

TO: Interested Parties
FROM: Hart Research Associates
DATE: May 24, 2023
RE: Holding Social Media Companies Accountable for Their Impact on Children and Teens

Hart Research conducted a survey for Reset to understand voters' and parents' attitudes and views about the impact that social media has on children and teens and to measure the level of support for government action to address it. The survey was conducted from April 17 to 22, 2023 among 1,800 registered voters, including oversamples of voters in five states: Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, North Carolina, and Pennsylvania. The sample was weighted to be representative of a national cross section of registered voters and includes 454 parents of children ages 6 to 17. This memo summarizes key findings from the survey.

Voters believe that the harms of social media outweigh the benefits, particularly for children and teens, and there is widespread concern that the way social media companies design their products poses a danger to children and teens on their platforms. Voters across the political spectrum support the government taking action to hold social media companies accountable for the impact their platforms have on young people. In particular, voters want to see companies be required to design social media platforms to better protect all young people and limit the amount of personal data they collect on children and teens, while also imposing large fines and penalties when they do not fulfill these requirements.

1. Social media companies are unpopular, and social media is seen as harmful to children and teens.

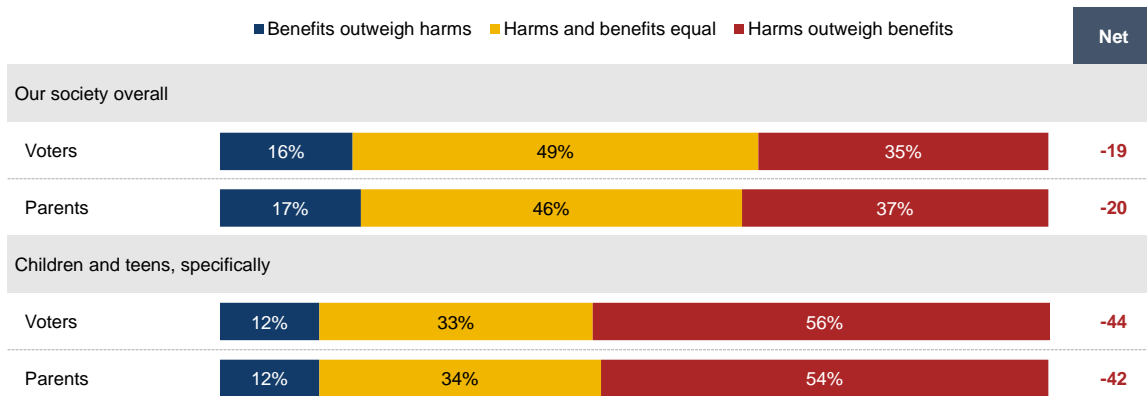
More voters have negative than positive views of social media companies: 21% favorable, 50% unfavorable, 29% neutral/no opinion. Parents also hold more negative than positive views of them: 25% favorable, 41% unfavorable, 33% neutral/no opinion. TikTok is the least popular platform tested, with ratings of 20% favorable and 57% unfavorable among voters; but Meta (25% favorable, 45% unfavorable) and Twitter (24% favorable, 44% unfavorable) also have unfavorable images.

Voters feel that the harms of social media outweigh benefits for our society overall by 35% to 16%, with 49% who say the benefits and harms are equal. Parents also feel that the harms outweigh the benefits by 37% to 17%, with 46% who say they are equal.

Voters and parents are more pessimistic about the impacts of social media on children and teens, however. By more than a four to one margin, voters and parents think that the harms of social media outweigh the benefits for children and teens. Across party, voters think the harms outweigh the benefits by large margins.

Voters and parents think the harms of social media outweigh the benefits for society overall and particularly for children and teens.

Do you feel that the benefits of social media outweigh the harms or that the harms outweigh the benefits?



Fully 71% of voters and 63% of parents think that children and teens are not safe when using social media. And when it comes to use of specific platforms, more voters think children and teens are not safe than safe. They view TikTok as the least safe (22% safe, 69% not safe, 10% unfamiliar), but are also more likely to think several platforms are not safe than safe: Facebook (41% safe, 57% not safe, 2% unfamiliar), Snapchat (26% safe, 52% not safe, 22% unfamiliar), and Instagram (40% safe, 46% not safe, 14% unfamiliar).

2. Large majorities of voters and parents want President Biden and Congress to place a priority on addressing the impact of social media on young people.

Two in three voters (67%) and nearly three in four parents (73%) feel it is important for President Biden and Congress to take action to address the impact of social media on young people. Large majorities of Democrats (69%), independents (62%), and Republicans (67%) think it is important.

By large margins, voters and parents say they would be more likely to vote for a candidate for Congress who prioritizes legislation to require technology and social media companies to do more to protect children and teens online

(voters: 78% more likely, parents: 82% more likely). More than eight in 10 Democrats (83%) and Republicans (81%) and two in three independents (66%) say they would be more likely to vote for a candidate who makes it a priority.

3. The tools platforms offer parents do not override voters' and parents' desire for government to take action to hold social media companies accountable for their impact on children and teens.

Fully 84% of voters think social media companies should do more to protect the safety of children and teens on social media. Large majorities also would like the federal government (71%) and their state government (67%) to do more. These sentiments hold across party lines and among parents.

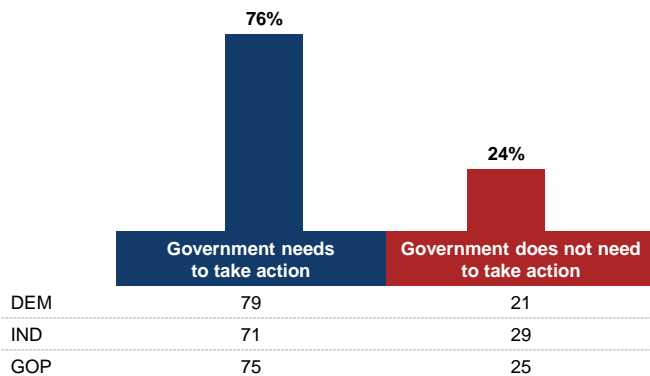
Three in four voters think that government needs to take action to hold technology companies accountable because the tools they offer are complicated and ineffective and are no match for the complex technologies they use. Large majorities of Democrats, Republicans, and independents feel government needs to take action.

Tools that platforms offer parents are seen as insufficient. The large majority of voters think government must take action to hold tech companies accountable for their impact on children and teens.

Which statement better describes your point of view?

Government needs to take action to hold technology companies accountable for their impact on children and teens because the tools they offer to parents are often complicated and ineffective and are no match for the complex technologies these companies have devised to addict children and collect their data.

Government does not need to take action to hold technology companies accountable for their impact on children and teens because these companies are providing tools to parents that allow them to monitor and limit their children's social media use.



Voters express high levels of concern about the ways that social media companies design their products to collect and store children and teens' personal information (95% very or somewhat concerned), to direct children and teens to harmful content (93%), to track and collect data on their online activity for marketing purposes (91%), and to get children and teens to stay online as long as possible (90%).

4. Support for Congress to hold social media companies accountable by requiring them to take steps to protect children and teens is widespread and unites voters across the political spectrum.

There is near universal support across the electorate for Congress to require social media companies to take specific steps to protect children and teens:

- 94% of voters and 95% of parents favor limiting the amount of personal data social media companies can collect on children and teens;
- 92% of voters and 93% of parents favor requiring them to design or redesign their platforms to better protect all children and teens;
- 93% of voters and 95% of parents favor requiring them to provide parents more tools to monitor and control their children's use; and
- 92% of voters and 94% of parents favor holding them accountable when they do not fulfill their requirements.

Across party lines, approximately nine in 10 (or more) voters support Congress passing legislation that would do each of these things.

Additionally, more than nine in ten voters (91%) and parents (92%) favor Congress requiring social media companies to obtain parental consent for their children under age 18 to use social media.

Parents want to be the ones giving their children permission to use social media, but most say they would still allow their children to use these platforms if their state passed parental consent legislation: seven in ten parents (71%) say they would allow their children to use social media, including 58% of parents of children age 6 to 9, 71% of parents of children age 10 to 13, and 81% of parents of children age 14 to 17.

5. When asked about holding social media companies to account for the design and impact of their platforms on children and teens, the most compelling messages focus on themes of transparency and accountability, protecting the safety of *all* children, and the deceptive and unsafe design of platforms.

- **Transparency and accountability:** Given the major influence that social media platforms have on children and teens, Congress should require social media companies to be transparent about the practices they use to profit off user data and keep users online longer. And Congress should hold these companies accountable with fines and penalties when they cause harm to children's and teens' privacy, safety, and mental health (89% convincing, 49% very convincing).

- **Protect all kids:** We have a collective responsibility to keep all children and teens safe online. That means looking out for all children and teens, including those whose parents don't have the ability to look out for their kids online. Government must require social media companies to be safe by design and put protections in place to stop them from exploiting young people (86% convincing, 45% very convincing).
- **E-cigarette parallel:** Just like e-cigarette companies that intentionally and deceptively marketed harmful and addictive e-cigarettes and vapes to children and teens, social media companies deceptively design their platforms to addict children and collect their personal data in order to boost their companies' profits. Congress should intervene to protect children and teens as they did with e-cigarettes (82% convincing, 42% very convincing).
- **Unsafe by design:** Social media products are unsafe by design. They use algorithms designed to make their platforms addictive for children and teens and to collect as much of their personal data and preferences as possible. And tech companies do this at any cost, including risks to children's and teens' privacy, safety, and mental health and wellbeing (81% convincing, 43% very convincing).