

Online Safety Act Sparks Transatlantic Dispute Over Censorship and Trade

August 4, 2025

— Categories: Politics & Government



The UK's Online Safety Act is facing mounting criticism from political figures and tech leaders on both sides of the Atlantic, with opponents warning the law risks overreach, censorship, and unintended consequences for global digital platforms. The legislation, which came into force in late July, mandates strict content regulation to protect minors online and imposes heavy penalties for non-compliance.

Under the law, tech companies must implement robust age verification systems, restrict algorithmic exposure to harmful material, and take proactive measures to limit access to self-harm content, grooming, and online abuse. Platforms that fail to meet these standards risk fines of up to £18 million or 10 % of their global turnover.

The response has triggered a wave of backlash. In the UK, Reform Party leader Nigel Farage has pledged to repeal the Act, calling it an assault on free speech and digital liberty. Across the Atlantic, US Republicans including Senators JD Vance and Jim Jordan have echoed similar concerns, warning the law could infringe on American businesses and users.

Major tech platforms such as X (formerly Twitter) and Reddit have already begun modifying their content moderation policies to comply with the new regulations. However, critics argue these changes could result in lawful content being unfairly suppressed, pushing users toward less regulated corners of the internet and creating a chilling effect on speech.

The UK government has defended the law, insisting it contains strong safeguards for journalistic freedom and politically significant material. Officials argue that the Act responds to long-standing public demand for child protection in digital spaces and that enforcement will remain proportionate, particularly for smaller platforms.

Public support for the legislation remains high. Polling suggests widespread approval among parents concerned about online exploitation, radicalization, and the spread of harmful content targeting children. Ministers maintain that safety must remain the top priority in regulating the digital environment.

Nonetheless, security researchers and digital rights campaigners continue to raise alarms. Experts warn that scanning encrypted messages for illegal content could lead to surveillance overreach and undermine online privacy. Some warn the Act could set a precedent for similar laws elsewhere, threatening open internet principles.

Diplomatic tensions have also emerged. US State Department officials have reportedly raised objections with UK regulators, questioning the law's extraterritorial impact on American platforms and its implications for free expression.

As the Act enters its enforcement phase, the broader debate reflects a growing divide over how best to balance child protection, platform accountability, and individual rights in the digital age.