



Written by [Luis Miguel](#) on March 18, 2023

TikTok Launches Influencer Campaign to Stop Ban Amid FBI Probe

Is TikTok pulling out all the stops to prevent its business in the United States from going under?

As TikTok faces increasing scrutiny from U.S. policymakers, the video-based social media giant is implementing a fitting strategy: [Deploying an army of influencers](#) to lobby on its behalf in Washington, D.C.

The move comes as the Biden White House is pressuring ByteDance, the Chinese firm that owns TikTok, to sell the app or else be subject to a ban in the United States.

The federal entity that is specifically demanding that ByteDance sell its most popular platform is the Committee on Foreign Investment (CFIUS) in the United States, which has spent years probing TikTok and its parent company.

In a final bid to avoid a sale and prevent a ban, TikTok has recruited dozens of content creators with significant followings on the app to participate in a Wednesday press conference. *Politico* reports that TikTok is covering these influencers' travel costs.

"Lawmakers in Washington debating TikTok should hear firsthand from people whose lives would be directly affected by their decisions," TikTok spokesman Jamal Brown said in a statement. "We look forward to welcoming our creators to our nation's capital, helping them make their voices heard, and continuing to drive meaningful impact in their lives and for their communities."

TikTok CEO Shou Zi Chew will also be in Washington next week, and will testify before the House Energy and Commerce Committee on Thursday.

Politico further reported of the push-pull dynamic currently playing out between TikTok and the federal government:

ByteDance has amassed an army of public relations and lobbying professionals in recent years to fend off threats to its business, which first began with efforts by the Trump administration to effectively ban the app. Although the Biden administration rescinded those executive orders, measures to ban the app have intensified among members of both parties in recent months. Recently, the White House offered its support for a bipartisan bill that could ban TikTok. The Justice Department is also reportedly investigating ByteDance for spying on American citizens, including journalists who have reported on the tech industry.

As the administration has mulled the app's fate in the [U.S.], the company brought on the Biden-connected public relations and political consulting firm, SKDK. Among former SKDK



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employees who occupy the administration's ranks are Anita Dunn, who was a founding partner of the firm and is now a senior advisor to Biden.

Meanwhile, new reporting reveals that the Department of Justice and Federal Bureau of Investigation are looking into allegations that TikTok spied on journalists.

A law enforcement official who claimed to have knowledge of the matter told [NBC News](#) on Friday that Justice Department prosecutors in Virginia are conducting the case in concert with the FBI in the Eastern District of Virginia and in D.C.

A spokesperson for ByteDance responded to the news with a statement to NBC, declaring: "We have strongly condemned the actions of the individuals found to have been involved, and they are no longer employed at ByteDance. Our internal investigation is still ongoing, and we will cooperate with any official investigations when brought to us."

Word of the investigation comes after [Forbes](#) on Thursday first reported that several ByteDance employees were fired after they were caught using reporters' TikTok accounts to access their IP addresses and other information in order to discover the source of leaks to the press from within the company.

The fact that TikTok employees were abusing private data is proof-in-action of precisely the danger of TikTok that many have been warning about for years now. President Trump wanted to ban the app because it places Americans' data within the grasp of the Chinese Communist Party.

FBI Director Christopher Wray is one of many voices within the federal government who has described TikTok as being controlled by the Chinese government.

In an [article](#) for *The New American*, Angeline Tan explained how Beijing uses TikTok to influence American citizens. "AI enables Beijing to study and categorize a user before surmising his or her motivators," Tan writes. "Data is power, and TikTok taps into data to curate content. This curated content then propels people to behave in specific ways. TikTok's influence is greater among the impressionable, young user demographic base."

In other words, TikTok uses its algorithm to deliver its users content which furthers China's aims, tailored in a way to appeal to users' particular interests. The app has billions of downloads to date, and is especially popular with younger users — one-third of TikTok users are younger than 14.

A number of countries have banned TikTok. The largest among them was India, although the ban lasted for less than a month in April 2019. Other countries, such as the United States and the United Kingdom, have banned it on government devices.

It's ironic that while the political Left in the U.S. initially sneered at the Trump administration's warnings about TikTok, the media and the feds now want to do something about since it journalists have been targeted by the app's employees.



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