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**The Youth Digital Policy Repository: A Tool for Tracking Digital Media Legislation Aimed
at Minors**

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The Youth Digital Policy Repository: A Tool for Tracking Digital Media Legislation Aimed at Minors

The Youth Digital Policy Repository (YDPR) is an ongoing, open-source repository of policies aimed at regulating digital media for minors. Created with the goal of strengthening the relationship between scientists and policymakers, it is our aim that the YDPR will increase researchers' incorporation of public policy into their work, while also providing policymakers and invested stakeholders a direct line to relevant scientific evidence. The overall landscape of digital and social media related public policy has changed considerably within recent years. As researchers continue to work toward determining the effects of media on child and adolescent users, the public narrative, particularly surrounding social media's impact on minors, grows increasingly resolute. In the United States (U.S.), 48% of 13 to 17-year-olds say that social media is harmful for people their age (Pew Research Center, 2025). Of the 89% of U.S. parents who report worrying about their child's mental health, 44% identify social media as the leading harm, with an additional 14% blaming technology more generally (Pew Research Center, 2025). Parents in the United Kingdom (UK) report sharing similar concerns, particularly surrounding their child seeing age-inappropriate content or content promoting self-harm or extremist views while online (Ofcom, 2025).

The rapid increase in efforts toward regulating social media and digital technology for minors is perhaps one of the clearest manifestations of this public concern over harmful effects. As of August 2023, 21 states in the U.S. had introduced or enacted legislation surrounding minors' use of social media (Vigil et al., 2025). This has increased dramatically, with, as of March 2026, all 50 states having at least introduced a bill to in some way regulate digital media for minors. These efforts have similarly occurred globally — perhaps most notable in laws such

as the UK's Online Safety Act (2023) and Australia's Online Safety Amendment (2024), which have both garnered widespread attention. While the Online Safety Act imposes a stricter duty of care onto online platforms for ensuring user safety, the Online Safety Amendment blocks those aged 16 and under from creating or maintaining social media accounts.

While some policies, such as school guidelines that limit smartphone use, are supported by research (Abrahamsson, 2024; Beland & Murphy, 2016; Beneito & Vicente-Chirivella, 2022), others, such as proposals for total social media bans for those under a certain age, have outpaced the available scientific evidence (Goodyear et al., 2025). Though social media has been shown to have negative effects for some minors (Ivie et al., 2020), for others, such as those who identify as LGBTQ+, it can provide a way to find support and community (Berger et al., 2022). Given the complex and individualized nature of mental health and well-being outcomes associated with use (Shawcroft et al., 2025), it becomes increasingly important to regulate social media with care in order to maximize the benefits for those who have positive use cases and minimize the harms for those who do not.

The role of researchers in the domain of public policy can be complicated — particularly in topic areas such as the effects of social media on child and adolescent users, where there are not always easy answers for some of the most frequently asked questions. Some have questioned the appropriateness of social and behavioral science in policy work (Ijzerman et al., 2020), emphasizing the need for stakeholder intent to be considered in the early stages of research rather than deriving practical implications post hoc (Livingstone, 2013; Livingstone et al., 2020). In this regard, maintaining a connection between academic research and government is critically important for creating research suitable for informing evidence-based policy that is in turn best able to promote young people's well-being.

Creating and maintaining this connection between science and policy poses challenges for scientists and policymakers alike. For researchers aiming to keep track of relevant policy, the task may quickly become overwhelming. For example, in the state of California, over 2,000 new bills were introduced in the 2025 legislative cycle alone (Micheli, 2025). When considering the 49 other states in the US, as well as the over 190 countries worldwide, even just keeping track of legislation and parsing out laws specifically focused on digital media and minors quickly becomes overwhelming. Differing governmental websites across state and country lines only add to the difficulty of this task. Moreover, in many places, bill identification numbers are recycled so that an unpassed bill labeled ‘SB123’ (for example) may be focused on social media and minors during one legislative cycle but then be assigned to an environmental protection bill the next. This makes retroactively finding bills that were not enacted all the more complicated.

Just as scientists may struggle to keep track of policy updates, those working in policy may find difficulty in staying informed on scientific advances in all of the topic areas they are responsible for legislating. While ideally a policymaker would have easy access to field-specific scientific evidence and expert opinion each time they introduce or vote on a new bill, in practice this is not always the case. For those without formal research training, parsing through findings and deriving meaning from them may pose significant challenge. These challenges may limit the extent to which empirical evidence is considered when making policy decisions. Given the improved effectiveness of evidence-based interventions (Baron, 2018), a lack of connection between science and policy opens the door for ineffectual and potentially harmful policy.

It is our aim that the YDPR will ease some of this burden on researchers, policymakers, and industry professionals and create more direct pathways between science and policy. For researchers, the repository will provide increased ease in staying informed on the practical

implications and implementations of their work and discover new avenues of investigation. For policymakers, activism groups, and other invested stakeholders the repository may be used to collect information on regulation strategies utilized elsewhere to improve the efficacy of their own efforts. In providing a centralized interface for researchers, government officials, and industry professionals, we seek to leverage the affordances of a digital world that allow us to connect across traditional boundaries and help bridge the gap between social scientists and the public. Below we describe the YDPR, how it was created, the process of maintaining the repository, implementation strategies across various domains, and implications of incorporating public policy into research.

What is the Youth Digital Policy Repository?

The YDPR is an online tool for following legislation aimed at regulating digital media for those under age 18. It can be accessed online at <https://youthdigitalpolicyrepository.com>. The repository was created, and will be maintained, by a team of researchers and research assistants at the University of California, Davis (Department of Communication), the Ohio State University (Department of Communication), Brigham Young University (School of Family Life), and the London School of Economics and Political Science (Department of Media and Communications). In our research, we broadly study child and adolescent media use, media effects, and child rights in the digital age.

The first iteration of the repository contains legislation aimed at regulating social media (and social media use) specifically. However, we have chosen to focus on ‘digital’ policy, rather than exclusively social media to allow room for expansion of the legislation that is included in the future. For example, since the repository’s conception, a great deal of legislative effort has shifted toward regulating artificial intelligence (AI) for minors. We are actively working to incorporate

such legislation into coming iterations of the repository, and therefore do not want to impose limitations by strictly referring to this as ‘social media’ policy specific.

In addition, the repository focuses on policies proposed or adopted by government. For the YDPR, government may include state or country level bodies that possess sovereignty, or the authority to self-govern and impose law. While local governments in many places do possess certain powers to legislate (e.g., passing city/town ordinances or creating zoning rules), they do not possess sovereignty and ultimately remain underneath state or country-level government. Further, the repository focuses specifically on policy rather than guidelines or recommendations. Though similar, a key distinction is that policy demands action, whereas guidelines may offer suggestions that are not imposed by law.

The YDPR’s webpage contains a filterable list of policies across the U.S. by topic, a map for easy visualization of policy by state, links to research utilizing the data, contact information for experts in the area of media and human development who are available to provide guidance to policymakers, as well as additional practical information for researchers such as coding scheme and downloadable raw data files.

Creation & Maintenance

Our tracking of social media legislation began in 2023 with a compilation of policies introduced during the 2022-2023 U.S. legislative cycle. In this initial phase, a team of two UC Davis researchers gathered policies related to social media and minors that were, at the time, being newly proposed across the United States. While the U.S. has shown increased efforts in recent years to develop social media regulation, it is by no means the first country to do so. Though the initial launch of the repository includes only U.S. legislation, we are working to expand to capture legislation on a global scale. Beginning in 2024, a team of UC Davis

undergraduate research assistants performed a retroactive search of social media policies from 2022 to present for all countries outside of the U.S. Importantly, failed legislation from prior years is often difficult to find, increasing the likelihood that the list of global policies gathered from past legislative cycles is not fully comprehensive and instead skews toward successful legislation. We are further working to build a more diverse team regarding language fluencies in order to accurately translate policies written in non-English languages for future iterations of the repository. We anticipate parts of the global portion of the repository to become available in 2027.

To maintain the repository, a team of undergraduate research assistants performs weekly searches for new policy. Key word searches are performed using phrases such as “social media policy minors,” “child digital policy,” and “social media adolescent policy” and are inclusive of governmental websites (i.e., senate.gov, etc.) and popular press (i.e., New York Times, BBC News, etc.). The key word search expands to include things like “artificial intelligence”, among others, as the focus of the legislation grows. For a more comprehensive list, please see the ‘For Researchers’ tab on the YDPR webpage. The repository will be updated bi-yearly (June and November to align with a majority of legislative cycles) to include newly collected legislation, as well as to update the status of previously listed legislation.

The repository is open source, allowing anyone to suggest new policies and maximize the potential for creating a fully comprehensive database. All suggested additions will be reviewed and formatted to fit the structure of the repository by the YDPR team and added during the twice-yearly updates. A key strength of the repository is that it will provide a formal, centralized location for all policy gathered by researchers across the field to be collected and viewed.

Implementation Strategies & Implications

The YDPR's uses are not limited to those who study, or wish to study, public policy directly. Rather, there are many instances in which this tool can be utilized by researchers in fields such as Psychology, Sociology, Communication, Public Policy, Law, and Media and Technology Studies (among others) more broadly. Primarily, for those studying human development and media effects who want to ensure that their research program creates meaningful change in the lives of children and families, the YDPR can help ground their work in timely policy. As policymakers continue to create child-focused media legislation with varying degrees of grounding in empirical evidence, researchers can look at the solutions proposed by policymakers and design studies to test their efficacy. This may not only lead to novel discovery but may also allow researchers to impose a level of accountability on policymakers to propose and support policy with evidential support. In this way, incorporating policy information into research can both inspire new areas of study while also adding important, practical value.

Perhaps the most straightforward way to bridge the gap between academic research and the more general public is through policy involvement. The current trajectory of legislation focused on regulating digital media (i.e., social media, artificial intelligence, etc.) for minors indicates that policymakers intend to implement legislation in this area with or without the input of researchers. In our personal experience, however, we have found members of the legislature and closely related organizations (e.g., Department of Public Health, policy advocacy groups) to be eager to receive guidance from scientists. For members of these groups, we believe the YDPR will similarly prove useful. Given that, to our knowledge, no such platform or database currently exists which tracks legislation on the specific topic of digital policy for minors, it will enable policymakers to easily see what other states and countries are implementing. As there is a page on the YDPR's main interface that links to all scientific work that utilizes the repository in some

way, as well as contact information for experts willing to provide policy guidance, public officials will also be able to readily access relevant research and the scientists conducting it. In this way, the repository will also serve as a centralized meeting ground for scientists and policymakers. To ensure this broad access, the repository will be disseminated across research communities on children and media, local and national government agencies, and digital media industries.

Information provided in the repository may further be used as a way for researchers to contextualize findings. Previous work in the area of children and media has highlighted the importance of considering local regulatory context when deriving meaning from results. For example, Davletshina and Voyer (2025) highlight the importance of considering strong state involvement in children's media experiences when examining the effects of parental mediation in Sweden. As the authors point out, parents' individual beliefs surrounding media may not hold the same potential for impact as they would in a place with less governmental media oversight. Awareness of all the factors that may be at play in regard to what media participants are (or are not) using can add nuance and clarity to findings and any implications derived as a result.

The primary aim of the Youth Digital Policy Repository is to simplify the process of tracking digital media legislation aimed at minors on a global scale. While use may vary based on individual needs and interests, we believe staying more easily informed holds numerous wide-reaching benefits. However, from the perspective of researchers studying topics that affect the lives and well-being of children and adolescents, we feel a specific responsibility to ensure our work extends beyond academia. At any given time, policymakers may be responsible for proposing and voting on bills which cover dozens (if not hundreds) of issues. Creating a more stable throughline from researchers to public policy holds the potential to ensure that legislation

in the area of digital technology for minors is informed by scientific evidence and therefore well positioned to maximize positive impact.

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