Texas App Store Age Verification Law: Analysis and Commentary

The New Texas Law

On May 27th, Texas Governor Greg Abbott signed legislation requiring Apple and Google to verify the age of users before they can access their respective app stores. The law is scheduled to take effect on January 1st, giving tech companies approximately seven months to develop and implement a solution to what the speakers describe as "a problem nobody has solved yet."

Under this legislation, users under 18 years old will be required to obtain parental consent before downloading any applications from these platforms.

Industry Response

Apple's Position: Apple immediately issued a statement opposing the law, arguing that "there are better proposals that help keep kids safe without requiring millions of people to turn over their personal information." The company expressed concerns about privacy implications and the broad scope of the requirement, noting that age verification would be needed even for innocuous applications like weather updates and sports apps.

Google's Response: As of the time discussed, Google had not yet issued a public statement regarding the legislation.

Connection to Federal Legislation

This Texas law is designed to support the Kids Online Safety Act (KOSA), a federal initiative aimed at protecting children from potentially harmful online content and social media platforms. The state-level legislation represents an attempt to address child safety concerns in digital spaces.

Technical and Implementation Challenges

The Universal Verification Problem

The speakers identify a fundamental technical challenge: to verify that someone is not a minor, systems must essentially verify everyone's age. This creates a situation where all users, regardless of age, would need to provide personal identification information to access app stores.

Security and Privacy Concerns

The implementation would likely require users to upload identification documents, creating what the speakers describe as a "Texas-sized honeypot" - a massive database of personal information that could

become a target for cybercriminals. The speakers express particular concern about trusting state-level governments to maintain secure online registries linked to major tech platforms.

Enforcement Mechanism

The law appears to place the burden entirely on Apple and Google to maintain age verification databases, with no indication that the state of Texas will directly manage or oversee the verification process. This raises questions about oversight and compliance standards.

Fraud and Security Vulnerabilities

The speakers identify several potential weaknesses in the system:

- **Document Forgery**: Digital documents are easier to forge than physical identification, making the system vulnerable to falsified age verification
- **Lack of Incentive**: Apple and Google may not be strongly motivated to implement rigorous verification processes that could detect forged documents
- **Historical Precedent**: Document forgery for age verification has been a persistent problem across various industries and applications

Alternative Approaches Discussed

Content Rating System

The speakers suggest implementing a more robust content rating system similar to the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) used for video games. This would involve:

- Independent standards board rather than self-regulation by tech companies
- Explicit vetting process for applications rather than self-reporting
- Automatic mature audience designation for apps containing gambling elements, loot boxes, or gacha mechanics

Parental Control Features

The discussion includes support for enhanced parental consent requirements for in-app purchases and app downloads, suggesting that targeted protections might be more effective than universal age verification.

Political and Regulatory Irony

The speakers highlight what they perceive as a contradiction in the political approach: a party that typically advocates for small government and anti-regulation policies implementing what they describe

as "extremely burdensome regulation" with "zero concrete plan for execution." They note the irony of requiring tech companies to collect even more personal information about citizens while claiming to support limited government intervention.

Broader Political and Economic Context

Global Political Frustration

The discussion expands to observe widespread political dissatisfaction globally, with citizens frustrated with current governments across party lines. The speakers note that voters often seem motivated more by desire for change than enthusiasm for specific alternatives.

Economic Challenges

Several interconnected economic issues are identified as contributing to political instability:

- **Inflation and Economic Hardship**: Rising costs affecting daily life
- **Demographic Imbalance**: Younger populations bearing the financial burden of supporting aging populations while being economically disadvantaged compared to previous generations
- **Government Debt**: Extensive overspending by governments globally during periods when fiscal restraint might have been more appropriate
- **Empty Coffers**: Current challenging economic conditions coinciding with depleted government resources and high debt service obligations

Norway as Economic Counterexample

The speakers reference Norway's sovereign wealth fund as an example of successful long-term financial planning. The Norwegian Government Pension Fund Global, worth approximately 2.5 trillion Canadian dollars, invests in major international companies including American tech stocks like Apple, Microsoft, Nvidia, Alphabet, and Exxon.

Interestingly, the speakers note that some Norwegians reportedly express frustration with American economic policies because downturns in U.S. stock markets negatively affect their country's investment returns, given their significant holdings in American companies.

Timeline and Implementation Concerns

The January 1st effective date provides what the speakers consider an inadequate timeframe for developing and testing age verification systems. Given the technical complexity and the scale of implementation required across millions of users, the compressed timeline raises questions about the feasibility of creating secure, reliable systems that protect both children and adult privacy rights.

The law represents a significant regulatory challenge that intersects technology policy, privacy rights, child safety, and practical implementation concerns, with potential implications for how digital platforms verify user identity and age across various online services.