



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on February 25, 2013

Iceland Considers Pornography Ban — Why Not United States?

Another nation is growing tired of the negative effects that hard-core online pornography has on its population. The government of Iceland is considering implementing online filters that would prevent Icelanders from viewing or downloading pornography from the Internet. Ogmundur Jonasson, Iceland's interior minister, said that the potential dangerous effects of pornography on women and children has prompted him to draft legislation that would block access to some porn via computers, gaming systems, and mobile devices. The measure would include a ban on using credit cards to pay for such material. "We have to be able to discuss a ban on violent pornography, which we all agree has a very harmful effects on young people and can have a clear link to incidences of violent crime," Jonasson told the U.K.'s [Telegraph](#) newspaper.



Iceland already bans the printing and distribution of hard-copy pornography, but thus far online porn has fallen through the cracks of enforcement. Proponents of the legislation said a majority of residents in the small sub-Arctic nation support the crackdown.

"There is a strong consensus building in Iceland," said Halla Gunnarsdóttir, another Iceland official and political advisor to Jonasson. "We have so many experts from educationalists to the police and those who work with children behind this, that this has become much broader than party politics. At the moment, we are looking at the best technical ways to achieve this. But surely if we can send a man to the moon, we must be able to tackle porn on the Internet."

While opponents of the move say that it smacks of the same type of control the government in communist China exerts over the Internet, those pushing the law insist it is necessary to protect the nation's vulnerable residents, specifically women and children. [Gail Dines](#), a noted expert on the impact of pornography on society, applauded Iceland's approach, noting that it is the first country in Europe to specifically target hard-core pornography as a step in protecting women and children. "It is looking at pornography from a new position," she said, "from the perspective of the harm it does to the women who appear in it and as a violation of their civil rights."

Like most European countries, Iceland has ultra-liberal views on sex, nudity, and other issues. While China has a political motivation in limiting citizens' access to the Internet, Iceland's reason appears far more pragmatic. "We are a progressive, liberal society when it comes to nudity, to sexual relations, so our approach is not anti-sex but anti-violence," explained Gunnarsdóttir to the U.K.'s [Guardian](#) newspaper. "This is about children and gender equality, not about limiting free speech."



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She noted that research shows that the average age of Icelandic children who first view online porn is 11. “We are concerned about that and about the increasingly violent nature of what they are exposed to,” she said. “This is concern coming to us from professionals since mainstream porn has become very brutal.”

Gunnarsdóttir added that “the internet is a part of our society, not separate from it, and should be treated as such. No one is talking about closing down exchange of information. We have a thriving democracy here in our small country and what is under discussion is the welfare of our children and their rights to grow and develop in a non-violent environment.”

The *Guardian* noted that gender equality “is highly valued in Iceland and by its prime minister, Jóhanna Sigurdardóttir. In the [Global Gender Gap Report 2012](#), Iceland holds the top spot, closely followed by Finland, Norway, and Sweden.”

A closer analysis of the proposed porn ban reveals a link to the gender equality issue. It turns out that, in all likelihood, sexually explicit material would still be available online in Iceland — it just wouldn’t fall under the umbrella of porn. Only material of a violent nature would be targeted. Hildur Fjóra Antonsdóttir, a gender specialist at Iceland University, explained to the *Guardian* that the initiative “is about narrowing the definition of porn so it does not include all sexually explicit material, but rather material that can be described as portraying sexual activity in a violent or hateful way” — most specifically, violence against women and children.

As for the issue of censorship, Antonsdóttir agreed that it is “indeed a concern and it is important to tread carefully when it comes to possible ways of restricting such material.... It is very important not to rush into anything, but rather have constructive dialogues and try to find the best solutions. I see the initiative of the interior ministry on this issue as a part of that process. Otherwise we leave it to the porn industry to define our sexuality and why would we want to do that?”

[Last year England](#) looked into tightening up on the availability of online porn to Brits, but the proposal was ultimately rejected after a consultation found only lukewarm public support.

Meanwhile, at least one conservative U.S. group likes Iceland’s direction, and has criticized the Obama administration for its apparent blocking of similar efforts in America. Pat Trueman of [Morality in Media](#) (MIM) told OneNewsNow.com that “Iceland is falling in line with other countries that are now seeing the harms of pornography over the 20 years that the Internet has been popularized. And they know that it’s just so harmful they’ve got to stop it.”

Trueman said that America was on the leading edge of the porn war when it moved to ban hard-core pornography years ago. He noted that it is a federal crime to distribute hard-core pornography over the Internet or via cable and satellite television, as well as through the mail. “But we have a problem,” he told OneNewsNow, “and that is that this attorney general of the United States, Eric Holder, shut down the prosecution unit that would enforce these laws — and he’s on the side of the pornographers, not on the side of the people.”

OneNewsNow added that Trueman “summarizes the situation by noting that the laws to deal with porn are in place but are not being enforced — resulting in men, women, and children being exposed to it daily. If the courts were used, Trueman says, many of the operations that produce and distribute pornography would go out of business.”

According to at least one study, there are at least 40 million regular viewers of online pornography in the United States alone, and online porn in America nets its purveyors some \$2.8 billion in profits per year.



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