

OONI Policy for URL prioritization

To improve the monitoring of website censorship around the world, the [Open Observatory of Network Interference \(OONI\)](#) aims to create a smart URL list system, while ensuring, to the extent possible, the safety of the URL lists themselves by running them through the usual [Citizen Lab URL review process](#). This will help ensure smarter test target selection and by extension, it will enable us -- and the broader internet freedom community -- to more effectively monitor, analyze, and respond to cases of website censorship around the world.

This document outlines OONI's policy for URL prioritization.

Smart URL list system

Based on the smart URL list system, OONI Probe users would no longer test URLs (included in the [Citizen Lab test lists](#)) randomly. Rather, the testing of certain categories of URLs would be prioritized over others, in order to improve the monitoring of website censorship around the world.

Goals

The underlying **goals and principles** behind URL prioritization involve:

- Responding faster to emergent censorship events;
- Expanding the breadth and granularity of global coverage of website censorship;
- Optimizing the value of collected measurements;
- Ensuring the regular testing of the same URLs for consistency and to support data analysis efforts;
- Ensuring that the tested URLs are more relevant to OONI Probe users.

We will adjust URL priorities based on the above goals and URL priorities will be transparent. We will openly display which URLs are prioritized for testing and we will provide the internet freedom community the option to offer suggestions.

In every case, the smart URL list system will only prioritize URLs that are already included in the [Citizen Lab test lists](#) and which have therefore been reviewed by the community and vetted in terms of safety.

Criteria for URL prioritization

As part of the smart URL list system, the testing of URLs will be prioritized based on specified criteria. Some criteria will apply to all OONI Probe users globally, while other criteria will differ from country to country. Below we share the main criteria for each.

Global URL prioritization criteria

The testing of URLs by OONI Probe users globally will be prioritized based on the following criteria:

- **Public interest.** URLs that host content or offer services that are of public interest will be prioritized. Whether a URL or category of URLs is of “public interest” will be determined based on whether the censorship of such information could have an impact on the general public (because it relies on this information). News media, for example, is generally [considered to be of public interest](#), which is why its testing will be prioritized.
- **Impact on human rights.** Our goal is to defend human rights on the internet. We will therefore prioritize the testing of human rights sites and other sites whose potential blocking could have an impact on human rights.
- **Frequently blocked around the world.** Social media is an example of online content that is [frequently blocked](#) in countries around the world, particularly during political events, such as elections or protests. We will prioritize the testing of URLs if they fall under a category that has commonly been blocked around the world (such as social media, news media, and VPNs), particularly in correlation to political events.

Country-specific URL prioritization criteria

The testing of URLs by OONI Probe users may differ from country to country. In addition to the global URL prioritization criteria, country-specific URL prioritization may apply too based on the following criteria:

- **Reportedly blocked URLs.** If a specific website or type of content is known to be blocked or reportedly blocked in a country (according to news articles, research reports, local accounts, or other third party resources), its testing may be prioritized. This may include a certain type of content (such as gambling) that is illegal/banned in a specific country. We are cognizant of the increased [potential risk](#) associated with testing illegal content, and will therefore evaluate whether the testing of such content should be prioritized based on input from local communities and country experts.
- **Likelihood of being censored.** If certain types of URLs are likely to be blocked (now or in the future) due to their provocative content, their testing may be prioritized in a

specific country. For example, this may include blogs and other websites that express political criticism.

- **Correlation to political events and potential for censorship.** Over the years, we have [observed](#) a strong correlation between political events and the spike in censorship events around the world. We may therefore prioritize the testing of certain types of websites if they are likely to get blocked in correlation to specific political events. For example, this could involve the prioritized testing of election watchdog websites leading up to, during, and shortly after an election.

The above country-specific criteria require local knowledge and expertise. They will therefore mainly be applied when and if we receive relevant advice and recommendations from local experts.

Any future changes to the URL prioritization criteria will be reflected through an update to this policy.