

# Internet censorship 2

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[Technology](#), [Internet](#)



## Internet Censorship

The Internet is a wonderful place of entertainment and education, but like all places used by millions of people, it has some murky corners people would prefer children not to explore. In the physical world, society as a whole wants to protect children, but there are no social or physical constraints to Internet surfing. The Internet Censorship Bill of 1995, also known as the Exon/Coats Communications Decency Act, has been introduced in the U. S. Congress. It would make it a criminal offense to make available to children anything that is indecent, or to send anything indecent with " intent to annoy, abuse, threaten, or harass" (" Stop the Communications ..." n. p.). The goal of this bill is to try to make all public discourse on the Internet suitable for young children. The issue of whether is it necessary to have censorship on the Internet is being argued all over the world. Censorship would damage the atmosphere of the freedom to express ideas on the Internet; therefore, government should not encourage censorship. The Internet was originally a place for people to freely express their ideas worldwide. It is also one of America's most valuable types of technology. Ordinary people use the Net for communication, expressing their opinions, or obtaining up-to-date information from the World Wide Web (WWW). The Internet can be compared to a church. In many ways the Internet is like a church: it has its council of elders, every member has an opinion about how things should work, and they can either take part or not. It's the choice of the user. The Internet has no president, chief operating officer, or Pope. The networks may have presidents and CEO's, but that's a different issue; there is no single authority figure for the Internet as a whole. As stated by Frances Hentoff, the staff

writer for The Village Voice and the author of First Freedoms, " on an info superhighway driven by individuals, there are no cops preventing users from downloading" (Hentoff 1). Internet users can broadcast or express anything they want. The fact that the Net has no single authority figure sets forth a problem about what kind of materials could be available on the Net. The U. S. government is now trying to pass bills to prevent misuse of the Net. The Internet Censorship Bill of 1995 was introduced to the U. S. Congress. Under the Censorship Bill, a person breaks the law if he/she puts a purity test on a web page without making sure children cannot access the page. Also, if a person verbally assaults someone, he/she breaks the law. If a university, where some students may be under 18 years old, carries the alt. sex\* newsgroups, which contains adult material, it breaks the law. According to George Melloan from the Wall Street Journal, a censorship bill was passed by the Senate 84-16 in July, and an anticensorship bill was passed by the House 420-4 in August. There are now four different sets of censorship and anticensorship language in the House and Senate versions of the Telecomm reform bill, which contradict each other and will have to be reconciled (Melloan, n. p.). Another crucial Internet crime is the theft of credit card numbers. Companies do business on the Net, and credit card numbers are stored on their servers; everyone with the necessary computer knowledge could hack in and obtain such databases for illegal purposes. To cite an instance, the most infamous computer terrorist, Kevin Mitnick, " waived extradition and is now in jail in California, charged with computer fraud and illegal use of a telephone access device. The list of allegations against him include theft of many files and documents, including twenty-thousand credit

card numbers from Netcom On-Line Services, which provides thousands with access to the Internet" (Warren 52). Many experts have pointed out that government censorship is not possible. Howard Rheingold, the editor of the Whole World Review, observes that, " the 'censor the Net' approach is not just morally misguided. It's becoming technically and politically impossible" (Rheingold n. p.). First, it is not fair to exclude the freedom and damage the atmosphere of freely expressing ideas just for the safety of children. Corn-Revere, an expert on Internet censorship at the Howgan & Harson Law Firm, points out that " the purpose of indecency regulation is to keep adult material from falling into the hands of kids. When he first introduced a similar bill last year, Senator Exon said he was concerned that the Information Superhighway was in danger of becoming an electronic 'red light district' and that he wanted to bar his granddaughter's access to unsuitable information" (Corn-Revere 24). It is clear that Senator Exon introduced the bill to prevent minors from viewing unsuitable material on the Net. In addition, Meleedy, a computer science graduate student at Harvard University, said that if " the Internet makes democracy this accessible to the average citizen, is it any wonder Congress wants to censor it?" (Meleedy 1). As predicted by Corn-Revere, " At the very least, the law will force content providers to make access more difficult, which will affect all users, not just the young" (Corn-Revere 70). Censoring the Net is technically and politically impossible; it will damage the atmosphere of freedom and free idea expression on the Net; therefore, government should not encourage censorship. Most Internet users are enjoying their freedom of speech on the Net, which is supposed to be protected by the First Amendment of the United

States. The freedom of idea expression is what makes the Internet important and enjoyable, and it should not be waived for any reason.