

Countries increasingly regulating Internet content

By Caitlin Dewey, Washington Post

A new Vietnamese law will make it illegal for citizens to post news or “general information” online, a restriction that sounds absurdly unenforceable but turns out to be more doable – and less of an outlier – than you might expect.

According to analysis from the watchdog group Freedom House, Vietnam isn’t alone in its crackdown, even if its methods are particularly severe. Internet censorship is on the rise worldwide, and restrictive, one-party countries like Vietnam aren’t the only ones legislating what people can post online.

Consider the headlines you’ve seen over the past month alone. In the U.K., a proposed filter would automatically block pornography and, according to Internet rights groups, other unwanted content. In Jordan, news websites can’t operate without a special license from the government.

“What we’ve seen in our research is that as more people access the internet, governments are more and more likely to impose measures that censor certain types of content,” said Sanja Kelly, the project director for Freedom House’s “Freedom on the Net,” which will publish its 2013 report in September. “One of our findings for this year will be that Internet censorship is on the rise: more Web sites are being blocked than ever before and an increasing number of countries are passing laws that would restrict certain types of online content.”

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