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What Happens If TikTok Shuts Down? Here's Everything We Know.

Your TikTok app could look different as soon as this weekend.

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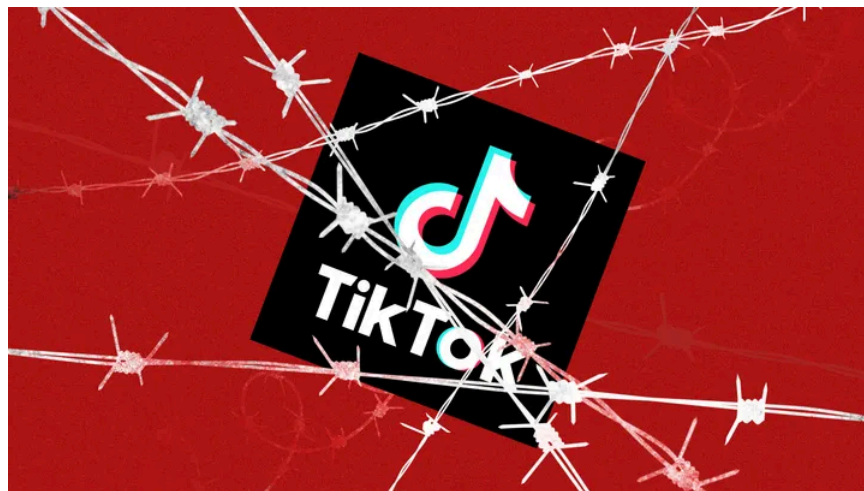
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U.S. users could see changes to TikTok as soon as Sunday.

Bad news for TikTok lovers in the U.S.: You may not be able to see your beloved For You Page soon.

As part of the terms set by a federal law President [Joe Biden](#) signed this spring, TikTok will no longer be able to operate in the U.S. unless ByteDance, its Chinese owner, sells the platform by Jan. 19. That deadline is this weekend.

So far, an 11th-hour deal to spare TikTok hasn't come to pass. Because the ban's timing comes on the last full day of Biden's presidency, [it will be up to President-elect Donald Trump](#) to decide how to implement it. Trump is [reportedly](#) weighing an executive order that would delay enforcement of the ban, but it is legally questionable if that could overturn a law that Congress approved with bipartisan support.

TikTok challenged the ban and took its case to the Supreme Court. But during oral arguments earlier this month, a majority of the Supreme Court justices appear inclined to uphold the ban, [suggesting that national security interests](#) justified the law's restrictions on free speech.

HuffPost reached out to computer science experts about what will likely happen once the ban goes into effect. Here's what you could see:

What will happen to my TikTok app on day of the ban and weeks later?

If the ban is upheld, one likely scenario is that TikTok will quickly cease operating in the U.S. "On January 19th, as I understand it, we shut down," TikTok lawyer Noel Francisco [told Supreme Court justices](#) during arguments.

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According to [The Information](#) and [Reuters](#), TikTok reportedly plans to immediately close U.S. operations of its social media app on Sunday, the ban deadline. Reuters [reported](#) that users who try to open the app "will see a pop-up message directing them to a website with information about the ban."

Under this scenario, the app would not work at all anymore after Sunday. New U.S. users would not be able to download the app and old users would not be able to access their feeds, because the law bans app stores and internet hosting services from providing service to TikTok in the U.S.

There are scenarios in which the app does not immediately go dark, but the details are unclear. "Americans shouldn't expect to see TikTok suddenly banned on Sunday," an unnamed

Biden administration official [told](#) NBC News on Wednesday night.

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What happened when India banned TikTok also offers clues as to what could happen in the U.S. Following border violence between India and China, the Indian government banned TikTok and the app was removed from [Google](#) and Apple stores. Its website is [now blocked](#) for people in India.

Even if the app remains on your phone, it may not be able to receive updates, and it will eventually become unusable, said Kate Ruane, director of the Free Expression Project at the Center for Democracy and Technology, a group that joined an [amicus brief](#) supporting the First Amendment rights of TikTok users.

“Over time, without these updates, the quality of the app will degrade and, eventually, [it] will likely become incompatible with people’s operating systems,” she said. “People using browsers will also have a hard time accessing TikTok because the services — like file hosting and domain name service hosting — required to [use TikTok] will not be allowed to provide those services [to TikTok] in the United States any longer.”

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What happens if I use a VPN to access TikTok?

VPNs, or virtual private networks, are popular tools in countries with strict censorship. VPNs hide your IP address, which makes it harder for advertisers — and governments, in this case — to track your web activities.

So if your internet service provider blocks TikTok's domain, you would still be able to use a VPN to access it, said [Central Michigan University computer science professor Qi Liao](#).

"It is entirely legal and encouraged to use here to increase security and privacy. For example, I use VPN for work every day," Liao said. "The only issue may be performance and convenience issues. Network metrics such as bandwidth, latency, jitter, etc. may be ... subject to VPN providers."

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But in TikTok's case, using a VPN won't solve the larger problem of the app's performance worsening over time for U.S. users. In other words, you may find a way to access TikTok, but it will not be the fully functioning app you remember. "The service likely will not be the same as it was prior to the ban taking effect," Ruane said.

Would other Chinese-owned social media apps get banned too?

It's likely that Lemon8, the Chinese-owned TikTok alternative, could also be banned, based on what [the law](#) states, Ruane said.

"The law prohibits the provision of certain services to 'foreign adversary-controlled applications,'" she explained. "'Foreign adversary-controlled applications' are defined to include mobile applications and websites that are operated directly or indirectly by ByteDance, TikTok or other covered companies."

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In other words, since ByteDance owns Lemon8, the law will treat Lemon8 as also subject to the ban, "meaning it will also likely disappear from app stores," Ruane said.

Unlike Lemon8, TikTok alternative RedNote, which is owned by a Chinese company and is based in China, is not explicitly named in the law, so it is not automatically subject to the ban. However, since the app does have Chinese origins, Congress could potentially compel the platform to divest its U.S. operations from Chinese ownership if the app is determined to be a national security threat, putting it in the same dilemma as TikTok.

Or, Ruane said, the president “could designate [RedNote] to be a foreign adversary-controlled app if he determines it is controlled by a foreign adversary and a significant threat to national security,” Ruane said.

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Can't I just download TikTok outside of app stores?

There are ways to download apps outside of the official Google Play store and Apple App Store. These unauthorized techniques are called “sideloading” or “[jailbreaking](#).” They are not generally illegal, but they could get you in trouble with the manufacturer of your device.

“‘Sideloading’ is permitted by Google’s terms of service but ‘jailbreaking’ is not permitted by Apple, meaning jailbreaking an Apple device could void warranties and have other consequences,” Ruane explained. For example, your devices could have a shorter battery life.

Besides, “sideloading” and “jailbreaking” are a short-term fix to the larger problem of the TikTok app worsening over time for U.S. users.

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“These workarounds may allow updates to the TikTok app, which might alleviate anticipated degradation for a longer period, but likely would not prevent the degradation that will occur from internet hosting services no longer being provided to TikTok in the U.S.,” Ruane said.

The Social Video Platforms People Are Using As TikTok Alternatives

What makes TikTok special is its eerily accurate For You Page algorithm and its irreverent, wholesome and funny commenters. There’s no app that is exactly like TikTok, but there are a growing list of alternative short-form video apps that people are migrating to right now. The biggest contenders:

RedNote ([iOS](#), [Android](#))

Also called Xiaohongshu, which translates to “little red book” in English, this app [became the top-downloaded free app](#) in Apple’s App Store on Monday. Reportedly, [more than 700,000 new users](#) joined RedNote this week.

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Dubbing themselves “[TikTok refugees](#),” U.S. TikTok users are documenting their move to RedNote, along with cross-cultural exchanges on food, politics and healthcare they are having with longtime Chinese users.

Keep in mind that Xiaohongshu’s default language is Mandarin Chinese. But that hasn’t been a deterrent to determined TikTokers. Language-learning app Duolingo reported Wednesday that it has seen a [216% spike](#) in U.S. people learning Mandarin Chinese, compared to last year.

oh so NOW you’re learning mandarin
— Duolingo (@duolingo) [January 14, 2025](#)

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Lemon8 (iOS, Android)

Lemon8 is a lifestyle-focused short-form video app that looks similar to Pinterest. The main drawback with Lemon8 is that it is also owned by ByteDance, the same parent company that owns TikTok, and may be subject to the same ban.

YouTube Shorts

The video staple YouTube has Shorts, which appear similar to TikTok's video feed. The biggest advantage with this platform is its reach. Besides [Facebook](#), YouTube is the [most widely used](#) social media platform in the U.S., according to the Pew Research Center.

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Instagram Reels

Instagram Reels already recirculate TikToks, so they should look familiar to any TikTok fan. Launched in 2020, Reels has a short-form video feed and offers text options, filters, and audio tools that are similar to what TikTokers use.

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