
Freedom of Speech: Transborder Issues



“On the Internet, the Bill of Rights
is a local ordinance.”

The Rest of the World

- The US has very strong protections for certain kinds of content
- Attitudes in the rest of the world are different, often much different
- How is the Internet regulated? How should it be?

US Law

- The First Amendment is paramount
- Truth is an absolute defense against libel; burden of proof is on the plaintiff
- Few privacy protections
- No political topics off-limits
- But — the US is much more conservative about sex than, say, Europe

Libel Law

- England is a democracy with a fair court system — but the defendant has to prove the truth of statements
- Other countries have — let's say “different standards”
- Whose law should prevail?

Libel Tourism

- While in the US, British doctor Peter Wilmshurst made statements critical of an American firm
- An American online medical news publication posted a story on this
- NMT Medical sued Wilmshurst — in England
- As of December, Wilmshurst had spent over £50,000 defending himself

Singapore

- Singapore is often accused of using libel laws to punch or silence political opponents
- *International Herald Tribune* found liable for saying “some Asian leaders relied “on a compliant judiciary to bankrupt opposition politicians”” (non-Internet case); Singapore was not mentioned by name
- Whose law should prevail?

Australia

- An article in *Barron's* (published by Dow Jones) allegedly said nasty things about Joseph Gutnick, a resident of Australia
- The article was published on the Barron's web site, on a server located in New Jersey
- The High Court of Australia ruled for Gutnick
- Among other things, it noted that Rule 7.01(1)(j) provides for jurisdiction if “(j) the proceeding is brought in respect of damage suffered wholly or partly in Victoria and caused by a tortious act or omission wherever occurring”.
- Since Gutnick was only citing damage to his reputation in Australia, the case was held to be within Australian jurisdiction
- (The opinion is also notable for its extensive use of American law)

It's Not Just Libel

- Most democracies value the right to a fair trial
- How is this balanced against freedom of speech?
- Different countries have different rules
- The Internet has made life more complex

US Law

- In *Irvin v. Dowd*, 366 U.S. 717 (1961) and *Sheppard v. Maxwell*, 384 U.S. 333 (1966), the Supreme Court ruled that publicity before and during a trial could indeed bias jurors
- But — it violates the First Amendment to bar press coverage
- Permissible solutions include questioning possible jurors, gag orders on the attorneys, sequestering jurors, and changes of venue

Canadian Law Differs

- Canadian law puts more stress on balancing rights
- “The *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* guarantees the rights and freedoms set out in it subject only to such reasonable limits prescribed by law as can be demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society.”
- The Internet (and cross-border radio and television) lead to conflicts
- In a 2005 political scandal investigation, a Canadian judge barred publication of some witnesses’ testimony, because they were facing a criminal trial
- An American blogger posted it anyway

What is “Publication”?

- If a Canadian posted the information on a Canadian web site, it’s clearly publication within Canada
- What about hyperlinks to a posting in the US?
- What about enough information to let Google find the posting?
- What if an American newspaper — say, the Wall Street Journal, which charges and hence knows more about its subscribers — carries the story and knows it has Canadian readers?

Other Examples

- In 1995, Bavarian prosecutors indicted CompuServe for permitting access to allegedly-obscene Usenet newsgroups
- In response, CompuServe originally blocked access to those groups worldwide
- France charged EBay with carrying listings for Nazi memorabilia

Major Issues

- Jurisdiction
- Responsibility

Jurisdiction

- Law of the Sea — the original 3 mile limit was the range of shore-based cannon in the early 1800s
- Now it's 12 miles, with a 200 mile “exclusive economic zone”
- What is the Internet equivalent? A 3 millisecond limit?

No Natural Borders in Cyberspace

- Before the 1980s, international telecommunications was tightly regulated by all countries
- Most countries had *PTTs* — *Postal, Telegraph, and Telephone* departments of the government
- Even in the US, the right to set up foreign links was restricted
- Much of that was swept away in a world-wide push towards deregulation

The Internet is Different

- The first commercial ISPs were organized when deregulation was at its height
- They were not subject to any such restrictions (partly because they were under the radar and weren't facilities-based)
- The Internet's topology is dictated by commercial and technological concerns, not regulation

Internet Routing

- IP addresses are divided into host and network numbers, but the boundary is variable
- `www.cs.columbia.edu` (128.59.11.206) is on network `128.59.11.0/22` — there are 22 bits in the network number
- My desktop machine, `gg1.cs.columbia.edu`, is `128.59.23.127`, on network `128.59.16.0/21`
- From the outside, though, CU is `128.59.0.0/16`.
- Why the difference? To accommodate different sizes of networks, while conserving space in routing tables
- Routing is based on *longest-prefix matches*

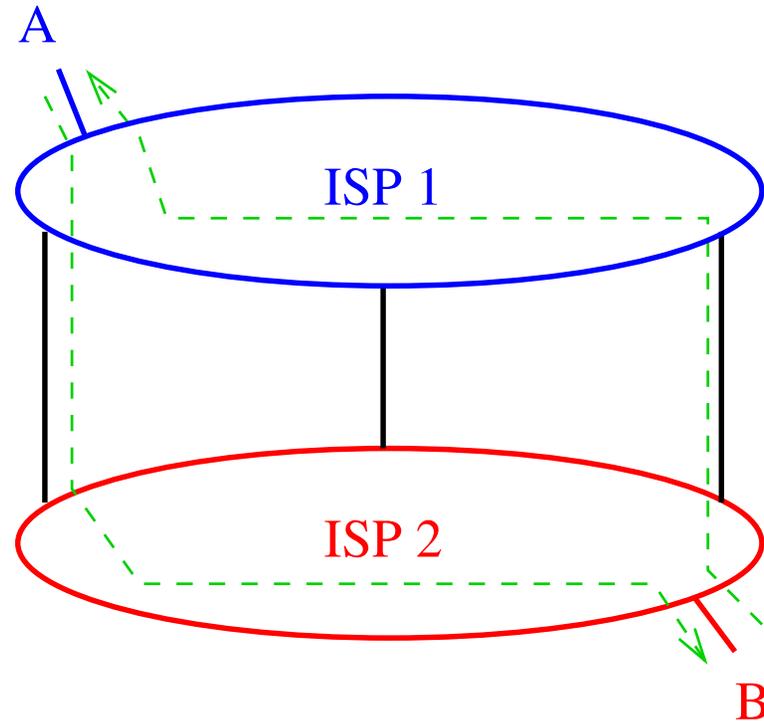
Autonomous Systems

- Internet routing is organized into *autonomous systems* (AS)
- Routing within an AS is cheapest by metric
- Inter-AS routing is by AS hop count (with a healthy dose of policy)
- AS's use this policy to accomplish their own traffic engineering goals, often overriding *hot potato routing*
- ISPs may be one or several AS's, depending on their network engineering philosophy

Many Interconnections

- Many different ISPs have international links — they only have to buy bandwidth from a telco; they don't need to lay physical cables
- ISPs interconnect at many different points
- The same pair of ISPs will interconnect at many points

Hot Potato Routing



Suppose there's an international border somewhere? What traffic will cross it? Who controls that? (Does the physical route of the fibers matter?)

Jurisdiction

- But — countries have *always* asserted as much jurisdiction as they can get away with
- The US has seized people overseas; the courts have held that to be legal under certain circumstances (e.g., *U.S. v. Fawaz Yunis*, 924 F.2d 1086 (1991))
- But an Italian court has convicted some CIA agents — and some Italian intelligence agents were charged in the case
- It seems unlikely that the Internet will change these behavior patterns (e.g., the Gutnick case and the explicit court rule)
- Yes, this can lead to problems. . .

Who is Responsible for Content?

- The viewer?
- The viewer's ISP?
- The transit networks?
- The source ISP?
- The creator/poster?
- At different times, all have been asked to censor traffic

The Viewer

- (Mostly) current US policy
- In court arguments on the Communications Decency Act, the benefits of filtering software were mentioned
- Schools and libraries are required to use filtering software

ISPs

- ISPs are easier to go after
- Countries (Thailand, Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, many others) sometimes order their ISPs to filter sites or networks that they don't like
- The US has indicted an ISP because (it is alleged that) the ISP promotes online gambling
- A Pennsylvania law required ISPs to block child pornography (struck down because it blocked many other things besides)

The Creator

- Ultimately, the creator is the one liable
- But — there are those messy cross-border issues
- US law usually shields the creator's ISP — *if* it responds promptly to complaints
- But that isn't universal; see Google's trial in Italy
- If there is no safe harbor provision, what happens to Web 2.0?
- But if the creator has to be liable, what happens to anonymity?