

# There May Soon Be Three Internets. America's Won't Necessarily Be the Best. | The New York Times

By The New York Times Editorial Board

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The received wisdom was once that a unified, unbounded web promoted democracy through the free flow of information. Things don't seem quite so simple anymore. China's tight control of the internet within its borders continues to [tamp down talk of democracy](#), and an increasingly sophisticated system of digital surveillance plays a major role in human rights abuses, such as the [persecution of the Uighurs](#). We've also seen the dark side to connecting people to one another — as illustrated by how misinformation on social media played a significant role in the [violence in Myanmar](#).

There's a world of difference between the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation, known commonly as G.D.P.R., and China's technologically enforced censorship regime, often dubbed "[the Great Firewall](#)." But all three spheres — Europe, America and China — are generating sets of rules, regulations and norms that are beginning to rub up against one another. What's more, the actual physical location of data has increasingly become separated by region, with data confined to data centers inside the borders of countries with data localization laws.

[...]

What this future will bring for Europe and the United States is not clear. Mr. Gomes's leaked speech from inside Google sounded almost dystopian at times. "This is a world none of us have ever lived in before," Mr. Gomes told employees. "All I am saying, we have built a set of hacks, and we have kept them." He seemed to hint at scenarios the tech sector had never imagined before. The world may be a very different place since the election of Donald Trump, but it's still hard to imagine that what's deployed in China will ever be deployed at home. Yet even the best possible version of the disaggregated web has serious — though still

uncertain — implications for a global future: What sorts of ideas and speech will become bounded by borders? What will an increasingly disconnected world do to the spread of innovation and to scientific progress? What will consumer protections around privacy and security look like as the internets diverge? And would the partitioning of the internet precipitate a slowing, or even a reversal, of globalization?

A chillier relationship with Europe and increasing hostilities with China spur on the trend toward Balkanization — and vice versa, creating a feedback loop. If things continue along this path, the next decade may see the internet relegated to little more than just another front on the new cold war.

Source: [There May Soon Be Three Internets. America's Won't Necessarily Be the Best. | The New York Times](#)