

## Britain's proposed online porn filters

How do we strike the right balance between freedom of expression and child protection? Sarah Glatte explores a proposal by the British government.



In July 2013, British prime minister David Cameron sparked a media debate by [announcing plans](#) to "crack down" on online pornography. Arguing that the internet had created a "cultural challenge" for child protection, Cameron declared that an agreement with four major British broadband providers had been reached to introduce automatic online filters to block pornographic content on private networks. According to the proposed measures, family-friendly filters would be enabled by default on all newly purchased British broadband accounts, and existing customers would be contacted by their internet providers to choose whether or not to install them. The prime minister stressed that it would be possible to disable network filters, but that this could only be done by the adult network account holder. [In addition](#), Mr Cameron announced that videos streamed in Britain would become subject to the same restrictions as video material sold in British sex shops.

The new regulations were met with [widespread criticism](#). Opponents of Cameron's proposals expressed fears that such measures could jeopardise "[longstanding efforts to prevent or abolish](#)

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[censorship ... and protect civil liberties and human rights worldwide.](#) "What began as a crusade against child pornography," one commentator [remarked](#), turned into censorship of legal adult content. Critics also voiced practical concerns that porn filters might not be able to [distinguish between pornographic and educational material](#), and that [they could in fact be too easily circumvented](#).

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