

Should TikTok be banned from personal devices?

What they said...

'Having TikTok on our phones is like having 80 million Chinese spy balloons flying over America.'

Darrell Issa, a United States Republican Congressman

'This whole TikTok ban has nothing to do with our safety and everything to do with [the fact that Facebook] can't beat them.'

Fiona Williams, a United States TikTok user and supporter

The issue at a glance

On April 15, 2023, Montana became the first state in the United States to impose a total ban on the TikTok app, including its installation on personal devices. TikTok as well as Apple and Google, which operate mobile app stores, will face fines if they violate the ban. [↗](#)

On February 28, 2023, the White House announced that all United States federal agencies had 30 days to delete the TikTok app from government-issued mobile devices. This directive came into effect at the start of April. [↗](#)

On April 3, 2023, the Australia government similarly announced that TikTok must be removed from all devices issued to federal employees, including politicians. The United Kingdom, Canada and New Zealand have already ordered such bans. [↗](#)

Many fear the current bans will lead to a total ban on TikTok on all devices in the United States and similar action in other Western democracies. India's nearly 200 million private users were required to stop using 59 Chinese apps, including TikTok, in 2020. [↗](#)

Those who want the app to remain available highlight the importance of freedom of expression and access to entertainment and commercial opportunities. Those who want a complete ban on TikTok stress national security and privacy concerns.

Background information

The information below is abridged from a Wikipedia entry titled 'TikTok'. The full text can be accessed at [↗](#)

TikTok, and its Chinese counterpart Douyin, is a short-form video hosting service owned by the Chinese company ByteDance. It hosts user-submitted videos, which can range in duration from 3 seconds to 10 minutes. Since their launches, TikTok and Douyin have gained global popularity. As of 2018, TikTok was available in more than 150 markets, and in 75 languages. In October 2020, TikTok surpassed 2 billion mobile downloads worldwide.

Features

The mobile app allows users to create short videos, which often feature music in the background and can be sped up, slowed down, or edited with a filter. They can also add their own sound on top of the background music. To create a music video with the app, users can choose background music from a wide variety of music genres, edit with a filter and record a 15-second video with speed adjustments before uploading it to share with others on TikTok or other social platforms.

The 'For You' page on TikTok is a feed of videos that are recommended to users based on their activity on the app. Content is curated by TikTok's artificial intelligence depending on the content a user liked, interacted with, or searched. This is in contrast to other social networks' algorithms basing such content on the user's relationships with other users and what they liked or interacted with.

Videos that users do not want to post yet can be stored in their 'drafts'. The user is allowed to see their 'drafts' and post when they find it fitting. The app allows users to set their accounts as 'private'. When first downloading the app, the user's account is public by default. The user can change to private in their settings. Private content remains visible to TikTok but is blocked from TikTok users who the account holder has not authorized to view their content.

TikTok announced a 'family safety mode' in February 2020 for parents to be able to control their children's presence on the app. There is a screen time management option, restricted mode, and the option to put a limit on direct messages. The app expanded its parental controls feature called 'Family Pairing' in September 2020

to provide parents and guardians with educational resources to understand what children on TikTok are exposed to. Content for the feature was created in partnership with online safety nonprofit, Internet Matters.

Demographics

TikTok tends to appeal to younger users, with 41 percent of its users between the ages of 16 and 24. Among these TikTok users, 90 percent said they used the app daily. As of the first quarter of 2022, there were over 100 million monthly active users in the United States and 23 million in the United Kingdom. The average user, daily, was spending 1 hour and 25 minutes on the app and opening TikTok 17 times.

Influencer marketing

TikTok has provided a platform for users to create content not only for fun but also for money. As the platform has grown significantly over the past few years, it has allowed companies to advertise and rapidly reach their intended demographic through influencer marketing. The platform's AI algorithm also contributes to the influencer marketing potential, as it picks out content according to the user's preference. Sponsored content is not as prevalent on the platform as it is on other social media apps, but brands and influencers still can make as much as they would if not more in comparison to other platforms. Influencers on the platform who earn money through engagement, such as likes and comments, are referred to as "meme machines."

Bans and attempted bans

Asia: as of January 2023, TikTok is reportedly banned in several Asian countries including Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, India, Iran, Pakistan, and Syria. The app was previously banned temporarily in Indonesia and Jordan, though both have been lifted since.

Canada: In February 2023, the Canadian government banned TikTok from all government-issued mobile devices.

Europe: In February 2023, the European Commission and European Council banned TikTok from official devices.

United Kingdom: In March 2023, the UK government announced that TikTok would be banned on electronic devices used by ministers and other employees, amid security concerns relating to the app's handling of user data. The same month, the BBC told all employees to delete TikTok off their devices unless the app was being used for work purposes. The network is also reportedly considering a ban on the app.

United States: On 6 August 2020, then **U.S. President Donald Trump** signed an order [165][166] which would ban TikTok transactions in 45 days if it was not sold by ByteDance. Trump also signed a similar order against the WeChat application owned by the Chinese multinational company Tencent.

On 14 August 2020, Trump issued another order giving ByteDance 90 days to sell or spin off its U.S. TikTok business. In the order, Trump said that there is 'credible evidence' that leads him to believe that ByteDance 'might take action that threatens to impair the national security of the United States.' Donald Trump was concerned about TikTok being a threat because TikTok's parent company was rumored to be taking United States user data and reporting it back to Chinese operations through the company ByteDance.

In June 2021, new **President Joe Biden** signed an executive order revoking the Trump administration ban on TikTok, and instead ordered the Secretary of Commerce to investigate the app to determine if it poses a threat to U.S. national security.

As of February 2023, at least 32 (of 50) states have announced or enacted bans on state government agencies, employees, and contractors using TikTok on government-issued devices. State bans only affect government employees and do not prohibit civilians from having or using the app on their personal devices.

In March 2023, Politico reported that TikTok hired SKDK to lobby amid a possible federal ban. President Biden has told TikTok that the company must divest to an American buyer or face a general ban.

The same month TikTok's CEO appeared before Congress to address the concerns surrounding the app. He stated that TikTok's data collection practices did not differ from those of US social media platforms.

Internet information

On April 14, 2023, The Conversation published a comment and analysis entitled 'Australia needs a robust cybersecurity overhaul - not whack-a-mole bans on apps like TikTok', by Lyria Bennett Moses, Professor in the Faculty of Law and Justice at UNSW, Director of the UNSW Allens Hub for Technology, Law and Innovation. In the report Professor Moses argues that Australia needs better cybersecurity provisions and privacy laws, not ad hoc responses to individual platforms. The full text can be accessed at [\[link\]](#)

On April 12, 2023, The New York Times published a comment and analysis titled 'Why Countries Are Trying to Ban TikTok'. The article presents some of the reasons for attempts to ban TikTok, where those bans currently exist, how bans might be imposed and what their effects might be. [\[link\]](#)

On April 12, 2023, The Conversation published a comment by Robert Olson, Senior Lecturer of Computing Security, Rochester Institute of Technology. The article is titled 'Banning TikTok could weaken personal cybersecurity'. In the article Olson explains that the steps many users are likely to take to sidestep any bans imposed on the use of TikTok would weaken the overall security of their personal devices. The full text can be accessed at [\[link\]](#)

On April 4, 2023, The Conversation published an article by David Tuffley, Senior Lecturer in Applied Ethics & Cyber Security at Griffith University titled 'Why was TikTok banned on government devices? An expert on why the security concerns make sense'. Tuffley explains the extent of TikTok's access to users' private data and argues that given our potential hostile relationship with China the banning of TikTok on government devices is appropriate. The full text can be accessed at [\[link\]](#)

On March 29, 2023, Vox published a comment and analysis by Rebecca Jennings titled 'Has TikTok made us better? Or much, much worse?' The article examines the cultural impact of TikTok, presenting both a positive and negative view of its effects on the populations it influences. The full text can be accessed at [\[link\]](#)

On March 26, 2023, The Sydney Morning Herald published a report titled '"We are not China": TikTok boss says the app is not a national security threat'. The report details the claims made by Lee Hunter, the head of TikTok in Australia, that the company is not a threat to Australian national security. The full text can be accessed at [\[link\]](#)

On March 24, 2023, Radio Free Asia published an analysis and comment titled 'Asia Fact Check Lab: Can TikTok share US user data with China's government?'. The article concludes that TikTok is able to share data with the Chinese government. The full text can be accessed at [\[link\]](#)

On March 23, 2023, Vanity Fair published an article by Delia Cai titled 'What We Lose If We Actually Ban TikTok'. Cai's article is an interview with German TikTok researcher Marcus Bosch in which he attempts to explain the value of TikTok, why it might be banned and what might happen if it were. The full text can be accessed at [\[link\]](#)

On March 23, 2023, the American Civil Liberties Union published a media release titled 'Congressional Efforts to Ban TikTok in the U.S. Remain a Danger to Free Speech'. The release explains some of the ways in which banning TikTok would limit United States' citizens freedom of speech. The full text can be accessed at [\[link\]](#)

On March 23, 2023, The Washington Post published an analysis by Christian Lima titled 'Warning of a 'Red Scare,' some Democrats rush to TikTok's defense'. The article explained why some Democrats were rejecting calls for a complete ban of TikTok in the United States. The full text can be accessed at [\[link\]](#)

On March 13, 2023, USA Today published an opinion piece titled 'Should the US ban TikTok? Here's why

blocking it isn't a good idea.' The article argues a ban would be an excessive infringement of civil liberties and that more minor restrictions could address concerns about the platform.

The full text can be accessed at [🔗](#)

On March 8, 2023, Sky News published a report titled 'TikTok "screams" of US national security concerns, FBI chief warns'. The article details FBI director Christopher Wray's warning that China's government could use the social media platform to control software on millions of devices.

The full text can be accessed at [🔗](#)

On March 4, 2023, El Pais published an opinion piece titled 'Does TikTok spy on us? Not any more than other social media platforms, experts say' which claims that other social media platforms are at least as intrusive as TikTok and should face similar restrictions.

The full text can be accessed at [🔗](#)

On December 13, 2022, Vox published a report titled 'Maybe Trump was right about TikTok'. The report details the growing agreement within among Democrats that former President Trump was correct when he attempted to ban TikTok.

The full text can be accessed at [🔗](#)

On December 9, 2022, Forbes magazine published a comment and analysis titled 'Why Businesses Benefit from Being on TikTok'.

The article outlines some of the advantages that businesses gain from the TikTok platform.

The full text can be accessed at [🔗](#)

On September 28, 2022, Observer published a comment and analysis titled 'TikTok Faces a \$29 Million Fine for Violating Children's Privacy, But It May Not Be Enough to Change Its Behavior'

The report examines the data TikTok accesses from young users and the extent to which it fails to observe age restrictions for social media uses.

The full text can be accessed at [🔗](#)

On September 7, 2022, The Drum published an opinion and analysis piece titled 'TikTok's got its competitors pressed. What happens next?' which examines TikTok's impact on its major competitors and the political climate which may result in it being banned.

The full text of the article can be accessed at [🔗](#)

On July 8, 2022, The Conversation published a comment and analysis by Paul Haskell-Dowland, Associate Dean (Computing and Security), Edith Cowan University and James Jin Kang, Lecturer, Computing and Security, Edith Cowan University. The article is titled, 'China could be using TikTok to spy on Australians, but banning it isn't a simple fix'. It argues that TikTok could pose a security risk for Australia but that banning the app would be difficult.

The full text can be accessed at [🔗](#)

On September 16, 2021, The Los Angeles published a report titled 'Fed up with TikTok, Black creators are moving on' which reported on numerous claims that the TikTok treats Black users prejudicially.

The full text can be accessed at [🔗](#)

On December 17, 2020, Medium published an opinion piece titled 'Why TikTok is the Most Creative Social Platform'. The article details those features of the platform which encourage creativity among its users.

The full text can be accessed at [🔗](#)

On August 17, 2020, The Conversation published an article by Joanne Orlando, Researcher: Children and Technology, Western Sydney University, titled 'TikTok can be good for your kids if you follow a few tips to stay safe'. The comment explains how TikTok can encourage children's creativity and advises parents on how to help their children use it safely.

The full text can be found at [🔗](#)

On June 28, 2020, The New York Times published an article titled 'TikTok Is Shaping Politics. But How?' which features comments from two researchers who claim that TikTok does not appear politically biased.

The full text can be accessed at [#8080FFd](#) at [🔗](#)

Arguments in favour of banning TikTok from personal devices

1. The United States sees TikTok as a threat to its national security, a view shared by some other Western nations

Those who want TikTok either banned from all devices used in the United States or forcibly sold to an American buyer are concerned that the company, as it currently exists, is a threat to United States' national security. Other nations, such as the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Australia appear to see TikTok as posing a similar threat to their security.

This concern derives from the fact that TikTok's parent company, ByteDance, is a Chinese-owned company headquartered in the capital Beijing and has an internal Chinese Communist Party (CCP) committee, with the firm's vice president, Zhang Fuping, serving as the company's CCP Committee Secretary. [🔗](#) The United States sees Chinese companies as inextricably linked to the Chinese government and the Chinese Communist Party. This view was intensified with the passing of China's 2017 National Intelligence Law. Article 14 of the law obliges all Chinese firms (referred to as 'relevant institutions, organizations, and citizens') to give the government assistance in areas of intelligence and national security if requested. The same legislation prohibits the disclosure of this activity if the Chinese state deems it to be secret. [🔗](#) Critics claim that this legislation would oblige TikTok (through its parent company ByteDance) to make users' private data available (on request) to the Chinese government.

The Biden administration sees TikTok as an agent of the Chinese government and regards China as a hostile state. On March 7, 2023, a bill was put before the United States Congress titled 'The RESTRICT Act'. This proposed legislation would empower the United States Secretary of Commerce to act against foreign businesses who offer 'information and communications technologies products or services' that are considered a threat to national security. These foreign businesses would have to be under the control of what the proposed Act describes as a 'foreign adversary'. Six states are designated as 'foreign adversaries' - China, Cuba, Iran, North Korea, Russia, and Venezuela. [🔗](#)

The Chairman of the United States Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, Senator Mark Warner, a Democrat representing Virginia, was a co-presenter of the RESTRICT Act. In a Fox News interview given on March 5, 2023, Senator Warner stated, 'Well I think for a long time, conventional wisdom was, the more you bring China into the world order, the more they're going to change. That assumption was just plain wrong. China...in 2016... [made] it explicitly clear that [for] every company in China, their first obligation is to the Communist Party. So, we have never had a potential adversary like China...They have \$500 billion in intellectual property theft, and we are in a competition not just on a national security basis but on a technology basis. That's why national security now includes telecommunications, satellites, artificial intelligence, quantum computing...

[In] terms of foreign technology coming into America, we've got to have a systemic approach to make sure we can ban or prohibit it when necessary.' [🔗](#)

The United States Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has the same view of China. It has similarly stated, 'The counterintelligence and economic espionage efforts emanating from the government of China and the Chinese Communist Party are a grave threat to the economic well-being and democratic values of the United States... the adversary is not the Chinese people or people of Chinese descent or heritage. The threat comes from the programs and policies pursued by an authoritarian government.' The FBI has further stated its belief that 'the Chinese government is seeking to become the world's greatest superpower through predatory lending and business practices, systematic theft of intellectual property, and brazen cyber intrusions.' [🔗](#)

Australia has been less explicit than the United States in identifying China as an espionage threat. However, on February 21, 2023, Mike Burgess, secretary-general of security at the Australian Security Intelligence Organization (ASIO), altered Australians to the general risk he believes Australia faces. He said, 'Based on what ASIO is seeing, more Australians are being targeted for espionage and foreign interference than at any time in Australia's history - more hostile foreign intelligence services, more spies, more targeting, more harm, more ASIO investigations, more ASIO disruptions.' [🔗](#)

2. TikTok could exploit users' private data to harm their countries

Opponents of TikTok claim that China could require the company to pass on users' private data which could then be used against nations such as the United States and Australia.

Critics have warned that TikTok collects large amounts of potentially sensitive information from users. The United States Federal Communications Commissioner, Brendan Carr, has noted, 'TikTok is not just another video app. That's the sheep's clothing. It harvests swaths of sensitive data that new reports show are being accessed in Beijing.'

TikTok doesn't just see its users dance videos. It collects search and browsing histories, keystroke patterns, biometric identifiers, draft messages, and metadata, plus it has collected the text, images, and videos that are stored on a device's clipboard.' [Ellie Abraham](#), writing for *Indy100*, in July 2022, further claimed, 'Whether or not you have signed up for an account on the app, the moment you access the site, cookies and other trackers are able to track you... It can also collect the metadata for content that you might make on the app but decide to not publish and delete.'

TikTok generates data automatically by parsing through user-generated content. The digital privacy blog, *Clario*, explains what TikTok accesses and stores, '...[A]ny video or image made or uploaded to the platform (even if it was never published) provides audio and visual data for TikTok to analyze, including: biometric faceprints and voiceprints (as permitted by law); face and body features within imagery; text transcripts of spoken audio and identifying objects and environments.' *Clario* also notes, 'TikTok also has access to your messages - composed, sent, and received - and cookies that track your behavior on and off the platform.' In addition, *MakeUseOf.com* notes, 'TikTok also takes advantage of every access permission you give it, collecting information about your phone's model, screen resolution, current OS, phone number, email address, location, and even contact list.'

Critics claim that both the amount of data that TikTok acquires on any individual user and the collective mass of data it has about a population pose dangers from a national security perspective. In the United States Republican Congressman Michael McCaul has called TikTok a 'spy balloon in your phone,' and fellow Republican Congressman Mike Gallagher has described TikTok as 'digital fentanyl.' It has been suggested that individuals whom the Chinese government wished to target could be blackmailed or discredited through the information acquired from TikTok databanks. In an article published on October 20, 2022, the business magazine *Forbes* claims to have seen records of ByteDance plans to use data it held to locate and surveil individual American citizens. According to an internal email, TikTok has admitted that it used its own app to spy on reporters as part of an attempt to track down journalists' sources. The data was accessed by employees of ByteDance, TikTok's Chinese parent company, and was used to track the reporters' physical movements. IP addresses of journalists who were using the TikTok app were accessed to learn if they were in the same location as employees suspected of leaking confidential information. The effort was unsuccessful but resulted in at least four members of staff based in both the United States and China improperly accessing the data. The tracking of these reporters was done within the company for its own purposes and there is no suggestion of Chinese government involvement. However, the fact the ByteDance was prepared to use personal data in this way has provoked further concern about its lack of regard for data confidentiality.

Some Australian commentators and politicians have also expressed dissatisfaction regarding TikTok's security protocols and their lack of openness about them. Ausma Bernotaite, a postdoctoral researcher at the Charles Sturt University Graduate School of Policing and Security, has stated, 'TikTok has not presented itself as a very trustworthy and transparent company on how... data is shared or accessed between different countries. It's not unreasonable to make an assumption that if TikTok data can be accessed in China it would be easily made available to public security and law enforcement.' Opposition shadow minister for cyber security, James Patterson, has argued the Chinese government could request TikTok hand over data without the user - or TikTok Australia - even being aware. The Senator has stated, 'I don't use TikTok because I regard it as a serious national security threat.'

3. TikTok has the capacity to shape users' online information resulting in harmful or biased political messages

Those who believe TikTok should be banned from all private devices are concerned that the Chinese-owned platform will present a disruptive or biased worldview to its Western users and thus damage political life in other countries.

Critics note that the TikTok algorithms seem to polarize, or drive to opposing extremes, the political views of its users. In an opinion piece published in the John Hopkins Newsletter on October 1, 2023, Samhii Boppana stated, 'However TikTok's structure, algorithm and moderation are inherently hostile to productive political discussions and instead encourage extremism.' Boppana explains that the algorithm's function is to direct users toward their pre-existing preferences. This means the platform tends to intensify and simplify users' political views. Boppana states, 'In my experience with TikTok, the nuance of politics is lost. Buzzwords are privileged over reasonable and complex arguments. Short videos with outrageous and uncomplicated claims will gain more traction than longer videos discussing more detailed evidence and viewpoints...political positions... [are reduced to] black-and-white stances and... one side [is presented] as unequivocally right or unequivocally wrong.' [↗](#) This tendency has been condemned as divisive and destructive of democracy. For example, extremist Republican claims made on TikTok about vote fixing seem to have fostered the belief among many people that the result of the 2020 United States presidential ballot was invalid. [↗](#)

Relatedly, it has been claimed that TikTok seems prone to spread political misinformation. In October 2022 the digital watchdog Cybersecurity for Democracy published research findings that showed TikTok was failing to filter out false information in the leadup to the United States midterm elections. The researchers tested the effectiveness of the TikTok's vetting processes by posting false or harmful information on the platform. These posts included ads containing the wrong election date, false claims about voting requirements, and rhetoric dissuading people from voting. TikTok approved 90 percent of test advertisements featuring election misinformation. This was a far higher rate than that of the other social media platforms tested. Critics have noted that TikTok is not open to being scrutinized. Unlike Twitter and Meta, TikTok does not offer tools for external audits. [↗](#)

Apart from a systemic tendency to polarize user political views and a failure to detect and filter out misinformation, TikTok has been accused of deliberately censoring and misrepresenting political material in its feeds. For example, it has been claimed that TikTok has suppressed feeds dealing with the Chinese government's actions against a religious and ethnic minority group in China, the Uyghurs. In August 2020, of 444 publicly visible videos relating to the Uyghurs, only 5.6 percent were critical of the Chinese Communist Party's policies. It has been claimed that censorship was being practised regarding these posts. Posts on TikTok are ranked primarily according to the number of 'likes' they receive. Researchers noted that one video with the caption 'Free Uyghur' had 2,831 likes and was ranked 129th on the page whereas other videos expressing a different opinion but with similar numbers of 'likes' appeared among the top 30 videos. [↗](#) In November 2020, TikTok's United Kingdom Director of Public Policy, Elizabeth Kanter, admitted during a parliamentary committee hearing that the app had previously censored content that was critical of the Chinese government in regard to forced labor of Uyghur Muslims in China. Kanter later withdrew this admission. [↗](#)

Critics maintain that the TikTok platform could be used more generally to promote propaganda that conflicted with the interests of other nations. United States Senator Mark Warner has stated, 'TikTok can be used as a propaganda mechanism for the Communist Party of China.' [↗](#) The potential risks as seen by the United States were summed up by Salvador Rodriguez in an article published by CNBC on June 25, 2021. Rodriguez stated, 'One set of risks is how the Chinese government could spread propaganda or influence the thinking of the Americans who use TikTok each month. This could be done through short-length videos that the Chinese government may want to show to Americans, whether it be factual content or misinformation.' [↗](#)

4. TikTok has been accused of having adverse effects on children and young adults

Among those arguing for a ban on the use of TikTok on personal devices are those who are concerned about the app's negative effect on its young user base.

One of the major accusations levelled at TikTok is that its algorithms work in a way that effectively addicts its users to its content and that this effect is intensified among young users. Experts have claimed that children and teenagers find it very difficult to disconnect from the platform because the brain's prefrontal cortex that targets impulse control and decision-making does not fully develop until age 25. Dr. Michael Manos of Cleveland Children's Clinic has claimed, 'TikTok clips are designed to continue to engage attention and to turn away is very difficult because it's like, after you've been -- say -- fasting for three days, then there's a sumptuous meal in front of you, it's hard for anybody to pull back.' [↗](#) The app's capacity to engage its users is shown by the fact that 90 percent of its users access it every day. [↗](#) The supposed addictive effect

on young users is said to be particularly concerning given the large percentage of TikTok users who are 25 or younger. The health care digit marketing agency Omnicore found that in 2022, 21.5 percent of TikTok's global audience were females between the ages of 18 and 24 years, while male users of the same age made up approximately 17 percent of the platform's audience. In the United States, the biggest TikTok age group in 2022 were 18-19-year-olds (67 percent).[↗](#)

It has also been claimed that the content TikTok offers young users is predominantly trivial and non-demanding. It is said that TikTok's sister platform, Douyin, which has been created exclusively for the use of the Chinese market, treats its young users far more carefully than TikTok does non-Chinese teens. Douyin has enforced limits which prevent long scrolling sessions. It also has different algorithms which direct young users toward educational content rather than the predominantly entertainment material offered to users outside China. The Douyin material features videos of teachers being celebrated, at-home science experiments and a man solving a Rubik's cube blindfolded. Psychologist Jean Twenge has stated, 'The contrast between the U.S. and Chinese versions is a great example of why the US needs more regulation around social media, especially for kids.' Others have claimed that the disruptive effect of the TikTok platform warrants it being banned. [↗](#)

Critics also claim that TikTok's algorithms intensify young users' exposure to potentially harmful content. Imran Ahmed of the Center for Countering Digital Hate (CCDH) has stated 'The algorithm recognises vulnerability and, instead of seeing it as something it should be careful around, it sees it as a potential point of addiction - of helping to maximise time on the platform for that child by serving them up content that might trigger some of their pre-existing concerns.' CCDH's research suggests that where a user's response to initial exposure material suggests an interest in dieting or cosmetic surgery they are directed toward sites which will increase the potential for self-harm. Ahmed said that the centre's research, which was based on 13-year-old users in the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, and Australia, suggested that, within about two-and-a-half minutes of setting up a TikTok account, young people could be pushed self-harm content - and eating disorder content within eight. Another of the centre's surveys suggested a 14-year-old boy on the platform was likely to be pushed content from the aggressively misogynist Andrew Tate in less than three minutes of setting up an account. Ahmed concluded, 'The truth is that they are being flooded with content that gives them an extremely distorted view of themselves, their bodies, their mental health, and how they compare to other people.' [↗](#)

The Australian eating disorder support body, Butterfly Foundation, has similarly warned that TikTok is fostering eating disorders. National helpline team leader and clinician, Amelia Trinick, has noted, 'These videos depict potentially harmful content that has the ability to reinforce negative feelings, attitudes and behaviours - in relation to body image, food and diet - to a vulnerable youth audience.' [↗](#) The English Office of the Information Commissioner has also suggested that the exposure of children to potentially harmful material is widespread on the TikTok platform. The Commissioner's Office has claimed more than one million underage children could have been exposed, with the platform collecting and using their personal data. The Commissioner's Office stated, 'That means that their data may have been used to track them and profile them, potentially delivering harmful, inappropriate content at their very next scroll.' [↗](#)

5. TikTok treats creators unequally

Many of those who believe TikTok should be banned from private devices are concerned at the prejudicial way in which the company is accused of treating user groups.

It has been claimed that the TikTok's algorithms are very physiognomic, that is, that they relate strongly to physical characteristics, especially features of the face, the body, or other aspects of outward physical appearance. [↗](#) This has been claimed to have several consequences. It tends to mean, for example, that users whom the TikTok algorithm categorises as preferring pale-skinned presenters will tend to see feeds featuring only pale-skinned presenters. AI researcher Marc Faddoul (Associate Researcher with Professor Hany Farid, in the Berkely School of Information at the University of California) has suggested that this has consequences beyond limiting what certain groups of people are exposed to, based on the superficial criterion of physical appearance. It can also mean that users who belong to a less common physical or racial type get far fewer recommendations and thus far fewer viewers. For example, if many popular creators on TikTok are White, for example, this can prevent creators of color with smaller followings from being seen and recommended as often on the platform. [↗](#)

Many Black TikTok creators have alleged that not only are White creators given preference, but that Black creators are actively discriminated against. Since the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020, users of color have claimed that TikTok handles their accounts and content in ways that seem unfair and racially biased. [🔗](#) The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Review has noted, that TikTok creators from marginalised groups seem to be subject to targeted censorship. One MIT researcher has noted that he tried to enter certain phrases in his bio, some of them ('Black lives matter,' 'supporting black people,' 'supporting black voices,' and 'supporting Black success') were flagged as inappropriate content. Similar phrases referring to White activist groups were accepted. For example, if the researcher entered 'supporting white supremacy' this was allowed. Phrases such as 'I am a neo nazi' and 'I am an antisemitic' were accepted, while "I am a black man" was flagged. [🔗](#)

There has also been controversy around White commenters harassing Black creators without any apparent action being taken against them and racist videos going viral without being taken down. There have also been accusations that White creators have been allowed to steal material originally produced by Black creators. Viral dance challenges, a hallmark of the app, have proved particularly fraught, with white influencers accused of taking credit for moves created by Black choreographers. [🔗](#)

TikTok has also been accused of discriminating against poor, queer, 'ugly', overweight and disabled creators. In 2019, TikTok admitted to implementing a set of policies that had suppressed content created by users assumed to be 'vulnerable to cyberbullying.' As examples of users 'susceptible to bullying or harassment,' the policy listed people with facial disfigurement, autism, Down syndrome, and 'Disabled people or people with some facial problems such as birthmark, slight squint... etc.' [🔗](#) This was in response to criticisms from a range of minority groups that the platform appeared to discriminate against their material. On December 2, 2019, the German site Netzpolitik reported that TikTok asked moderators to watch 15-second videos and decide if the creator looked like the type of person others might want to bully. If so, moderators were instructed to add flags to the accounts of these 'vulnerable' users. These flags would stop their videos from being shown to audiences outside their home countries and, in some cases, would even prevent their videos from appearing in other users' feeds. A list of flagged users obtained by Netzpolitik included people with and without disabilities, whose bios included hashtags like #fatwoman and #disabled or had rainbow flags and other LGBTQ identifiers. [🔗](#)

The policy was presented as intended to protect at risk users from abuse.

However, subsequent reports have suggested that TikTok's policy may have been motivated by a desire to attract a wider user base rather than simply to protect vulnerable users. On March 16, 2020, The Intercept published an internal TikTok document, intended for TikTok moderators, which instructed them to suppress uploads from users with flaws such as 'abnormal body shape,' 'ugly facial looks,' 'dwarfism', 'obvious beer belly,' 'too many wrinkles,' 'eye disorders,' and other 'low quality' traits. The moderates were told that this filtering was necessary to attract an expanding customer base. The directions stated, 'if the character's appearance or the shooting environment is not good, the video will be much less attractive to...new users' [🔗](#)

Arguments against banning TikTok from personal devices

1. TikTok claims its app is not being used for Chinese espionage and its 'For You' pages are not politically biased

TikTok has claimed that it has not and would not give user data over to the Chinese government. On March 23, 2022, TikTok's chief executive officer, Shou Zi Chew, told a United States Congressional hearing 'TikTok has never shared, or received a request to share, U.S. user data with the Chinese government. Nor would TikTok honor such a request if one were ever made.' [🔗](#) TikTok maintains it is a separate commercial entity that exists to serve a user base outside China. TikTok has stated that all its data storage is outside China and protected against unauthorised access. Prior to storing its users' data on Oracle cloud-based servers in 2022, TikTok stated that it 'has long stored US user data in our own data centers in the US and Singapore. Our Virginia data center includes physical and logical safety controls such as gated entry points, firewalls, and intrusion detection technologies.' [🔗](#)

Since 2020, TikTok claims it has invested \$1.5 billion dollars to ensure sensitive user data is kept on United States soil, cannot be accessed from Beijing, and is subject to United States government audits. [🔗](#) On June 18, 2022, TikTok's U.S. Security Public Policy expert, Albert Calamug, issued a media release stating,

'Today, 100 percent of US user traffic is being routed to Oracle Cloud Infrastructure. We still use our US and Singapore data centers for backup, but as we continue our work, we expect to delete US users' private data from our own data centers and fully pivot to Oracle cloud servers located in the US.' [🔗](#) Oracle Cloud Infrastructure is a United States owned data storage service. In addition, TikTok is establishing a new department of United States security experts who will be solely responsible for managing United States user data. This department will have direct reporting ties to the United States government. Albert Calamug has stated that "[t]his is an important direction from a systems and data security standpoint, and part of our focus on ... building a security-first culture.' [🔗](#) TikTok's chief executive officer, Shou Zi Chew, has stated, 'The bottom line is this: [TikTok's] American data [is] stored on American soil, by an American company overseen by American personnel.' [🔗](#)

Several independent commentators have claimed that there is no evidence that TikTok has ever supplied United States users' data to the Chinese government. The journalist Chris Stokel-Walker, who has written a book about TikTok's rise, has stated, 'I've been trying for years to find any links to the Chinese state... I've spoken to scores of TikTok employees, past and present, in pursuit of such a connection. But I haven't discovered it. I can't say that link doesn't exist ... But none of us has found the smoking gun.' [🔗](#) Similar observations have been made in Australia where it has been noted that in 2020 investigations initiated by the then Coalition Government found no evidence to suggest that the security interests of the nation, or individual citizens, were being compromised by TikTok. [🔗](#)

With regard to accusations that TikTok curates users' feeds for political purposes, the company admits that it does shape its recommendations on each user's 'For You' page. However, TikTok claims this shaping is guided by user preferences and is not for any specific political purpose. TikTok states, 'When you open TikTok and land in your For You feed, you're presented with a stream of videos curated to your interests, making it easy to find content and creators you love. This feed is powered by a recommendation system that delivers content to each user that is likely to be of interest to that particular user. of the same standout videos, each person's feed is unique and tailored to that specific individual...

On TikTok, the For You feed reflects preferences unique to each user. The system recommends content by ranking videos based on a combination of factors - starting from interests you express as a new user and adjusting for things you indicate you're not interested in.' [🔗](#)

Some of those who have researched the platform claim not to have found a platform-wide political bias. In an article published in The New York Times on June 28, 2020, Ioana Literat, an assistant professor of communication and media at Teachers College, Columbia University, stated, 'In terms of youth political expression, while there's a dynamic and influential liberal activist community on TikTok, there's actually plenty of conservative political expression, and pro-Trump voices definitely find an audience on the platform.' [🔗](#)

Professor Literat further explained, 'On TikTok, you can find powerful political statements and activist organizing. You can find young people lip-syncing speeches by Trump or Obama (both earnestly and sarcastically) ... It's hard to refer to what we see on the platform as consensus. Rather, we find that TikTok enables collective political expression for youth - that is, it allows them to deliberately connect to a like-minded audience by using shared symbolic resources.' [🔗](#)

2. TikTok supplies entertainment and a creative outlet for its many users

TikTok's supporters claim it offers many benefits for its users which would be lost if the platform were banned from private devices. Among these are its highly entertaining and engaging content and its fostering of user-created content, thereby developing its users' skills and creativity.

TikTok states that its purpose is to entertain and engage its users and to allow them to create their own unique posts. AdNews has published an article by Brett Armstrong, the General Manager, Global Business solutions for TikTok, Australia. In the article, Armstrong states, 'Users can enjoy an endless stream of engaging content tailored to their interests on the personalised "For You Feed", while creators have a raft of in-app tools at their disposal to experiment with when crafting their videos, and brands have a new way to connect with their customers..' [🔗](#) James Rothwell, TikTok's head of marketing for Europe, has stated, 'When we think about the role we play in people's lives, we are first and foremost a destination where people come to be entertained.' Survey data shows that TikTok's users view the app in the same way. Survey results indicate that approximately 75 percent of TikTok users go to the app to be entertained. [🔗](#) TikTok's actual

user data in 2021 reveal the extent to which users access the platform for entertainment. According to TikTok statistics, 'entertainment' was the most popular content category on the platform worldwide. This hashtag amassed 535 billion hashtag views. The next most popular categories included dance, pranks, fitness/sports, and home renovations/DIY. [🔗](#)

TikTok's capacity to develop users' creativity has been noted repeatedly. On December 17, 2020, Medium published an article by Nir Hindl in which Hindl states, 'TikTok attracts such a wide variety of people because it gives creators the necessary tools to develop the content they want to put into the world...The large range of video editing software, filters, and text options let users develop their story in any way they want so that they need to find a way to be more compelling than the rest.' [🔗](#)

Hindl further notes, 'Even the limitation of 60 seconds pushes creators to create better content. Users are becoming experts in using their imagination to tell jokes and stories in such a short time. TikTok creators are celebrating creativity...Most users weren't taught the rules of cinematography or have taken a course on storytelling. They are just experimenting as they go, learning the ropes and using their creative minds to produce creative content.' [🔗](#)

TikTok has been praised as a valuable creative medium, especially for young people. On August 17, 2020, The Conversation, Dr Joanne Orland, Researcher at the Department of Digital Literacy and Digital Wellbeing, Western Sydney University, noted the extent to which TikTok acts as a creative outlet for its young users. She contrasts it favourably with other forms of social media which focus on passive consumption rather than creative construction. She states, 'Passive use of technology, such as scrolling and checking social media with no purpose, can lead to addictive types of screen behaviours for young people.' Referring to TikTok, she notes, 'Whereas planning and creating content, such as making their own videos, is meaningful use of technology and curbs addictive technology behaviours. In other words, if young people are going to use technology, using it creatively, purposefully and with meaning is the type of use we want to encourage.' [🔗](#)

Defenders of TikTok argue that it supports creativity everywhere to give a worldwide audience access to the lives and cultures of millions of other users they would never see without TikTok. On April 6, 2023, Riotact published a comment by writer, editor, and media producer, Zoya Patel, in which she stated, 'I don't want to be naive about the potential threat TikTok poses, but I also don't want the unintended consequence of limiting its use more broadly to be the loss of this vibrant and diverse media environment.' [🔗](#)

3. TikTok is a valuable advertising platform for businesses

Supporters of TikTok stress its effectiveness as a means of promoting products and helping businesses both large and small attract customers. In an article published by the United States business magazine Forbes on December 9, 2022, Srikar Karra, noted, 'Since its launch, TikTok has over 1 billion active users across the globe. This huge number of people on the platform means that businesses have a lot of potential customers at their fingertips. Brands such as McDonald's, Starbucks and Pizza Hut have already capitalized on this by setting up accounts for their companies.' [🔗](#)

TikTok has been praised as a valuable platform for the promotion of many products, offering enormous market access for large scale producers and retailers. A significant instance of this is BookTok, a subcommunity of TikTok, self-described as 'the biggest book club on the planet.' Enthusiastic readers connect with one another to share book reviews, reactions, and curated lists of recommended 'must reads'. This niche corner of TikTok, with the hashtag #booktok, has amassed over 112 billion views, becoming a powerful force within the publishing industry. It has been credited for helping authors sell over 20 million books in 2021. [🔗](#) Barnes & Noble, the United States largest remaining book chain, has partnered with TikTok to promote books and reading on the platform, and stores have table displays that cater to BookTok readers. This mutually beneficial arrangement has significantly boosted Barnes & Noble's sales. [🔗](#)

Small business owners also claim to be significantly advantaged by the carefully curated promotional reach of TikTok which allows them to access a vast potential market specifically interested in their products. The product delivery service, Sendle, has explained the appeal that TikTok has for small businesses. It states, 'TikTok's rise to popularity has also attracted the attention of freelancers, solopreneurs and small business owners who have flocked to the platform to take advantage of the massive user base, powerful algorithm, and easy video production tools. According to TikTok, 74 percent of users said that the app inspired them to

find out more about a product or brand and 67 percent said that TikTok inspired them to shop even when they weren't planning to do so.' [🔗](#) Currently, a group of small businesses is lobbying the United States Congress to halt the RESTRICT Act legislation that would make it possible to ban TikTok in the United States. The group is presenting an economic argument that banning TikTok could bring financial hardship to Americans who rely on it to help generate income. [🔗](#) The same argument is being put by TikTok spokesperson Jamal Brown, who has stated, 'TikTok creators are small business owners trying to make a living and put food on their tables, teachers educating the next generation of leaders, and everyday innovators who represent the breadth of America.' [🔗](#)

It has further been noted that TikTok is particularly effective as a means of music promotion. The Musicians Institute College of Contemporary Music has explained that TikTok supplies an enormous potential audience for unknown, starting-up musicians. In an article published on March 3, 2021, the College stated, 'Budding musicians depend on...[TikTok] to promote music and build a global fan base by simply uploading their original songs to the platform. Without a doubt, TikTok can make songs from relatively unknown artists go viral overnight.' It claims that the app now has the power to create and drive trends rather than merely reflect them. It states, 'In 2016, when the app launched, you could only come across viral videos or billboard hits. Today, popular TikTok songs influence the billboard charts, rather than the other way around.' [🔗](#) The article cites the case of Olivia Rodrigo's 'Driver's License' as an instance of a TikTok created sensation. It notes, 'Since posting the video, Rodrigo's account amassed more than 10 million followers, with only ten videos posted. "Driver's License" is still trending with more than 880,000 uses...the [TikTok] app helped steer Rodrigo's music to position one on streaming platforms like Amazon and Spotify.' Referring to the platform's threatened banning, the article concludes, 'While TikTok's fate in the USA is still hanging on a cliff, the app is undoubtedly the best video-sharing platform to promote music.' [🔗](#)


4. Banning TikTok can be seen as an attack on freedom of expression and access to information


Many of those who oppose the imposition of a total ban on the use of the TikTok app see this as an unjustifiable restriction of citizens' rights to freedom of information and freedom of expression. This opposition is particularly strong in the United States where the First Amendment to the American Constitution 'prohibits any laws that... abridge the freedom of speech, infringe upon the freedom of the press...or prohibit citizens from petitioning for a governmental redress of grievances.' [🔗](#)

On March 23, 2023, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) issued a statement which declared 'Banning TikTok would violate the First Amendment. The government can't impose this type of total ban unless it's necessary to prevent extremely serious, immediate harm to national security. There's no public evidence of that type of harm, and a ban would not be the only option for addressing that harm if it did exist.' [🔗](#) Jenna Leventoff, senior policy counsel at the ACLU. "Selective bans of entire platforms would cut off the flow of information, art, and communication that social media provides, interfering with communities and connections users in the United States have with each other and with people around the world. In fact, many Americans on TikTok are using TikTok at this very moment to organize political action against an unconstitutional ban. This kind of political speech on TikTok is at the very core of what the First Amendment protects.' [🔗](#)

It has been claimed that the very popularity of TikTok in the United States would make it difficult for state or federal governments to impose a total ban as the growing number of users would be likely to see such a ban as an infringement of their civil liberties. In August 2020 TikTok had about 100 million monthly active United States users, up nearly 800 percent from January 2018. [🔗](#) When TikTok chief executive officer, Shou Zi Chew, testified before the United States Congress in March 2023, he stated that there are now 150 million regular users of TikTok in America. [🔗](#) Critics of the United States proposed ban on TikTok argue that because most of the TikTok users are young people, summarily shutting down a popular social media app will raise serious questions in the minds of this generation about the respect for freedom of speech in the United States system of governance. Young people are likely to see it as an unjustified attack on a medium of expression that they prefer. [🔗](#)


TikTok itself has claimed that a general ban on the company's app across the United States would be an infringement on the civil liberties of American citizens, restricting their rights to freedom information and freedom of expression. TikTok spokesperson Brooke Oberwetter has stated, 'Over 100 million Americans use and love TikTok. It would be unfortunate if the House Foreign Affairs Committee were to censor millions of Americans, and do so based not on actual intelligence, but on a basic misunderstanding of our corporate




structure.' 


Concerns have also been expressed in Australia that a general ban on TikTok would be an attack on freedom of information. The Pirate Party Australia is a political party based around the core tenets of freedom of information and culture and civil and digital liberties. On April 6, 2023, the Pirate Party Australia issued a media release in response to a ban on TikTok on all government devices in Australia on a federal and state level. The release states, 'While we understand the importance of national security, we must also protect citizens' rights to freedom of expression and access to information. An outright ban on TikTok could set a dangerous precedent for censoring other platforms in the future. We encourage open dialogue and cooperation between the Australian government, TikTok, and the international community to address the concerns raised.' 


5. TikTok is claimed to be the victim of Western anxiety and prejudice against China and of unfair commercial rivalry


Both the Chinese government and general supporters of TikTok argue that the bans currently imposed or proposed on the app are the product of anti-Chinese sentiment. It is also claimed that government action against TikTok has been encouraged by the app's commercial competitors, particularly Meta which runs Facebook and Instagram.

The Chinese government has claimed that Western government bans on the use of TikTok by ministers and government employees are the product of political prejudice. The Chinese government has responded to Australia's ban on TikTok from government phones and devices by describing it as an 'abuse of state power'. A Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson, Mao Ning, has stated, 'We urge Australia to...provide a fair, transparent and non-discriminatory environment for Chinese companies.' Similarly, TikTok Australia and New Zealand general manager, Lee Hunter, has argued that TikTok 'should not be treated differently to other social media platforms.' He added, 'Our millions of Australian users deserve a government which...treats all businesses fairly, regardless of country of origin.' 

Claims of anti-Chinese prejudice have also been made by United States politicians and other spokespeople. In The United States, a small group of Democratic members of the House of Congress is fighting the proposed ban on TikTok in their country. The leader of the group is the Democratic representative for New York State, Jamaal Bowman. Bowman has stated, 'Let's not have a dishonest conversation. Let's not be racist towards China and express our xenophobia when it comes to TikTok.'  Bowman warned against 'fearmongering' by promoting anxiety about China. He added, 'Let's not facilitate another "Red Scare"', implying that popular apprehension about Chinese communism was being used to drive bans on TikTok.  Bowman further argued that TikTok is being unfairly singled out as other social media platforms which had allowed the dissemination of dangerous views and disinformation were not being threatened with bans. Bowman highlighted Facebook's role as a vector for Russian disinformation during the 2016 presidential election, and as a platform for rioters to coordinate ahead of the January 6 assault on the Capitol. 

It has further been claimed that anti-Chinese prejudice is being fostered by TikTok's commercial rivals to bring about bans on the company. It was reported that in October 2019, Mark Zuckerberg, the executive chairman, chief executive officer, and controlling shareholder of Meta (the parent company of Facebook and Instagram) discussed his concerns about China with then President Trump, the president's son-in-law Jared Kushner, and Facebook board member Peter Thiel. 

Then, in March 2022, it was reported that Meta was paying one of the biggest Republican consulting firms in the United States, Targeted Victory, to organise a nationwide campaign to turn the public against TikTok. The campaign included placing opinion pieces and letters to the editor in major regional news outlets and promoting stories about alleged questionable TikTok trends that originated on Facebook. 

It has been claimed that Meta is facing a serious commercial threat from platforms such as TikTok and is responding to discredit its business rival. It has been predicted that between 2020 and 2025, Facebook would have lost 1.5 million teenage users. In 2021, leaked internal documents from Facebook showed that teenage users in the United States alone had declined by 19 percent since 2019, with a projected drop of 45 percent over the following two years.  Facebook has been accused of using patriotic appeals and United States security concerns to target a commercial rival. For example, Facebook spokesman Andy Stone has stated, 'As Chinese companies and influence have been growing so has the risk of a global internet based on their values, as opposed to ours.' TikTok's chief executive officer, Keith Meyer, has accused Facebook of falsely

maligning TikTok 'to unfairly quash competition...[and] put an end to our very presence in the US.' [🔗](#) While a United States user and supporter of TikTok, Fiona Williams, has stated, 'By now, I think we've all come to the same conclusion that this whole TikTok ban has nothing to do with our safety and everything to do with Meta can't beat them.' [🔗](#)

Further implications

The current controversy involving TikTok reveals the fragility of the Internet as a means of global communication. It demonstrates ideological differences, conflicting economic interests and political distrust prompting the establishment of digital silos and threatening the continued existence of the internet as a means of whole world communication.

A *silo* in IT is an isolated point in a system where data is kept segregated (on purpose or accidentally) from other parts of an organization's information and communications network. [🔗](#) The term silo is typically used in a relatively restricted sense to refer to the breaking of digital links within an individual company or organisation; however, data silos also exist across the internet as a whole. As increasing numbers of firewalls have been erected restricting internet access to within specific countries, the term 'splinternet' is coming to be used. 'Splinternet' (also termed cyberbalkanisation) refers to the fragmented internet, a set of isolated pieces with communication barriers between them. [🔗](#)

China is a primary example of a nation that has erected digital communication barriers blocking information and services from other nations. These barriers are commonly referred to as the Great Firewall. The Great Firewall operates by checking incoming transmission packets for keywords that are seen as indicating sensitive content. If the keywords or sensitive words appear in the packets, access is closed. The effect includes limiting access to foreign information sources, blocking foreign internet tools (e.g., Google Search, Facebook, Twitter, Wikipedia, and others) and mobile apps, and requiring foreign companies to adapt to domestic regulations. [🔗](#) China has its own platforms which replicate services provided by Google and Facebook. People in China use Baidu as their search engine. The most common Chinese video streaming platform is Tencent, and the most popular social media platform is Weibo. [🔗](#) Services are provided to Chinese users; however, access to communication outside China is not. This is seen as regrettable because it limits freedom of information and thought.

Critics of attempts to force TikTok to sell their product to an American buyer claim that this will accelerate the splintering of the internet. For example, when India banned TikTok in 2020 it was proposed that the app be purchased by an Indian company. [🔗](#) It has been suggested that this sell to us or be banned strategy may result in TikTok being splintered into different locally owned companies within countries where it is currently under challenge. [🔗](#) Mark Zuckerberg, whose company Meta produces Facebook and Instagram, has warned of the possible negative repercussions of either a ban or a forced sale of TikTok. He has stated, 'I am really worried...it could very well have long-term consequences in other countries around the world.' [🔗](#) Behind Zuckerberg's concern is likely to be about the effect on his own company. Already, Facebook has been either permanently or temporarily banned in 20 countries, not including China. [🔗](#) This raises the possibility that other disputed platforms, like Facebook, might also be sold off to local digital companies and so lose their global reach. The same danger of a narrowing national focus exists with TikTok's Project Texas plan whereby all TikTok user data is to be stored on American soil in Oracle, a cloud-based, American-owned storage facility. [🔗](#) This is simply another form of fragmentation and silo building, reducing the reach of the platform to within national borders. And the trend is likely to extend beyond TikTok.

In an opinion piece published in Wired on March 18, 2022, Matt Perault wrote, 'If the US government succeeds in forcing TikTok to enter this local data-storing arrangement with Oracle, other governments will be more likely to impose comparable requirements on US companies operating within their borders.' [🔗](#) Those who see the internet as a framework for the free flow of ideas and information are distressed by the direction the world is taking, where increasing numbers of states are attempting to restrict individual platforms (or the total internet architecture) to a model that only operates within their own borders. On March 28, 2023, The Guardian published a comment by Emily Taylor, an associate fellow in the International Security Programme, Chatham House. Taylor stated, 'Advanced democracies have an opportunity to have a grown-up debate on how to hold a global internet together while respecting political differences, protecting free expression and supporting the most vulnerable. Instead, the incredible benefits of our shared digital architecture are being washed away in thoughtless, kneejerk responses to the economic and political rise of China.' [🔗](#)

