

China web users 'outnumber US population'

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A man uses a laptop in Beijing. The number of Internet users in China is now greater than the entire population of the United States, after rising to 338 million by the end of June, state media have reported.

The number of Internet users in China is now greater than the entire population of the United States, after rising to 338 million by the end of June, state media reported Sunday.

China's online population, the largest in the world, rose by 40 million in the first six months of 2009, the official Xinhua news agency reported, citing a report by the [China](#) Internet Network Information Center.

The number of broadband Internet connections rose by 10 million to 93.5 million in the first half of the year, the report said.

About 95 percent of townships were connected to broadband by early

June and 92.5 percent of villages had telephone lines that could be used for Internet access, Xinhua said, citing the official data.

Rural coverage is expected to improve as the country's three telecoms operators, China Telecom, China Mobile and China Unicom invest 280 billion yuan (40 billion dollars) in a national [3G network](#) over the next year, [China Mobile](#) vice president Lu Xiangdong was quoted as saying last week.

China's fast-growing online population has made the Internet a forum for the country's citizens to express their opinions in a way rarely seen in the traditional, strictly government-controlled media.

The growing strength and influence of the web [population](#) has prompted concern in Beijing about potential social unrest, and the government has stepped up its control over the Internet in recent years.

After rioting early this month in the capital of the restive northwest Xinjiang region, the government cut off online access to most of the area, in one of the largest known Internet blackouts in China yet.

It has also blocked access to Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and a range of other sites used for networking and sharing content.

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