

Video

Live

Shows ▾

538

Shop

Log In

Stream
on **hulu**

Will TikTok users be able to access the app after a potential ban? Experts explain

A majority of justices on the Supreme Court appear inclined to uphold the ban.

By [Max Zahn](#)

January 11, 2025, 6:03 AM



US business leaders bid to buy TikTok As the TikTok ban looms, Americans are asking, "what's next?" Investor Kevin O'Leary joins the show.

TikTok [mounted](#) a last-ditch effort at the Supreme Court on Friday meant to stop a [ban](#) of the app set to take effect within days -- but the platform's arguments may have landed with a thud.

A majority of the justices appeared inclined to uphold a federal law that would ban the company unless it divests from China-based parent ByteDance.

TikTok has [challenged](#) the law on First Amendment grounds, claiming that a ban would limit free-expression rights on a platform used by one of every two Americans. Lower courts, however, have [found](#) merit in security concerns about potential data collection or content manipulation that could be undertaken by the Chinese government.

If the court challenge fails and TikTok forgoes a sale, the ban would take effect on Jan. 19, a day before the inauguration of President-elect Donald Trump.

Experts who spoke to ABC News said the measure would not penalize individuals for accessing or using the app, even after the ban takes hold.

MORE: Supreme Court appears likely to uphold TikTok ban unless China-owned ByteDance divests



Here's what to know about exactly how the potential ban would work, and how users could still access TikTok, according to experts:

How exactly would the TikTok ban work?

The law potentially banning TikTok -- the Protecting Americans From Foreign Adversary Controlled Applications Act -- cracks down on the app by targeting third-party companies vital to the functioning of the platform.

Specifically, the law would restrict [app stores](#) and hosting companies, which provide the digital infrastructure on which web services like TikTok depend.

Mandatory withdrawal of the app from major app stores, such as those maintained by Google and Apple, would bar new users from downloading the app and prevent existing users from updating it.

Without updates, the app would degrade in quality over time through inconveniences such as video-loading delays and performance glitches, some experts said.

"If the app were not able to download updates, it would eventually become obsolete," Qi Liao, a professor of computer science at Central Michigan University, told ABC News.

A separate stipulation would also make it illegal for hosting companies to provide services for TikTok -- and the measure offers a fairly broad characterization of such firms.

Hosting companies "may include file hosting, domain name server hosting, cloud hosting, and virtual private server hosting," the law says.

TikTok would stop functioning if the firm's U.S.-based hosting companies stopped providing services, experts said.

"For you to pull up TikTok content on your phone, somebody has to be hosting that," said Timothy Edgar, a computer science professor at Brown University and a former national security official.

At least in theory, however, the social media giant could establish partnerships with hosting companies outside the U.S., putting them out of reach of U.S. enforcement, the experts added.

Such a move would keep TikTok available to U.S. users, but the service would likely be slower and glitchier as the digital infrastructure moves further away, they added.



TikTok Inc. offices in Culver City, California, March 20, 2024.

Bing Guan/Bloomberg via Getty Images

"The whole point of hosting content is to have it close to users," Edgar said. "It certainly wouldn't work in any kind of smooth way."

Considering potential legal liability, TikTok will likely opt against efforts to preserve its U.S.-based platform in modified form, Edgar added. Instead, he said, services may simply come to a halt, as they did in India in the immediate aftermath of the country's 2020 ban.

"You'll get a message saying, 'Oh, it looks like you're using the app in the U.S. It's not available in your country,'" Edgar said.

TikTok did not immediately respond to ABC News' request for comment.

Would TikTok users be able to access the app after the ban?

No matter the extent of potential service interruptions, users would still be able to access TikTok after the ban by using workarounds, experts said.

MORE: Meta, McDonald's: These companies are rolling back some DEI policies→

Users who do so will face technical hurdles and reduced app quality, Liao said. For some, that will likely prove a formidable deterrent; but others may seek out TikTok anyway.

"If they really want to use it, the user will find a way to use it," Liao said.

Users giving it a shot can rest assured that the conduct is perfectly legal, the experts said.

"If you're an ordinary user with TikTok on your phone, you're not a criminal," Edgar said.
"There's no penalty at all."

ABC News' Devin Dwyer contributed to this report.

Related Topics

[TikTok](#)



Actress Spills Hollywood Trick For Slim Body: "We All Do It"

Experts In Getting Slimmer

Seniors Born 1941-1979 Receive 55 Big Benefits This Month

WalletJump

Buying Nvidia? Wall Street Legend Issues Urgent A.I. Stock Warning

Chaikin Analytics

Buying Nvidia in 2025? Wall Street Legend Issues Urgent A.I. Stock Warning

Chaikin Analytics

Michigan: Say Goodbye to Your High Car Insurance Bill if You Live in These Zip Codes

Forbes

Who Charges the Most for Car Insurance in Michigan?(Check Zip Code)

OTTO Quotes

Nvidia's New Rival (Hint: It's Not AMZN)

Motley Fool

New Small Electric Car For Seniors - The Price May Surprise You

FavoriteSearches | Search Ads

Neurologists: Forget Gabapentin, These Shoes are a Must

Barefoot Vitality