

# Apple's child exploitation dilemma isn't going away anytime soon

Article

**The news:** A global coalition of **more than 90 policy and civil rights organizations** are [calling](#) on **Apple CEO Tim Cook** to put the brakes on Apple's child sexual abuse media (CSAM) scanning tool. The groups—which include the **ACLU**, the **Electronic Frontier Foundation**, the **Center for Democracy and Technology**,—urged the CEO to “abandon” the company's plans,

citing fears that the tools could be used to “” censor protected speech, [and] threaten the privacy and security of people around the world.”

The letter also claims that algorithms designed to detect sexually explicit material are “notoriously unreliable,” often mistakenly flagging art, educational resources, and other imagery as sexual content.

**The clock’s ticking:** The tools are part of the iOS 15 update, which is expected to roll out next month.

**How we got here:** Apple’s CSAM prevention efforts drew prompt and fervid [criticism](#) from privacy advocates almost as soon as they were announced. Privacy advocates worry the features could weaken Apple’s encryption, or be used by governments to quash political dissenters.

- In response, Apple released [multiple](#) documents detailing safeguards it claims it’s putting in place.
- Apple is also reportedly [facing](#) growing internal criticism from its own employees.
- Meanwhile, last week, a group of researchers claimed they had reverse-engineered an early version of the CSAM filter code and were able to trick it into mislabeling images. Apple has disputed the findings, per Vice.

**Why this matters:** Prolonged interrogations of Apple’s privacy commitments could damage one of its key [competitive advantages](#): consumer privacy.

- **24%** of users who switched from Android to an iPhone in the past five years said they thought Apple was safer.
- **18%** said they switched because they wanted devices with stronger privacy protections, per Consumer Reports.

**The bigger picture:** Continued pressure from advocacy groups deflates any hope Apple may have had of the issue fizzling out.

Instead, Apple’s decision to stand by the tool — or even withdraw it — could be a watershed moment for the company, and an inflection point for consumer privacy writ large.

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# Why Android users switch to Apple

*% of US users who have switched devices*

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An Apple device is safer and has more security features than other devices



24%

Wanted a phone with better protections for my privacy so that my data isn't stored or accessed by anyone but me



18%

Wanted apps that are better vetted for security and privacy



15%

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Source: *Consumer Reports, 2020*

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