SHOULD THERE BE A SOCIAL MEDIA BAN FOR UNDER-16S?

After Australia implemented a new social media ban for under-16s, the UK Government is considering doing the same. It is essential that young people's opinions are included in the 3-month consultation, particularly as they will be the ones most affected by its introduction. At the end of January 2026, we asked our voters to debate the topic with their peers and decide whether they think it's the best course of action to safeguard them against potential harm. Close to 70,000 young people between the ages of 5-16+ responded; this report explores the results of the vote, and adds vital context to the reasoning behind their results.

Melanie
Data Manager

69,746
TOTAL VOTES

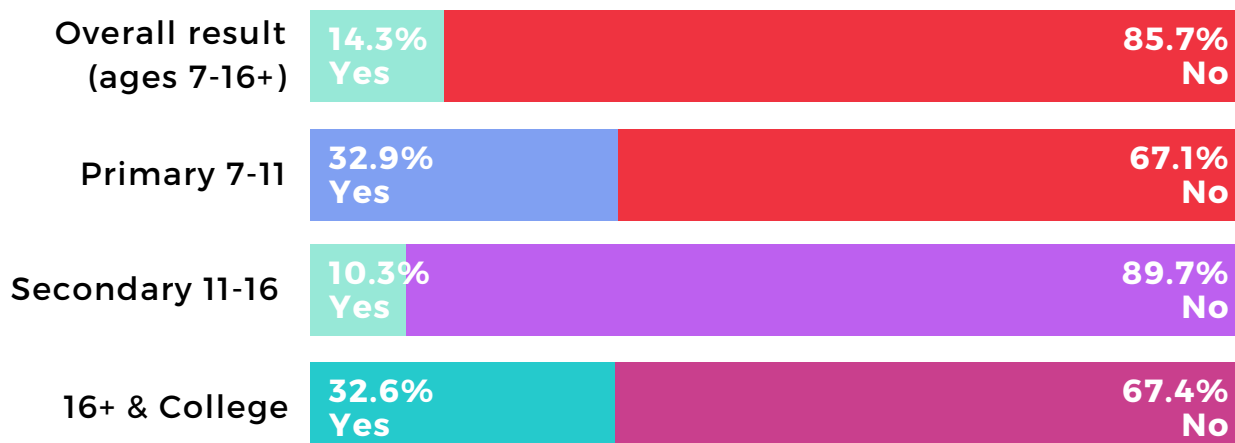**12,954**
VOTES AGE 5-11

56,792
VOTES AGE 11-16+

The VoteTopic questions, discussed amongst the different age groups:

Primary 5-7: "Should children stop using social media?"

Primary 5-7
- **57.8% Yes**
- **42.2% No**

Primary 7-11, Secondary 11-16, 16+ & College: "Should there be a social media ban for under-16s?"

Overall result (ages 7-16+)
- **14.3% Yes**
- **85.7% No**

Primary 7-11
- **32.9% Yes**
- **67.1% No**

Secondary 11-16
- **10.3% Yes**
- **89.7% No**

16+ & College
- **32.6% Yes**
- **67.4% No**

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THE CONSENSUS

Most students aged 7-16+ were against the introduction of a social media ban, with the greatest 'No' majority found amongst Secondary students (90%). Despite the clear swing, the arguments put forward were nuanced and considered, with many stressing their awareness of the dangers that social media can pose to young audiences and offering alternatives to a blanket ban. It is worth highlighting that before taking part in the vote, students participated in their weekly VotesforSchools lesson, where they were made aware of the consultation on the ban and considered reasons for and against its implementation. As with all votes we conduct, an informed debate preceded their decision.

IN FAVOUR OF A BAN

Whilst in the minority, many young people were in favour of a social media ban, particularly Primary and College students (33% of Primary, 16+ & College students compared with just 10% of Secondary students). Some pointed to the negative effects on children's attention spans and eye health as reasons to encourage a ban, whilst others were concerned about the dangers of young children viewing inappropriate content or connecting with dangerous people.

> *There should be a ban because a lot of children don't have the same understanding as adults so fake news can spread far easier.*
>
> **Primary Yes Voter**

> *We suggest a temporary ban until there is a better alternative as children are currently unsafe using social media and do not fully understand all of the risks involved.*
>
> **Primary Yes Voter**

> *There are a lot of harmful things being romanticised to children like self harm and eating disorders. In the long run, it would make a massive change to children's mental health - for the better.*
>
> **Secondary Yes Voter**

> *We think there should be a ban as social media can "frazzle [our] brains" and it can be addictive. This means [we] may not form [our] own opinions and use opinions [we] do not fully understand.*
>
> **Secondary Yes Voter**

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AGAINST A BAN

Whilst the majority of young people were against the ban, they did understand the potential dangers of under-16s having unlimited access to social media. Many felt the solution was to put stricter regulations in place to prevent the most harm, particularly for those under 13. They called for social media companies to block inappropriate content from reaching younger viewers and screen time monitors to prevent addiction.

Our voters were extremely engaged with this topic and many wanted to make the benefits of social media for under-16s clear. They argued that the content they view online supports their education, helps them to connect with others and combat loneliness, inspires creativity and enables them to build or engage with projects that interest them. Some explained that they simply enjoy using social media for entertainment purposes.

Secondary students in particular felt that the implications of a ban could be severe; as social media is used so heavily in today's world, they said that being disconnected from that could impact their political and media literacy, whilst also causing problems for their mental health.

A social media ban will not fix the root cause of the issue [but] make it more dangerous as children will find ways to get on unrestricted. It shouldn't be the users that are policed [but] the social media companies.
16+ & College No Voter

I think social media should not be banned for under-16s because they will not be able to use it for educational purposes. You can add restrictions but an outright ban is too much.
Primary No Voter

It would be more helpful if the people who made the apps were held accountable for content and algorithms.
Secondary No Voter

Social media is the new way to watch the news as we don't watch TV, so we would be isolated from what is going on in the world.
Secondary No Voter