



Surveillance Is Not Safety: A statement on the UK's latest threat to privacy

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Children deserve to be safe, protected, and nurtured. They do not deserve [surveillance](#), [funding cuts](#), and [cover-ups](#). Children also deserve their human right to privacy, as does everyone. The UK government's [demand](#) that all content on all devices sold or used in the UK be scanned on the presumption of nudity, using a [dystopian](#) combination of age verification and content scanning, will not safeguard children. It endangers us all, whilst strengthening Apple, Google, and Microsoft's market dominance and their control over our most personal information.

Forcing all UK residents to prove their age and/or have all their content scanned, simply to exercise their fundamental right to communicate, is a perilous proposition. We know that mass surveillance and censorship capabilities, however sincere-sounding the promises of those who initiate them are, never remain narrowly scoped. Once created, they will be [expanded](#), forming a dangerous tool that will be wielded both in the UK and abroad to censor and surveil whatever they might consider "threats" or "harmful content."

Promises that this system will only run on-device are cold comfort. Wherever it runs, including the "camera" itself once it is in place on UK devices - its scope will be defined by the whims and proscriptions of the government to detect nudity today and political speech tomorrow. We know from history that once in place, there will be an inevitable authoritarian expansion of the kind of content and people these technologies will be expected to surveil. We also know such tools will be leveraged to automatically report people to government authorities. We have already seen law enforcement agencies ask for similar [widely-scoped powers](#) which are ripe for exploitation in an increasingly tenuous political landscape.

This proposal will not keep children safe. Child safety looks like well-funded education, robust social services, and meaningful guardrails on the very AI technologies and platforms the current government is eagerly courting. What the UK government wants instead is invisible surveillance infrastructure, switched on by default and potentially rushed into law under cynical pretexts. All of this with scant care for the horrifying and far-ranging consequences that will ensue or the actual needs of the children they claim to be protecting.