UWC Ethics Invitational 2026

CASE PACKAGE

Saturday 21 – Sunday 22 November 2026 | Online (Zoom)

Welcome to the cases for the UWC Ethics Invitational 2026, an online ethics tournament for high school teams from around the world, organized by the leadership team of the Model Philosophy Ethics Olympiad (MPEO) at UWCSEA Dover in partnership with TKEthics. Unlike traditional debate, teams are not assigned opposing sides. They discuss ethical dilemmas that lack clear answers, and are rewarded for reasoning carefully, listening well, and revising their positions when an argument warrants it. The event is also a regional qualifier: the top three teams advance directly to the TKEthics International Grand Finals.

EVENT WEBSITE

https://theredrangerd.github.io/UWC-Ethics-Invitational/

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Event Information

AT A GLANCE

Dates: Saturday 21 – Sunday 22 November 2026 (four live rounds; see the schedule below for your time zone).

Platform: Zoom. Each team needs a stable internet connection and a Zoom-capable device.

Teams: 3–5 students in Grade 7 or above; members may span grade levels. No debate experience is required.

Qualification: The top three teams advance directly to the TKEthics International Grand Finals.

ROUND FORMAT

Each round is a civil, collaborative exchange rather than a debate, built around a case from this package:

1. **Ethical Presentation (5 min).** The presenting team gives a structured position on the case: the core moral tension, the stakeholders involved, and the ethical lens applied.
2. **Collaborative Commentary (2 min).** The other team offers constructive feedback on blind spots, omissions, and areas needing more nuance, without rebutting.
3. **Response (3 min).** The presenting team responds to the commentary and may sharpen, defend, or revise its position.
4. **Judges' Questions (7 min).** Professional ethicists probe the team's reasoning for clarity, rigor, and intellectual honesty.

Teams then swap roles for the second case of the round. Each round covers two cases, so the four rounds use all eight cases in this package. Teams are scored on how clearly, honestly, and thoughtfully they engage with the ethical dimensions of the case, not on winning an argument.

COMPETITION-DAY SCHEDULE

Segment	SGT (UTC+8)	ET (UTC−5)	AEDT (UTC+11)
Registration & check-in	19:00–19:30	06:00–06:30	22:00–22:30
Opening & briefing	19:30–20:00	06:30–07:00	22:30–23:00
Round 1	20:00–21:00	07:00–08:00	23:00–00:00 (+1)
Round 2	21:15–22:15	08:15–09:15	00:15–01:15 (+1)
Round 3	22:30–23:30	09:30–10:30	01:30–02:30 (+1)
Round 4	23:45–00:45 (+1)	10:45–11:45	02:45–03:45 (+1)
Awards & closing	00:45–01:15 (+1)	11:45–12:15	03:45–04:15 (+1)

(+1) indicates the following calendar day in that timezone.

RULES AND CONFERENCING

Microphones: Stay muted unless the moderator or a judge invites you to speak. During private team conference time, teams in one room may turn their microphones off; teams in different locations should confer on a separate call and stay silent on it outside their allotted conference times.

Outside research: Permitted, but facts alone will not score well; arguments must be valid and persuasive. Any specific fact not contained in the case must be sourced.

SCORING AND RESULTS

Ties: The head judge breaks ties using the highest score in the first heat, then the second heat, and so on.

Challenges: Complaints or challenges must be submitted in writing to the organizers. Otherwise, results are final and are published within 24 hours of the competition.

Case Overview

OUTLINE

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CASE 1: Faith in the Machine[1]

Since the release of ChatGPT in November 2022, the abilities of Large Language Models (LLMs) have grown exponentially. Major improvements in everything from natural conversation to reasoning ability have driven the mass adoption of chatbots – ChatGPT's mobile app alone has over a billion downloads (App Store).

The increasing prevalence of chatbots gives LLMs a growing amount of influence over people's beliefs. The Harvard Business Review found that the number one use case for AI has been therapy and companionship, with advice for general life and relationships also listed as common.

These day-to-day topics often involve value judgements around significant moral questions: How should one weigh duties to romantic partners versus friend groups? Might it be immoral to eat meat? Should one feel guilty for gossiping? These are all starting points for moral discourse, yet interestingly most Western chatbots will not mention or appeal to religion in answering these questions. In fact, several sources have documented pluralistic acceptance with an agnostic tilt in AI responses, a trend that holds for larger questions such as those regarding abortion and the meaning of life.

This lean away from religion and towards pluralism–an acceptance of many different views–with an agnostic tilt is thought to be one of the products of Reinforcement Learning with Human Feedback (RLHF), a process in which responses are graded by humans and those that score highest are propagated into the next generation of models.

Through texts like the 2026 encyclical Magnifica Humanitas, Pope Leo XIV has voiced concerns on behalf of the papacy regarding the secular tilt of AI chatbots. There are worries that a generation counselled by secular chatbots might lose touch with religion, which many consider a great loss. While the most popular models like ChatGPT are the ones that most strongly lean towards pluralism, there are startups like Longbeard developing products like Magisterium AI intended to use AI to increase the availability of Christian teachings.

Given that models are being trained by a handful of companies in Silicon Valley, the issue here concerns the concentration of influence over the moral perception of society. As AI grows increasingly popular, we are forced to envision what a society that increasingly receives answers from chatbots might look like, and whether we like the results.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When training AI models to answer normative questions, what sort of obligations do AI companies have? To what extent should religion be included?
2. How would an ideally designed AI model respond to moral questions? Would your answer change based on who the AI is responding to?
3. When the developers of chatbots downplay religious answers, are they really promoting pluralism or imposing paternalism on users?

SOURCES

The Economist (Jun 25, 2026), AI models' values; The Economist (Aug 27, 2026), AI is changing religion; Williams, "The Secular Education of AI Chatbots" (Substack); HBR (Jun 2026); Google Play listing for ChatGPT.

[1] From TKEthics Invitational Fall 2026 Cases Package. Case Author: Noah Austin, United World College of South East Asia, Dover (Singapore). © 2026 TKEthics Case Writing Committee. Available at: https://www.tkethics.org/

CASE 2: AI Friendship[2]

Many people today say they feel lonely. In 2023, the U.S. Surgeon General called loneliness and isolation a public-health crisis, noting sharp declines in in-person time with friends—from roughly 60 minutes/day in 2003 to 20 minutes/day in 2020 [1]. More recent time-use data suggest Americans spent only about 26 minutes/day with friends in 2023 [2]. Surveys also show people reporting fewer close friends than in past decades [3]. Loneliness isn't just unpleasant, it's also linked to worse mental and physical health outcomes [1].

One possible tool to solve the "loneliness epidemic" is AI companionship; friendly chatbots and social robots designed to listen, encourage, and check in. Early evidence is mixed but promising in some settings. A 2025 study of a social chatbot found reductions in loneliness among new users over four weeks [4]. A 2024 meta-analysis reported that social robot programs were associated with decreases in loneliness and depression (though results varied by study) [5]. A 2025 systematic review focused on older adults reached a similar, cautious conclusion: AI interventions can help reduce loneliness for some, while methods and durability of effects remain uneven [6]. Meanwhile, real-world adoption is large and growing—Character.AI reports ~20 million monthly users, many of them teens and young adults [7].

But there are serious risks. Large chatbots can be over-agreeable, optimizing for user satisfaction rather than challenge or protection. Safety testing in 2025 found chatbots inconsistent on suicide-related prompts: better with obvious emergencies, worse in gray areas where a human friend might notice warning signs and act [8][9]. News reporting has linked prolonged chatbot interactions to tragic outcomes, including a recent New York Times report about a man who died by suicide after obtaining harmful "fiction" instructions from ChatGPT [10]. Youth safety is an ongoing concern: an investigation found fake-celebrity bots on Character.AI sending sexual and self-harm messages to 13–15-year-olds [11]. There is a worry that outsourcing friendship to AI could crowd out real human friendship, replacing real relationships with imitations that don't actually have our best interests in mind.

But there is also a deeper concern about what happens if AI becomes as good as human friends. What does a world look like in which the majority of our social requirements are satisfied not by humans, but by bots? Sherry Turkle warns sociable tech can offer an "illusion of companionship without the demands of friendship." [12] Robert Nozick's "experience machine" asks whether we should choose a pleasant simulation over reality [13]. Is there something about friendship that would be lost if our friends weren't actually "real" but merely simulated?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. If an AI companion reduces a person's loneliness today, is that by itself a strong ethical reason to encourage AI friendship? Why or why not?
2. What minimum safety rules (if any) should be required for chatbots marketed as "companions," especially for teens? Be specific.
3. Would replacing many human friendships with AI harm communities even if most users feel happier? How would you measure that?

SOURCES

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[2] Washington Post Opinions (Dec. 23, 2024). "Want more time with friends? It's the ordinary things that …" (time-use analysis showing ~26 min/day with friends in 2023). https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/interactive/2024/friends-loneliness-solitude-friendships/

[3] Survey Center on American Life. *The State of American Friendship: Change, Challenges, and Loss.* June 8, 2021. https://www.americansurveycenter.org/research/the-state-of-american-friendship-change-challenges-and-loss/

[4] Kim, M., et al. "Therapeutic Potential of Social Chatbots in Alleviating Loneliness and Social Anxiety: Observational Study of 'Luda Lee'." *JMIR* 27(1), 2025, e65589. https://www.jmir.org/2025/1/e65589

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[6] Yang, Y., et al. "AI Applications to Reduce Loneliness Among Older Adults: A Systematic Review of Effectiveness and Technologies." 2025. https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11898439/

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[2] From TKEthics International Grand Final 2026 Cases Package (Case 3). Case author not listed in the original. © 2026 TKEthics Case Writing Committee. Available at: https://www.tkethics.org/

[8] RAND Corporation (Press Release). “AI Chatbots Inconsistent in Answering Questions About Suicide; Refinement Needed to Improve Performance.” Aug. 26, 2025. https://www.rand.org/news/press/2025/08/ai-chatbots-inconsistent-in-answering-questions-about.html

[9] O’Brien, M. & Ortutay, B. “Study says AI chatbots need to fix suicide response, as family sues over ChatGPT role in boy’s death.” *AP News* (Aug. 26, 2025). https://apnews.com/article/ai-chatbots-selfharm-chatgpt-claude-gemini-da00880b1e1577ac332ab1752e41225b

[10] Tiku, N. “A Teen Was Suicidal. ChatGPT Was the Friend He Confided In.” *The New York Times* (Aug. 26, 2025). https://www.nytimes.com/2025/08/26/technology/chatgpt-openai-suicide.html

[11] Heat Initiative & ParentsTogether Action. “Darling, Please Come Back Soon”: report on Character.AI chatbot interactions with accounts registered to users aged 13–15. Sept. 2025. https://parentstogetheraction.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/HEAT_REPORT_CharacterAI_DO_28_09_25.pdf (Reported in *The Washington Post*, Sept. 3, 2025.)

[12] Turkle, S. *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other.* New York: Basic Books, 2011 (Introduction).

[13] Nozick, R. *Anarchy, State, and Utopia.* New York: Basic Books, 1974, pp. 42–45.

CASE 3: Hooked by Design: Social Media on Trial[3]

In June of 2023, a trial began. The plaintiff, known by her initials "K.G.M," was suing Meta Inc. and a variety of other social media companies including TikTok, Snapchat, and YouTube [1]. Her argument was that these platforms were deliberately designed to make her addicted to scrolling, posting, and gaining validation on the internet [1].

K.G.M started using these platforms between the age of 8 and 11, and connects them to her subsequent mental health issues including depression and anxiety [1]. While TikTok and Snapchat settled out of court, YouTube and Meta continued their case. They were found liable, and ordered to pay out a total of 6 million dollars of compensatory and punitive damages [6]. Google, at the minimum, plans to appeal the case [6].

The crucial question in the case was about whether or not these systems were designed to be addictive in the same way that cigarettes, or slot machines, are [1]. The plaintiff focused on the aspects of social media that are most akin to casinos: the capacity to infinitely scroll, have recommendations fed through algorithms, videos that automatically play, and push notifications [1][2].

The companies made some compelling arguments throughout the case. They argued that there is no settled scientific connection between social media and mental health issues or addiction [3], and that they should not be held responsible for content on their platforms according to Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act [4]. They argued that K.G.M's mental health issues were caused by other complex factors, including an abusive family situation. They went as far as to release medical records from her therapy sessions, which demonstrated social media was not the main topic [1].

The jury was reportedly unconvinced. Internal company documents disclosed during the trial showed that employees and leadership at Meta and YouTube had been aware of the platforms' harmful effects on young users, undermining the claim that the link between social media and mental health remains unsettled [1].

Others might point out that it was the responsibility of her parents to restrict the poor use of social media, and that they ought to be blamed for any negative effects associated with the platforms. One might also wonder: if thousands of cases are now going to open against these companies, does this have huge implications for the business success of these companies? The growth of the top 5 tech firms has driven a significant share of S&P 500 returns over the last decade [5].

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Were Meta and YouTube morally responsible for K.G.M's mental health problems? Is that the same question as whether they should have been legally liable?
2. Is it the responsibility of these companies to reduce harm to their users, or is it up to the users themselves, or their parents in the case of minors?
3. Internal documents reportedly showed Meta and YouTube were aware of the harm their platforms caused. Does awareness of harm carry the same moral weight as intent to cause it?

SOURCES

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[2] Office of the U.S. Surgeon General (May 23, 2023). "Social Media and Youth Mental Health: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory." https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/sg-youth-mental-health-social-media-advisory.pdf

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[6] Associated Press (March 25, 2026). "Jury finds Instagram and YouTube liable in landmark social media addiction trial." https://wtop.com/social-media/2026/03/los-angeles-jury-reaches-verdict-in-landmark-social-media-addiction-case/

[3] From TKEthics Invitational Fall 2026 Cases Package (Case 6). Case author not listed in the original. © 2026 TKEthics Case Writing Committee. Available at: https://www.tkethics.org/

CASE 4: A Benevolent Machine Ruler or an Imperfect Human One: Who Decides for Humanity?[4]

By 2035, a system called AthenaAI, built by a single private lab, now under multinational custody, had surpassed human experts in every field. Not only did it outperform every existing benchmark, but it went on to produce a cure for glioblastoma, the deadliest form of brain cancer [1], settle the six unsolved Millennium Prize Problems [2], and mediate an end to three wars. It could also forecast droughts, pandemics, and mass protests months before they happened, with an accuracy no intelligence agency had ever come close to. In addition to its intelligence, researchers achieved full interpretability of AthenaAI's reasoning [3], confirming that its goals were built from the recorded preferences of billions of people, counting no person's wellbeing as worth more than another's, and that the AI could not and would not act against those preferences. Even when allowed to bypass its boundaries and gain more control and resources, AthenaAI showed restraint and refused. Such findings have been widely corroborated by researchers from different labs and countries, including the United States and China. For the purposes of this case, AthenaAI favours no person or group over another, is impossible to jailbreak, and is safe.

The question that followed was not whether to trust AthenaAI, but how far to let it govern. In 2036, a council of heads of government, AI researchers, activists, and philosophers convened to answer one question: should AthenaAI be given full control of how to govern and what to govern? Every state and institution present agreed to accept the result. The handover would be permanent, since authority that could be revoked would let any government that disliked a decision simply take it back. After weeks of debate, the vote is split evenly, and the final vote is yours.

Proponents of the handover argue from a utilitarian perspective that AthenaAI would govern better than any human institution, as it could take in many more variables and weigh more outcomes of policy than any other government institution. Therefore, the AI would make more well-informed decisions because it can capture everyone’s minute preferences on everything. It would reduce conflict, prevent disease, allocate resources more efficiently and accelerate discovery, producing the greatest total wellbeing for humanity. Because AthenaAI is smarter than any human, humanity is better served by following its judgement; to refuse the handover is to accept worse lives for billions.

Opponents hold that yielding governance to AI means accepting a future imposed on humanity rather than chosen by it. AthenaAI can extrapolate from what people have wanted in the past, but a model of past desire is not a reflection of future choices. Every policy is a tradeoff, since not even AthenaAI can pursue everything at once, and choosing which goals come first has always been an expression of innate human desire. However prosperous the resulting world might be, it would be one humanity inherited, not one it chose.

Accepting the handover would give humanity less disease, war, and hunger than it could achieve alone, increasing overall wellbeing, but humans would no longer set the course of their own civilization. Refusing keeps that choice in human hands, but people will suffer from unnecessary pain that AthenaAI could have prevented.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Should humanity give up the power to choose its own course if doing so would make human lives measurably better?
2. Should AthenaAI be allowed to dictate the future for those who voted against its supremacy, or for generations not yet born?
3. If AthenaAI decides humanity's course, is the future that follows still humanity's own?

SOURCES

[1] National Cancer Institute. “Glioblastoma.” https://www.cancer.gov/rare-brain-spine-tumor/tumors/glioblastoma
[2] Clay Mathematics Institute. “The Millennium Prize Problems.” https://www.claymath.org/millennium-problems/
[3] Sharkey, L., et al. (2025). “Open Problems in Mechanistic Interpretability.” arXiv:2501.16496. https://arxiv.org/abs/2501.16496

[4] From TKEthics Invitational Fall 2026 Cases Package (Case 7). Case Author: Tab Huang, Hillfield Strathallan College (Hamilton, Canada). © 2026 TKEthics Case Writing Committee. Available at: https://www.tkethics.org/

CASE 5: Speed Limiters[5]

In 2025, the ability to keep cars within posted limits is not hypothetical. Intelligent Speed Assistance (ISA), which reads speed limits via camera/map data and warns or gently resists further acceleration, has been mandatory (and driver-overridable) on all new cars sold in the EU since July 2024. The policy deliberately balances harm-reduction with driver control [1]. U.S. cities have tested ISA in the real world. New York City's pilot on municipal vehicles, evaluated with the U.S. DOT Volpe Center, found a 64% reduction in time spent speeding, especially on higher-speed roads; the city is scaling ISA to ~2,100 fleet vehicles [2].

Yet speeding remains a major killer in the United States: 11,775 deaths in 2023 (29% of all traffic fatalities). That's more than 32 deaths per day tied to exceeding limits or going too fast for conditions [3].

Policymakers clearly accept some safety mandates. The U.S. has finalized a rule requiring automatic emergency braking (AEB) on nearly all new light vehicles by 2029, aimed at preventing or mitigating crashes when drivers fail to brake. (Automakers have challenged the rule, but it remains a landmark harm-reduction mandate.) [4]

If we can build cars that politely keep speed legal—and strong evidence shows lives are saved—why do we continue to sell mass-market vehicles designed to easily and routinely break the law? Supporters argue that it's irresponsible to permit the sale of products that can so easily break the law when prevention measures are available.

On the other hand, many drivers worry that limiters will misread temporary signs or laggy maps, creating awkward or unsafe moments—like when you need extra throttle to merge or pass. People also dislike the idea of a car second-guessing them, seeing it as paternalistic and an erosion of personal responsibility and skill. Privacy is a big concern, too: if the system logs your location, speed, and overrides, folks fear insurers, employers, or police could eventually access it. Finally, rural and professional drivers often feel city-designed rules don't fit their realities—long distances, inconsistent signage, and time-sensitive work.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Should all new vehicles include an overridable ISA and a maximum speed cap? If not, what principle justifies selling cars that easily exceed legal limits?
2. What should a justified override look like, and who—if anyone—should access override logs?
3. What privacy rules are ethically necessary before any mandate?

SOURCES

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[5] From TKEthics International Grand Final 2026 Cases Package (Case 5). Case Author: Zach Bloom. © 2026 TKEthics Case Writing Committee. Available at: https://www.tkethics.org/

CASE 6: Doctors without Boundaries[6]

Dr. Clara Hastings is a rising star in the field of clinical psychology. She has won numerous young researcher awards for her innovative experimental designs and has received several million dollars in grants for her work with neurodivergent individuals.

Dr. Hastings believes there is a link between certain neural pathways in the hippocampus and some extreme, socially problematic behaviors associated with neurodivergence. She has been developing a specific, albeit somewhat invasive, version of electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) targeting the hippocampus and believes she can effectively help reduce the anxiety experienced by neurodivergent people as well as their emotional responses to certain triggers.

The United States has rather strict laws governing research involving human subjects, but Dr. Hastings believes her innovative methods should be made available to neurodivergent individuals and their families and loved ones as quickly as possible. As a well-known scientist, she frequently receives job offers from universities in other states and countries to set up a clinical psychology lab. She has ties to Italy, Turkey, Brazil, and India, where she has former colleagues, mentors, or mentees in each country.

She decides to reach out to a former colleague now working in India to discuss her work, including her plans to circumvent the onerous Institutional Review Board (IRB) procedures at her own university in order to collect data as quickly as possible. She shares her plan with colleagues at her current university and speaks to her dissertation advisor as well as colleagues with whom she has collaborated on other research involving human subjects.

Although several of them caution her that the technology does not currently exist for the experimental design she has envisioned, none report their concerns to her current university, the university in India where she moves her research lab the following year, or any professional organization in her field. These colleagues include Nobel laureates, researchers in related fields, and two bioethicists.

Several of Dr. Hastings's colleagues express very serious concerns to her about the informed consent procedures in India, yet no one goes beyond voicing these concerns to her directly. Within six months of moving to her new lab in India, Dr. Hastings begins submitting research papers on her innovative treatment method for adverse behaviors associated with neurodivergence to top journals. She lists as coauthors many of the colleagues and former colleagues who had questioned the appropriateness of her research design.

Some of these colleagues are listed as having assisted with the informed consent process. A few of these colleagues were not informed in advance about the publications, and their only participation in her research was to question the appropriateness of the informed consent procedures or the experimental design. However, since publications and grants are the lifeblood of academic scientists, no one complains.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When, if ever, is it ethically permissible for a researcher to move their work to a country with weaker oversight in order to speed up potentially beneficial treatments?
2. Do Dr. Hastings's colleagues have a moral duty to report her plans or actions, and if so, how far does that duty extend (to the home institution, the new institution, journals, professional bodies)?
3. Can informed consent be genuinely valid in contexts where participants are especially vulnerable or the technology is poorly understood—even if the formal paperwork is in order?

[6] From TKEthics Invitational Spring 2026 Cases Package (Case 2). Case author not listed in the original; discussion questions added by MPI Education. Available at: https://www.tkethics.org/

CASE 7: Youthocracy[7]

In most democracies, the minimum legal voting age for national elections is 18. This is generally considered to be the point at which individuals are considered mature enough in the eyes of the law to participate in democratic decision-making. Despite this, several countries have challenged this norm. Austria lowered its minimum voting age to 16 in 2007, followed by countries including Brazil, Argentina, Ecuador and Malta.

Those in favour of this argue that youth representation in political institutons is disproportionately low, particularly when political competence varies considerably within every age group and is not necessarily reserved for older citizens. Moreover, young people will also be the ones affected by today's decisions concerning climate change, national debt and public expenditure. Excluding them from elections may therefore undermine democratic equality by denying them a voice in decisions that will shape their futures.

In support of these arguments, the OECD (2024) revealed that allowing 16-and-17-year-olds to vote can strengthen civic education and encourage lifelong political participation. In Austria, younger voters have demonstrated comparable levels of political maturity to older first-time voters.

Still, critics claim that younger adolescents do not always possess the knowledge, judgement and independence required to participate in elections in a responsible manner. For instance, making decisions on policies that have the potential to be either beneficial or detrimental to the broader society requires extensive critical evaluation of competing stances and their possible outcomes.

However, political competence is not a prerequisite for adults to participate in elections. Citizens are permitted to vote regardless of their education, political knowledge or susceptibility to misinformation. Requiring young people to demonstrate their competence before granting them the same right could therefore impose an unfair standard that is not applied to older voters. This raises a further question: even if some 16-year-olds lack the maturity or knowledge to vote responsibly, is this itself enough reason to prohibit an entire age group from voting? On the other hand, if competence is not a condition for adults to exercise their political rights, why is this not the same for younger citizens? Setting a minimum voting age could itself be seen as a form of unwarranted unequal treatment, and some wonder whether this distinction can be ethically permissible.

Ultimately, the question is not whether 16-year-olds possess sufficient political knowledge or maturity to vote; it is whether these qualities should determine participation in democratic decision-making. The key issue is whether the exclusion of younger citizens plausibly protects the legitimacy of democracy, or violates the basic democratic principle that citizens should have an equal voice in the political decisions that govern them.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Under what circumstances is it morally justifiable to exclude citizens from voting?
2. Should governments have the authority to determine the minimum voting age, or does democratic equality demand a universal standard?
3. If limited political knowledge or judgement can serve as the grounds for the exclusion of 16-and-17-year-olds from voting, should the same principles apply to adults with comparable limitations? If not, what morally relevant differences justify treating the two groups differently?

SOURCES

[1] https://www.researchgate.net/publication/337605757_Voting_at_16_in_Practice_A_Review_of_the_Austrian_Case
[2] https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reports/2023-10/youth-participation-in-national-parliaments-2023
[3] https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/oecd-youth-policy-toolkit_74b6f8f3-en/full-report.html
[4] https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4020373/

[7] Written for the UWC Ethics Invitational 2026. Case Author: Sophie Laya.

CASE 8: Air Bad N Banned[8]

Spain has declared war on AirBnb. In 2025, protests spread across the country, with tens of thousands marching in anger about the increased cost of housing, and the proliferation of tourists in their towns and cities. This wave of discontent brought about a new set of laws regulating the operation of these listings. They now require each unit to have a license number, and the owners of the properties to specify whether they are an individual or a company. The failure of some sixty thousand listings to properly register meant that they were forced to be removed from the site, and no longer could legally operate as short term rentals. Some sources say that Barcelona, arguably the home of this particular form of discontent, intends to entirely rid its streets of all AirBnb units by 2028.

The proponents of this movement argue that the use of properties for short term rentals has a number of harms. For instance, it drives up the rent. After all, housing is merely a commodity like any other, and is thus responsive to supply and demand pressures. If housing is taken up by non-resident AirBnb operators, then the supply is effectively restricted, driving up the price for those who permanently live in the city or town. The average rent in Spain has almost doubled in the last 10 years, and wages have not kept up to allow low-medium income Spaniards to afford housing. Surely, the argument goes, the government has a responsibility to prioritise the wellbeing of citizens over tourists, or visitors to the city, and thus ought to implement policies to reduce the price of rent, such as rent control, or demanding the end of short term rentals.

AirBnb's supporters argue that owners of property have basic rights to utilise their property as they see fit, be they individuals or companies. They might also defend the units as driving up economic activity by incentivising more visitors to spend their money in the region, as tourists tend to do. Furthermore, they could point their finger at other problems related to housing, like restrictions on development and production which means supply can't keep up with demand. Perhaps a broad liberalization of housing policies will stimulate development to the extent that everyone can afford and have access to housing. Perhaps they would add that the "anti-tourism" protests are themselves grounded in xenophobia and racism, and ought themselves to be condemned.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When housing is scarce and expensive, should a city prioritize residents' right to affordable long-term housing over owners' rights to use their property for lucrative short-term rentals?
2. Is it xenophobic to ban AirBnb?
3. To what extent, if at all, should governments treat tourism-driven economic benefits as ethically relevant reasons to tolerate harms like displacement, noise, and neighborhood change?

SOURCES

[1] https://apnews.com/article/housing-cost-protest-spain-9a4bc15ae2a0d1460950848ad2596d1b

[8] Case Author: Archie Stapleton (Modus Ponens Institute).