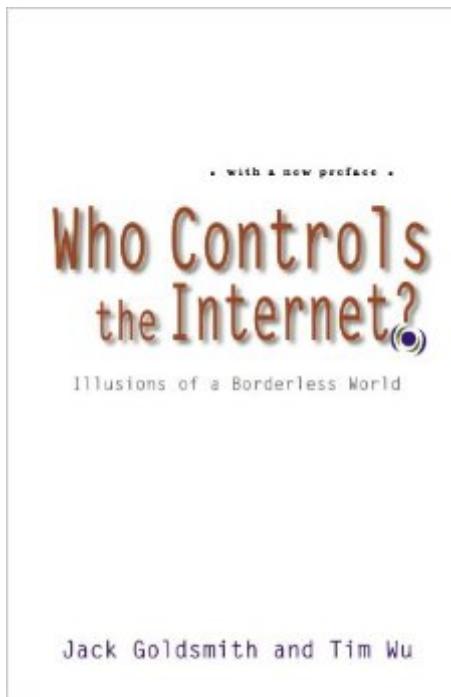


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Who Controls The Internet?: Illusions Of A Borderless World



Synopsis

Is the Internet erasing national borders? Will the future of the Net be set by Internet engineers, rogue programmers, the United Nations, or powerful countries? Who's really in control of what's happening on the Net? In this provocative new book, Jack Goldsmith and Tim Wu tell the fascinating story of the Internet's challenge to governmental rule in the 1990s, and the ensuing battles with governments around the world. It's a book about the fate of one idea--that the Internet might liberate us forever from government, borders, and even our physical selves. We learn of Google's struggles with the French government and Yahoo's capitulation to the Chinese regime; of how the European Union sets privacy standards on the Net for the entire world; and of eBay's struggles with fraud and how it slowly learned to trust the FBI. In a decade of events the original vision is uprooted, as governments time and time again assert their power to direct the future of the Internet. The destiny of the Internet over the next decades, argue Goldsmith and Wu, will reflect the interests of powerful nations and the conflicts within and between them. While acknowledging the many attractions of the earliest visions of the Internet, the authors describe the new order, and speaking to both its surprising virtues and unavoidable vices. Far from destroying the Internet, the experience of the last decade has lead to a quiet rediscovery of some of the oldest functions and justifications for territorial government. While territorial governments have unavoidable problems, it has proven hard to replace what legitimacy governments have, and harder yet to replace the system of rule of law that controls the unchecked evils of anarchy. While the Net will change some of the ways that territorial states govern, it will not diminish the oldest and most fundamental roles of government and challenges of governance. Well written and filled with fascinating examples, including colorful portraits of many key players in Internet history, this is a work that is bound to stir heated debate in the cyberspace community.

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Customer Reviews

"Who Controls the Internet?" by Jack Goldsmith and Tim Wu offers a clear-eyed assessment of the struggle to control the Internet. Starting with a discussion of the early vision of a borderless global community, the authors present some of the most prominent individuals, ideas and movements that have played key roles in developing the Internet as we know it today. As Law Professors at Harvard and Columbia, respectively, Mr. Goldsmith and Mr. Wu adroitly assert the important role of government in maintaining Internet law and order while skillfully debunking the claims of techno-utopianism that have been espoused by popular but misinformed theorists such as Thomas Friedman. The book has three sections. Part One is "The Internet Revolution". The authors discuss the early days of the Internet through the 1990s, when Julian Dibbell and John Perry Barlow articulated a libertarian vision that gained wide currency in the public imagination. The Electronic Frontier Foundation worked to protect the Internet from regulation in the belief that a free online community might unite people and melt government away. However, Jon Postel's attempt to assert control over the root naming and numbering system in 1998 was short-lived, as the U.S. government flexed its power in order to protect its national defense and business interests. Part Two is "Government Strikes Back". Users in different places with widely varying cultures and preferences want information presented in their local language and context, the authors explain. Governments use a number of techniques to pressure or control local intermediaries to restrict Internet content that a majority of its citizens find unacceptable, such as the sale of Nazi paraphenelia in France.

I was very disappointed with this book after seeing all of the high reviews here, and reading the description for the book. I thought I was going to be reading an in-depth analysis of the technical, legal, and political means by which governments control, censor, and surveil the Internet, what the sociopolitical effects of this are, and how people around the world are resisting invasion of privacy and deprivation of autonomy. Instead, I discovered that it was actually a poorly reasoned apology for government surveillance, censorship, and control of the Internet. Bringing out those trusty old substitutes for rational analysis and debate -- child porn, Nazi hate speech, and computer fraudsters -- Wu and Goldsmith repeatedly attempt to show us how grateful we should be for our governments

"protecting" us from "villains", and how we were all so "naive" for thinking that we wanted to be able to have a democratic, uncensored electronic communications medium, and how silly we were for thinking that we would actually be allowed to have one. They discuss issues within inane framings such as "uninhibited debate vs. order", and talk about how it's great that governments are censoring and monitoring the public, because that's what people need to keep them safe from all of those Nazis and child pornographers. They of course, superficially touch upon the Chinese surveillance state, and how in *extreme* and *rare* situations like China, government surveillance, censorship, and control might *possibly* lead to political repression -- but other than that, they keep on the velvet gloves, hardly discussing government violations of liberty and privacy, and not touching at all upon the extensive surveillance apparatus in the United States or Great Britain.

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