

Reform UK Pledges to Scrap Online Safety Act Over Free Speech Concerns

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Reform UK has vowed to repeal the Online Safety Act, denouncing it as a “borderline dystopian” law that poses a serious threat to free expression and online privacy. The party argues that the legislation grants excessive powers to regulators and encourages censorship under the guise of child protection.

Party leader Nigel Farage and former chairman Zia Yusuf criticised the law during a press briefing, describing it as a heavy-handed measure that could undermine civil liberties. They warned that the new powers given to the Office of Communications (Ofcom), particularly around content monitoring and platform regulation, risk setting a dangerous precedent.

The Online Safety Act, which came into effect on 25 July 2025, obliges tech platforms to verify users' ages before allowing access to harmful or adult content, including materials related to suicide, eating disorders, and self-harm. Failure to comply can result in fines of up to £18 million or 10 per cent of a company's global turnover.

Zia Yusuf argued that the policy may have unintended consequences, such as pushing younger internet users towards virtual private networks (VPNs), increasing their exposure to unregulated corners of the web. He believes that sending all of these kids onto VPNs is a far worse situation and sends them much closer to the dark web.

Despite this strong opposition, Reform UK has yet to offer a detailed alternative. Farage admitted that while the party has access to expert advice from within the tech industry, they are still developing a replacement strategy that would ensure online safety without compromising free speech.

The party's stance has sparked criticism from child safety campaigners, including the Molly Rose Foundation, who warn that scrapping the legislation would undo years of work to protect vulnerable young people from online harm. They point to strong public backing for the act's objectives, particularly among parents and educators.

A petition opposing the law has nonetheless gained significant traction, amassing thousands of signatures in its first week. Critics of the act include digital rights advocates and small website operators who say the cost of compliance could force closures and limit community spaces.

While the UK government insists the legislation is proportionate and necessary, Reform UK's position reflects a growing movement challenging state intervention in digital life. The debate highlights the tension between safeguarding users and preserving individual freedoms in an increasingly regulated online environment.