

The TikTok debate featured many disputed claims. Here are 7 of them.

TikTok says many of the claims legislators made at Wednesday's House hearing are untrue



By [Taylor Lorenz](#)

March 16, 2024 at 10:00 a.m. EDT

House lawmakers making impassioned arguments for shutting down TikTok last week overwhelmingly persuaded their fellow representatives, but repeated many claims that are false, unproven or disputed. Here are some of those claims:

TikTok 'forced' its users to contact their member of Congress to protest the bill.

TikTok did send an in-app notification asking users to call their representatives, but users could click the X on the notification to dismiss it or swipe it away and continue to use the app. TikTok said the notification went only to users who listed their age as over 18. "People could use the app whether or not they chose to call their member of Congress," the company said. The response caused some House offices to turn off their phones, according to news reports.

TikTok's algorithm is controlled by the Chinese Communist Party to push government propaganda to U.S. users.

To date, there is no public evidence that this has happened, though it is a concern that has long been expressed by TikTok's detractors.

The most recent evidence for this, claim TikTok's detractors, is the imbalance between the number of pro-Palestinian videos and pro-Israel videos on the app since the Oct. 7 [Hamas](#) attacks on Israeli civilians. But that imbalance is consistent with what polling has shown already about young people's opinions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and also is consistent with the imbalance seen in U.S.-owned sites Facebook and Instagram. Young Americans have consistently shown support for Palestinians, according to Pew Research surveys, [including in one poll issued in 2014](#), four years before TikTok launched in the United States. On Facebook, the #freepalestine hashtag was found on more than 11 million posts — 39 times more than those with #standwithisrael. On Instagram, the primary pro-Palestinian hashtag is found on 6 million posts, 26 times more than the primary pro-Israel hashtag, [according to previous reporting by The Post](#).

Experts also question the validity of judging content by hashtags, noting that many users add a hashtag in hopes of drawing interest to their video, not necessarily as an expression of which side they favor. TikTok also asserts that Oracle, a U.S. company based in Texas, reviews any changes to the algorithm.

TikTok's parent company, ByteDance, is owned by the Chinese Communist Party.

Rep. Nick Langworthy (R-N.Y.) made this accusation, saying, "TikTok is essentially operating Communist Chinese malware." TikTok denies that the Chinese Communist Party owns any portion of ByteDance. Sixty percent of ByteDance, TikTok says, is owned by international investors, including Americans. Another 20 percent is owned by TikTok employees, including 7,000 Americans, and the final 20 percent is owned by the company's founder. ByteDance has a five-person board of directors; three of those seats are held by Americans. ByteDance is not publicly traded, but is by some measures the world's largest social media company. In addition to TikTok itself, ByteDance owns a range of other apps in the United States, including a Pinterest competitor called [Lemon8](#) and CapCut, a wildly popular video editing platform.

TikTok's China ties give the Chinese Communist Party access to the personal data of Americans.

Several proponents of the divestiture legislation said that was their reason for supporting TikTok's sale. TikTok says the Chinese government has never requested U.S. data and that access to U.S. data is strictly controlled, with only employees of TikTok's U.S. subsidiary having access to it.

ByteDance said it tightened access to data after [American ByteDance employees](#) were found to have accessed TikTok data of a journalist who had written critically about the app.

TikTok says that U.S. user data is housed on servers controlled by Texas-based Oracle. Others have noted over the years that Facebook and Instagram collect similar data and that data brokers, who sell personal information collected via the internet, can sell to anyone, including Chinese buyers. Legislation to limit those sales is before the same House committee that backed the divestiture bill 50-0 but has yet to be voted on.

TikTok is based in China

TikTok Inc. is a U.S. company and bound by U.S. law. TikTok's headquarters are in Los Angeles and Singapore. TikTok is not available in China.

The bill does not violate the First Amendment

Many civil liberties groups such as [the ACLU](#) and [Fight for the Future](#), a nonprofit digital rights advocacy group, disagree. "They're falling right into the strictest First Amendment scrutiny," said Corbin K. Barthold, internet policy counsel at TechFreedom, a nonprofit, nonpartisan technology think tank. "Saying that children are getting exposed to ideas and they're finding those ideas convincing, translates into, 'our bill is attacking what we see as a speech problem based on the content of the speech and potentially who the speaker is.'"

The bill is not a ban

Several lawmakers insisted the legislation doesn't seek to ban TikTok, only to end its ownership by ByteDance. That claim is viewed skeptically by opponents, and the committee's [press release announcing the legislation](#) quoted many members describing the legislation as a ban.

"I am proud to partner with Representatives Gallagher and Krishnamoorthi on this bipartisan bill to ban the distribution of TikTok in the US," [Rep. Chip Roy \(R-Tex.\)](#) said.

"I am proud to join Chairman Mike Gallagher in introducing the Protecting Americans from Foreign Adversary Controlled Applications Act to finally ban TikTok in the United States," [Rep. Elise Stefanik \(R-N.Y.\)](#) said.

"I'm proud to help lead the bipartisan Protecting Americans from Foreign Adversary Controlled Applications Act, which will ban the app from the United States," [Rep. Bob Latta \(R-Ohio\)](#) said.

Nora Benavidez, a civil rights and free-speech attorney and senior counsel at Free Press, a nonpartisan organization focused on protecting civil liberties, said it would be nearly impossible for TikTok to meet the terms of the bill and avoid a potential ban.