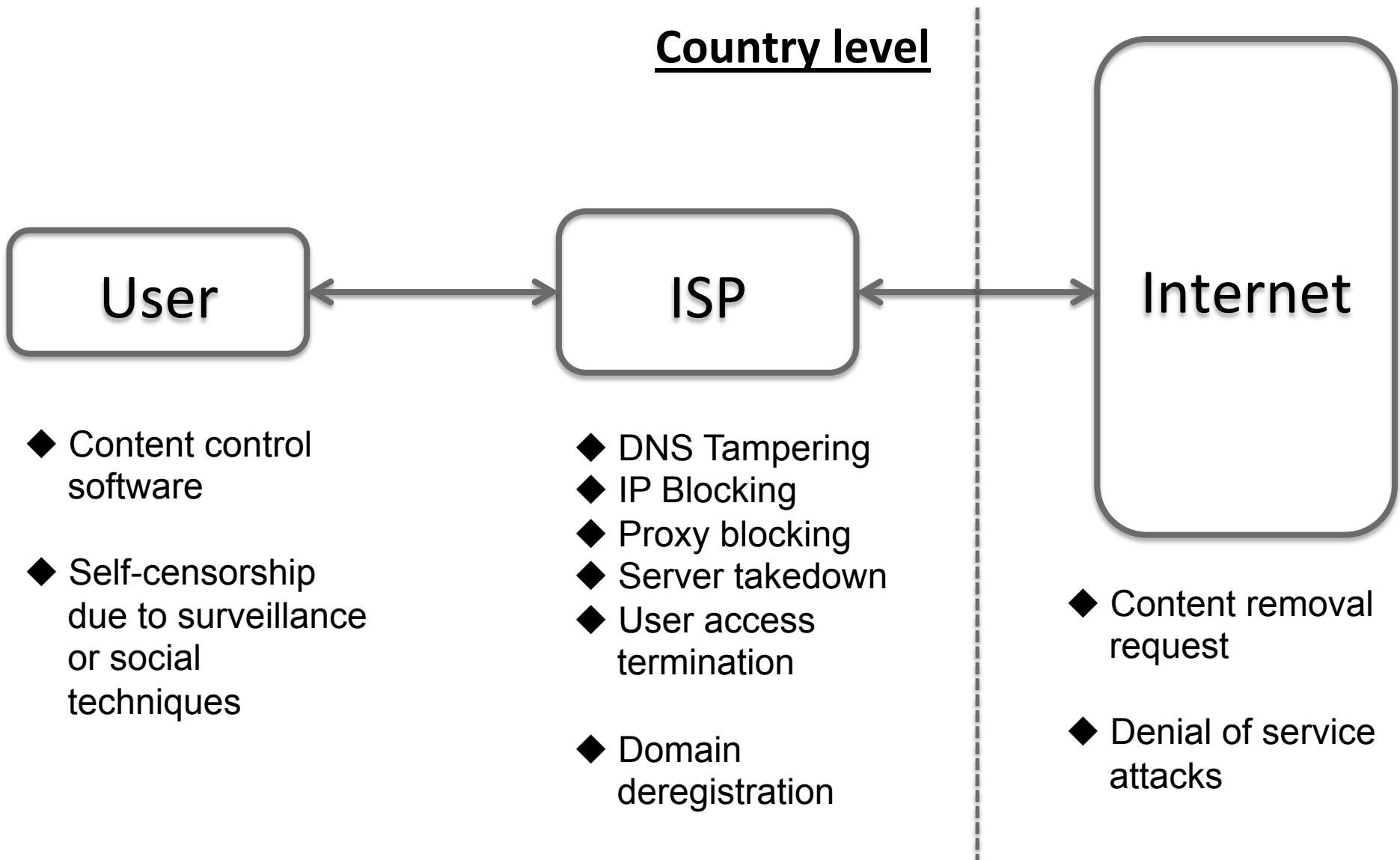
# Internet blocking



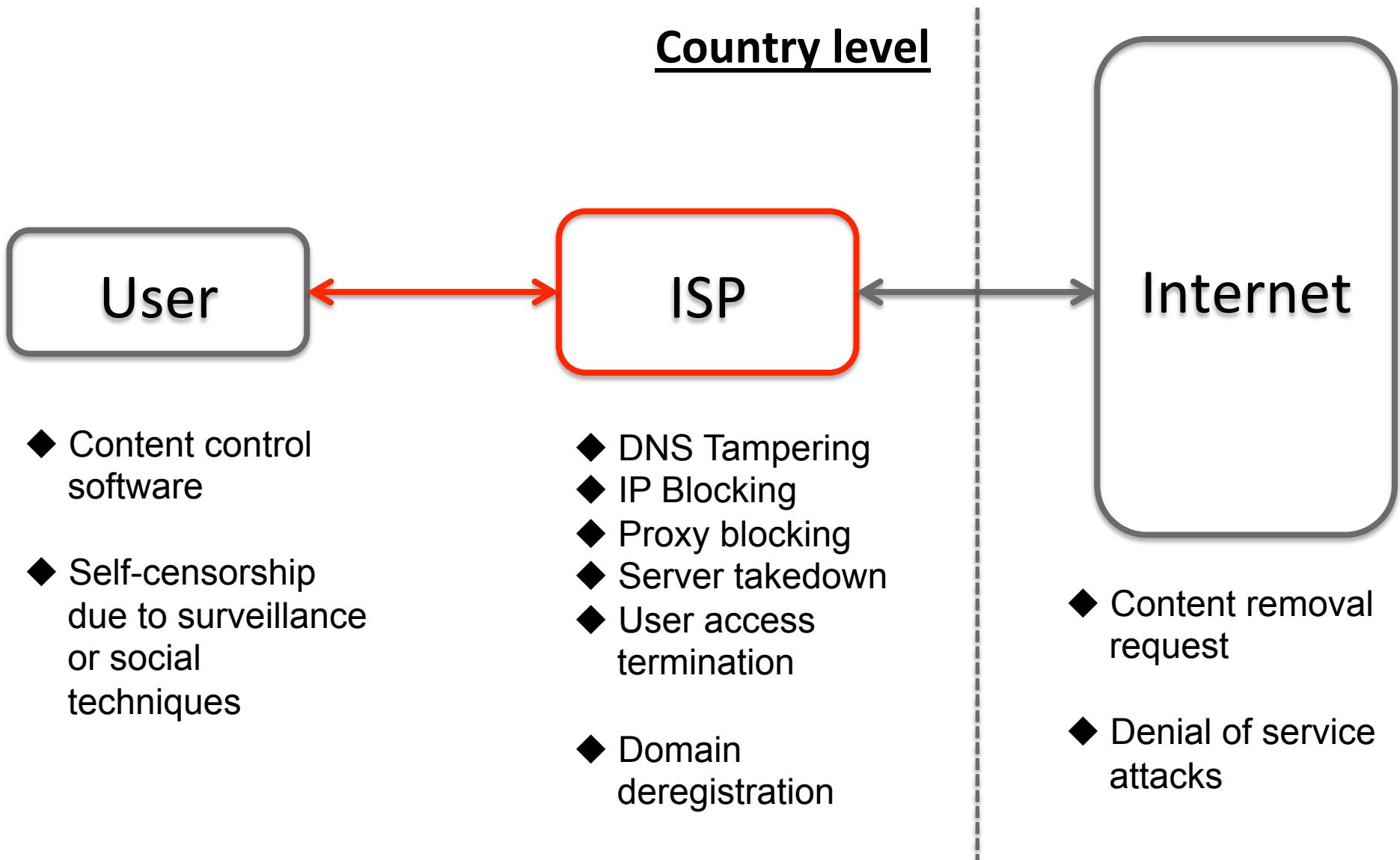
# Internet blocking



# Internet blocking



# Web blocking



# **LEGAL, TECHNICAL AND POLITICAL ISSUES**

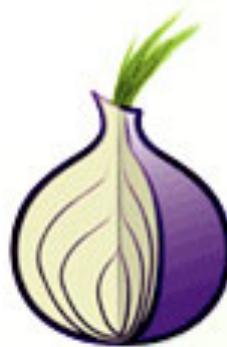
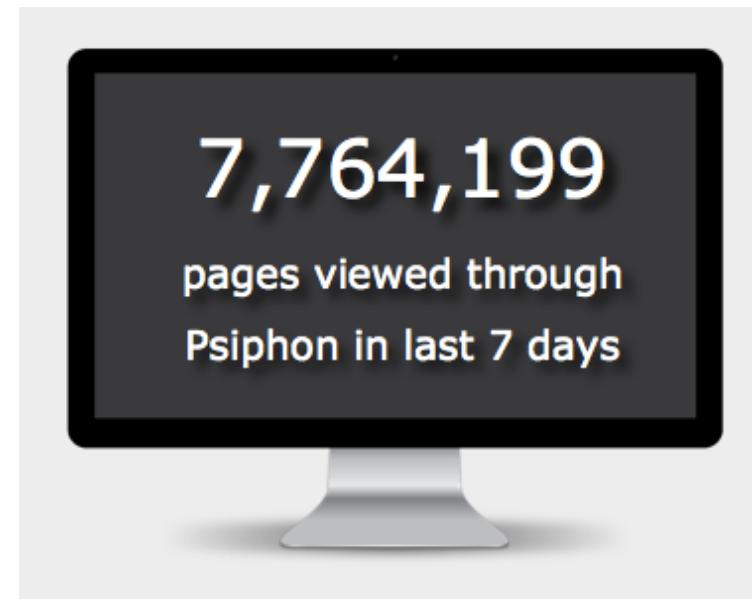
# Blocking is problematic

- Legal issues
  - Freedom of expression, privacy
  - Due process, rule of law
  - Privatisation of law enforcement
- Technical issues
  - Over/under-blocking
  - Costly
- Political issues
  - Mission creep
  - Territorialisation of the internet
  - Bad example for authoritarian states

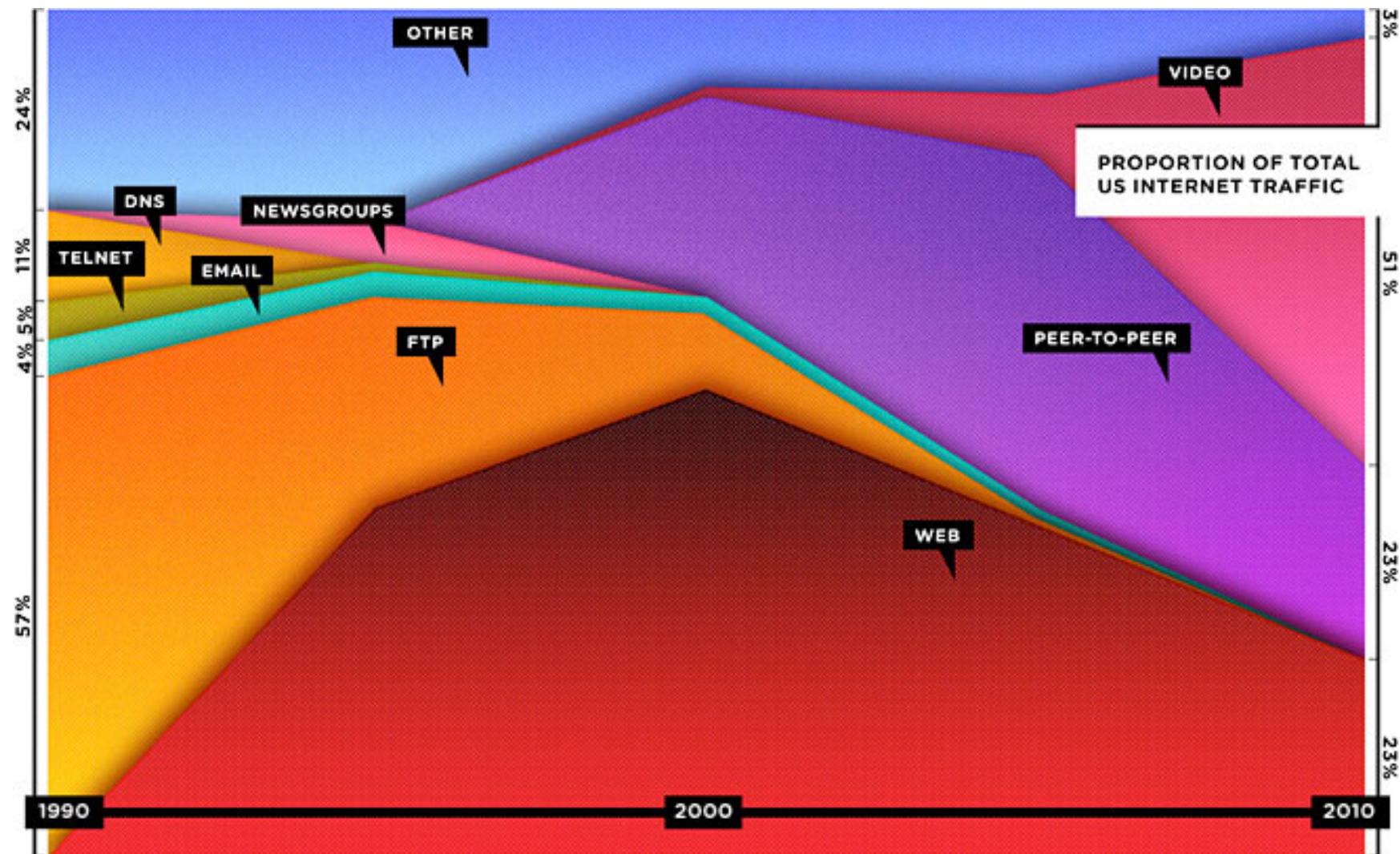


# Blocking is ineffective

- Easy to circumvent
- Targets content where it is not
- Techniques are not perfect



# US Internet traffic 2010



(Cisco estimates based on CAIDA publications, Wired, 2010)

# Blocking is popular

## Pro

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- Governments
- Copyright holders
- Security industry
- Telcos
- Child protection groups
- Civil liberties advocates
- Individuals (defamation...)

## Con

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- ISPs/network operators
- Internet industry
- Cyber-libertarians
- Digital rights groups

# **CONCLUSIONS**

# Conclusions

- Most states block – global norm
- Some states block more than others. Why?
- Legal, technical and political issues
- Various possible actor constellations
- Differences in type of content, blocking system and democratic accountability
- How open, transparent, focused and accountable are blocking systems?
- Challenge: measurement of blocking