Avoiding Internet Censorship Through Coded Words
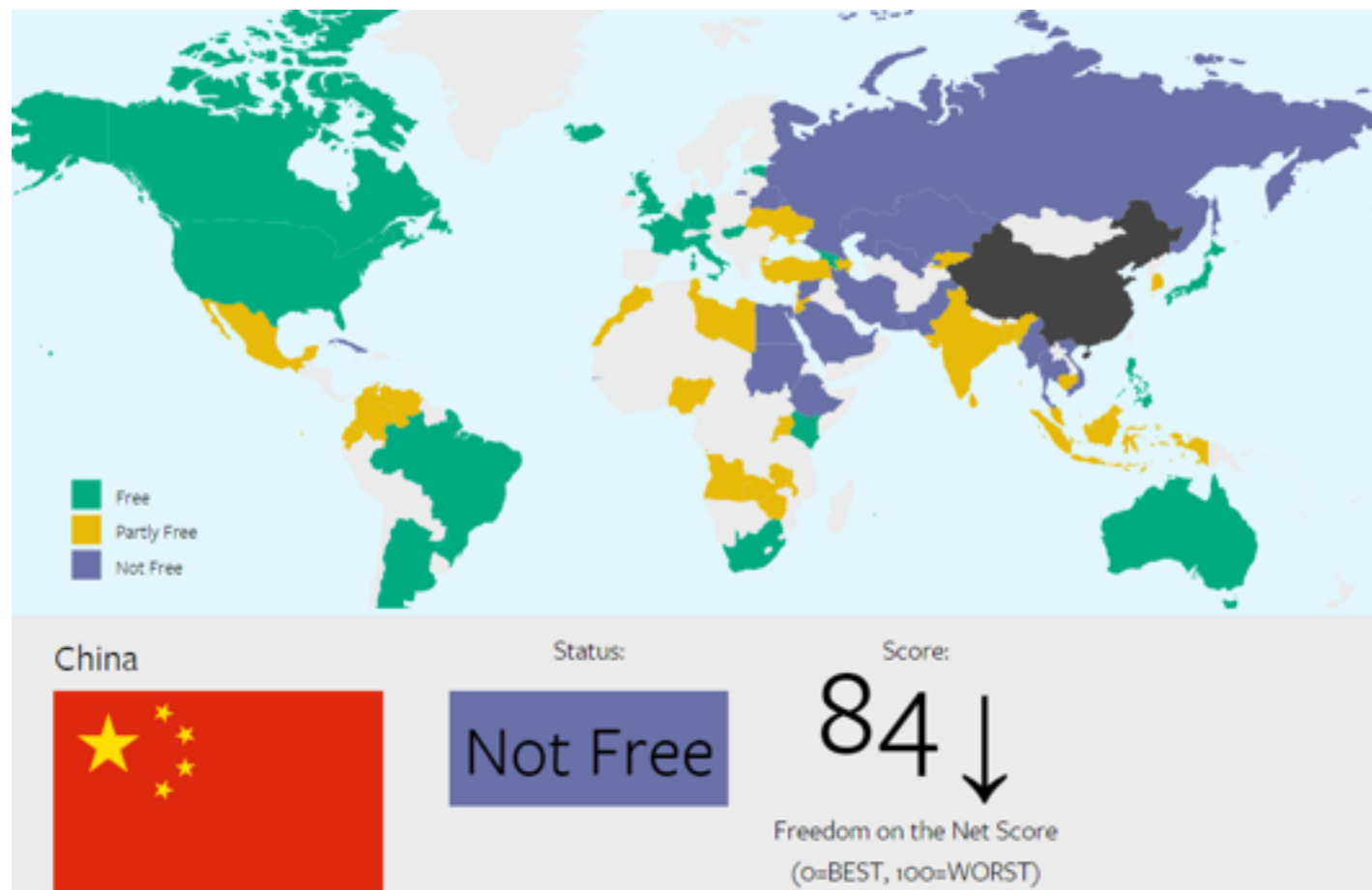
Hanwei Shi

Internet Censorship in China

largest population of Internet users

- 1.3 billion microblog account holders;

- 600 million WeChat account holders

least degree of online freedom

China's internet freedom was ranked at 80 among 86 countries in the annual index issued by the <u>World Wide Web Foundation</u>.

CIS

- Central Internet Security and Informatization Leading Group

- since 2014

- China's President Xi Jinping

- cyber aspects of economic, social, political and military issues.

"Efforts should be made to build our country into a cyber power."
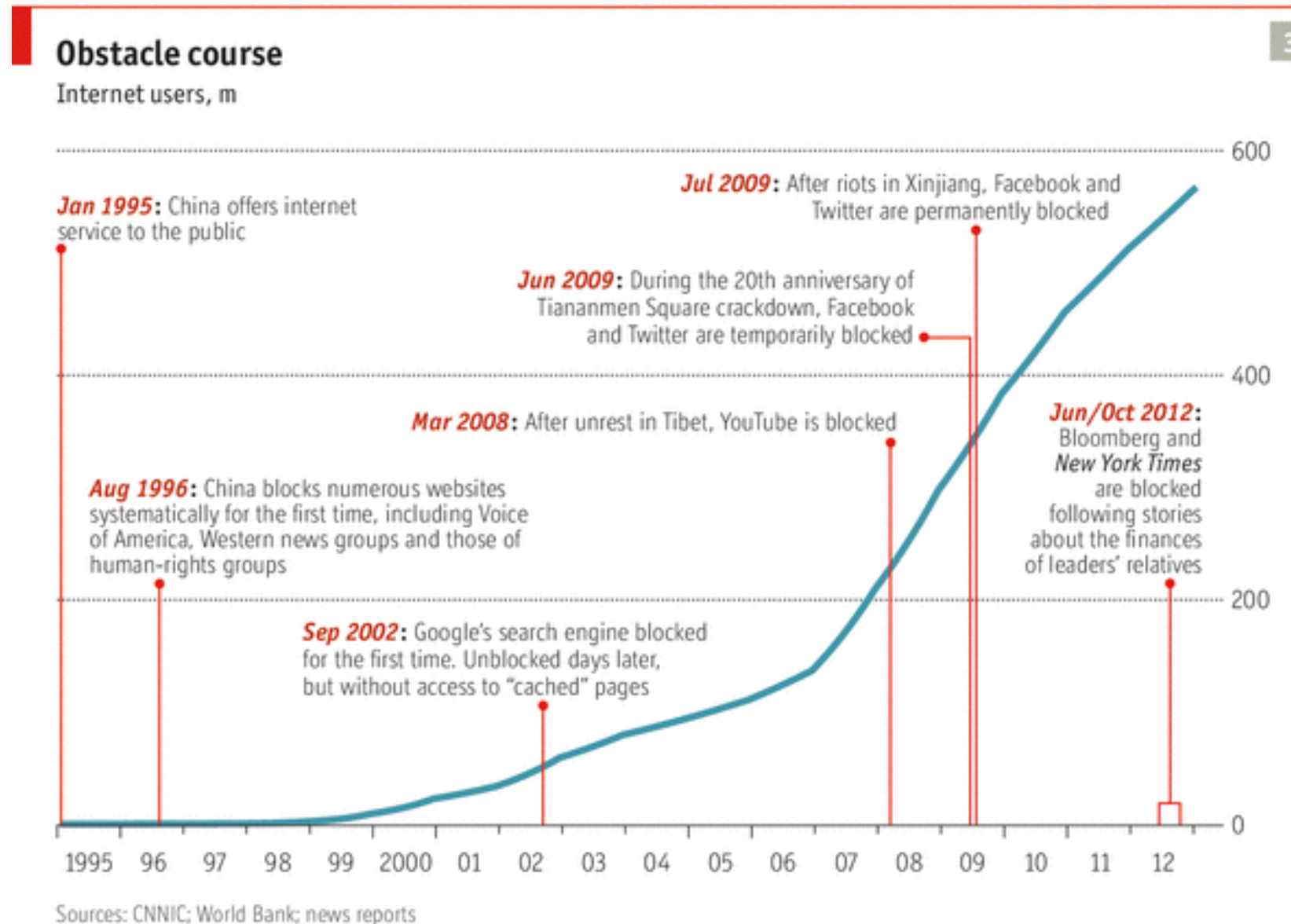
– President Xi Jinping

How does China censor the internet?

- **two main ways**:

1. the Great Firewall

2. the Golden Shield

Criteria for censoring the Internet

Obstacle course

Internet users, m

Jan 1995: China offers internet service to the public

Aug 1996: China blocks numerous websites systematically for the first time, including Voice of America, Western news groups and those of human-rights groups

Sep 2002: Google's search engine blocked for the first time. Unblocked days later, but without access to "cached" pages

Mar 2008: After unrest in Tibet, YouTube is blocked

Jun 2009: During the 20th anniversary of Tiananmen Square crackdown, Facebook and Twitter are temporarily blocked

Jul 2009: After riots in Xinjiang, Facebook and Twitter are permanently blocked

Jun/Oct 2012: Bloomberg and New York Times are blocked following stories about the finances of leaders' relatives

600
400
200
0

1995 96 97 98 99 2000 01 02 03 04 05 06 07 08 09 10 11 12

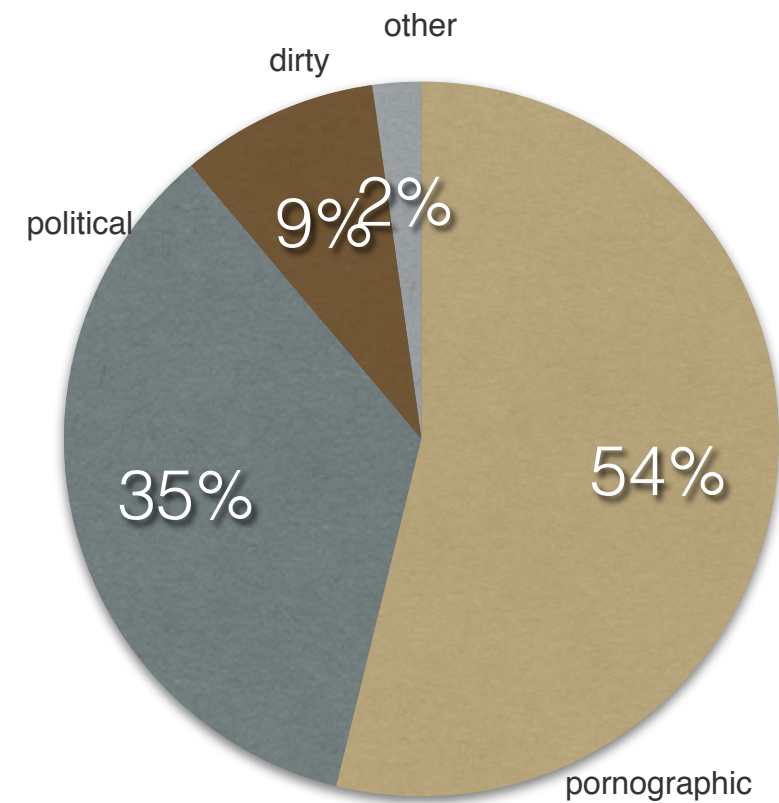Sources: CNNIC; World Bank; news reports

- do not jeopardize social stability,

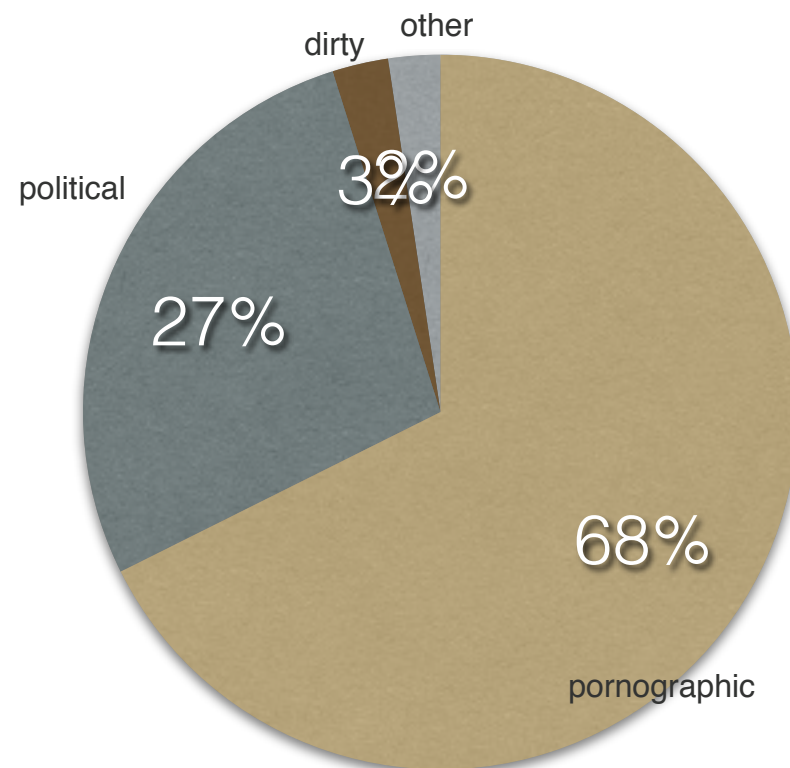- do not organize activities that threaten the party.

Lists of restricted keywords

- Tom Skype (Chinese version)
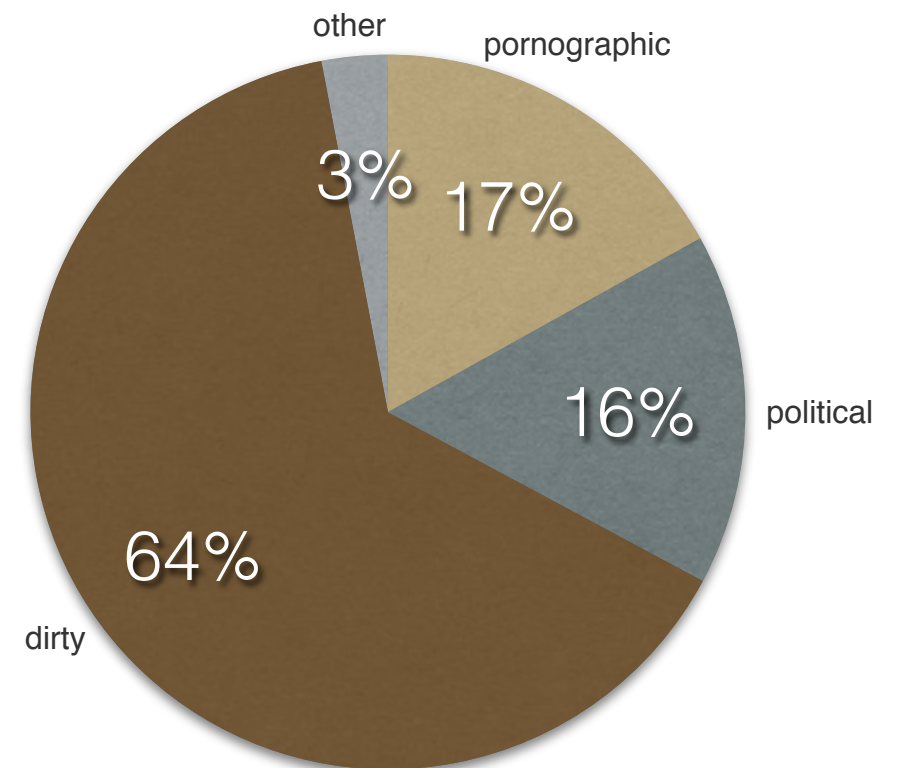
- VeryCD

- All for football

Categorizing the banned words

Tom-skype list

VeryCD list

All for Football list

Avoid the censoring of political content

1. **Creating the list of banned keywords**

- words referring to political content mark as "p"

- the overlapping words

2. **Creating the replacement vocabulary**

- coded words

- can be understood by most people

3. **Write a sensitive keywords filter**

- replace banned words into safe words

How to create coded replacing word

- similar pronunciation

How to create coded replacing word

- **Emoticons**

- original: "江泽民"

- replacement: "O-O"

How to create coded replacing word

- **add or cut some strokes, make it a different character but has similar shape**

- Tiananmen Square Protest of 1989

- original: 天安门

- replacement: 大安门

- 天 → 大

How to create coded replacing word

- **Use other language**

- original: 共产党

- English： The Party

The results of extreme censorship

- **self-regulation**

- e.g. Google sensitive word list posed on *Github*

- Foucaultian mode

- **counter effect**

- distrust to the government