ECONSTOR
Make Your Publications Visible.

A Service of

ZBW Leibniz-Informationszentrum Wirtschaft
Leibniz Information Centre for Economics

Deutsches Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung (DIW) (Ed.)

Periodical Part

DIW Weekly Report, No. 10/2026

DIW Weekly Report

Provided in Cooperation with:
German Institute for Economic Research (DIW Berlin)

Suggested Citation: Deutsches Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung (DIW) (Ed.) (2026) : DIW Weekly Report, No. 10/2026, DIW Weekly Report, ISSN 2568-7697, Deutsches Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung (DIW), Berlin, Vol. 16, Iss. 10

This Version is available at:
https://hdl.handle.net/10419/339401

Standard-Nutzungsbedingungen:

Die Dokumente auf EconStor dürfen zu eigenen wissenschaftlichen Zwecken und zum Privatgebrauch gespeichert und kopiert werden.

Sie dürfen die Dokumente nicht für öffentliche oder kommerzielle Zwecke vervielfältigen, öffentlich ausstellen, öffentlich zugänglich machen, vertreiben oder anderweitig nutzen.

Sofern die Verfasser die Dokumente unter Open-Content-Lizenzen (insbesondere CC-Lizenzen) zur Verfügung gestellt haben sollten, gelten abweichend von diesen Nutzungsbedingungen die in der dort genannten Lizenz gewährten Nutzungsrechte.

Terms of use:

Documents in EconStor may be saved and copied for your personal and scholarly purposes.

You are not to copy documents for public or commercial purposes, to exhibit the documents publicly, to make them publicly available on the internet, or to distribute or otherwise use the documents in public.

If the documents have been made available under an Open Content Licence (especially Creative Commons Licences), you may exercise further usage rights as specified in the indicated licence.



https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

WWW.ECONSTOR.EU

Mitglied der Leibniz-Gemeinschaft

DIW Weekly Report

A policy bulletin from the German Institute for Economic Research

10 2026

Economy. Policy. Science.

DIW BERLIN



79 Report by Jörg Dollmann, Christian Hunkler, Nicolas Legewie, Julian B. Axenfeld, Andreas Franken, and Felix von Heusinger

Social media: Population favors regulation—but ban only for those up to the age of 12

- Short SOEP survey on risks, opportunities, and possible regulation of social media
- Majority supports bans for children up to the age of 12 and in schools; a ban on use up to the age of 16 is rejected
- Findings suggest differentiated, context-specific regulatory approaches rather than blanket bans

LEGAL AND EDITORIAL DETAILS

DIW BERLIN

DIW Berlin — Deutsches Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung e. V.
Anton-Wilhelm-Amo-Straße 58, 10117 Berlin
www.diw.de
Phone: +49 30 897 89–0 Fax: –200
Volume 16 March 11, 2026

Publishers
Prof. Anna Bindler, Ph.D.; Prof. Dr. Tomaso Duso; Sabine Fiedler; Prof. Marcel Fratzscher, Ph.D.; Prof. Dr. Peter Haan; Prof. Dr. Claudia Kemfert; Prof. Dr. Alexander S. Kritikos; Prof. Dr. Alexander Kriwoluzky; Prof. Karsten Neuhoff, Ph.D.; Prof. Dr. Sabine Zinn

Editors-in-chief
Prof. Dr. Pio Baake; Claudia Cohnen-Beck; Sebastian Kollmann; Kristina van Deuverden

Reviewer
Dr. Lavinia Kinne

Editorial staff
Dr. Hella Engerer; Petra Jasper; Adam Mark Lederer; Frederik Schulz-Greve; Sandra Tubik

Layout
Roman Wilhelm; Stefanie Reeg; Eva Kretschmer, DIW Berlin

Cover design
© imageBROKER / Steffen Diemer

Composition
Satz-Rechen-Zentrum Hartmann + Heenemann GmbH & Co. KG, Berlin

Subscribe to our DIW and/or Weekly Report Newsletter at
www.diw.de/newsletter_en

ISSN 2568-7697

DIW Weekly Report 10 2026

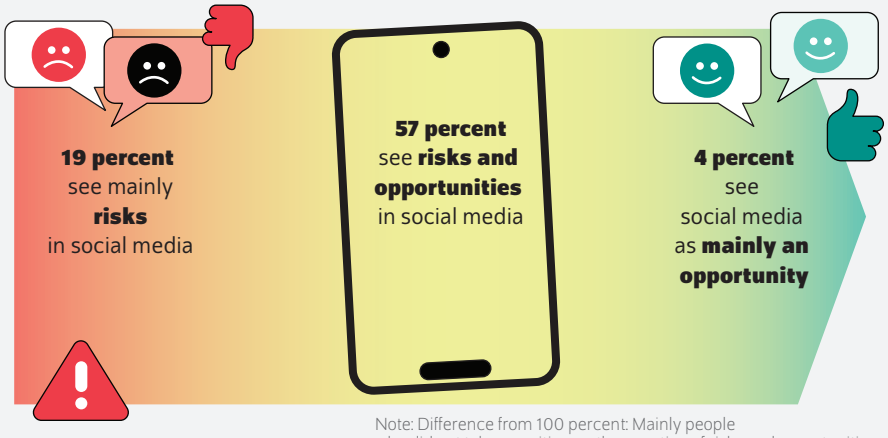
AT A GLANCE

Social media: Population favors regulation—but ban only for those up to the age of 12

By Jörg Dollmann, Christian Hunkler, Nicolas Legewie, Julian B. Axenfeld, Andreas Franken, and Felix von Heusinger

- Short survey in the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) from September 2025 on the risks, opportunities, and possible regulation of social media
- Results paint an ambivalent picture: a large majority sees risks in social media, but a significant proportion also sees opportunities, and more than half seeing both at the same time
- While the majority supports bans for children up to the age of 12 and in schools, a ban on use up to the age of 16 is rejected
- Broad support for alternative protective measures such as promoting media literacy, parental supervision, and obligations for platform operators
- Findings suggest differentiated, context-specific regulatory approaches rather than blanket bans

Majority of the population sees both risks and opportunities in social media – ban on use for young people up to the age of 16 does not have majority support, but other regulatory measures do



Agreement/Disagreement with possible measures

- Ban for children up to the age of 12 (71 percent)
- Ban in schools (59 percent)
- Strengthening media literacy (94 percent)
- More parental control (95 percent)
- Mandatory intervention by platform operators (93 to 94 percent)
- Ban up to the age of 16 (50 percent)

Source: SOEP short survey, September 2025.

Note: Difference from 100 percent: Mainly people who did not take a position on the question of risks and opportunities; To a lesser extent, people who see neither risks nor opportunities.

CC BY 4.0, creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0

FROM THE AUTHORS

"More differentiated protective measures obviously enjoy broader support than blanket bans up to a certain age. It's also important to note that the enforcement of drastic bans would depend heavily on acceptance in the community, because such age limits can always be circumvented in some way."

— Christian Hunkler —

MEDIA

Audio Interview with Christian Hunkler (in German)
www.diw.de/mediathek

Social media: Population favors regulation—but ban only for those up to the age of 12

By Jörg Dollmann, Christian Hunkler, Nicolas Legewie, Julian B. Axenfeld, Andreas Franken, and Felix von Heusinger

ABSTRACT

Social media usage by children and young people is an increasingly controversial topic. The focus is on risks, opportunities, and possible regulations. Politicians from all relevant parties are now open to a social media ban up to a certain age; the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs has set up a commission of experts. Based on a short survey in the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP), conducted in September 2025 in cooperation with the German Center for Integration and Migration Research (DeZIM) and the University of Münster, this Weekly Report examines the population's attitudes toward this issue. The results paint an ambivalent picture: a large majority consider social media to be a risk, but at the same time a significant proportion also recognize opportunities; more than half of those surveyed see both sides. While a majority support bans for children up to the age of 12 and in schools, a ban up to the age of 16 is overwhelmingly rejected. There is significantly broader support for alternative protective measures, such as promoting media literacy, parental supervision, and regulatory requirements for platform providers. The findings argue in favor of differentiated, context-specific regulatory approaches rather than blanket bans.

The debate surrounding the use of social media by children and young people is gaining momentum. In view of the potential risks—from cyberbullying and sexualized content to excessive use—the association "Smarter Start ab 14" (Smarter Start from 14) is calling for a blanket ban on social media for children and young people under the age of 16 in its petition to the German Bundestag.[1] Others emphasize the opportunities offered by social media, for example in terms of social and political participation, creativity, and informal education.[2] Several current legislative initiatives underscore the relevance of the issue: In Australia, a law prohibiting under-16s from accessing social media came into force on December 10, 2025,[3] while in the UK, since July 2025, platforms must implement highly effective age checks.[4] Meanwhile, France is currently debating a bill that would ban social media for under-15s.[5] Similar demands are coming from the European Parliament.[6]

In the international scientific debate, the increasing prevalence of smartphones and "unregulated" social media is identified as one of the "megatrends" that could be linked to the rise in mental health problems among adolescents.[7] Based on scientific findings, a commission of experts appointed by Leopoldina, the German National Academy of Sciences, concludes that social media poses significant risks to the health, well-being, and development of children and adolescents in

1 German Bundestag (2025): Petition 177673: Protection of children and young people in the media – minimum age of 16 for the use of social media / establishment of an independent scientific expert commission dated February 8, 2025 (in German; available online; accessed on February 2, 2026. This also applies to all other online sources in this report, unless otherwise noted).

2 Carla Siepmann (2026): Breakpoint: Fundamental rights are not rated 16+. Netzpolitik.org dated January 25 (In German; available online).

3 eSafety Commissioner (2026): Social media age restrictions. Australian Government, January 13, 2026 (available online).

4 Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (2025): What's changing for children on social media from July 25, 2025. GOV.UK, July 24, 2025 (available online).

5 Assemblée nationale (2025): Protecting minors from the risks posed by social media use. Legislative files, 17th legislature (In French; available online).

6 European Parliament press release dated November 26, 2025: Children should be at least 16 to access social media, say MEPs (available online).

7 Patrick McGorry et al. (2024): The Lancet Psychiatry Commission on youth mental health. Lancet Psychiatry, 11(9), 731 (available online).

DOI: https://doi.org/10.18723/diw_dwr:2026-10-1

Box 1

Data, variables, and methods

The sociodemographic groups were created using the most recent information from the 2,685 respondents in the preliminary data version 2024 of the SOEP main surveys.[1] With the exception of the three cases described below, each subgroup comprises more than 200 observations (all data in this box refer to unweighted observations).

Generation and gender are based on the respondents' information about their date of birth and self-assigned gender. For the characteristic of whether at least one child between the ages of 9 and 16 lives in the household, the (self-)reported years and months of birth of all members of the respondent's household were used.

Education is based on the CASMIN classification of educational and professional qualifications provided by the SOEP group. The category "low level of education/in training" comprises 149 persons, including those who left school without a qualification and those with a secondary school leaving certificate. The category "medium level of education" includes persons who have completed a secondary school leaving certificate and an apprenticeship or vocational training, as well as all persons who have a technical college or university entrance qualification. The category "high level of education" includes individuals who have completed at least a Bachelor's, Master's, or diploma degree at a university of applied sciences, technical college, or university. For 14 percent of respondents, there is insufficient information available on education.

The migration background is based on the variable "migback" provided by the SOEP group, which is mainly based on the person's country of birth and the country of birth of their parents. Respondents born abroad are classified in the category "direct migration background." The 108 people who have at least one parent who was born abroad are assigned to the category "indirect migration background."

The division between West and East Germany is based on the person's place of residence in 2024, using the 1989 borders as a basis. The information on personal use of social media was last asked in 2021 in the SOEP main interview, which is why the proportion of missing values is very high at 54 percent.

Whether a respondent is a teacher was coded for 147 persons based on the ISCO classification provided by the SOEP group (pgisco08). The latter is derived from the answers to the question about current occupation. University teachers were not classified as teachers. Missing values (26 percent) were assigned to the category "other occupations."

In order to examine group differences, in addition to the descriptive figures,[2] eight regressions were calculated for each of the eleven questions to examine the differences according to generation, gender, children in the household, education, migration background, region, own use of social media, and occupation.[3] We report significant differences at the five percent level of these bivariate weighted linear probability models with standardized dependent variables. The results of unweighted regressions, multivariate regressions, and ordered probit regressions hardly differ.

1 Preliminary data version of the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) for the years 1984 to 2025, as of January 2026.

2 See Figures 1, 2, and 4 in this report.

3 The results are presented in Figure 3.

Germany.[8] Thus, the commission proposes a set of age-differentiated measures for social media and messenger services, including educational measures and parental supervision. A social media ban is proposed for children under the age of 13. Federal Minister for Family Affairs Karin Prien (CDU) has also repeatedly spoken out in favor of stricter age restrictions on the use of social media.[9] At its party conference in February 2026, the CDU passed a motion that calls for a minimum age of 14 for social media.[10] On the other hand, the possibilities of social media for prevention programs and real-time interventions are also emphasized[11] and the right to digital participation is discussed.[12]

Against the backdrop of this debate, the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP)[13] at DIW Berlin, together with the German Center for Integration and Migration Research (DeZIM) and the University of Münster, developed a short online survey. The survey focuses primarily on the perception of risks and opportunities associated with social media, while also addressing support for, or rejection of, various prohibition

8 Julia Brailovskaia et al. (2025): Social media and the mental health of children and adolescents. Discussion No. 40, German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina, 45 (In German; available online).

9 Die Zeit (2026): Prien and consumer protection advocates call for social media ban. Die Zeit, February 10 (In German; available online; accessed February 10, 2026).

10 Tagesschau (2026): What the CDU wants to change in terms of content. Tagesschau.de, February 21, 2026 (In German; available online; accessed February 22, 2026).

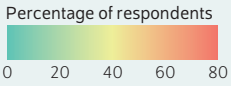
11 McGorry et al. (2024), ibid, 740.

12 Susanne Enssen, Iris Nieding, and Sybille Stöbe-Blossey (2023): Digitalization and participation: Opportunities and risks in child and youth welfare. Institute for Social Pedagogical Research (ism).

13 The SOEP is a representative annual repeat survey of private households that has been conducted in western Germany since 1984 and in eastern Germany since 1990. Jan Goebel et al. (2019): The German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP). Yearbooks for National Economy and Statistics 239(2), 345–360 (available online).

Figure 1

Assessment of social media risks and opportunities, prohibition scenarios, and alternative protective measures
In percent (weighted)



	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
Risk	1.3	4.5	4.1	43.8	46.3
Opportunity	2.9	18.3	15.5	49.6	13.7
Prohibition up to the age of 12	4.4	15.8	8.8	36.8	34.2
Prohibition up to the age of 16	16.0	34.4	16.2	23.9	9.5
Ban in schools	7.9	20.8	12.2	32.0	27.1
Strengthening media literacy	1.0	1.9	3.3	24.2	69.6
Parental control	0.6	1.0	3.6	29.5	65.4
Provider deletes problematic content	1.3	2.2	3.4	15.5	77.7
Provider deletes offensive content	1.3	1.5	3.1	13.0	81.0
Protection against extremist/ body-idealizing content	1.3	2.8	8.0	23.4	64.5
Basic accounts[1]	1.1	2.7	8.1	36.5	51.6

1 Potentially problematic functions, such as contact requests from strangers, are deactivated in basic accounts.

Source: Online short survey on social media conducted by the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP).

CC BY 4.0

Nine out of ten people see risks for children and young people using social media.

scenarios alongside alternative protective measures.[14] In September 2025, a random sample of adults in the SOEP who could be reached by email or text message were invited to participate in the survey; 31 percent of those contacted took part. The responses of these 2,685 respondents (Box 1) were weighted for the analyses such that the results presented here are representative of the population living in Germany.[15]

The results show an ambivalent overall picture: the population sees both risks and opportunities in social media. Certain restrictions—in particular a ban for children up to the age of 12 or a prohibition on use in schools—are supported by a majority. However, banning social media use up to the age of 16 is not supported by a majority. At the same time, there is clear support for various alternative protective measures—from media education and parental responsibility to mandatory intervention by platform providers. A differentiated analysis according to sociodemographic characteristics provides deeper insights into the assessment of individual measures.

Opportunities and risks of social media: Not an either/or situation

To assess the opportunities and risks of social media, respondents were asked to agree or disagree with two statements (Box 2).

Nine out of ten people see dangers

The view that social media poses a risk to children and young people—for example in the form of bullying, sexualized content, or problematic contacts—is widespread among the population. Ninety percent "strongly agree" or "somewhat agree" with the statement (Figure 1). Although there are minor differences between different population groups, overall agreement[16] is very high for all groups surveyed, ranging from 78 to 97 percent (Figure 2).

There are only minor differences between the generations when it comes to assessing risks:[17] 86 percent of Generation Z (born between 1997 and 2010) consider social media to be a risk, compared to 92 percent of the comparison group born before 1965. For Generations X (born between 1965 and 1980) and Y (born between 1981 and 1996), there are no relevant differences compared to the comparison group, with around 90 percent in each case. Women are slightly more likely than men to consider social media risky. There are no systematic differences in risk perception between people with children aged between nine and 16 in their household and people without children of this age.

However, differences in risk perception are evident along other sociodemographic characteristics: people with a low level of education (81 percent agreement) consider social media to be less dangerous than people with a medium or high level of education (92 and 90 percent, respectively). The difference is even more pronounced when it comes to migration background: people with a direct migration background[18] are less likely to rate social media as dangerous overall (78 percent) than those without a migration background (92 percent) or with an indirect migration background (89 percent). There is also a regional effect: people in eastern Germany rate the risk posed by social

14 The authors would like to thank Elisa Grabas, Alexander Lepe, Marvin Petrenz, Denise Rolle, and Sabine Zinn for their support in creating and implementing the short survey. The questions are listed in Box 2 of this report, and information on the data, variables, and methods can be found in Box 1.

15 This means that the results are based on a weighted random sample. Different selection and group-specific participation probabilities were accounted for via design and adjustment weights.

16 Here and in the following, the responses "strongly agree" and "somewhat agree" are considered together.

17 Here and in the following, differences that are significant at the five percent level in the bivariate regressions are reported, see Figure 3 in this report.

18 Migration background is based on country of birth. Those born abroad are assigned a "direct" migration background, while those born in Germany with at least one parent born abroad are assigned an "indirect" migration background.

Box 2

Questionnaire

Agreement or disagreement was surveyed using the following questionnaire (presented without introductory text).

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

Danger: Social media poses significant dangers for children and young people (e.g., through bullying, sexualized content, or contact with strangers).

Opportunity: Social media offers children and young people important opportunities (e.g., to exchange ideas, be creative, or gain access to information and social participation).

Ban until age 12: A general ban on the use of social media for children and young people up to the age of 12 would be an appropriate measure to protect them from the dangers.

Ban until age 16: A general ban on the use of social media for children and young people up to the age of 16 would be an appropriate measure to protect them from the dangers.

Ban at school: A ban on the use of social media at school would be an appropriate measure to protect children and young people from the dangers of social media.

Alternative measure 1: Children and young people should receive better training in media literacy so that they can use social media safely.

Alternative measure 2: Parents should pay more attention to how their children use social media (for example, through supervision, discussions, or technical protective measures).

Alternative measure 3: Social media providers should be obliged to quickly identify problematic content and delete it consistently.

Alternative measure 4: Social media should do more to ensure that offensive, discriminatory, or dangerous content is deleted quickly.

Alternative measure 5: Social media should take countermeasures if children and young people repeatedly consume extremist or body-idealizing content, for example.

Alternative measure 6: Only restricted accounts ("basic accounts") should be available to children and young people, with problematic functions—such as contact by strangers—deactivated.

The response scale for all questions comprised six options: 1 ("strongly disagree"), 2 ("somewhat disagree"), 3 ("neither agree nor disagree"), 4 ("somewhat agree"), 5 ("strongly agree") and -1 ("cannot/do not want to answer").

media only slightly lower (89 percent agree "somewhat" or "completely") than those in the western German states (90 percent agree). However, the proportion of people in western Germany who "strongly agree" with the statement on risks is significantly higher at 49 percent than among people in eastern Germany (36 percent). There are also differences in terms of personal usage behavior, which was last surveyed in the SOEP in 2021: Those who use social media daily are less likely to perceive a risk (87 percent) than those who do not use it at all (93 percent). Finally, it appears that 97 percent of the 147 teachers surveyed see a risk in social media, compared to people in other professions (90 percent).

Almost two-thirds see opportunities in social media

In addition to the risks, many people also see the potential of social media—for example, for social participation, creative development, and access to information. Sixty-three percent agree with the statement that social media offers such opportunities for children and young people (Figure 1). This assessment is also shared by the majority of all population groups surveyed, but with approval ranging between 56 percent and 77 percent, it is much more differentiated than the risk assessment (Figure 2).

This also applies to the different generations: both among members of Generation X (65 percent agreement) and Generation Z (77 percent agreement), a larger proportion see the opportunities offered by social media than in the comparison group of those born before 1965 (58 percent agreement). For Generation Y, on the other hand, no statistically significant difference to the comparison group can be identified (Figure 3). There are also no significant differences between men and women.

People with children between the ages of nine and 16 in their household tend to rate the potential opportunities offered by social media more positively than people without children of this age. However, there are no systematic differences across educational dimensions. Of people with a direct migration background, 56 percent see opportunities offered by social media, compared to 64 percent of people with an indirect or no migration background.

Figure 2

Agreement with social media risks and opportunities, prohibition scenarios, and alternative protective measures by sociodemographic groups

In percent (weighted)

Percentage of respondents who "somewhat" or "strongly" agree

20 40 60 80 100

	Risk	Opportunity	Prohibition up to the age of 12 years	Prohibition up to the age of 16 years	Ban in in school	Strengthening media competence	Control by parents	Provider deletes problematic content	Providers deletes offensive content	Protection against extremist/ body-idealizing content	Basic accounts[1]
Years 1900 to 1945 and Baby boomers (1946 to 1964)	91.9	57.8	70.3	37.3	68.6	95.8	98.3	95.6	96.6	88.6	92.5
Generation X (1965 to 1980)	89.8	64.9	73.4	35.3	56.9	94.5	95.4	93.9	94.1	90.7	89.3
Generation Y (millennials, 1981 to 1996)	90.5	61.8	68.2	33.0	56.7	91.6	94.9	90.6	92.3	86.2	86.9
Generation Z (1997 to 2010)	85.8	76.6	73.2	19.9	43.6	91.2	84.9	90.3	89.9	83.5	76.7
Male	88.8	63.2	67.9	33.1	58.2	92.5	93.5	90.7	91.6	88.0	86.9
Female	91.4	63.3	74.1	33.6	60.0	95.0	96.2	95.7	96.3	87.7	89.3
No children aged 9 to 16	90.5	62.0	70.3	33.3	59.5	93.8	94.9	92.9	93.6	87.4	87.8
At least one child aged 9 to 16	88.3	70.1	75.0	33.3	57.2	93.5	94.8	94.9	96.1	90.4	89.9
Low level of education / In training	80.8	62.2	78.5	39.7	64.4	88.2	91.7	91.0	92.2	85.7	83.9
Medium level of education	92.3	63.4	68.6	34.0	59.6	95.0	96.1	93.8	93.4	86.6	89.3
High level of education	90.2	62.6	71.4	29.9	58.9	93.9	96.6	92.7	95.4	89.3	88.0
No information on educational level	92.2	65.4	71.2	30.4	51.7	95.3	89.8	94.5	95.8	92.6	88.4
No migration background	91.8	64.2	71.0	32.9	59.3	95.3	95.4	94.1	94.5	88.3	88.5
Direct migration background	78.3	55.6	70.4	37.2	59.2	82.5	89.7	86.0	88.5	83.5	83.1
Indirect migration background	89.3	63.5	72.1	32.0	56.0	92.8	97.0	94.4	96.8	90.1	92.3
West Germany	90.3	62.9	71.7	34.4	59.2	94.3	94.6	93.6	94,3	88.4	87.9
East Germany	89.3	64.9	67.9	28.6	58.6	91.6	95.9	91.4	92.7	85.7	89.0
Daily use of social media	86.7	67.2	68.6	30.8	55.7	93.9	96.8	93.2	94.4	88.8	88.6
Less frequent use of social media	91.2	62.4	67.8	35.1	60.4	94.3	93.5	89.8	89.5	87.3	85.0
No social media use	93.0	59.7	69.0	36.0	67.1	93.1	96.5	93.5	94.5	82.4	89.5
No information on social media use	90.1	63.4	73.8	32.8	56.5	93.9	93.5	93.9	94.6	90.2	88.0
Occupation Teacher	97.0	58.0	80.9	32.6	56.4	94.7	99.4	95.3	96.1	91.5	93.6
Other occupation/ no information	89.9	63.5	70.6	33.4	59.2	93.7	94.7	93.1	93.9	87.7	87.9

1 Potentially problematic functions, such as contact requests from strangers, are deactivated in basic accounts.

Sources: Online short survey on social media by the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP); preliminary data from the SOEP for the years 1984 to 2025.

CC BY 4.0

Members of different generations assess the risks of social media similarly. There are greater differences in their assessment of the opportunities.

A regional difference can be seen when comparing eastern and western Germany: people in eastern Germany see the positive sides of social media slightly more often than people in the west. Usage behavior also plays a role: those who use social media daily are more likely (67 percent) to see its opportunities than people who never use social media (60 percent). The difference between teachers (58 percent) and people in other professions (64 percent) is not statistically significant (Figure 3).

Many see both risks and opportunities

The analyses show that people do not exclusively emphasize the risks or opportunities of social media. Rather, many see both simultaneously: more than half of the population (56.7 percent[19]) agrees that social media poses a risk and offers opportunities (Figure 4). This underscores the ambivalent attitude toward social media—an area of tension that is often exaggerated in public debate with a focus solely on the risks and prohibitions, but which the population perceives in a more nuanced way.

Another pattern is also evident: almost one in five (19.4 percent) see mainly risks but no opportunities. These individuals clearly view social media as a threat—without attributing any positive aspects to it. This group more often includes older people, teachers, and individuals who do not use social media. The remaining individuals are divided into smaller groups: 20 percent do not take a position on the question of risks and opportunities or see neither risks nor opportunities, while four percent see mainly opportunities.

No unanimous agreement on social media bans for children and young people

The question of whether access to social media should be restricted for children and young people, for example through age limits or bans in schools, is the subject of heated public debate. The results of the survey clearly show that support for a range of prohibitive measures varies, depending on underlying socio-demographic characteristics.

Banning access up to the age of 12 can gain majority support

The question of banning social media for children up to the age of 12 ties in with the recommendation of the Leopoldina expert commission, which calls for a general ban on use for children under the age of 13. Such a measure finds broad support among the population: 71 percent favor such a ban (Figure 1). This support is shared by the majority across all population groups surveyed, but there are also some nuances: approval ratings range from 68 to 81 percent (Figure 2).

There are no significant differences between the generations: members of Generations X, Y, and Z do not differ in their assessment from people born before 1965. Women, on the other hand, are more likely (74 percent) to support such a ban than men (68 percent).

Differences also emerge along educational dimensions: people with a low level of education are more likely to support the ban (79 percent) than people with a medium or high level of education (69 and 71 percent, respectively).

With regard to migration background, there is no difference between people with and without a direct migration background. Individual usage behavior also plays no role: people who use social media daily do not differ in their assessment from those who do not use these media.

A regional difference emerges when comparing eastern and western Germany: people in eastern Germany are slightly less likely to support a social media ban up to the age of 12 (68 percent) than those in the west (72 percent). Finally, the ban up to the age of 12 is supported more often by teachers (81 percent) than by people in other occupational groups (71 percent).

Only one-third support a ban up to the age of 16

Compared to the ban on social media for those up to the age of 12, the picture is significantly different when it comes to an age limit up to the age of 16: only 33 percent of the population favors a general ban on social media use until this age, while a narrow majority of 50.4 percent rejects this measure. This means that, unlike the proposed ban for children up to the age of 12, there is no social majority in favor of such a regulation.

Here, too, there are few differences in the assessment between individual socio-demographic groups, with approval ratings ranging from 20 to 40 percent. Only the youngest Generation Z stands out: 20 percent agree with such a ban, while in the older groups the figure is between 33 and 37 percent. There are also no significant differences between women and men.

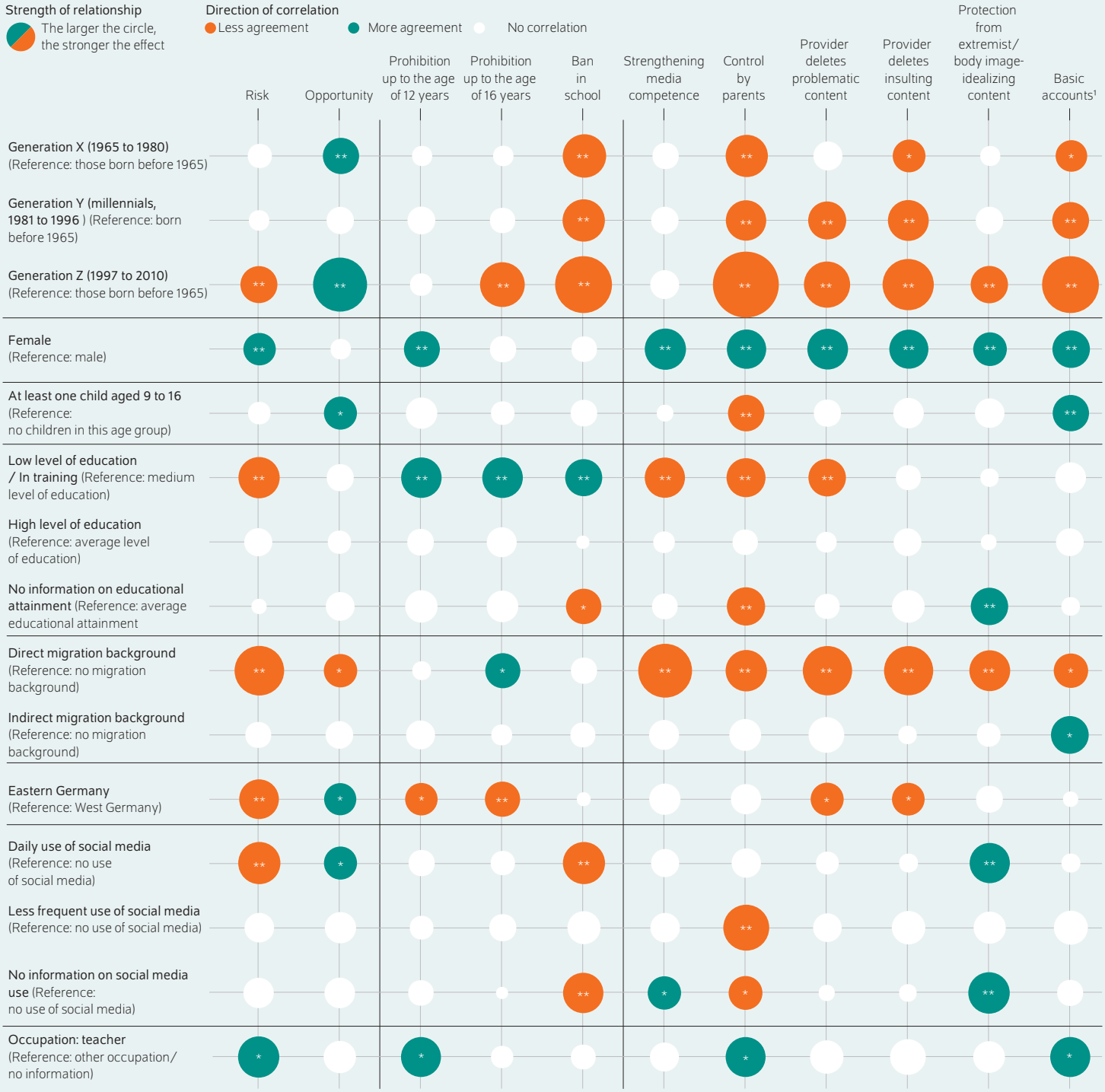
With regard to educational background, a similar pattern emerges as before: people with a low level of education are more likely to support the ban (40 percent) than people with a medium or high level of education (34 and 30 percent, respectively). People with a low level of education are the only group in which a narrow relative majority favors a ban (40 percent in favor compared to 39 percent against). People with a direct migration background are also slightly more likely to support a social media ban up to the age of 16 (37 percent) than people with no or an indirect migration background (33 and 32 percent, respectively).

Similar to the question of a ban for children up to the age of 12, people living in eastern Germany are less likely to support a ban up to the age of 16 than people living in western Germany (29 percent compared to 34 percent). Personal usage habits do not play a significant role here—daily users

19 This value is obtained by adding the four values 25.1, 19.6, 7.8, and 4.2 in the cross-tabulation of both questions.

Figure 3

Relationship between the assessment of social media and its regulation and sociodemographic characteristics
Bivariate regressions (weighted)



1 Potentially problematic functions, such as contact requests from strangers, are deactivated in basic accounts.

Notes: * and ** indicate statistical significance at the five and one percent levels. The "reference" is the comparison group that is identical within a category (such as migration background or educational level).

Reading example: Compared to the group born before 1965, Gen Z sees statistically significantly more opportunities in social media (third row from the top, second circle from the left).

Sources: Online short survey on social media conducted by the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP); preliminary data from the SOEP for the years 1984 to 2025.

CC BY 4.0

In many cases, the differences in agreement between different population groups are statistically significant.

do not differ significantly from people who do not use social media. In contrast to a ban for children up to the age of 12, there are no differences between teachers and people in other professions.

The majority believe that social media should be taboo at school—"Gen Z" is drawn

A majority of 59 percent supports banning the use of social media in schools. At the same time, this is where the most significant differences between the groups surveyed become apparent (ranging from 44 to 69 percent): in particular, Generation Z rejects such a ban significantly more often than the comparison group born before 1965. Forty-four percent of Generation Z agree with a ban and 41 percent reject it, while in all other groups surveyed, an absolute majority (between 57 and 69 percent) favors a ban. However, Generations X and Y are also more cautious in their views than those born before 1965. There is little difference in the assessment of women and men, or between people in households with children between the ages of nine and 16 and households without children in this age group.

In terms of education, people with a low level of education are more likely to support a ban in schools (64 percent) than people with a medium or high level of education (60 and 59 percent, respectively). A direct or indirect migration background has no influence on approval.

There is also a correlation with usage behavior: people who use social media daily are more likely to reject a ban in schools (31 percent) than people who use it rarely (23 percent) or not at all (25 percent). It is also surprising that teachers (56 percent in favor of a social media ban in schools) do not differ statistically significantly in their assessment from other occupational groups (59 percent in favor) (Figure 3)—contrary to what might be expected, they do not support a school ban more often.

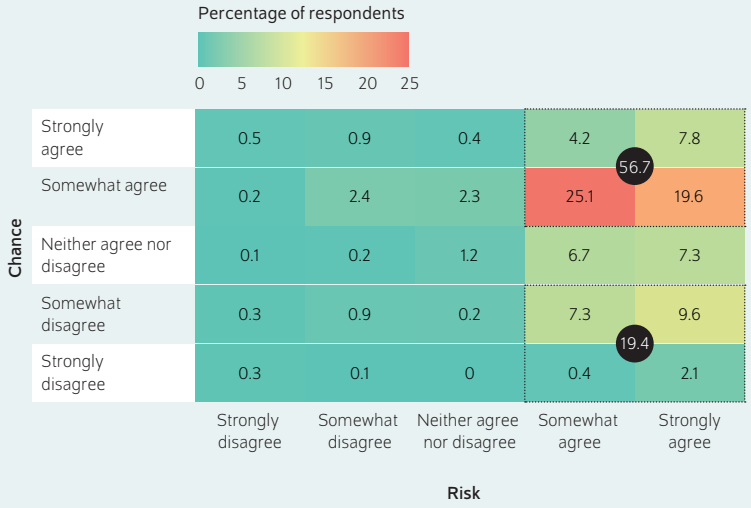
Alternative protective measures receive widespread approval

While a large part of the population supports bans for children up to the age of 12, a ban for older adolescents up to the age of 16 is likely to fail, mainly due to a lack of general support. This brings alternative, sometimes less drastic protective measures by platforms, parents, and schools into focus.

Support for these alternatives is extremely high (Figure 1): Over 90 percent favor better media literacy training and stronger parental supervision. Measures on the part of platform providers—such as the rapid detection and consistent deletion of problematic content—enjoy equally broad support. More than 85 percent also support algorithmic countermeasures in the event of repeated consumption of extreme or body image-idealizing content. So-called basic accounts, which deactivate potentially problematic functions such as contact requests from strangers, also meet with broad approval.

Figure 4

Assessment of the risks and opportunities of social media
In percent (weighted)



Source: Online short survey on social media conducted by the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP).

CC BY 4.0

More than half of the population in Germany sees both risks and opportunities using social media.

Although each of these measures enjoys high acceptance in all groups surveyed, with more than 75 percent in favor, the level of support is not equally strong in all groups (Figure 2). While the promotion of media literacy is supported across generations, there are differences when it comes to other measures: younger generations are generally more cautious about additional regulatory measures than older generations. Women are significantly more likely than men to support all measures.[20] People with children between the ages of nine and 16 in their households support the idea of restricted basic accounts and parental control to a similar extent. However, they agree "fully" with basic accounts ten percentage points more often than people without children between the ages of nine and 16 in their households, which is a statistically significant difference (Figure 3). The opposite is true for parental controls, where they agree fully ten percentage points less often.

People with a low level of education and those with a direct migration background are less likely than other groups to support most measures. An indirect migration background, on the other hand, is associated with higher approval of basic accounts. In particular, east Germans are slightly more likely to reject measures to delete content. The extent of social media use only has a selective influence: Only when it comes to protection from extremist or body image-idealizing content

20 When it comes to agreeing with protection against extremist/body-idealizing content on social media, women and men agree in equal proportions (88 percent). However, the proportion of women who "strongly agree" with the statement is significantly higher than that of men (70 percent compared to 59 percent).

do frequent users show higher approval than people who do not use social media. Teachers are particularly vocal in their support for stronger parental control. They also endorse the introduction of basic accounts at an above-average rate. However, when it comes to media literacy, teachers promote it just as much as people in other professional groups.

Conclusion: Broad support for differentiated protective measures

Overall, the results of the survey paint a nuanced picture: the vast majority perceive risks posed by social media for children and young people, while the assessment of opportunities is more heterogeneous. Above all, social media is seen by a majority of the population as both a risk and an opportunity. The assessment varies between the population groups surveyed, particularly with regard to age, educational level, and migration background.

The assessment of regulatory measures also reveals a gradated level of acceptance: while a general ban on social media for children and young people up to the age of 12 is supported by the majority, there is no social majority in favor of a ban up to the age of 16. On the other hand, a majority agrees with a ban on use in schools, although the youngest generation ("Gen Z") is more controversial in its views.

The high level of support for various alternative measures is noteworthy: from strengthening media literacy and parental supervision to mandatory requirements for platform providers, a wide range of risk minimization tools are strongly supported. This high level of acceptance could play a central role in political decision-making processes, especially if far-reaching bans are difficult to implement and enforce legally or in practice.

The results show that effective regulation of social media use by children and young people should not rely solely on blanket bans. Differentiated packages of measures are accepted by large sections of the population and, therefore, have a better chance of being implemented. At the same time, the analyses in this Weekly Report show that the potential dangers of social media are perceived as significantly less in some population groups and potential regulatory measures are less likely to find support. Politicians, parents, educational institutions, and platform operators are equally called upon to make their respective contributions to protecting and empowering young users. The differences between sociodemographic groups highlighted here can be used to inform specific groups in a more targeted manner about the risks and benefits of various measures.

Jörg Dollmann is Head of the Research Data Center at the German Center for Integration and Migration Research (DeZIM) and a private lecturer at the University of Mannheim | dollmann@dezim-institut.de

Christian Hunkler is Head of Survey Methodology and Management at the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) at DIW Berlin | chunkler@diw.de

Nicolas Legewie is Professor of Social Research Methods at the Institute of Sociology at the University of Münster | nlegewie@uni-muenster.de

Julian B. Axenfeld is a researcher at the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) at DIW Berlin | jaxenfeld@diw.de

Andreas Franken is a research associate at the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) at DIW Berlin | afranken@diw.de

Felix von Heusinger is a researcher at the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) at DIW Berlin | fvonheusinger@diw.de

JEL: D19, L86, I28, K24

Keywords: Social media ban

Open Access: This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).