

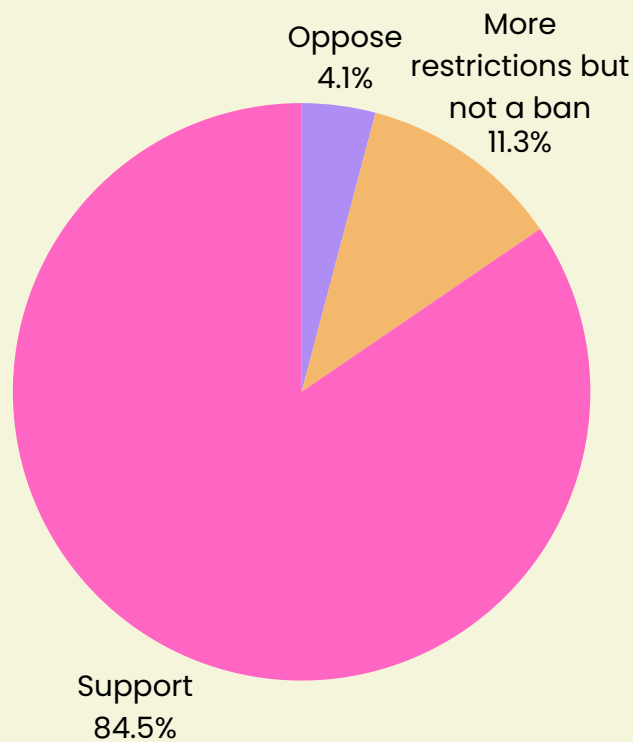
SOCIAL MEDIA BAN FOR UNDER 16s

SURVEY
REPORT

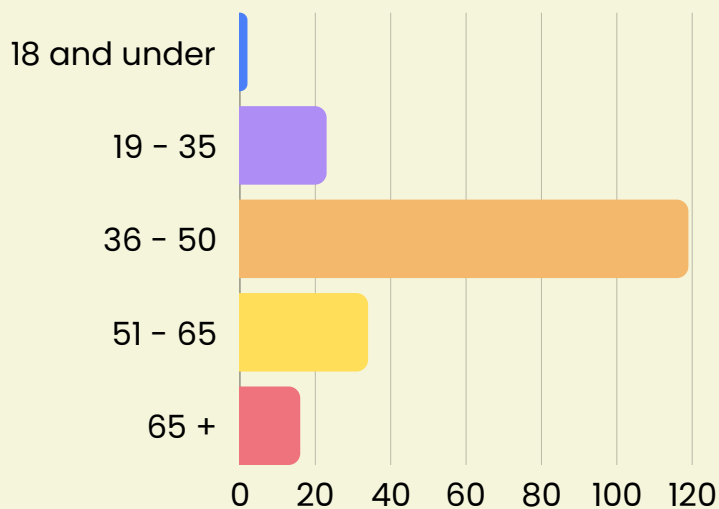
195

TOTAL RESPONDENTS

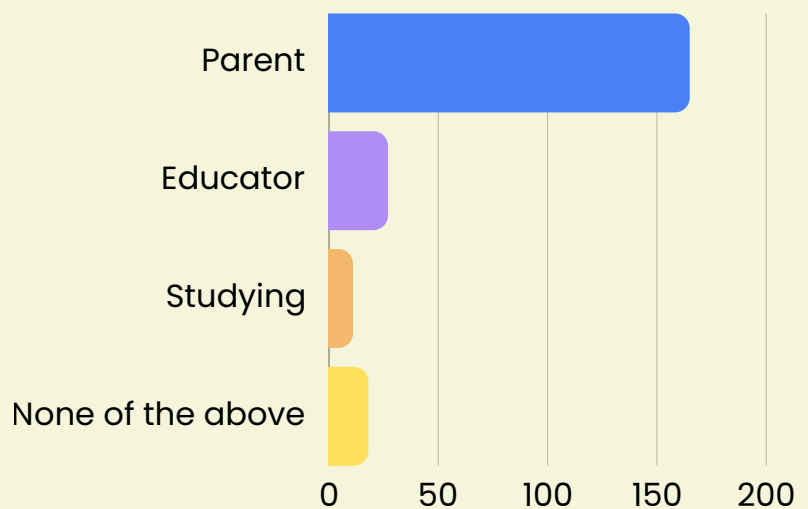
WOULD YOU SUPPORT OR OPPOSE A BAN ON SOCIAL MEDIA FOR CHILDREN UNDER 16?



HOW OLD ARE YOU?



DO ANY OF THESE DESCRIBE YOU?



4. TELL ME WHY YOU WOULD **SUPPORT** A BAN ON SOCIAL MEDIA FOR UNDER 16S.

Mental health and wellbeing

The most prominent concern relates to the negative impact of social media on young people's mental health. Respondents frequently linked usage to heightened anxiety, depression, low self esteem, and body image issues. Social comparison—driven by curated or idealised online content—was identified as a core contributor to declining wellbeing.

Addictive design and developmental risks

Many respondents emphasised that social media platforms are intentionally designed to maximise engagement through addictive features such as algorithm driven content feeds and short form video. This was seen as particularly harmful for under 16s, whose cognitive and emotional regulation is still developing. Concerns include reduced attention spans, disrupted sleep, and compulsive usage patterns.

Exposure to harmful and inappropriate content

Respondents consistently raised concerns about children being exposed to unsuitable material, including violent, sexual, or extremist content. There was a widespread perception that existing content moderation and safeguards are insufficient at scale, exposing children to risks they are not equipped to manage.

Safeguarding and online safety risks

Strong concerns were expressed about online grooming, exploitation, and contact with strangers. Respondents highlighted the difficulty of monitoring private messages and the risks associated with features such as disappearing content and geolocation tools.

Cyberbullying and peer pressure

Social media was widely seen as exacerbating bullying by extending it beyond school hours and into children's homes. Respondents described a "24/7" pressure environment, where peer comparison and social validation intensify emotional distress.

Impact on childhood and social development

Many respondents argued that social media reduces opportunities for face to face interaction, play, and the development of interpersonal skills. There was a common view that excessive use diminishes creativity, independence, and "real world" social competence.

Supporting parents and creating consistency

A ban is seen as a way to support parents in setting boundaries, particularly given the influence of peer pressure. Respondents noted that inconsistent rules across families make it difficult to restrict use on an individual basis.

Lack of trust in social media companies

Respondents expressed limited confidence in platforms' willingness or ability to self regulate. Many argued that profit driven incentives conflict with child safety, and therefore require stronger government intervention.

5. TELL ME WHY YOU WOULD **OPPOSE** A BAN ON SOCIAL MEDIA FOR UNDER 16S.

Practicality and enforceability

A recurring concern is that a ban would be difficult to enforce effectively, with users able to bypass restrictions through false age declarations or technical workarounds (e.g. VPNs). There is a risk that prohibition could drive usage into less regulated or more harmful online environments.

Benefits of social media

Some respondents emphasised the positive aspects of social media, including maintaining friendships, accessing educational content, and participating in support networks—particularly for vulnerable or isolated young people.

Need for digital literacy and gradual exposure

Concerns were raised that a full ban could prevent young people from developing the skills needed to navigate online environments safely. Respondents suggested that a sudden transition at age 16 may leave young people unprepared.

Responsibility of platforms and parents

Many respondents argued that responsibility should lie primarily with social media companies and, to a lesser extent, parents. A ban was seen by some as addressing symptoms rather than root causes, particularly inadequate platform regulation.

Privacy concerns

Objections were raised regarding age verification systems, particularly those requiring biometric data or identity documentation. Respondents expressed concern about data security, surveillance, and the normalisation of sharing personal information online.

One size fits all approach

Some respondents argued that a universal ban does not account for differences in maturity and individual circumstances, and may disadvantage those who use social media positively.

6. IF YOU SUPPORT MORE RESTRICTIONS FOR SOCIAL MEDIA ACCESS FOR UNDER 16S, BUT NOT A BAN - WHAT CHANGES WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE?

Stronger regulation of platforms

- Legal accountability for harmful content
- Financial penalties for non compliance
- Mandatory safeguarding standards

Reform of algorithms and platform design

- Reduced promotion of harmful or addictive content
- Greater user and parental control over content feeds

Improved content moderation

- Stricter filtering of violent, sexual, extremist, and self harm content
- Removal or restriction of high risk features (e.g. disappearing messages, anonymous contact)

Enhanced parental controls and transparency

- Tools enabling parents to monitor activity and content
- Greater control over contacts and interactions

Time limits and usage controls

- Daily usage caps
- Night time or "curfew" restrictions

Education and awareness

- Digital safety education for children and parents
- Integration into school curriculum

School level interventions

- Restrictions on smartphone and social media use during the school day
- Consistent policy alignment between schools and families

Age appropriate experiences

- Development of safer, child focused platforms
- Tiered access based on age and maturity

6. IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE YOU WOULD LIKE TO SHARE ABOUT ACCESS TO SOCIAL MEDIA?

Complexity of the issue

Respondents overwhelmingly recognised that social media regulation is complex, with no single solution. Many cautioned against overly simplistic approaches or policies that do not consider unintended consequences.

Need for a broader systemic response

Suggestions included national education campaigns, development of safe online spaces for young people, and increased investment in offline youth activities.

Strong concern from parents and professionals

Parents, teachers, and health professionals reported direct experience of social media-related harm, particularly in relation to mental health and school environments. Many expressed feeling under-supported in managing these challenges.

Policy consistency and clarity

Concerns were raised about inconsistent messaging, particularly where schools restrict phone use but require digital access for learning. Respondents called for clearer and more consistent national guidance.

Risks of unintended consequences

Respondents highlighted potential downsides of a ban, including displacement to unregulated platforms, uneven enforcement, and privacy risks associated with verification systems.