

The possibility of a US TikTok ban is reaching an inflection point

Article

The news: Rumblings about the possibility of a TikTok ban are reaching a boiling point. The US House of Representatives **voted Wednesday to give President Joe Biden the power to ban TikTok from the US outright**, capping off a month that saw several governments put restrictions on the app.

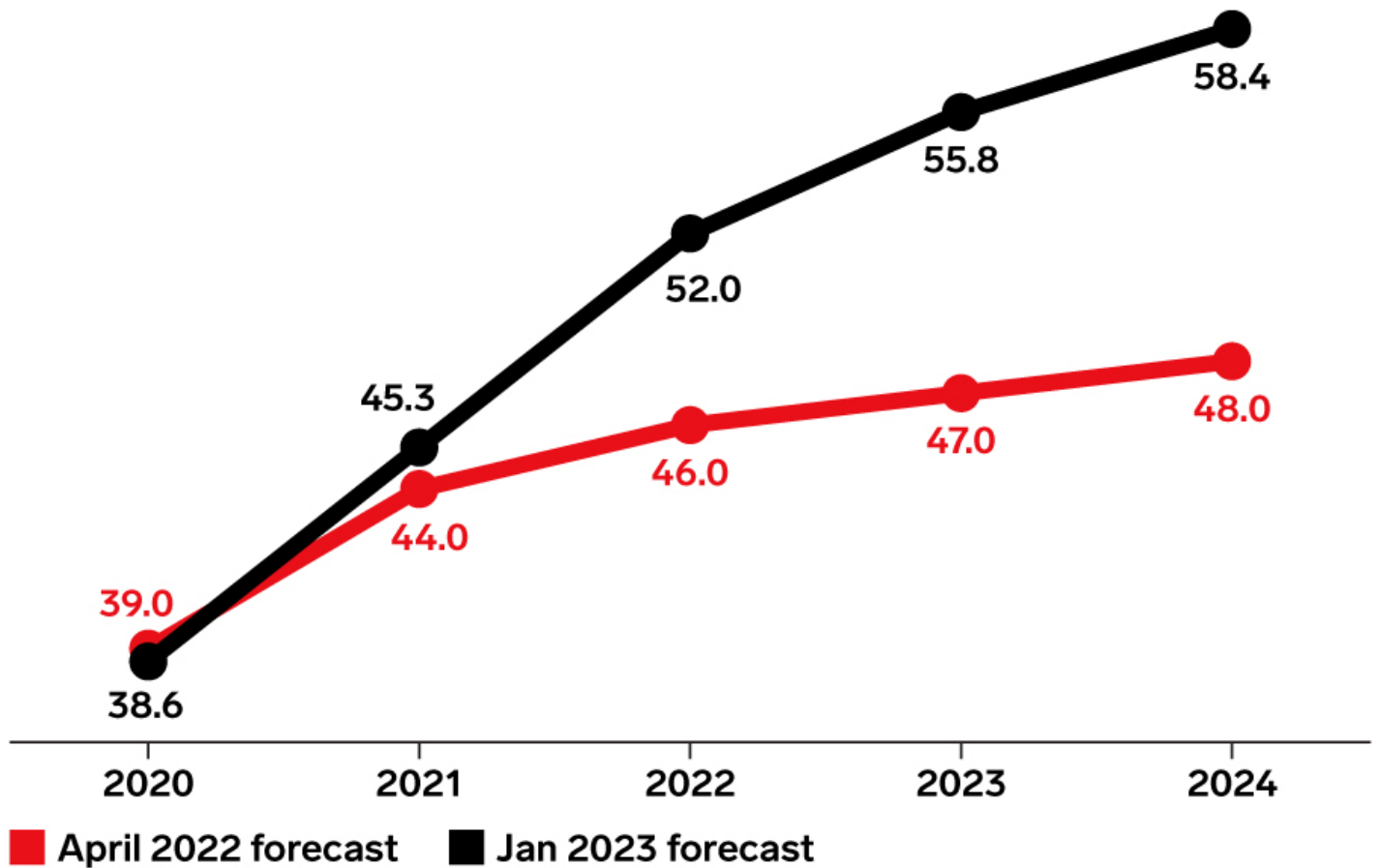
- Feeling the heat, TikTok has offered a series of olive branches to regulators like opening its back end to researchers and restructuring its US business. This week brought its most recent concession: **a one-hour daily time limit on TikTok usage for users under 18.**

Why a time limit matters: The US discussion around TikTok has been focused on the two issues of data privacy and teen impact. The latter is an issue across social media, but TikTok's explosive growth and dominance over teen culture have made it an especially scrutinized target, Insider Intelligence principal analyst **Jasmine Enberg** writes.

- A spring 2022 survey from Pew Research found that exposure to explicit content and excessive time spent were the top two concerns US parents had about their children's social media use—and kids are spending a lot of time on TikTok.
- Just last week, we published our report on time spent with TikTok, which found that while **adult TikTok users will spend 56 minutes per day on the app in 2023**, adult Gen Z users will spend **1 hour and 19 minutes**. While we don't forecast minors' time spent on social media, other sources and TikTok's multiple attempts to address time spent suggest the demographic's numbers are much, much higher than adults.
- TikTok has introduced self-appointed usage timers before, but it wasn't enough to ease concerns. Now, users who exceed 60 minutes of scrolling will have to put in a passcode to continue—but, of course, the time limit can easily be bypassed by going into the app's settings. TikTok isn't about to let those valuable eyes go to waste.

Just as the previous time limit didn't lift scrutiny, neither will the flimsily enforced new one. As Insider Intelligence principal analyst **Debra Aho Williamson** points out in a recent LinkedIn post, TikTok is actively rolling out features designed to *increase* time spent like longer video lengths and live streaming and shopping features.

How Has the Forecast for Average Daily Time Spent on TikTok by US Adult Users Changed? *minutes, 2020-2024*



Note: ages 18+ who access their TikTok account at least once per month; includes all time spent on TikTok; includes usage via any device
Source: eMarketer, Jan 2023

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The big red button: All that leads up to the House's expansion of President Biden's ability to ban the app. It's difficult to predict what TikTok's fate will ultimately be—the app is a bright spot for advertising amid an industrywide slump, and an outright ban would likely be highly unpopular with Gen Z adults and teen users, not to mention free speech backers.

- The simple possibility of President Biden being able to hit the “eject” button is enough to bring this chapter to an inflection point, be that a forced sell-off of TikTok’s US business, a ban, or otherwise.
- Should those changes come to pass, TikTok’s elder competitors **Instagram** and **YouTube**, which have made a business of copying the app’s format, could swoop in to fill the void, summarily removing a rising threat to the ad duopoly’s dominance—which itself could be another reason regulators might not pursue an outright ban.