## SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE	UNITED STATES
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TIKTOK, INC., ET AL.,	)
Petitioners,	)
v.	) No. 24-656
MERRICK B. GARLAND,	)
ATTORNEY GENERAL,	)
Respondent.	)
	_
BRIAN FIREBAUGH, ET AL.,	)
Petitioners,	)
v.	) No. 24-657
MERRICK B. GARLAND,	)
ATTORNEY GENERAL,	)
Respondent.	)
	_
Pages: 1 through 178	
Place: Washington, D.C.	
Date: January 10 2025	

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6	MERRICK B. GARLAND,	)
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10	BRIAN FIREBAUGH, ET AL.,	)
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12	v.	) No. 24-657
13	MERRICK B. GARLAND,	)
14	ATTORNEY GENERAL,	)
15	Respondent.	)
16		
17	Washington, D.	C.
18	Friday, January 10	, 2025
19		
20	The above-entitled matter	came on for
21	oral argument before the Supreme	Court of the
22	United States at 10:08 a.m.	
23		
24		
25		

1	APPEARANCES:
2	NOEL J. FRANCISCO, ESQUIRE, Washington, D.C.; on
3	behalf of Petitioners TikTok, Inc., et al.
4	JEFFREY L. FISHER, ESQUIRE, Menlo Park, California; on
5	behalf of Petitioners Brian Firebaugh, et al.
6	GEN. ELIZABETH B. PRELOGAR, Solicitor General,
7	Department of Justice, Washington, D.C.; on behalf
8	of the Respondent.
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1	PROCEEDINGS
2	(10:08 a.m.)
3	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: We will hear
4	argument this morning in Case 24-656, TikTok
5	versus Garland, and the consolidated case.
6	Mr. Francisco.
7	ORAL ARGUMENT OF NOEL J. FRANCISCO
8	ON BEHALF OF PETITIONERS TIKTOK, INC., ET AL.
9	MR. FRANCISCO: Mr. Chief Justice, and
10	may it please the Court:
11	Under the Act, one of America's most
12	popular speech platforms will shut down in nine
13	days. That shouldn't happen for three reasons.
14	First, TikTok incorporated is a U.S.
15	company speaking in the United States. The Act
16	requires it to go dark unless ByteDance executes
17	a qualified divestiture. Whether you call that
18	a ban or a divestiture, one thing is clear:
19	It's a burden on TikTok's speech, so the First
20	Amendment applies.
21	Second, the Act is content-based from
22	beginning to end. It applies only to social
23	media platforms that have user-generated
24	content, except for business, product, and
25	travel reviews. Within that content-based

- 1 universe, it singles out a single speaker for
- 2 uniquely harsh treatment, and it does so because
- 3 the government fears that China could, in the
- 4 future, indirectly pressure TikTok to
- 5 disseminate foreign misinformation and
- 6 propaganda.
- 7 Finally, the Act can't satisfy any
- 8 standard of scrutiny. The government has no
- 9 valid interest in preventing foreign propaganda.
- 10 And its fall-back that it seeks merely to
- 11 prevent covertness makes no sense since that
- 12 could be addressed with a risk disclosure.
- The government's real target, rather,
- is the speech itself, its fear that Americans,
- even if fully informed, could be persuaded by
- 16 Chinese misinformation. That, however, is a
- 17 decision that the First Amendment leaves to the
- 18 people.
- 19 Given that, the government's data
- 20 security rationale cannot independently sustain
- 21 the Act. It is also grossly under-inclusive and
- 22 ignores the most obvious less restrictive
- 23 alternative: simply banning TikTop,
- 24 Incorporated, from sharing any sensitive user
- 25 data with anyone.

- In short, this Act should not stand.
- 2 At a minimum, you should preliminarily enjoin
- 3 it, which will allow you to carefully consider
- 4 this momentous issue and, for the reasons
- 5 explained by the President-Elect, potentially
- 6 moot the case.
- 7 I welcome your questions.
- 8 JUSTICE THOMAS: Exactly what is
- 9 TikTok's speech here?
- 10 MR. FRANCISCO: TikTok, Your Honor,
- 11 uses an algorithm that, in its view, reflects
- 12 the best mix of content. What the Act does is
- it says TikTok cannot do that unless ByteDance
- 14 executes a qualified divestiture. That's a
- direct burden on TikTok's speech, much less of a
- 16 burden than the one that this Court struck down
- in the Simon & Schuster case, where all the
- 18 author had to do was take a certain amount of
- 19 proceeds and put it into an escrow account for a
- 20 short period of time to satisfy a civil
- 21 judgment.
- 22 JUSTICE THOMAS: So why does a
- 23 restriction on ByteDance, which is not a
- 24 citizen, is not located in the U.S., a
- 25 restriction on TikTok?

1	MR. FRANCISCO: Because what the law
2	says to TikTok is that, TikTok, you cannot use
3	the algorithm that you prefer to use unless
4	ByteDance executes a qualified divestiture.
5	So the law, therefore, falls directly
6	on TikTok itself. It imposes a burden on
7	TikTok's speech, again, a much less a much
8	more significant burden than the one that was
9	struck down in Simon & Schuster. There
LO	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Sir
L1	JUSTICE THOMAS: You're you're
L2	converting the restriction on ByteDance's
L3	ownership of the algorithm and the company into
L4	a restriction on TikTok's speech.
L5	MR. FRANCISCO: Mm-hmm.
L6	JUSTICE THOMAS: So why can't we
L7	simply look at it as a restriction on ByteDance?
L8	MR. FRANCISCO: Because because I
L9	think the burden falls directly on TikTok. And
20	I can use a hypothetical that helps illustrate
21	the point. Suppose that China used its leverage
22	over Jeff Bezos's international empire,
23	including his Chinese businesses, to force
24	Wash the Washington Post to write whatever
25	China wanted on the front page of the Post.

1	Surely, the government couldn't come
2	in and say, Jeff Bezos, you need to either sell
3	the Washington Post or shut it down. That
4	wouldn't just violate Mr. Bezos's First
5	Amendment rights. That would also violate the
6	Washington Post's First Amendment rights because
7	they are ultimately the one that's suffering the
8	burden under that law because they have to go
9	dark and close up their books.
10	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Counsel, you
11	began by saying this is a U.S. company operating
12	in the United States.
13	MR. FRANCISCO: Yes, Your Honor.
14	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: But the
15	ultimate company that controls it, ByteDance,
16	was found by Congress and I'll quote this
17	"to be subject to Chinese laws that require it
18	to assist or" "or cooperate with the Chinese
19	government's intelligence work" and to ensure
20	that the Chinese government "has the power to
21	access" and "control private data" that the
22	company holds.
23	So are we supposed to ignore the fact
24	that the ultimate parent is, in fact, subject to

doing intelligence work for the Chinese

- 1 government?
- 2 MR. FRANCISCO: Well, Your Honor, I
- don't think you are supposed to ignore that at
- 4 all, but I also don't think that it changes the
- 5 analysis for a couple of reasons.
- 6 Look, TikTok --
- 7 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, just --
- 8 hold on a second. Well, as I said, you began by
- 9 saying this is a U.S. company operating in the
- 10 United States.
- MR. FRANCISCO: Mm-hmm.
- 12 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: And it seems
- to me that you're ignoring the major concern
- here of Congress, which was Chinese manipulation
- 15 of the content --
- MR. FRANCISCO: Mm-hmm.
- 17 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: -- and
- 18 acquisition and harvesting of -- of the content.
- 19 MR. FRANCISCO: Sure. And I'll start
- 20 by saying that TikTok, Incorporated, is a United
- 21 States subsidiary operating in the United States
- 22 with its own set of free speech rights. I --
- 23 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Do you dispute
- 24 the fact that ByteDance --
- MR. FRANCISCO: Yeah.

1	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: is a has
2	ultimate control of TikTok in its corporate
3	organization?
4	MR. FRANCISCO: Yes, Your Honor, I do
5	dispute that, but I also don't think that it
6	matters because, even if China could exercise
7	overwhelming power against TikTok versus
8	ByteDance, I don't think it would change the
9	analysis. And I can take that Washington Post
LO	hypothetical and ratchet it up a little bit to
L1	help illustrate the point.
L2	Let's suppose that the Chinese
L3	government had actually taken the Bezos children
L4	hostage and it was using that leverage in order
L5	to force Bezos and the Washington Post to
L6	publish whatever they wanted on the front page
L7	of the Post. So China effectively has total
L8	control.
L9	I still don't think that Congress
20	could come in and tell Bezos either sell the
21	Post or shut it down because that would violate
22	Bezos's rights and the Washington Post's rights.
23	Maybe what they could do is come in
24	and say you need to disclose the fact that
2.5	you're under this amount of coercion so that the

- 1 people who are looking at the paper understand
- 2 it and can make their own assessment.
- 3 But I think the First Amendment rights
- 4 of both Bezos and the Post would be directly
- 5 implicated, notwithstanding that China, in that
- 6 scenario, has effectively total control over
- 7 what -- what -- what gets printed in the
- 8 Washington Post.
- 9 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Counsel, let me
- 10 break this down. I understand your argument
- 11 that there is a First Amendment right that the
- 12 U.S. company has. I'll go that far with you,
- 13 okay --
- MR. FRANCISCO: I'll take it.
- 15 (Laughter.)
- 16 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: -- because we're
- 17 affecting their ability to talk in some -- in
- 18 whatever way they choose. The Washington Post
- 19 could choose, without any influence or threat
- against the children of Mr. Bezos, to promote
- 21 Chinese policy, and our First Amendment would
- 22 permit them to do that if they chose it
- independently, correct?
- MR. FRANCISCO: Yes.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Now the question

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becomes -- so it's not -- that's just a given,
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- 2 that they have a First Amendment right. The
- 3 next question is, assuming they do, what's the
- 4 level of scrutiny --
- 5 MR. FRANCISCO: Mm-hmm.
- 6 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: -- we apply?
- 7 Isn't that what the issue here is?
- 8 MR. FRANCISCO: That is certainly one
- 9 of the issues, Your Honor.
- 10 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: All right. So, if
- 11 we get to that side of the issue, that TikTok
- 12 U.S.A. has some sort of First Amendment right,
- taking your example, if the government said no
- 14 speaker is free to speak under -- under a
- criminal compulsion by someone else, because of
- extortion, because of kidnapping, we are doing
- this because it is the only way to ensure the
- 18 safety of people, that they are not going to be
- 19 kidnapped or threatened, their lives threatened.
- You don't think that the government
- 21 has a compelling state interest in saying, if
- 22 there is a threat, a -- a physical criminal
- threat against someone to do some activity, that
- the government couldn't say: I'm not
- 25 questioning whatever the content is --

1	MR. FRANCISCO: Mm-hmm.
2	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: of that
3	activity. I'm simply saying we, in our
4	governmental powers, have a right to say: You
5	can't do that. You can't speak.
6	MR. FRANCISCO: Sure, Your Honor. So,
7	to take your question in pieces, I do think that
8	they would have a compelling interest in that
9	scenario to do something. But what I don't
10	think is that they could simply target speakers
11	and speech.
12	Take, for example, generally
13	applicable laws like the Trading
14	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: So you think in
15	that situation that it that the only thing
16	the government could do is tell the Washington
17	Post: Disclose to the public that you are
18	saying this because you are being forced to?
19	MR. FRANCISCO: So, sure
20	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: That that

MR. FRANCISCO: No -- no, Your Honor,

that's the only remedy the government could

24 but I want to make sure I understand the

21

22

undertake?

25 hypothetical. The compelling interest is in

- 1 preventing this kind of compulsion, coercion,
- and, ultimately, harm to children.
- 3 And I think that the government has a
- 4 lot of different ways they can address that
- 5 through speech-neutral laws. And I was going to
- 6 point to things like the Trading with the Enemy
- 7 Act or Russia sanctions. You can broadly say
- 8 and attack problems --
- 9 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: They haven't been
- 10 very effective.
- MR. FRANCISCO: Well, be that as it --
- 12 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: We -- we're still
- 13 having people kidnapped. We're still having
- 14 coercion.
- 15 MR. FRANCISCO: Yeah. And be that as
- it may, you can say to Americans: You cannot
- 17 collaborate with our enemies at all, and if you
- do that, you're going to be severely punished
- 19 for doing that. But what I don't --
- 20 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: All right. We can
- 21 go on to the effectiveness of the remedy.
- MR. FRANCISCO: Mm-hmm.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: But the point is,
- I believe, that even if your First Amendment
- 25 rights are impinged and there is some

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1 protection, the question is, is what -- at what
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- 2 level of scrutiny --
- 3 MR. FRANCISCO: Yes, Your Honor.
- 4 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: -- and whether
- 5 that -- the action is content-neutral or not.
- 6 MR. FRANCISCO: I -- I agree that
- 7 that is the way that the analysis proceeds.
- 8 Here, we believe that the level of scrutiny
- 9 should be strict scrutiny, but --
- 10 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: What -- what is
- 11 the relevance of the history? Chief Judge
- 12 Srinivasan, in his opinion in the D.C. Circuit,
- 13 emphasized that there is a long tradition of
- 14 preventing foreign ownership or control of media
- 15 in the United States --
- MR. FRANCISCO: Sure.
- 17 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: -- going back:
- 18 radio, television --
- MR. FRANCISCO: Right.
- 20 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: -- and what have
- 21 you. I would think, no matter the level of
- 22 scrutiny, that history has to be important, and
- 23 I want to get your response to it.
- MR. FRANCISCO: Mm-hmm. I don't
- 25 actually think it's important in this context

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1 because that history all arises in the context
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- of bandwidth scarcity. And, in that context,
- 3 you have the government that's in -- in the
- 4 position of doling out a limited number of
- 5 licenses.
- 6 And when you have to dole out a
- 7 limited number of licenses, you, by definition,
- 8 have to pick winners and losers, and when you
- 9 have to do that, you get a certain amount of
- 10 discretion. I think that's the whole basis of
- 11 those cases.
- 12 You can't really take those cases
- 13 and --
- 14 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Well -- keep
- 15 going.
- MR. FRANCISCO: You can't really take
- 17 those cases and extend them to an area where
- there is no scarcity, like the World Wide Web,
- 19 because, once you do that, there's really no
- 20 limiting principle. There's no reason why it
- 21 wouldn't also apply to really popular books or
- 22 magazines or newspapers or chains of newspapers.
- The bandwidth scarcity, I think, is
- 24 really what justifies the greater discretion
- 25 that the government gets in that area.

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1 JUSTICE ALITO: Mr. Francisco, let me
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- 2 see if I can break this down.
- 3 Suppose that TikTok were outright
- 4 owned by the People's Republic of China. Would
- 5 you make the same argument?
- 6 MR. FRANCISCO: I wouldn't be making
- 7 the same argument, Your Honor. There, you
- 8 would --
- JUSTICE ALITO: Why -- why not?
- MR. FRANCISCO: Because, there, you
- 11 would have to confront a very different
- 12 question, whether a foreign government that was
- 13 speaking in the United States has First
- 14 Amendment rights. And I don't know that the
- 15 Court has ever addressed that.
- But, here, we've got a U.S. company --
- 17 JUSTICE ALITO: No, I understand that.
- 18 I just want to see where you draw the line.
- 19 MR. FRANCISCO: Mm-hmm.
- JUSTICE ALITO: So it's true, the
- 21 Court has never held that a foreign government
- 22 has free speech rights. And if we were to hold
- that, I would think it's because -- it would be
- 24 because speech by a foreign government,
- 25 particularly one with enormous resources, is not

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1 protected -- allowing that is -- does not serve
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- 2 the underlying interests of the First Amendment,
- 3 which are, among other things, fostering
- 4 democratic self-government and furthering the --
- 5 the truth -- the search for truth.
- 6 So let's assume that that's -- we
- 7 start with that, all right? What if TikTok were
- 8 then not owned by the foreign government, but it
- 9 was undisputed that TikTok was totally
- 10 controlled by the foreign government, could not
- do one thing without the approval of the foreign
- 12 government? That's different?
- 13 MR. FRANCISCO: I do think that it is
- 14 different, Your Honor. For example, you know,
- 15 I -- I've given the hypothetical that I've
- 16 given, but there are a lot of companies in this
- 17 country that have foreign owners, not just
- 18 companies like Politico, with -- which is German
- owned, or Al Jazeera, which is partly owned by
- the government of Qatar.
- 21 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, I -- I
- 22 understand that, but what would be the reason
- 23 for drawing that line?
- MR. FRANCISCO: Sure. Because --
- 25 JUSTICE ALITO: If -- if there's a

- 1 good reason for saying --
- 2 MR. FRANCISCO: Mm-hmm.
- JUSTICE ALITO: -- that a foreign
- 4 government, particularly an adversary, does not
- 5 have free speech rights in the United States,
- 6 why would it all change if it was simply hidden
- 7 under some kind of contrived -- a corporate
- 8 structure?
- 9 MR. FRANCISCO: Because it is a U.S.
- 10 speaker.
- 11 I'll give you another example. AMC
- movie theaters used to be owned by a Chinese
- 13 company. Under this theory, Congress could
- order AMC movie theaters to censor any movies
- that Congress doesn't like or promote any movies
- 16 that Congress wanted.
- 17 And I think the reason is that, here,
- 18 where it's conceded you actually have a bona
- 19 fide U.S. company, it is not simply a Chinese
- 20 cutout that is the Chinese government speaking
- 21 itself --
- JUSTICE ALITO: All right. Let's say
- 23 that's not a complete --
- MR. FRANCISCO: -- but an independent
- 25 United States company.

1	OOSIICE	ALTIO.	Let's	say	CHIS	$\perp$ S	HOL

- 2 a complete answer to -- to your First Amendment
- argument, but would you be willing to concede
- 4 that this is a very important factor that should
- 5 be taken into account in deciding whether
- 6 there's a First Amendment violation?
- 7 MR. FRANCISCO: Well, Your Honor, I
- 8 think that it does help supply a compelling
- 9 governmental interest, but I still think you
- 10 have to march through the strict scrutiny
- 11 analysis and analyze their interests. I do not
- 12 think that they have a compelling government --
- 13 mental interest in -- in -- in the manipulation
- of content.
- 15 I think that is in the teeth of the
- 16 First Amendment. And if you look at the
- 17 government's brief and the rest of the record in
- this case, that's really what it's focused on.
- 19 Their complaint is the fear that the content
- 20 could be critical of the United States
- 21 Government or -- or could undermine our
- 22 democracy.
- Yes, Your Honor.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: Mr. Francisco, I
- just wanted to follow up on -- on that line of

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1 questioning with just some fact questions --
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- 2 MR. FRANCISCO: Mm-hmm.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- because it seems
- 4 to me there are a couple of things that the
- 5 parties still dispute about facts in this Court,
- 6 which is a little unusual.
- 7 The government says that TikTok U.S.
- 8 has no authority or ability to alter the
- 9 algorithm or recommendation engine but must
- 10 simply follow ByteDance's directives. You
- 11 disagree with that in your reply brief.
- MR. FRANCISCO: Yes, we do.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: Somebody has to be
- 14 right and somebody has to be wrong about that.
- 15 What's -- what's the fact -- what does the
- 16 record show on that?
- MR. FRANCISCO: Well, Your Honor, we
- are here on a record, and there is nothing in
- 19 the record that says that TikTok, like any other
- 20 subsidiary, doesn't have its own
- 21 independent-making authority. If you look at
- their record cites, what they point to is the
- ordinary types of control that a parent company
- 24 has over a subsidiary company. But it doesn't
- 25 change the fact that --

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1 JUSTICE GORSUCH: All right. What is
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- 2 the fact? Are you prepared to make a -- a
- 3 representation of the fact here?
- 4 MR. FRANCISCO: Yes, Your Honor. The
- fact is that TikTok, Incorporated, as a U.S.
- 6 company, does have a choice over the algorithm.
- 7 Now it would be a incredibly bad business
- 8 decision for them to abandon this algorithm, and
- 9 they very doubtful would ever do it, but they
- 10 have that authority.
- 11 What they clearly have the authority
- to do is shut down the platform in the face of
- 13 Chinese pressure. That's actually what they
- agreed to do in the national security agreement.
- 15 I think that underscores why TikTok,
- 16 Incorporated, as a U.S. company, does have its
- 17 own set of First Amendment rights.
- 18 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Okay. And then
- 19 another fact question.
- 20 Before the D.C. Circuit, you -- you
- 21 argued that the Chinese government has made
- 22 clear in public statements that it would not
- 23 permit a forced divest -- divestment of the
- 24 recommendation engine. Does that mean that some
- 25 key component of the recommendation engine is

- 1 under Chinese control?
- 2 MR. FRANCISCO: No, Your Honor. What
- 3 it means -- and this might warrant a little more
- 4 explanation. What it means is that there are
- 5 lots of parts of the source code that are
- 6 embodied in intellectual property that are owned
- 7 by the Chinese government, and they would
- 8 restrict, like the United States restricts, the
- 9 sale of those types of things to foreign
- 10 governments.
- It doesn't alter the fact that this is
- being operated in the United States by TikTok,
- 13 Incorporated. So --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: Okay. I -- I got
- 15 it.
- MR. FRANCISCO: Okay.
- 17 JUSTICE GORSUCH: I got it. And then
- 18 you represent that the divestiture is not
- 19 feasible within the Act's timeframe.
- MR. FRANCISCO: Mm-hmm.
- 21 JUSTICE GORSUCH: I'm sorry for these
- 22 fact questions --
- MR. FRANCISCO: Sure.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- but I just want
- 25 to understand what's before us.

1	MR. FRANCISCO: Yeah.
2	JUSTICE GORSUCH: Would it be feasible
3	in any timeframe? I I take the government
4	doesn't dispute that it's infeasible in the 270
5	days provided by law. But would it be feasible
6	at all?
7	MR. FRANCISCO: Your Your Honor, I
8	think, at least as we understand how they've
9	interpreted the qualified divestiture provision,
10	it would be exceedingly difficult under any
11	timeframe for two principal reasons.
12	The first is that there's a global
13	team of engineers that are some in China, some
14	in Europe, some in the United States, that
15	maintain and update the original source code.
16	And, as we understand their interpretation, a
17	qualified divestiture would prohibit any kind of
18	coordination with that global team of engineers.
19	The other reason is because, as we
20	understand how they're interpreting it, a
21	qualified divestiture would divorce the U.S.
22	platform from the global content. So, for
23	example, there are videos created in the United
24	States. There are videos created in Ireland.
25	In order to get global content, we need access

- 1 to the Irish videos. They need access to the
- 2 U.S. videos.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: I got that.
- 4 MR. FRANCISCO: We understand that
- 5 couldn't happen.
- 6 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Okay. So you think
- 7 it's probably not feasible in any timeline?
- 8 MR. FRANCISCO: Well, Your Honor, I
- 9 think it would be extraordinarily difficult.
- 10 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Okay. Last -- last
- 11 fact question. Then I'll yield the floor here.
- 12 The -- the government admits that it
- 13 has no evidence that TikTok has engaged in
- 14 covert content manipulation in this country but
- says that ByteDance has responded to PRC demands
- 16 to censor content outside of China in other
- 17 countries. Again, you deny that in your reply
- 18 brief. Somebody has to be right about that.
- 19 MR. FRANCISCO: Well -- well, Your
- 20 Honor, the problem there is everything that
- 21 follows what you just read is redacted, and so I
- don't know what it says.
- What the record shows is two things.
- 24 The record shows first what you just said: They
- 25 haven't done anything here in the United States

- 1 with respect to TikTok, Incorporated. And,
- 2 second, the record also shows through our
- 3 transparency reports that we haven't removed or
- 4 restricted content on the TikTok platform in
- 5 other parts of the world. And TikTok doesn't
- 6 operate in China. It operates in other parts of
- 7 the world. We haven't removed or restricted
- 8 content at the request of China. That's what we
- 9 put out in our regular transparency reports.
- 10 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Removed or
- 11 restricted, though, doesn't necessarily cover
- 12 covert content manipulation, though, right?
- MR. FRANCISCO: Well, Your Honor, I --
- 14 I'm limiting my response to what's in the
- 15 record.
- 16 JUSTICE GORSUCH: To what's in the
- 17 record? Okay.
- 18 MR. FRANCISCO: It's very difficult
- 19 for me to respond to things that I -- where I
- 20 don't know what the accusation is.
- 21 JUSTICE GORSUCH: I -- I have other
- 22 questions about the secret evidence in this
- case, but we'll get to that later.
- MR. FRANCISCO: Yes, Your Honor.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: Thank you.

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1 JUSTICE BARRETT: Mr. Francisco, can I
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- 2 ask you a question about the relevant speech
- 3 here? So it strikes me that this is a little
- 4 different than your Bezos example because,
- 5 there, it's clearly content discrimination
- 6 because we're talking about the ability to post
- 7 particular articles versus other articles.
- 8 MR. FRANCISCO: Mm-hmm.
- 9 JUSTICE BARRETT: Am I right that the
- 10 algorithm is the speech here?
- MR. FRANCISCO: Yes, Your Honor.
- 12 The -- the -- well, I -- I would say it's -- you
- 13 know, the algorithm is a lot of things. The
- 14 algorithm has built within it -- it's -- it's --
- it's basically how we predict what our customers
- 16 want to see.
- 17 JUSTICE BARRETT: The editorial
- 18 discretion?
- MR. FRANCISCO: Yeah --
- JUSTICE BARRETT: Yeah.
- 21 MR. FRANCISCO: -- the editorial
- 22 discretion. It also has built within it the
- 23 moderation elements. All of this kind of comes
- 24 together when the source code is translated into
- 25 executable code in the United States. In the

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1 United States, that executable code is then
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- 2 subject to vetting, review, moderation through
- 3 content moderation algorithms. And that -- so
- 4 it ultimately lands on the TikTok platform.
- 5 JUSTICE BARRETT: Got it. But what
- 6 we're -- what we're talking about as -- as in
- 7 NetChoice is the editorial discretion that
- 8 underlies the algorithm. And -- and I just want
- 9 to be clear. A lot of your examples talk about,
- 10 including the Bezos one --
- MR. FRANCISCO: Mm-hmm.
- 12 JUSTICE BARRETT: -- the right of an
- 13 American citizen to repeat what a foreign entity
- says or say, you know, I'm hitching my wagon to
- 15 China; I want to say everything China does.
- 16 Here, the concern is about the covert
- 17 content manipulation piece of the algorithm.
- MR. FRANCISCO: Mm-hmm.
- 19 JUSTICE BARRETT: That is something
- 20 that ByteDance wants to speak, right?
- MR. FRANCISCO: Well, Your Honor, I
- think that ultimately it's TikTok's choice
- 23 whether to put it on the platform. And --
- 24 JUSTICE BARRETT: And you don't want
- 25 that? Are you -- is your client disclaiming

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1 any --
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- 2 MR. FRANCISCO: Well, we -- we --
- 3 we -- we absolutely resist any kind of content
- 4 manipulation by China at all, but what I do want
- 5 to focus in on is what -- their asserted
- 6 interests here. They do talk about covertness.
- 7 But it can't possibly be that all they're
- 8 concerned about is mere covertness.
- 9 If all you were concerned about was
- 10 the covertness untethered from the underlying
- 11 content, that's something that could be easily
- 12 addressed through a risk disclosure.
- JUSTICE BARRETT: But that goes to
- 14 scrutiny, the level of --
- MR. FRANCISCO: Yes, Your Honor.
- 16 JUSTICE BARRETT: -- the application.
- 17 I'm trying to -- I mean, let's say that I agree
- 18 with you the First Amendment is implicated, and
- 19 I'm trying to figure out what level of scrutiny
- applies.
- MR. FRANCISCO: Sure.
- JUSTICE BARRETT: And I'm trying to
- figure out what content, if any, discrimination
- is going on here. You know, there's a
- 25 disproportionate burden. I --

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1 MR. FRANCISCO: Right.
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- 2 JUSTICE BARRETT: Let's say that I
- 3 agree with you about that.
- No one is preventing you -- I mean,
- 5 you -- you're seeking access to a particular
- 6 source code engineering the recommendation
- 7 feature. It's -- it's the technology that you
- 8 want. You're not trying to repeat, as in the
- 9 Bezos example -- if we take the speech that the
- 10 government's concerned about to be the covert --
- 11 the covert content manipulation rationale,
- 12 you're not seeking to utter that speech.
- MR. FRANCISCO: Well, what we're --
- that's correct, Your Honor. What we are seeking
- to do is use an algorithm that displays the
- 16 combination of content that we prefer our users
- 17 to see on the platform.
- JUSTICE KAGAN: But is that --
- 19 JUSTICE BARRETT: And the government
- 20 doesn't care about that. I mean, the
- 21 government -- the government is fine with you
- 22 doing that. You can invent it yourself. It
- doesn't even care what content that displays,
- 24 cat videos or whatever.
- 25 MR. FRANCISCO: Yeah, but -- but I

- 1 think that the way that the analysis has to
- 2 unfold is first you ask, is this law burdening
- 3 our speech? I think we agree --
- 4 JUSTICE BARRETT: Yeah.
- 5 MR. FRANCISCO: -- that the law is
- 6 burdening our speech. Then you have to look at
- 7 whether the law itself is somehow content-based,
- 8 not just what their motivations are but whether
- 9 the law is content-based. And, here, the
- 10 trigger for this law, the one thing that gets it
- 11 going, is if you operate a social media platform
- 12 that has user-generated content, unless that
- 13 content takes the form of a product, travel, or
- 14 business review.
- Then, within that universe of content,
- it says there's one speaker we're particularly
- 17 concerned about, and we're going to hammer home
- on that one speaker. And then, just to make the
- 19 rubble bounce, they come in and tell us that one
- of the reasons they're targeting that speaker is
- 21 because they're worried about the future content
- 22 on that platform, that it could in the future
- 23 somehow be critical of the United States or
- 24 undermine democracy, to pull examples from the
- 25 government's brief.

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1 So I think there's no way to get
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- 2 around the fact that this is a content-based
- 3 speech restriction and you do have to go
- 4 directly to what their interests are.
- Now their principal interest is --
- 6 JUSTICE KAGAN: Could -- could I --
- 7 because I think I'm -- I'm a little bit
- 8 surprised by one of the answers that you gave to
- 9 Justice Barrett. I had understood that TikTok's
- 10 essential complaint here is that they wouldn't
- 11 be able to use the algorithm that ByteDance has
- invented and that they want to use the algorithm
- 13 that ByteDance has invented.
- MR. FRANCISCO: One hundred percent.
- 15 And if I -- if I was unclear on that, Your
- 16 Honor, I apologize.
- 17 JUSTICE KAGAN: Okay. Because I
- 18 think --
- 19 MR. FRANCISCO: That is absolutely the
- 20 core of the claim.
- 21 JUSTICE KAGAN: -- what Justice
- 22 Barrett was saying to you is, like, what's the
- 23 problem here because ByteDance is a foreign
- 24 company. Or maybe this isn't what Justice
- 25 Barrett says; it's just what I say.

Т	(Laughter.)
2	JUSTICE KAGAN: ByteDance is a foreign
3	company. And you started off with Justice Alito
4	saying, you know, well, we would be making a
5	different argument. And, of course, that's
6	true. I mean, I would think that Alliance for
7	Open Society makes it pretty clear that you have
8	to be making a different argument with respect
9	to a foreign state or a foreign company.
LO	So let's let's say that they don't
L1	have First Amendment rights. The only First
L2	Amendment rights lie in TikTok, which does have
L3	First Amendment rights. And I I I guess
L4	my question is, how are those First Amendment
L5	rights really being implicated here?
L6	This this statute says the foreign
L7	company has to divest. Whether or not that's
L8	feasible
L9	MR. FRANCISCO: Mm-hmm.
20	JUSTICE KAGAN: however long it
21	takes, TikTok still has the ability to use
22	whatever algorithm it wants, doesn't it?
23	MR. FRANCISCO: No, Your Honor. And
24	their rights are implicated at a most basic
25	level In 10 days TikTok wants to speak In

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1 10 days, because this law was passed, TikTok
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- 2 cannot speak unless ByteDance executes a
- 3 qualified divestiture.
- 4 That's not just ByteDance's choice.
- 5 That is a -- that is a condition --
- 6 JUSTICE KAGAN: Well, I realize --
- 7 MR. FRANCISCO: -- that's imposed by
- 8 law.
- 9 JUSTICE KAGAN: -- that it has -- it
- definitely has effects on TikTok if ByteDance
- acts in the way that you're assuming it will
- 12 act. So -- so this is not to say that the First
- 13 Amendment isn't involved because TikTok is going
- 14 to suffer some pretty severe incidental effects,
- but they are incidental, aren't they?
- Because the statute only says to this
- 17 foreign company divest or else and -- and leaves
- 18 TikTok with the ability --
- 19 MR. FRANCISCO: Right.
- 20 JUSTICE KAGAN: -- to do what every
- 21 other actor in the United States can do, which
- is go find the best available algorithm.
- MR. FRANCISCO: Yeah. I -- I very
- 24 much disagree that the effects are incidental
- 25 because the way that this law works is it is

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1 only triggered if somebody is engaging in speech
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- based on their content, user-generated content,
- 3 except for business, product, and travel
- 4 reviews. It then singles out a single speaker.
- 5 And you have the concession for the government
- 6 that one of the reasons they've singled out that
- 7 speaker --
- 8 JUSTICE KAGAN: That puts a lot of
- 9 emphasis on the idea of just like -- you know --
- 10 I think what you're basically saying is that all
- 11 speaker-based restrictions generate strict
- 12 scrutiny. I'm not sure that we've ever said
- 13 anything like that.
- 14 You know, let's put aside the
- 15 facial -- your argument that this is facially
- 16 content-based. It seems to me that your
- 17 stronger argument or at least the one that most
- interested me was this argument of, look, if the
- 19 government is doing something specifically for
- 20 the purpose of changing the content that people
- see, that has to be subject to strict scrutiny.
- 22 But I don't see that as -- as
- 23 affecting TikTok as opposed to as affecting
- 24 ByteDance, that --
- MR. FRANCISCO: Well, no, no, I -- I

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very much do see it as affecting TikTok because
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- 2 they choose this algorithm because it reflects
- 3 the mix of content. The government's fear is
- 4 that China could come in and pressure TikTok,
- 5 TikTok, through ByteDance, to TikTok, to alter
- 6 that mix of content to make it too pro-Chinese
- 7 or too anti-American. That is very much
- 8 directly a content-based charge straight at
- 9 TikTok.
- 10 The other point I would like to --
- 11 JUSTICE KAGAN: I -- I hear you that
- 12 it might very well have that effect. I guess
- what I'm suggesting is that the law is only
- 14 targeted at this foreign corporation, which
- doesn't have First Amendment rights.
- Whatever effect it has, it has. You
- 17 know --
- 18 MR. FRANCISCO: So --
- 19 JUSTICE KAGAN: -- maybe ByteDance
- 20 will figure out a way to, like, put this on open
- 21 source, and then TikTok will be able to use the
- 22 algorithm.
- MR. FRANCISCO: So -- so, Your Honor,
- if I could take that on directly, because, to
- 25 the -- I think TikTok has First Amendment

- 1 rights. To the extent ByteDance is speaking in
- 2 the United States, it, I believe, has First
- 3 Amendment rights.
- 4 If you conclude that neither has First
- 5 Amendment rights, then, surely, the creators
- 6 have First Amendment rights. But, if you take a
- 7 step back, what their position is is that none
- 8 of these entities -- this is the universe of
- 9 entities affected by this law -- none of these
- 10 entities have the authority to assert First
- 11 Amendment rights, which means that the
- 12 government really could come in and say: I'm
- going to shut down TikTok because it's too
- 14 pro-Republican or too pro-Democrat or won't
- 15 disseminate the speech I want, and that would
- 16 get no First Amendment scrutiny by anybody.
- 17 That cannot possibly be the case, yet that is
- 18 the -- the effect of their position.
- The last point I'd like to emphasize,
- though, is this law, like the Playboy case, like
- 21 the Hobby Lobby case, has built within it a less
- 22 restrictive alternative, which is the general
- 23 provision by definition designed to protect
- 24 against the very harm the government is
- 25 identifying.

- 1 Suppose New York State passes an
- 2 asbestos abatement law. They say: These types
- 3 of buildings have to abet -- abate asbestos. In
- 4 addition, New York Times, you have to abate
- 5 asbestos in your building. And they say: There
- 6 are two reasons for this. One, we want to abate
- 7 asbestos. Two, we hate the New York Times
- 8 editorial page.
- 9 Surely, at the very least, what you're
- 10 going to say is: You can't target The New York
- 11 Times directly. What you can do is throw them
- 12 into the general process.
- 13 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
- 14 counsel.
- MR. FRANCISCO: We think that's the
- 16 minimum that should be done here.
- 17 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
- 18 counsel. We -- we've been talking about
- 19 connection between the regulation of -- of
- 20 TikTok and the burden on expressive conduct.
- 21 And your basic position is that interfering with
- 22 the ownership of TikTok constitutes a direct
- 23 regulation of the expressive conduct of other --
- 24 other people.
- What -- what is your best example in

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1 our precedent of a situation where we've -- a
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- 2 regulation of corporate structure or something
- 3 else has been treated as a direct regulation of
- 4 expressive conduct?
- 5 MR. FRANCISCO: The regulation of a
- 6 corporate structure as a --
- 7 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Yeah.
- 8 MR. FRANCISCO: Your Honor, I -- I --
- 9 I don't have a case in my fingertips. I can
- 10 consider it when we come back on --
- 11 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, I don't
- 12 have one at my fingertips or any other part of
- my body.
- MR. FRANCISCO: -- rebuttal. But I --
- but I think it's quite clear, though, that if
- 16 you're saying to a company: You have to talk --
- 17 stop talking unless somebody else does
- something, and that's imposed by the force of
- 19 law, it directly affects that company's speech.
- 20 That's --
- 21 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, it's --
- 22 it's -- it's -- again, I don't -- I don't know
- if it's directly affecting the company's speech
- or the speech of third parties. And I'm not
- 25 sure what -- you know, where your -- your

- 1 emphasis is.
- 2 But, again, I'm not sure there's
- 3 another case where we've said that regulating a
- 4 company has -- should be -- others' expression
- 5 should be treated as direct imposition on their
- 6 speech in terms of a standard of review, for
- 7 example, when it's based on derivative
- 8 regulation of corporate structure of somebody
- 9 else.
- 10 MR. FRANCISCO: Well, Your Honor, I
- 11 think that it's -- I -- I would concede that
- 12 this is a pretty unprecedented case. I'm not
- aware of any time in American history where the
- 14 Congress has tried to shut down a major speech
- 15 platform.
- 16 But I -- I think that if a law imposes
- 17 a -- a direct regulation on a third party that,
- in turn, results in shutting down somebody
- 19 else's speech, and they do it for content-based,
- viewpoint-based reasons, and, in particular, on
- 21 this record, because the speaker that is
- 22 ultimately being shut down, they don't like the
- 23 speech of that particular platform, that's a
- 24 real problem. So --
- 25 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, it may

- 1 be a real problem or it may not. But I just am
- 2 wondering if there's any precedent where we have
- 3 that same connection and that it affects the
- 4 standard of review. For example, you would
- 5 treat it as a direct restriction on expression.
- 6 Even the only thing the law does is say, in this
- 7 case --
- 8 MR. FRANCISCO: Mm-hmm.
- 9 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: -- somebody
- 10 other than the Chinese government has to own
- 11 TikTok.
- 12 MR. FRANCISCO: So -- so we
- don't have any direct precedent along the lines
- that you're citing, but we do have precedents.
- We have cases like Arcara, and what Arcara says
- is, if the law is totally speech-neutral, then
- 17 that's one thing. We have cases like O'Brien,
- which say, if the law doesn't care about speech
- but happens to draw in speech, that's another
- 20 thing.
- 21 Both of those cases make clear,
- 22 however, is that when the law is concerned with
- 23 the content of the speech, when the
- justification is based on the content of the
- 25 speech -- that's cases like Reed too -- then you

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1 do trigger strict scrutiny --
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- 2 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: So then I
- 3 think your argument comes down to: Is this
- 4 direct concern with speech, or is it concern
- 5 with the potential for Chinese interference with
- 6 the level of interference in -- indirectly?
- 7 In other words, they're not coming
- 8 back -- the Chinese government -- TikTok doesn't
- 9 care what the people are saying on TikTok.
- 10 That's not the -- the concern. The concern is
- 11 that they are regulating a particular channel of
- 12 communication. And I just wonder if there's any
- 13 precedent for that type of thing.
- They're not saying: We're going to
- 15 restrict this contact -- content and that
- 16 content but not this. They're just saying:
- We're going to be in a position where we can
- 18 control what happens, whether it's based on
- 19 expression, whether it's based on anything else.
- MR. FRANCISCO: So, Your Honor, I
- 21 disagree. And I think, if you take a step back
- 22 and look at this record, I think it is quite
- 23 clear that it is focused on both current and
- 24 potential future content on TikTok, TikTok,
- 25 Incorporated.

Τ	Here, you don't have just an act that
2	is based on speakers and speech. It's triggered
3	by speech. It's focused on a single speech or
4	TikTok speaker, TikTok, Incorporated.
5	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you.
6	Thank you.
7	Justice Thomas, anything further?
8	Justice Alito?
9	JUSTICE ALITO: What if Congress if
LO	there were nothing in this Act about content
L1	moderation or covert manipulation? What if it
L2	was just about preventing what Congress viewed
L3	as an enormously powerful, popular application
L4	from gathering an arsenal of information about
L5	American citizens, and they said: This is the
L6	worst offender and we're going to require
L7	divestiture by this offender?
L8	Would there be a First Amendment
L9	problem there? And if you think there would be,
20	what would the level of scrutiny be?
21	MR. FRANCISCO: Yeah. Yes, there
22	would be a First Amendment problem if you had a
23	law like this that was only focused on speakers,
24	those who use user-generated content, other than
25	product, travel, or business reviews, and

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JUSTICE ALITO: Well, Congress --
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- 2 Congress concludes that this particular entity
- 3 is the worst, this is the worst offender, and it
- 4 happens to be an entity that is involved with
- 5 speech.
- 6 MR. FRANCISCO: If all you had -- so I
- 7 want to make sure I understand the hypothetical.
- 8 The only provision you have is one that says:
- 9 This company has to shut down --
- 10 JUSTICE ALITO: Right.
- 11 MR. FRANCISCO: -- because of data
- 12 security.
- 13 JUSTICE ALITO: Right.
- MR. FRANCISCO: I would have a
- 15 different set of arguments.
- I think it would still implicate the
- 17 First Amendment, particularly where you have
- 18 strong evidence that they were being targeted in
- 19 part at least because of their speakers and
- 20 speech. Suppose Congress passed the law that
- 21 you posited --
- JUSTICE ALITO: Well, all right, but
- 23 you're changing the -- you're changing the
- 24 hypothetical by -- by injecting congressional
- 25 concern about the content of the speech.

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1 MR. FRANCISCO: Okay. Well, I'll put
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- 2 that to the side.
- JUSTICE ALITO: So what would your
- 4 argument be? It would be an equal protection
- 5 argument --
- 6 MR. FRANCISCO: No. No. I'd still be
- 7 saying --
- JUSTICE ALITO: -- based on rational
- 9 basis? What --
- 10 MR. FRANCISCO: -- I'd still be saying
- 11 that Arcara itself makes clear that where a law
- 12 disproportionately burdens just a speaker, we
- have to subject that to scrutiny to suss it out,
- 14 to suss out whether the asserted interest is the
- 15 actual interest.
- There, the asserted interest is in
- 17 data security. I think I would have a couple of
- 18 arguments under whatever form of scrutiny you
- wanted to apply, whether it is strict scrutiny
- or intermediate scrutiny, in that context.
- 21 I would say first that that law is
- 22 dramatically under-inclusive because it
- 23 categorically exempts e-commerce apps that this
- 24 record shows have comparable ties to China --
- 25 JUSTICE ALITO: All right. You say --

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1 you say -- I don't want to prolong this too
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- 2 much. You -- you say this is not like Arcara, I
- 3 think primarily because you say that divestiture
- 4 requires the new company to cease using the
- 5 algorithm, right?
- 6 MR. FRANCISCO: No. I think it's not
- 7 like Arcara for a much more fundamental sense.
- 8 Arcara involved a totally
- 9 speech-neutral law. It didn't go after speakers
- 10 at all. If you had a law in Arcara that said
- 11 we're going to prohibit prostitution in
- 12 bookstores only, then I think that Arcara would
- 13 have come out differently. There would have at
- least been, you know, some kind of intermediate
- 15 scrutiny, potentially strict scrutiny.
- 16 JUSTICE ALITO: All right. Well,
- 17 you're -- you're continuing --
- MR. FRANCISCO: That's the law that I
- 19 think is your hypothetical.
- 20 JUSTICE ALITO: -- you're continuing
- 21 to walk away from the hypothetical that --
- MR. FRANCISCO: I don't think so, Your
- Honor.
- JUSTICE ALITO: -- I proposed for the
- 25 purpose of narrowing in on what your -- on what

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1 your argument is.
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- 2 My -- I understood you to say that
- 3 it -- this -- that would not be a -- a -- a
- 4 solution to the problem because one of
- 5 Congress's motivations was -- was the content --
- 6 was based on the content of TikTok.
- 7 Am I wrong in that? Did I read your
- 8 argument incorrectly?
- 9 MR. FRANCISCO: Well, I think the -- I
- 10 want to make sure I understand what you're
- 11 saying. I -- I certainly think that because one
- of the motivations was content, that is an
- 13 enormously important fact.
- I was trying to answer your
- 15 hypothetical where we were trying to take that
- 16 out of the mix.
- 17 And the reason why Arcara is different
- is because Arcara didn't just simply say no
- 19 prostitution in bookstores. That's what your
- 20 hypothetical effectively says. It says no data
- 21 security problems in speakers or in this
- 22 particular speaker. And I think that that would
- 23 trigger at the very least intermediate scrutiny.
- JUSTICE ALITO: All right.
- MR. FRANCISCO: And then --

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1
                JUSTICE ALITO: Thank you. Thank you.
 2
                CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
 3
      Sotomayor?
 4
                JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: That gets to my
      question, which is Justice -- the Chief Justice
 5
 6
      asked you whether or not we've ever had a case
 7
      where pure ownership was at issue and not
      speech. And I don't think we've had one like
 8
 9
     that, you're right, but I don't think that your
      question -- that the question gets to the
10
      essence of your argument, is it? The essence of
11
12
     your argument is you're being asked to divest
13
     because of speech, correct?
14
               MR. FRANCISCO: Correct.
15
                JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: All right. So, if
16
      I get past that, if I go to Justice Alito's
17
     point, which is I don't think it's just about
18
      speech, it's about data control --
19
               MR. FRANCISCO: Mm-hmm.
20
                JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: -- if it's about
21
     data control -- and assume for the sake of
22
      argument that I believe intermediate scrutiny
23
     applies --
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MR. FRANCISCO: Mm-hmm.

JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: -- to the data

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1 control provision --
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- 2 MR. FRANCISCO: Mm-hmm.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: -- then your
- 4 arguments would be different, wouldn't they?
- 5 They would be under-inclusiveness, they would be
- 6 other arguments, correct?
- 7 MR. FRANCISCO: Well, Your Honor, I
- 8 think they'd be very similar because I think the
- 9 nature of our arguments work just as well under
- 10 intermediate and strict scrutiny.
- 11 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: All right.
- MR. FRANCISCO: If I could unpack that
- 13 a little?
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: No, I'm not going
- 15 to --
- 16 MR. FRANCISCO: Sure.
- 17 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Because we're
- going to run out of time, because we're going to
- 19 need to figure out what intermediate scrutiny
- 20 means. But I'm not sure it means what you do,
- 21 which is I don't think any of our cases have
- 22 ever suggested that we have to use the least
- 23 restricted means under intermediate scrutiny.
- 24 In fact, our cases have said --
- MR. FRANCISCO: Mm-hmm.

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1 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: -- we have to use
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- 2 a reasonable means.
- 3 MR. FRANCISCO: And if I can respond
- 4 to that point specifically, I completely agree
- 5 it's not a least restrictive means alternative,
- 6 Your Honor. But you do have to at least
- 7 consider alternatives.
- 8 Here, if the concern -- let's take the
- 9 data security concern, which you put your finger
- 10 on.
- 11 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Well, I -- I -- I
- 12 know you want to keep going on, but I can't let
- 13 you because I can't monopolize the argument,
- 14 okay? But let me just get to the bottom of
- 15 that, all right?
- You seem to suggest that Congress has
- 17 to actually look at all of the alternatives and
- 18 say no. I don't think we have a case that says
- 19 that.
- 20 MR. FRANCISCO: I -- I am not
- 21 suggesting --
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: If from the record
- it's clear that alternatives won't be adequate
- for whatever set of reasons, isn't that enough?
- 25 MR. FRANCISCO: If the record were

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1 clear on that, that might be enough.
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- 2 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Okay. Now -- I
- 3 take that.
- 4 MR. FRANCISCO: But, here, on the
- 5 key --
- 6 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Now let me go to
- 7 the next question and the last.
- 8 MR. FRANCISCO: If -- if I could, Your
- 9 Honor, just one sentence?
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Mm-hmm.
- 11 MR. FRANCISCO: If, on the key less
- 12 restrictive alternatives, they had actually
- 13 considered them and said what you suggested,
- 14 this would be a different case. But our point
- is that on the key most obvious less restrictive
- 16 alternatives, a law, for example, that simply
- 17 prohibits TikTok, Incorporated, from sharing any
- 18 sensitive user data with ByteDance or anyone
- 19 else, there's nothing in the record that
- 20 suggests they even considered it.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: That's because
- 22 there --
- MR. FRANCISCO: And that's why it
- 24 would fail under even intermediate scrutiny.
- 25 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: We have -- we have

- 1 a different problem, which is that the record
- 2 shows that there is no sharing that could happen
- 3 that wouldn't put the data at security.
- 4 MR. FRANCISCO: That's --
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: But we can go past
- 6 that.
- 7 MR. FRANCISCO: -- that's incorrect
- 8 actually.
- 9 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: No, because the
- 10 NSA doesn't. What's very clear --
- 11 MR. FRANCISCO: Yeah. I'm not talking
- 12 about the NSA.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Or even anything
- 14 else. But putting that aside, one last
- 15 question.
- 16 Assuming that the covert manipulation
- issue is one, I think that what remains is, to
- 18 the Chief's question and Justice Alito's
- 19 questions, if the covert manipulation is a
- 20 concern, then the question becomes what kind of
- 21 burden does it put on TikTok U.S.A.
- 22 And I think your point is that that
- 23 requires strict scrutiny because it doesn't
- 24 permit them to speak to the Chinese government
- 25 through the algorithm and promote whatever

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1 speech it wants to promote through the
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- 2 algorithm, correct?
- 3 MR. FRANCISCO: It doesn't prohibit --
- 4 permit them to speak to the American public
- 5 through the algorithm --
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Right.
- 7 MR. FRANCISCO: -- and promote
- 8 whatever type of speech they want to promote on
- 9 the algorithm. And I -- I also think that this
- 10 covert manipulation is a little bit odd.
- 11 They're not concerned just with covertness. If
- 12 all you were concerned with is secret --
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I'm going to ask
- 14 the SG about that, how you disentangle the two
- 15 things.
- MR. FRANCISCO: Thank you, Your Honor.
- 17 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice Kagan?
- 18 Justice Gorsuch?
- Justice Kavanaugh?
- 20 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Just on the data
- 21 collection interest, I think Congress and the
- 22 President were concerned that China was
- 23 accessing information about millions of
- 24 Americans, tens of millions of Americans --
- MR. FRANCISCO: Mm-hmm.

1	JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: including
2	teenagers, people in their 20s, that they would
3	use that information over time to develop spies,
4	to turn people, to blackmail people, people who,
5	a generation from now, will be working in the
6	FBI or the CIA or in the State Department.
7	Is that not a realistic assessment by
8	Congress and the President of the risks here?
9	MR. FRANCISCO: Well, Your Honor, I'm
10	not disputing the risks. I'm disputing the
11	means that they've chosen. One way, the most
12	direct way to address that, all of this user
13	data sits on data servers in Virginia controlled
14	by Oracle.
15	I'm not talking about the national
16	security agreement. What I'm talking about is a
17	law that simply says to TikTok, Incorporated,
18	and its U.S. employees, you cannot share that
19	user data with anybody. You can't give it to
20	ByteDance. You can't give it to China. You
21	can't give it to Google. You can't give it to
22	Amazon. You cannot give it to anybody under
23	threat of massive penalties.
24	They never even considered that most
25	obvious alternative. And so, whether you apply

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1 intermediate scrutiny or strict scrutiny, it's
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- 2 not a least restrictive means test, but you've
- 3 got to at least consider the most obvious
- 4 alternative.
- 5 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: So you acknowledge
- 6 the risk that Congress and the President were
- 7 concerned about. You're just saying the means
- 8 they chose to address that risk were incorrect?
- 9 MR. FRANCISCO: So I -- I --
- 10 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Not permissible?
- 11 MR. FRANCISCO: -- I mean, I -- I
- 12 certainly acknowledge the risk, but I think
- there are lots of reasons, not just the one I
- just gave, but there are lots of reasons why
- that risk still can't justify the law. When it
- 16 sits alongside of the impermissible covert
- 17 manipulation risk, I think it falls under Mt.
- 18 Healthy. It's no different if they came in and
- 19 said we passed this law, one for data
- 20 security --
- 21 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: I -- I understand
- 22 that, but just on the -- on the data collection,
- that seems like a huge concern for the future of
- 24 the country.
- MR. FRANCISCO: And, Your Honor,

- 1 again, it is a concern -- two responses.
- 2 First, it is a concern that can be
- addressed directly. The reason why there's no
- 4 evidence in this record about whether that kind
- of direct prohibition on TikTok, Incorporated,
- 6 from sharing sensitive user data with anybody,
- 7 including ByteDance, the reason why the record
- 8 is devoid of any evidence of that is because
- 9 Congress never considered the other side of the
- 10 balance.
- 11 And that's the minimum that Congress
- 12 has to do under the First Amendment. It's got
- 13 to at least consider the -- the consequences of
- shutting down a speech platform used by 170
- 15 million Americans against the benefits of an
- 16 alternative like simply saying to TikTok's
- 17 employees, you're essentially going to get
- 18 massive fines, potentially jail sentences, if
- 19 you share any of that sensitive user data with
- 20 anybody, not TikTok, not ByteDance -- I'm sorry,
- 21 not ByteDance, not China, not anybody else in
- the world. Yet there's nothing in this record
- 23 that suggests they even considered that
- 24 alternative.
- 25 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: What happens after

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1 January 19th if you lose this case? Can you
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- just spell that out?
- 3 MR. FRANCISCO: At least as I
- 4 understand it, we go dark. Essentially, the
- 5 platform shuts down.
- 6 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Unless there's a
- 7 divestiture?
- 8 MR. FRANCISCO: Unless there's a
- 9 divestiture. Unless --
- 10 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: A presidential
- 11 extension --
- 12 MR. FRANCISCO: -- President Trump
- exercises his authority to extend it by not --
- but -- but he can't do that on January 19th. On
- January 19th, we still have President Biden --
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Mm-hmm.
- 17 MR. FRANCISCO: -- and on
- January 19th, as I understand it, we shut down.
- 19 It is possible that come January 20th,
- 20 21st, 22nd, we might be in a different world.
- 21 Again, that's one of the reasons why I think it
- 22 makes perfect sense to issue a preliminary
- 23 injunction here and simply buy everybody a
- 24 little breathing space.
- 25 This is an enormously --

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1 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: What do you mean
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- 2 by "shut down" too? Can you just spell that
- 3 out?
- 4 MR. FRANCISCO: So --
- 5 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: If -- if you can.
- 6 MR. FRANCISCO: -- the -- the app --
- 7 one, the app is not available in the app stores.
- 8 That's at a minimum. But, in addition, what the
- 9 Act says is that all of the other types of
- 10 service providers can't provide service either.
- Now there's enormous consequences for
- 12 violating that for the service providers. So,
- essentially, you know, what they're going to say
- is that, you know, I think, we're not going to
- be providing the services necessary to have you
- 16 see it. So it's essentially going to stop
- 17 operating.
- I think -- I think that's the
- 19 consequence of this law, which, again, is why a
- 20 short reprieve here would make all the sense in
- 21 the world. It's an enormously consequential
- 22 decision, and it -- and -- and I think all would
- 23 benefit if it weren't necessary.
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Thank you.
- 25 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice

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1 Barrett?
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- 2 JUSTICE BARRETT: So I just want to --
- 3 just kind of following up on Justice Kavanaugh's
- 4 questions. Let's say I agree with you that some
- 5 level of scrutiny applies and --
- 6 MR. FRANCISCO: Mm-hmm.
- 7 JUSTICE BARRETT: -- I'm trying to
- 8 figure out which level of scrutiny applies, and
- 9 I'm trying to figure out if there's content
- 10 discrimination.
- 11 And let me ask you a different
- 12 question than I did before --
- MR. FRANCISCO: Mm-hmm.
- JUSTICE BARRETT: -- about the
- 15 algorithm. I mean, you keep saying "shut down."
- 16 The law doesn't say TikTok has to shut down. It
- 17 says ByteDance has to divest.
- 18 If ByteDance divested TikTok, we
- 19 wouldn't be here, right? If -- if -- if
- 20 ByteDance was willing to let you go and willing
- 21 to let you take the source code with you, that
- 22 would be fine, right? We would not be here?
- MR. FRANCISCO: Well, Your Honor, if
- 24 ByteDance divested, then the law wouldn't fall
- on TikTok. But the law will -- the law, not

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1 ByteDance. The law requires TikTok to shut
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- 2 down.
- JUSTICE BARRETT: But that's because
- 4 of ByteDance's choice, right?
- 5 MR. FRANCISCO: Well, it --
- 6 JUSTICE BARRETT: I mean, this is like
- 7 Justice Kagan's point. I mean, I'm trying to
- 8 figure out how we account for the reality of
- 9 third-party choices, and --
- 10 MR. FRANCISCO: Mm-hmm.
- 11 JUSTICE BARRETT: -- the choices of
- third parties, that the whole reason for the law
- 13 being passed in the first place.
- MR. FRANCISCO: Yeah, Your -- Your
- 15 Honor, I -- I -- I still don't -- I -- I think
- that the way the analysis works is: Step 1, is
- 17 there a First Amendment violation?
- JUSTICE BARRETT: Right.
- MR. FRANCISCO: Step 2, you get to the
- 20 question that we're grappling with: What
- 21 standard of scrutiny do you apply?
- 22 Typically, what you do is you ask: Is
- 23 this law content-based? Is it content-based
- 24 based on its face? Is it content-based in its
- 25 decision?

- 1 Here, we know it's content-based on
- 2 its face because it says what it says. We know
- 3 it's content-based in its motivation because the
- 4 government concedes it's content-based in its
- 5 motivation.
- JUSTICE BARRETT: Well, that's not
- 7 quite what I'm asking. I mean, let's see.
- 8 MR. FRANCISCO: I -- I think --
- 9 JUSTICE BARRETT: That's the dispute
- 10 between you --
- 11 MR. FRANCISCO: Yeah.
- 12 JUSTICE BARRETT: -- and the
- 13 government, is, is it content-based if it's
- 14 about divestiture and not about telling TikTok
- what content it can display on the platform.
- 16 MR. FRANCISCO: And I think it has to
- 17 be because that's -- I think that that really
- 18 goes to the first question: Does the burden
- 19 fall on the speaker? If the burden falls on the
- 20 speaker, that triggers the speaker's First
- 21 Amendment rights.
- 22 But the law is, in fact,
- content-based, whether it comes in the form of a
- 24 divestiture or something else, when the law
- 25 specifically says it's content-based. We're

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1 worried about the content on the platform and
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- when the government tells you that one of our
- 3 reasons -- one of the things that we're worried
- 4 about is TikTok, not ByteDance, but TikTok,
- 5 Incorporated, and TikTok in the United States
- 6 will, absent the divestiture, have a mix of
- 7 content that we find objectionable. They will
- 8 mix around their videos in a way that is too
- 9 pro-Chinese or too anti-American.
- 10 JUSTICE BARRETT: Okay. Let me --
- 11 MR. FRANCISCO: And that is TikTok,
- 12 the platform.
- JUSTICE BARRETT: -- let me just ask
- 14 you one last question. Why is it impossible to
- divest in the 270 days, even assuming that the
- 16 Chinese government hadn't said you couldn't?
- 17 MR. FRANCISCO: Mm-hmm. Sure. And
- 18 this is the exchange I was having with Justice
- 19 Gorsuch. There -- there are two basic reasons.
- The first is that the underlying
- 21 source code, that's the source code that comes
- in here and then has to be converted and
- 23 executed and --
- 24 JUSTICE BARRETT: But -- but that's
- 25 what Justice Gorsuch said, just not ever.

- 1 So it's not really that you can't do
- 2 it within the timeframe. It's that you really
- 3 couldn't ever divest because you never are going
- 4 to get the source code.
- 5 MR. FRANCISCO: So -- well, let me
- 6 unpack that a little bit. No, it -- it's that
- 7 with the underlying source code, it takes a team
- 8 of engineers to update and maintain that. It
- 9 would take us many years to reconstruct a
- 10 brand-new team of engineers to do that with
- 11 respect to the source code.
- 12 With respect to the sharing of
- 13 content, that was the --
- JUSTICE BARRETT: Yeah.
- MR. FRANCISCO: -- different reason.
- In theory, we could kind of send our salesmen
- around the world, go to Ireland, go to Finland,
- 18 go to every country, and say: Look, you used to
- 19 automatically get our content, but now you've
- 20 got to separately sign up for our platform.
- JUSTICE BARRETT: Okay. So last --
- 22 last point. Let me make sure I understand what
- 23 you're saying.
- It's not that you couldn't execute the
- 25 disentanglement. You could say: We're

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independent. You just can't re-create TikTok in
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- 2 any kind of way --
- 3 MR. FRANCISCO: Well, I think that --
- 4 JUSTICE BARRETT: -- if I recall.
- 5 MR. FRANCISCO: -- any new -- new
- 6 TikTok would be a fundamentally different
- 7 platform with different content, which is yet
- 8 another reason why I think this is a
- 9 content-based restriction that falls directly on
- 10 TikTok, Incorporated, itself and our platform.
- 11 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 12 Jackson?
- JUSTICE JACKSON: So I guess I'm back
- 14 to some of the questions that Justice Barrett
- and Justice Kagan asked about the sort of
- 16 threshold issue that you point out --
- 17 MR. FRANCISCO: Mm-hmm.
- 18 JUSTICE JACKSON: -- which is, is
- 19 there a burden on the speaker.
- 20 I'm trying to understand what the
- 21 burden is that you are articulating and whether
- 22 it really isn't about association and not
- 23 speech. You say -- you have in your brief some
- 24 cases that talk about American speakers being
- 25 free to choose whether to affiliate with foreign

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1 organizations.
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- 2 MR. FRANCISCO: Mm-hmm.
- 3 JUSTICE JACKSON: And the colloquy you
- 4 had with Justice Kagan made me think that what
- 5 you're really complaining about is the inability
- 6 to associate with ByteDance and its algorithm,
- 7 that it's not really about, you know, if TikTok
- 8 came up with its own algorithm or bought an
- 9 algorithm from some other company or devised it
- or whatever. This law would have nothing to do
- 11 with them from your perspective.
- But the problem I think you're
- articulating -- and this is -- I'm -- I'm
- 14 seeking your clarification.
- 15 MR. FRANCISCO: Mm-hmm. Sure. I --
- 16 JUSTICE JACKSON: The problem I think
- 17 you're articulating is that you want to use
- 18 ByteDance's algorithm and, therefore, associate
- 19 with ByteDance, and Congress has prohibited that
- 20 by requiring divestiture.
- 21 So isn't this really a right of
- 22 association case under the First Amendment?
- MR. FRANCISCO: I -- I think it's -- I
- think it's both, Your Honor. I do think that
- 25 that is a component of it. We want to use the

- 1 algorithm that we think reflects the best mix of
- 2 content. That's the algorithm that reflects the
- 3 best mix of content.
- 4 What this law says is we can't do that
- 5 unless ByteDance exercises a qualified
- 6 divestiture. But I also think more directly
- 7 what this law does is it says to TikTok,
- 8 Incorporated, if ByteDance doesn't exercise a
- 9 qualified divestiture, you have to go mute. You
- 10 cannot speak at all. Full stop, period.
- JUSTICE JACKSON: No, I don't think it
- 12 says that, though. I mean, if -- if -- if
- 13 TikTok were to, post-divestiture or whatever,
- 14 pre-divestiture, come up with its own algorithm,
- right, then, when the divestiture happened, it
- 16 could still operate.
- 17 MR. FRANCISCO: Mm-hmm. I think --
- JUSTICE JACKSON: It doesn't say,
- 19 TikTok, you can't speak.
- 20 MR. FRANCISCO: -- I -- I think
- 21 that's theoretically correct, Your Honor.
- JUSTICE JACKSON: Right. But --
- 23 but --
- 24 MR. FRANCISCO: But I think that also
- 25 underscores the content-based nature of the

- 1 restriction. We have to change our speech.
- 2 JUSTICE JACKSON: No, but the fact --
- 3 excuse me. The fact that that's true suggests
- 4 that you're wrong about the statute being read
- 5 as saying, TikTok, you have to go mute, because
- 6 TikTok can continue to operate on its own
- 7 algorithm, on its own terms, as long as it's not
- 8 associated with ByteDance.
- 9 So isn't this really just all about
- 10 association?
- 11 MR. FRANCISCO: Your Honor, I think it
- is partly about association, but I'm going to
- take another shot at explaining why it's not
- 14 just about association.
- JUSTICE JACKSON: Okay. Well, let me
- 16 just take you down the association path for a
- 17 second because, if it is about the association
- of TikTok with ByteDance, then don't we have
- 19 cases that seem to undermine your view that
- 20 Congress can't do this?
- I mean, I thought we had cases about
- 22 Congress prohibiting association with terrorist
- organizations, prohibiting association with
- foreign adversaries. And so why doesn't this
- 25 fall into that kind of group of -- of our

- 1 jurisprudence?
- 2 MR. FRANCISCO: Well -- well, at least
- 3 as I understand all of those cases, they applied
- 4 strict scrutiny. The -- the -- the material
- 5 support statute most definitely applied strict
- 6 scrutiny.
- 7 JUSTICE JACKSON: And -- and
- 8 ultimately upheld the law, so fine.
- 9 MR. FRANCISCO: But -- but -- sure.
- 10 And if -- I think, if we go down the strict
- 11 scrutiny road here, I don't see that this law
- can possibly be satisfied under the interests
- 13 that they assert here.
- But I do want to emphasize why this is
- 15 also about TikTok's speech. Even under your
- 16 hypothetical, where, theoretically, they can say
- 17 something differently than they are say --
- 18 saying today, that in and of itself is a direct
- 19 restriction on TikTok's speech.
- They can't engage in the speech they
- 21 want to engage in. They have to engage in a
- different kind of speech, the speech they don't
- want to engage in. That is a direct burden on
- 24 TikTok, Incorporated's speech --
- JUSTICE JACKSON: All right.

- 1 MR. FRANCISCO: -- wholly apart from
- 2 association.
- JUSTICE JACKSON: I think I understand
- 4 that argument.
- 5 Let me ask you a question about your
- 6 colloquy with Justice Kavanaugh. Did I
- 7 understand you to concede that there is a
- 8 compelling interest and that the problem is
- 9 really tailoring?
- I mean, you said: I understand the
- 11 risks. I don't hear you suggesting that the
- 12 risks don't exist. So it sounds like we've
- 13 gotten past -- even if we're in strict scrutiny
- world, we've gotten past the compelling interest
- 15 part of this.
- MR. FRANCISCO: No, Your Honor. What
- I was saying is that if all you had, standing
- 18 alone, were the data security, that would be a
- 19 different case.
- 20 Here, when you have the content
- 21 manipulation sitting right alongside of the data
- 22 security, that taints the data security
- 23 rationale. If Congress came in and said: We're
- 24 passing this law for two reasons -- one, we
- really care about data security, and, two, we

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1 hate the speech on TikTok -- the data security
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- 2 wouldn't alone sustain that law.
- 3 Under cases like Mt. Pleasant, it
- 4 would speak in both --
- 5 JUSTICE JACKSON: I understand. But
- 6 why -- why -- you're equating we don't want
- 7 foreign adversaries to be able to manipulate the
- 8 content on this platform, you're equating that
- 9 with we hate the content, and I'm just trying to
- 10 understand why.
- MR. FRANCISCO: Be -- be -- sure.
- 12 Because content manipulation is, by definition,
- 13 a content-based distinction.
- 14 Look, everybody manipulates content.
- 15 There are lots of people who think CNN, Fox
- 16 News, The Wall Street Journal, The New York
- 17 Times, are manipulating their content. That is
- 18 core protected speech. That's why they put so
- 19 much weight on this mere covertness. But --
- JUSTICE JACKSON: Right, but that's --
- 21 that -- but that analysis is just about
- 22 content-based versus content-neutral and,
- 23 therefore, whether you apply strict scrutiny.
- I'm in the strict scrutiny world.
- MR. FRANCISCO: Mm-hmm.

1	JUSTICE JACKSON: Okay? I'm assuming
2	that you're right that strict scrutiny applies,
3	and now prong number one in that world is do
4	does the government have a compelling interest.
5	MR. FRANCISCO: And
6	JUSTICE JACKSON: And so I'm trying to
7	understand why the government's argument that we
8	have data manipulation concerns, which I
9	understood you in colloquy with Justice
10	Kavanaugh to say is a risk, and we are
11	concerned, based on what Justice Gorsuch says
12	when he's looking at the facts, you know, that
13	the government contends that there's this real
14	problem with this foreign adversary doing
15	manipulation in other places, are you saying
16	those are not compelling government interests?
17	MR. FRANCISCO: I am 100 percent
18	saying that content manipulation is not just not
19	a compelling governmental interest, it is an
20	impermissible governmental interest. You could
21	not go to CNN or Fox News and say we're going to
22	regulate you because you're manipulating the
23	content in the way that we don't like. That is
24	per se impermissible.
25	JUSTICE JACKSON: Okav

1	MR. FRANCISCO: That is why
2	JUSTICE JACKSON: Can I just ask you
3	one last thing? You you say with respect to
4	the tailoring issue that disclosure, you think,
5	is a possible more narrowly tailored way of
6	handling some of this.
7	And I guess I'm just wondering whether
8	disclosure under this Court's case law and the
9	law of other lower courts doesn't carry its own
LO	First Amendment complications, that don't we
L1	have wouldn't we have compelled speech
L2	problems if disclosure was required in this
L3	situation?
L4	MR. FRANCISCO: Sure, Your Honor.
L5	Now, look, I might think so because I think that
L6	the factual predicate is wrong, but they think
L7	the factual predicate is right. And if the
L8	factual predicate is right, then there are no
L9	First Amendment problems at all under Zauderer
20	and the cases that you're suggesting.
21	And that underscores the larger
22	problem here. Not all disclosures are perfect.
23	I'm not here to argue that they are. But you've
24	always got to consider what the alternative is.

And, here, the alternative is shutting down one  $% \left\{ 1,2,...,n\right\}$ 

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of the largest speech platforms in the --
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- 2 America.
- 3 The reason there's no evidence in this
- 4 record as to disclosures is because Congress
- 5 never even undertook that balancing in the first
- 6 place --
- 7 JUSTICE JACKSON: Thank you.
- 8 MR. FRANCISCO: -- the bare minimum
- 9 that has to be done before we take an
- 10 unprecedented -- unprecedented step of shutting
- down the voices of 170 million Americans.
- 12 JUSTICE JACKSON: Thank you.
- 13 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
- 14 counsel.
- Mr. Fisher.
- 16 ORAL ARGUMENT OF JEFFREY L. FISHER
- 17 ON BEHALF OF PETITIONERS BRIAN FIREBAUGH, ET AL.
- 18 MR. FISHER: Mr. Chief Justice, and
- 19 may it please the Court:
- 20 Wholly apart from the companies' legal
- 21 interests here, the Act directly restricts the
- 22 rights, the First Amendment rights, of American
- 23 creators to participate and speak in what the
- 24 Court a little less than a decade ago called the
- 25 modern public square and what you might say

- 1 today is the most vibrant speech forum in the
- 2 United States of America.
- 3 And the Act, therefore, is inescapably
- 4 subject to strict scrutiny because of the First
- 5 Amendment implications. And the Act fails that
- 6 test and, indeed, any level of scrutiny under
- 7 this Court's case law because the Act and the
- 8 reasons behind it defy our history and
- 9 tradition, as well as precedent.
- 10 American creators have long and always
- 11 enjoyed the right to speak in conjunction with
- 12 foreign speakers or work with foreign
- 13 publishers. Americans even have the right under
- 14 the Lamont case to receive information from
- foreign speakers, indeed, foreign governments.
- 16 The -- so that leaves the -- the government with
- 17 this implication in its -- in its use of the
- 18 phrase "national security" in this context. But
- 19 that just simply doesn't change the calculus.
- 20 Throughout our history, we have faced
- 21 ideological campaigns by foreign adversaries.
- 22 Yet, under the First Amendment, mere ideas do
- 23 not constitute a national security threat.
- 24 Restricting speech because it might sow doubt
- about our leaders or undermine democracy are

- 1 kind of things our enemies do. It is not what
- 2 we do in this country. And so we think the
- 3 Court should reverse.
- 4 And I would welcome the Court's
- 5 questions.
- 6 JUSTICE THOMAS: How exactly is -- are
- 7 the creators' speech being impeded?
- 8 MR. FISHER: So two ways, Justice
- 9 Thomas. First, I'd just point you to the text
- of the statute, which directly regulates text,
- images, communicate -- real-time communications,
- 12 videos. My clients, the creators, are the ones
- creating that speech and posting it to speak to
- 14 other Americans.
- JUSTICE THOMAS: But it doesn't say
- anything about creators or people who use the
- 17 site. It's only concerned about the ownership
- and the concerns that data will be manipulated
- or there will be other national security
- 20 problems with someone who's not a citizen of
- 21 this country or a company who's not here.
- MR. FISHER: So -- so there's two
- ways, and I think the Sorrell case is where you
- look for the analysis of the First Amendment
- 25 burden here. As I said, the text of the statute

- 1 regulates our speech. And then you point out
- 2 ownership, and this was talked about a lot in
- 3 the first part of the argument here, so let me
- 4 be very clear.
- 5 The American creators have a right to
- 6 work with the publisher of their choice. So
- 7 imagine somebody wanted to work on -- post
- 8 speech on Twitter, now known as X, and Congress
- 9 passed a law saying we don't like the current
- 10 owner of X. The current owner of X has to sell
- 11 that platform or else it has to shut down.
- 12 People who post on that platform and
- who, indeed, some of them make a living
- 14 commentating, engaging on current events, news,
- 15 politics, would have a First Amendment claim --
- 16 JUSTICE THOMAS: But -- it -- it --
- 17 MR. FISHER: -- to work with that
- 18 particular publisher.
- 19 JUSTICE THOMAS: -- using that
- 20 argument, you could have said that about the
- 21 breakup of AT&T. You could say that about the
- 22 foring -- foreign limitations of on foreign
- ownership of broadcast companies.
- MR. FISHER: Well, no -- I think that
- 25 you have to dig a little deeper than that,

1 Justice Thomas. It's not mere foreign ownership

- 2 and it's certainly -- the broadcast cases I'll
- 3 get to in a moment. But it's foreign ownership
- 4 because of a particular perspective.
- If you boil it down to an essence, the
- 6 owner of a print media or online media
- 7 publication is -- is -- is the essence of the
- 8 viewpoint of that publication. The current
- 9 owner of X or the current owner of Fox News or
- 10 the current owner of MSNBC has a particular
- 11 perspective. And working with that particular
- 12 platform is shot through with the ownership from
- 13 top to bottom.
- JUSTICE JACKSON: But why couldn't
- 15 Congress prohibit Americans from associating
- with certain foreign organizations that have
- 17 interests that are hostile to the United States?
- 18 I mean, I thought that's what Holder versus
- 19 Humanitarian Law Project allowed, so I don't
- 20 really understand what you mean.
- 21 MR. FISHER: Right. So I'm glad
- 22 you're bringing that up.
- JUSTICE JACKSON: Yes.
- MR. FISHER: So, when it comes to this
- 25 national security, you are right that Congress

- 1 can prohibit Americans, to use that case as an
- 2 example, from associating with terrorist
- 3 organizations or other organizations that pose a
- 4 clear and present danger to this country.
- 5 This case, Justice Jackson, is
- 6 fundamentally different. What the government
- 7 tells you in its own brief that it is worried
- 8 about here are the ideas that might be expressed
- 9 on TikTok. We might undermine U.S. leadership.
- 10 We might sow doubts about democracy. We might
- 11 have pro-China views.
- 12 And so, if you look to whether that is
- 13 a legitimate interest, my fundamental
- 14 submission -- and this, I think, goes to the
- 15 last colloquy you were having with Mr.
- 16 Francisco -- is that is an impermissible
- 17 government interest. And you look throughout
- our history and tradition, and I think the place
- 19 I would point you most directly would be the
- 20 opinions of Justice Brandeis in Whitney and
- 21 Justice Holmes in Abrams --
- JUSTICE JACKSON: I guess I don't
- 23 understand how that's distinguishable from
- 24 what's happening in Holder, and -- and so can
- 25 you just say a little bit more?

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1
                MR. FISHER: It's -- it -- it goes to
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      the nature of the national security threat.
     my position is the government just doesn't get
 3
      to come in and say national security and the
 4
      case is over or you don't get to associate.
 5
 6
     have to dig underneath what is the national
 7
      security claim. And what Justice Holmes said in
     his Abrams dissent -- and I know that was a
 8
 9
     dissent, these are hard issues, but that has
10
     been vindicated over time -- is that it's not
      enough to say national security. You have to
11
12
      say what is the real harm. Is it -- you know,
13
      is it terrorism? Is it where are -- where our
14
     battleships are located?
15
                JUSTICE JACKSON: But Justice
16
     Kavanauqh --
17
               MR. FISHER:
                            Is it war?
18
                JUSTICE JACKSON: -- Justice Kavanaugh
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- 19 presented a number of potential risks, right,
- 20 with -- with foreign adversaries using covert
- 21 manipulation of the data platforms that are
- 22 being used by youths today that would then make
- 23 it more likely that people would turn into spies
- and do terrible things to the United States.
- 25 This is a hypothetical, but --

1	MR. FISHER: Yeah.
2	JUSTICE JACKSON: you know what I'm
3	saying?
4	MR. FISHER: I I get it. So I
5	think, if I understood Justice Kavanaugh
6	correctly, he was talking about the data
7	security arguments. Let me just pull these
8	apart.
9	You first have an argument and the
10	government itself separates these two arguments
11	in its brief. The first argument and the one
12	I'm focusing on initially is the content
13	manipulation argument, and that argument is that
14	our national security is implicated if the
15	content on TikTok is anti-democracy, undermines
16	trust in our leaders. They use they use
17	various phrases like that in their brief. So my
18	primary submission is that is an impermissible
19	government interest that taints the entire Act.
20	Now there's a secondary argument the
21	government makes, and we say you don't even get
22	to that because, once you have an impermissible
23	motive like that, the law is unconstitutional.
24	But, even if you could get to that,
25	Justice Jackson, I do grant that data security

- in -- in the way Justice Kavanaugh spelled it
- 2 out is compelling. That is compelling. But
- 3 that's not the question. You just don't ask in
- 4 the air, you know, was Congress worried about
- 5 data security or could it reasonably worry -- be
- 6 worried about data security? You say, can this
- 7 Act, the Act before you, be sustained on data
- 8 security grounds?
- 9 And our answer to that has to be no.
- 10 You don't have to look any further than the
- 11 divest -- the -- the divestiture provision
- 12 itself, which says that the content
- 13 recommendation algorithm cannot be used in the
- 14 future. Well, that has nothing to do with data
- 15 security. So the core feature of the
- 16 divestiture provision is going at content
- 17 manipulation, which I say is impermissible. You
- 18 can't -- you can't uphold that under data
- 19 security grounds.
- 20 And the rest of the Act, when you look
- 21 at the covered companies provision, Justice
- 22 Jackson, if this were primarily a data security
- law, what you think you'd find is, what kind of
- 24 data is procured? How is it stored? Is it
- 25 shared? Those are the things you think you'd

- 1 find under covered companies.
- 2 But you don't find that. What you
- 3 find is, are text images shared? Is content
- 4 being shared between users? Is it being created
- 5 and posted in a social media platform?
- 6 So I don't dispute for one second that
- 7 data security is a very important thing, and
- 8 Congress in this very law regulated data
- 9 security in other ways with the -- with data
- 10 brokers. That's perfectly permissible. But the
- 11 question before you today is narrower. The
- 12 question is, is this law before you sustainable
- on data security grounds? And that answer has
- 14 to be no.
- 15 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Mr. --
- 16 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Congress
- 17 doesn't care about what's on TikTok. They don't
- 18 care about the expression. That's shown by the
- 19 remedy. They're not saying TikTok has to stop.
- They're saying that the Chinese have to stop
- 21 controlling TikTok.
- 22 So it's -- it's not any -- a direct
- 23 burden on the expression at all. Congress is
- 24 fine with the expression. They're not fine with
- a foreign adversary, as they've determined it

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is, gathering all this information about the 170
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- 2 million people who use TikTok.
- 3 MR. FISHER: Well, again, Mr. Chief
- 4 Justice, if I may, let me separate the -- the --
- 5 where you started, which was the content
- 6 manipulation, and then go to the data security
- 7 part of it.
- 8 So I understand --
- 9 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, the
- 10 first part was not -- I'm not talking about the
- 11 content manipulation. I'm talking about the
- 12 content harvesting.
- MR. FISHER: I -- I -- when you say
- "content harvesting," do you mean people don't
- 15 know where the --
- 16 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, if
- they've got all the information --
- 18 MR. FISHER: Yeah.
- 19 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: -- whatever
- 20 they -- whatever algorithms they want that has
- 21 access to the personal information or at least
- 22 information that is not readily available about
- 23 170 million Americans.
- 24 And whether they're going to use it in
- 25 10 or 15 years, when those people grow up and,

- 1 you know -- you know, have different jobs in
- 2 different places, or whether they're going to
- 3 use it now, that, at least as I look at the
- 4 Congressional Record, is what Congress was
- 5 concerned about.
- 6 MR. FISHER: Well, I think, though,
- 7 that --
- 8 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: And they're
- 9 not concerned about the fact that it is
- 10 available. As I said, the remedy is just
- 11 somebody else has to run TikTok.
- 12 MR. FISHER: Right.
- 13 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: So they're not
- 14 concerned about the content. They're concerned
- about what the foreign adversary is doing.
- 16 MR. FISHER: So, if I may, I think I
- 17 still -- to answer your question properly, I
- 18 think I have to separate two things.
- 19 One is the content recommendation
- 20 algorithm, and that's what I was speaking about
- 21 a moment ago. That has nothing to do with data
- 22 security. That doesn't itself procure data.
- 23 That just determines what videos people see on
- 24 their feed on TikTok.
- 25 As to that, I think the answer is

- 1 inescapably that the government and Congress
- 2 itself was worried about content. The
- 3 government itself is here saying: National
- 4 security.
- 5 So, like, a mix of cat videos or dance
- 6 videos doesn't affect national security.
- 7 What -- no matter what happens, the only thing
- 8 that can affect data security -- I -- I'm sorry,
- 9 national security are the substance of those
- 10 videos.
- 11 And when the government's pressed in
- 12 its briefing, it outright tells you that. It
- 13 says: What we're really worried about is sowing
- doubts about U.S. leaders, et cetera. So let me
- 15 turn then to data security.
- 16 Yes, you know, there were various
- 17 Congresspersons, and in the record that we have
- in the D.C. Circuit, there were conversation
- 19 about the problem of data security here. As I
- 20 said, I don't dispute that that is a valid
- 21 governmental interest.
- 22 So I think you address whether that
- 23 alone could sustain the Act in two steps.
- 24 First, you would ask: If you have an
- impermissible motive and a permissible one, can

- 1 we sustain the Act based on the impermissible --
- base -- based simply on the permissible motive?
- 3 And I think, for the reasons
- 4 Mr. Francisco said and we lay out in our brief,
- 5 that alone, the answer is no under Hunter
- 6 against Underwood and other cases.
- 7 Even if you could get just to the data
- 8 security question, again, you'd have to ask the
- 9 question: Would this law have been passed by
- 10 Congress for data security reasons? Because
- 11 you're asking -- asked to uphold a law based on
- that single governmental interest. And when you
- look through the provisions, like the content
- 14 recommendation algorithm provision, like the
- covered company provisions, the answer's no.
- And if you're still in doubt on that,
- 17 just go back to the under-inclusiveness problem.
- 18 Would a Congress really worried about these very
- 19 dramatic risks leave out a e-commerce site like
- 20 Temu that has 70 million Americans using it and
- 21 every bit the connection to the world of
- 22 Chinese --
- JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Does Congress have
- 24 to go all or nothing on that? I mean --
- 25 MR. FISHER: It -- it doesn't have to

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1 go all or nothing, Justice --
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- 2 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: -- if they -- they
- 3 isolate a particular problem, then they could --
- 4 they might be getting to what you're talking
- 5 about next, who knows, but you're really sitting
- 6 up there and saying Congress would not pass the
- 7 divestiture law if data security were the only
- 8 interest. I mean --
- 9 MR. FISHER: So I'm saying it would
- 10 not have passed this divestiture law if -- if --
- if data security were the only interest.
- 12 It's very curious why you just single
- out TikTok alone and not other companies with
- 14 tens of millions of people having their own data
- taken, you know, in the process of engaging with
- those websites and equally, if not more,
- 17 available to Chinese control.
- 18 So I'm not trying to say that Congress
- 19 has to do everything at once. I'm trying to say
- that once you've concluded that content
- 21 manipulation, for the reasons I've said, as a
- 22 matter of our history and tradition has to be
- 23 impermissible --
- 24 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Is there another
- 25 site like this one that covers half the American

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1 population?
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- 2 MR. FISHER: I don't -- I -- I
- 3 don't think just by way of sheer numbers,
- 4 Justice Sotomayor, that -- the answer has to be
- 5 no.
- 6 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: All right. All
- 7 right. Now put -- put -- the --
- 8 MR. FISHER: But 70 million seems like
- 9 a lot.
- 10 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: A hundred and
- 11 seventy million is a lot, but put that aside.
- 12 MR. FISHER: Yeah.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: And -- and -- and
- 14 then go to the next question, which is: How
- 15 many of these sites have all of the data
- 16 collection mechanisms that TikTok has?
- 17 From what I understand from the
- briefs, not only is it getting your information,
- 19 it's asking, and most people give it permission,
- 20 to access your contact list, whether that
- 21 contact list has permitted them to or not.
- MR. FISHER: Mm-hmm.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: So they can now
- 24 have data about all of your contacts and
- anything you say about them.

1	How many other sites gather
2	information by keystrokes to be able to do voice
3	and finger ID information if they choose? I
4	mean, there's a whole lot of data stuff that was
5	discussed in the brief that I don't think any
6	other website gathers. So wouldn't this be a
7	unique site? If I view the evidence that way,
8	how would this be under-inclusive?
9	MR. FISHER: Justice Sotomayor, I
LO	I I don't think a lot of the suppositions
L1	you're making actually bear out. And, as
L2	Justice Gorsuch was pointing out, one of the,
L3	obviously, the real challenges in this case is
L4	it comes to you without an ordinary trial record
L5	compiled and all the rest. So we have only
L6	limited amounts of information. But,
L7	absolutely, these other websites are taking much
L8	the same kind of information, if not more.
L9	And, as to the as to the contact
20	list thing, I think you also that points out
21	one other aspect of this. That is voluntary
22	decision by an American user to share that
23	information.
24	You know, in the Riley case
25	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: But not informed.

- 1 And even if informed, but he --
- MR. FISHER: Well, but that could be
- 3 solved -- if you don't think it's informed, that
- 4 could be solved by a warning or disclosure.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Well, no, it can't
- 6 be because, for the United States, the threat of
- 7 using that information is what is at issue.
- 8 It's not whether the user thinks it's okay.
- 9 It's whether the U.S. believes that it could put
- 10 sites at issue.
- 11 But let me ask you one --
- MR. FISHER: Mm-hmm.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: -- last question
- 14 and fundamental question.
- 15 Assuming that content -- that
- 16 content-neutral data collection concerns were
- 17 Congress's -- is one of Congress's provisions,
- 18 divest because of this --
- MR. FISHER: Mm-hmm.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: -- why can't we
- 21 separate that out from how we analyze the --
- 22 algorithm question?
- 23 And couldn't we sever the two
- 24 provisions to say: Divestiture is right, but
- you can't force them not to discuss algorithm?

- 1 MR. FISHER: Well, I think the reason
- 2 why you can't do that is -- is -- is was
- 3 Mr. Francisco explained. I -- I direct you to a
- 4 case like Hunter against Underwood and just --
- 5 and -- and -- analogize it to this situation.
- If what you had is the government
- 7 saying: We -- we are shutting down TikTok or
- 8 requiring divestiture for two reasons, one,
- 9 because we think it helps the Democratic Party
- 10 too much and, number two, because we're
- 11 concerned about data, I think that first
- interest would be a poison pill. That would be
- an impermissible -- or because we think it, you
- 14 know, there's too much pro-Catholic content on
- 15 TikTok.
- 16 I think there are some interests that
- 17 are just so constitutionally verboten that I
- 18 think that -- that just makes the Act
- 19 unconstitutional, and you can't go looking for
- 20 other interests.
- You send it back to Congress: Look,
- 22 if you want to pass a data security law free and
- 23 clear of this impermissible interest, you go
- 24 ahead and do it.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Thank you,

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1 counsel.
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- JUSTICE GORSUCH: So, Mr. --
- 3 MR. FISHER: Can I say one other
- 4 thing, Justice Sotomayor, just because I think
- 5 it is also telling here that even if you didn't
- 6 buy that poison pill argument and you just asked
- 7 whether Congress would have passed this law,
- 8 something else that I think you might notice is,
- 9 even if all this Act goes into effect and the --
- 10 and the law goes through, TikTok gets to keep
- 11 all the data.
- 12 So wouldn't a data security law
- 13 require them to expunge that data or get rid of
- it or something? I mean, it's a very weird law
- if you're just looking at it through a data
- 16 security lens --
- 17 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Mr. --
- 18 MR. FISHER: -- and maybe Congress
- 19 could do better.
- 20 JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- Mr. Fisher, you
- 21 know, often we require divestiture for antitrust
- reasons, for example. And, as I take it, your
- argument here -- and we don't think of those as
- 24 normally implicating the First Amendment
- interests of users or people who might speak

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1 or --
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- 2 MR. FISHER: Right.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- associate with
- 4 editors. And -- and -- and the difference here
- 5 is, as I understand it, in your mind, that this
- 6 law is motivated by a content-based interest.
- 7 Is -- is that -- is that a fair summary?
- 8 MR. FISHER: I -- I think that -- the
- 9 only thing I would add to it is the prior step,
- 10 which it is -- it is regulating the speech
- 11 itself for content-based reasons, yes.
- 12 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Yeah. We don't do
- 13 that in the antitrust area --
- MR. FISHER: Exactly.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- but you say this
- law does.
- 17 MR. FISHER: Exactly.
- 18 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Okay. And -- and it
- 19 does on -- on the content -- covert content
- 20 manipulation side, do you think that's a
- 21 compelling interest or not? Forget about the
- 22 tailoring for a moment.
- MR. FISHER: No. My point is is that
- 24 preventing content manipulation, whether it's
- 25 covert or not --

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1 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Is simply not
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- 2 compelling?
- 3 MR. FISHER: -- is -- is
- 4 impermissible. If what you mean by "content
- 5 manipulation" are the kinds of interests the
- 6 government is saying, like undermining trust in
- 7 our leaders --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: Yeah.
- 9 MR. FISHER: -- you know, undermining
- 10 trust in democracy --
- 11 JUSTICE GORSUCH: And that's Whitney
- 12 and Abrams in your mind?
- MR. FISHER: -- that's Whitney and
- 14 Abrams. And, like, those cases --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: Got it. I got it.
- 16 MR. FISHER: Yeah.
- 17 JUSTICE GORSUCH: I got it.
- JUSTICE KAGAN: So, Mr. Fisher --
- 19 JUSTICE GORSUCH: I -- just a couple
- 20 more, I'm sorry.
- 21 MR. FISHER: Yeah. Yeah.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: I'll finish up real
- 23 quick.
- 24 And so that would take us to the
- 25 tailoring question, and there, you say

- 1 disclosure and alerting Americans that there is
- 2 covert content manipulation possibility, putting
- 3 aside that -- the data collection part of it --
- 4 MR. FISHER: Yeah.
- 5 JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- telling Americans
- 6 that there -- there is content -- covert content
- 7 manipulation going on in TikTok or at least it's
- 8 possible.
- 9 And the government says that's just
- 10 simply not enough. And the D.C. Circuit did
- 11 too. And I wanted to give you a chance to
- 12 respond to that.
- MR. FISHER: Right. So I think that's
- 14 the only aspect of the governmental interest
- 15 that could be permissible, the -- the -- the
- 16 covert part.
- 17 And my answer, as you just said, is
- 18 disclosure solves that problem. And -- and --
- and you have a law, a longstanding law which we
- 20 haven't talked about yet today, that gives you
- 21 that example. Again, under a
- 22 history-and-tradition test, you look at not just
- 23 precedent but laws and our traditions of our
- 24 country. Look at the Foreign Agent Registration
- 25 Act, passed -- passed in the run-up to World War

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1 II, and the concern was Americans would be
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- 2 controlled by foreign agents to speak and
- 3 advocate certain causes.
- 4 JUSTICE GORSUCH: We didn't ban them.
- 5 We just required disclosure.
- 6 MR. FISHER: You did not ban them.
- 7 All you did is require --
- 8 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Okay.
- 9 MR. FISHER: You, Congress.
- 10 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Yeah.
- 11 MR. FISHER: All Congress did was
- 12 require a disclosure.
- 13 JUSTICE GORSUCH: I certainly
- 14 wasn't -- I wasn't around for that.
- 15 (Laughter.)
- 16 JUSTICE GORSUCH: On -- on the secret
- 17 evidence point, I'm concerned about the
- 18 government's attempt to lodge secret evidence in
- 19 this case without providing any mechanism for
- 20 opposing counsel to review it. And I -- I
- 21 expressed that concern in Zubaydah, and I noted
- that there are mechanisms to read in counsel and
- that other countries, including our allies,
- 24 often do that. I just wanted to give you a
- 25 chance to give me your thoughts on that.

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1 MR. FISHER: Yes, Justice Gorsuch. We
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- 2 made all those arguments in the D.C. Circuit.
- 3 So there was a flurry of motion practice about
- 4 whether or not the government could rely on
- 5 classified evidence. Those motions were never
- 6 resolved.
- 7 What the D.C. Circuit did -- I think
- 8 you probably noticed from the decision -- is say
- 9 we're going to decide this case solely based on
- 10 the public record, and my understanding is
- 11 that's how it comes to this Court.
- 12 JUSTICE GORSUCH: It's interesting
- 13 that --
- MR. FISHER: But, if the Court were
- 15 ever -- ever --
- 16 JUSTICE GORSUCH: It's interesting
- 17 that Congress hasn't acted in this field. I
- mean, we have in the FISA area, you know, lots
- of opportunity. They're -- they have regulated
- 20 this area, and it does seem like an area that
- 21 Congress might want to -- to pay attention to
- 22 given the increased appeals to secret evidence
- that the government has made in recent years.
- 24 Last question for you. Could the new
- 25 administration after January 20th -- Mr.

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1 Francisco suggested that it might -- be able to
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- 2 extend the deadline even though -- if you were
- 3 to lose here by January 19th, is -- is that
- 4 possible as you read the law?
- 5 MR. FISHER: I'm not sure it is. I'm
- 6 not sure -- maybe -- maybe that's a question for
- 7 the Solicitor General, but --
- 8 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Oh, it certainly is.
- 9 I --
- 10 (Laughter.)
- 11 JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- I thought maybe
- 12 I'd give you a chance too.
- 13 MR. FISHER: The -- the -- so, you
- 14 know, as I understand the law, it's 270 days
- unless extended, and once that time runs, I'm
- 16 not sure you're talking about an extension
- anymore.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: Okay.
- MR. FISHER: You know, there's ex post
- 20 facto law that --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: Yeah, yeah.
- 22 MR. FISHER: -- kind of does this
- 23 stuff.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: Got it. Thank you.
- MR. FISHER: Yeah.

- 1 JUSTICE KAGAN: Can I take you back,
- 2 Mr. Fisher? Let's say I agree with you that if
- 3 you're talking about content manipulation,
- 4 that's an inherently content-based rationale for
- 5 acting. So, if Congress had passed a law that
- 6 says we hate the content manipulation that
- 7 TikTok is doing, that's strict scrutiny land,
- 8 and I don't know that the government can do
- 9 that, however important, you know, the -- the --
- 10 the interest.
- 11 But that's not what Congress is doing
- 12 here -- and this is the same kinds of questions
- 13 that I asked --
- MR. FISHER: Mm-hmm.
- JUSTICE KAGAN: -- Mr. Francisco --
- 16 because, if -- if -- let's take it as a given
- 17 that Congress actually can do whatever it wants
- 18 with respect to a wholly foreign corporation or
- 19 a foreign government.
- 20 MR. FISHER: Yeah.
- 21 JUSTICE KAGAN: And so Congress could
- 22 act with the intent to interfere with the
- 23 content manipulation that a foreign corporation
- is doing. And so now we're in this strange
- world where we're saying they can't act with

1 respect to TikTok. They could act with respect

- 2 to ByteDance.
- Why isn't this Congress acting with
- 4 respect to ByteDance in the sense that all it's
- 5 doing is saying ByteDance has to divest, and
- 6 then TikTok can go about its business, use
- 7 whatever algorithm it wants, use whatever
- 8 content-moderation policies it wants, just like
- 9 everybody else does, choosing from everything
- that's available on the open market?
- 11 MR. FISHER: So I -- let me answer
- 12 that question in two parts from the perspective
- of the creator Americans who want to use this
- 14 platform to speak to other Americans.
- So the first thing is what the Act
- does, as you said, Justice Kagan, is prevent us
- 17 from working with a application that is owned by
- 18 ByteDance that uses this algorithm. Well,
- 19 that's exactly what we want to do. That's our
- 20 editor and publisher of choice that we think
- 21 best disseminates our speech.
- JUSTICE KAGAN: Yeah, but what I'm
- 23 saying to you is, if you just assume a world
- 24 without TikTok, that -- where it's only
- 25 ByteDance --

1	MR. FISHER: Yeah.
2	JUSTICE KAGAN: and you were trying
3	to you you were trying to say, well, we
4	really want to work with ByteDance
5	MR. FISHER: Yeah.
6	JUSTICE KAGAN: and Congress was
7	saying we think ByteDance presents national
8	security interests and they don't have First
9	Amendment rights, they're just a foreign
10	corporation, I think that in that case, the
11	government I mean, tell me if you think this
12	is wrong. It just doesn't matter
13	MR. FISHER: Yeah.
14	JUSTICE KAGAN: that you have
15	creators who want to work with ByteDance
16	MR. FISHER: So
17	JUSTICE KAGAN: because ByteDance
18	is a foreign corporation with no First Amendment
19	rights.
20	Is that what you're contesting?
21	MR. FISHER: So that is what I'm
22	contesting. So you said two things, though. So
23	I could be clear, there's two aspects. Do we
24	have a First Amendment right to work with a
25	foreign company or even a foreign country to

- 1 publish our speech? And then there's a national
- 2 security part that you put into that, which goes
- 3 to the justification.
- 4 JUSTICE KAGAN: Forget that.
- 5 MR. FISHER: But -- forget that. Yes.
- 6 Let's do that. So, if that is right, Justice
- 7 Kagan, then American creators have no right
- 8 to -- to make documentaries with the BBC. They
- 9 can't -- they can't work with Al Jazeera if
- 10 Congress wants to prevent that. Any number of
- other publications that are state-owned wholly
- 12 or partially.
- 13 And even under Lamont, remember, where
- 14 you're not even creating speech, you're just
- 15 listening, you know, that was speech from China
- that the Court said you have a First Amendment
- 17 right to receive.
- JUSTICE KAGAN: So would I be right to
- 19 say that your position is that because of the
- 20 users who want to associate and want to partner
- 21 with this foreign corporation --
- MR. FISHER: Yeah.
- JUSTICE KAGAN: -- the foreign
- 24 corporation ends up having, in your view, the
- 25 exact same First Amendment rights as your users

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1 do? In other words, it's -- it's irrelevant --
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- 2 MR. FISHER: Yeah.
- JUSTICE KAGAN: -- that the foreign
- 4 corporation doesn't have First Amendment rights.
- 5 MR. FISHER: I -- I don't think it's
- 6 irrelevant because you could imagine a situation
- 7 where no American distributor or speaker wants
- 8 to work with that.
- 9 But the -- let me -- let me put it to
- 10 you this way: The Communist Manifesto written
- 11 by Karl Marx has no First Amendment standing on
- its own in America, but if a bookstore wants to
- sell that publication, I don't think Congress
- 14 can prevent it from doing so.
- JUSTICE BARRETT: Well --
- 16 MR. FISHER: A --
- 17 JUSTICE BARRETT: Oh, sorry. Go
- 18 ahead.
- 19 MR. FISHER: No, I'm -- I'm fine.
- JUSTICE BARRETT: No, no, no. It's --
- JUSTICE KAGAN: I'm good.
- JUSTICE BARRETT: Okay. So I want
- 23 to -- but I want to press you a little bit on
- 24 the distinction because, in Lamont, the --
- 25 the -- the prohibition worked directly on the

1 American, like you have to specifically request

- 2 this information that comes.
- 3 This is working -- kind of as Justice
- 4 Kagan's questions were -- were pressing you,
- 5 this is working on ByteDance. It's not saying
- 6 to your creators you can't post on ByteDance.
- 7 That's -- that's indirectly going to happen --
- 8 MR. FISHER: Right.
- 9 JUSTICE BARRETT: -- if ByteDance
- 10 chooses itself not to permit TikTok to walk away
- 11 with the code.
- 12 So does that matter, that distinction
- 13 between Lamont and this case?
- MR. FISHER: No, for two reasons.
- One, under the Sorrell case, you look
- 16 to not just the law itself but its practical
- 17 operation. And the practical operation does
- 18 prevent us from working with ByteDance. So
- 19 that's one answer.
- 20 And, you know, you bring up Lamont,
- 21 and Lamont's actually a very important case, as
- 22 I'm sure you all recognize here. It's important
- to look not just at the Court's opinion but look
- at the briefing in that case. The government
- 25 itself never came in and argued there's no right

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1 to receive this information. That's the sort of
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- 2 greater argument. All the government argued
- 3 was, of course, Americans have a right to
- 4 receive this, but it's just not so much of a
- 5 burden to require them to raise their hand to
- 6 get it.
- 7 So Archibald Cox, when he was the
- 8 Solicitor General, said to the Court quite
- 9 explicitly in the brief we're not even going to
- 10 make this argument because we think it's so
- 11 contrary to history and tradition. All we're
- going to argue is the burden isn't enough.
- Now what happened is the D.C. Circuit
- 14 kind of turned that upside down and said, oh,
- 15 Lamont's just a case about the burden. Well,
- that's because that's the only argument the
- 17 government was even willing to make in this
- 18 Court. There was no argument that Americans
- 19 didn't have the right to hear that speech.
- 20 JUSTICE BARRETT: What about -- so I
- 21 think this goes to Justice Gorsuch's questions
- 22 about antitrust divestiture. Let's say that --
- 23 let's say that for antitrust reasons or -- or
- let's even say not for that. Let's say, for
- 25 suspect First Amendment reasons, Congress tells

- 1 Jeff Bezos that he has to divest in the
- 2 Washington Post. You know, he can no longer own
- 3 the Post. And let's say that neither Bezos nor
- 4 the Post challenges that. But let's say that
- 5 you represent clients who really like the Post
- 6 as it was, who really want to keep receiving the
- 7 Post, who really want to publish op eds in the
- 8 Post.
- 9 MR. FISHER: Yeah.
- 10 JUSTICE BARRETT: Would you have
- 11 standing? Like, what kind of a claim would you
- 12 be making then?
- 13 MR. FISHER: I believe so, Justice
- 14 Barrett. And the Court has cited Lamont in
- other cases in more recent years to say we've
- 16 recognized the right of American listeners to
- 17 receive information from others. And remember
- 18 even that is a lot -- that's only a small part
- of the argument I'm making on behalf of the
- 20 creators.
- You know, I don't mean to diminish
- 22 Mr. Francisco's arguments on behalf of the
- company and ByteDance, but the core speech in
- 24 front of you in this case are the videos and
- 25 other forms of communication that people like my

- 1 clients are posting by the millions every day on
- 2 this platform to share with other Americans.
- JUSTICE BARRETT: Can you win if -- is
- 4 it possible for you to win and Mr. Francisco to
- 5 lose? Or you rise or fall together?
- 6 MR. FISHER: No, I think it's
- 7 possible.
- 8 JUSTICE BARRETT: How?
- 9 MR. FISHER: I mean, I don't think we
- 10 should.
- 11 (Laughter.)
- 12 MR. FISHER: But -- but --
- JUSTICE BARRETT: Well, is it possible
- 14 for you to win and him to lose? I mean, you --
- 15 you want to win.
- MR. FISHER: Well, put it -- let me
- 17 put it this way: If you were to conclude that
- 18 something about the corporate ownership
- 19 structure -- and I think there was some
- 20 conversation about this earlier -- impeded Mr.
- 21 Francisco from being able to assert
- 22 full-throated First Amendment rights in this
- case, I would step in and say, well, certainly,
- 24 we can do that and get you to the strict
- 25 scrutiny.

1	And then the arguments pretty much
2	line up. Then you're in a question of, can the
3	government satisfy strict scrutiny? And I
4	think, Mr. Chief Justice, you asked about do we
5	have cases for this and that. I think that the
6	idea is, yes, we have cases that say once you're
7	in strict scrutiny that regulating the content
8	because you don't think it's going to be
9	pro-American enough or it's going to be too
10	pro-foreign interest is just verboten under the
11	First Amendment. That's the history and
12	tradition.
13	And, Justice Kavanaugh, when you asked
14	about the broadcast cases, they're they're
15	grounded not just in scarcity, but they're
16	grounded in scarcity in a particular way, and it
17	has to do with the absolute need Congress has
18	for licensing in a world of scarce resources.
19	And so that's the very small carveout that even
20	in Turner the Court wouldn't extend to cable
21	television that exists for broadcast licensing.
22	And if you look in the 200-plus years
23	of our country for any other example of foreign
24	ownership of media being regulated by Congress,
25	let alone being permitted in the case law, you

1 are not going to find it, and I think the reason

- why is because everybody has understood that if
- 3 you're not in a world of scarcity where
- 4 licensing is impossible, you cannot give the
- 5 government and, in this -- in this more extreme
- 6 example, the President himself unbridled
- 7 discretion to choose who is a proper owner of a
- 8 speech platform in this country.
- 9 Because it is so hand-in-hand with
- 10 viewpoint, as I said earlier, any number of
- owners of big media enterprises, whether they be
- 12 Americans or foreign citizens, could be accused
- of having a particular viewpoint, but speakers
- who engage in those platforms have choices they
- 15 can make.
- And so, you know, on behalf of our
- 17 creator clients, we find it -- we find it not at
- 18 all satisfactory to be told: Well, look, just
- 19 go post somewhere else. You know, it's not
- 20 enough to tell a writer: Well, you can't
- 21 publish an op ed in the Wall Street Journal
- 22 because you can publish it in the New York Times
- 23 instead. Just like here, to say: You can
- 24 publish it on Instagram or some other platform,
- 25 not just TikTok.

- 1 TikTok has a distinct editorial and 2 publicational perspective, and it particularly 3 benefits people like my clients, who are not famous people. They're not actors from 4 Hollywood who have a lot of people following 5 6 They're ordinary American citizens whose 7 content that they create on the platform gets privileged by way of the quality of that 8 9 content. 10 And that's what's so powerful about 11 the platform. So whether you're an ordinary 12 American citizen or, I might add, whether you're a presidential candidate in our last election, 13 14 if you want to reach new and different 15 audiences, TikTok is the place people go. 16 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, this may not 17 make any difference for constitutional purposes, 18 but just out of curiosity, I'd like you to 19 explain what the practical consequences would 20 likely be for your clients if TikTok went dark, 21 as Mr. Francisco put it.
- There, I assume, is a great demand for what TikTok provides, and if TikTok was no longer there to provide what your clients really want, is there a reason to doubt that some other

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1 social media company would not jump in and take
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- 2 advantage of this very lucrative market?
- MR. FISHER: There are two reasons,
- 4 Justice Alito. One is many of the declarations
- 5 from my clients actually explain they have tried
- on other platforms to generate the kind of
- 7 audience and engagement they've been able to on
- 8 TikTok, and they've fallen dramatically --
- 9 JUSTICE ALITO: Yeah, I know, they
- 10 haven't so far. And I -- I'm just -- you know,
- 11 I'm just wondering whether this is like
- 12 somebody's attachment to an old article of
- 13 clothing.
- I mean, I really love this old shirt
- 15 because I've been wearing this old shirt, but I
- 16 could go out and buy something exactly like
- 17 that, but, no, I like the old shirt.
- Is that what we have here, or is there
- 19 some -- some reason to think that only
- 20 ByteDance --
- MR. FISHER: Yeah.
- JUSTICE ALITO: -- has this -- can --
- 23 that ByteDance has devised this magical
- 24 algorithm that all of the geniuses at Meta and
- 25 all of these other social media companies, they

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1 couldn't -- no matter, they put their minds to
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- 2 it, they couldn't come up with this magical
- 3 thing?
- 4 MR. FISHER: I -- I think,
- 5 empirically, the other companies have been
- 6 trying for a few years to catch up with TikTok
- 7 and replicate it and have been very
- 8 unsuccessful, and so that ought to tell you
- 9 something.
- 10 And so just imagine the algorithm here
- 11 as a collection of thousands of editors. You
- 12 know, imagine the floors of an office building
- being filled with a collection of editors. You
- 14 could imagine a situation where that collection
- of genius that is on a particular floor cannot
- 16 be replicated by another group of people.
- 17 JUSTICE ALITO: Okay. All right.
- 18 MR. FISHER: And that's kind of what
- 19 you have here.
- 20 JUSTICE ALITO: All right. I
- 21 understand that.
- 22 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
- 23 counsel.
- 24 Justice Thomas?
- 25 Anything further, Justice Alito?

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JUSTICE ALITO: Yeah, one other -- one
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    other question. I'm intriqued by your Mt.
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- 3 Healthy, Hunter versus Underwood argument.
- mean, maybe you're right, but Mt. Healthy arose 4
- in an entirely different context, where you're 5
- 6 trying to get to an employer's motivation.
- 7 MR. FISHER: Yeah.

- 8 JUSTICE ALITO: Hunter verse -- versus
- Underwood involved an extreme situation where 9
- 10 the Court looked at the records of a state
- 11 constitutional convention and came to the
- 12 conclusion apparently that racism was the only
- motivation for what was done. But it does seem 13
- 14 to me to be potentially quite unworkable and
- 15 contrary to what we've generally said about
- 16 legislative intent to apply the Mt. Healthy
- 17 framework to a congressional enactment.
- 18 Do you -- do you -- do you recognize
- 19 or do you -- do you acknowledge that that would
- 20 be very difficult? Because, when an act of
- 21 Congress is passed, there could be more than 250
- different motivations for the votes that were 2.2
- 23 cast by the members.
- 24 MR. FISHER: Mm-hmm. Yeah, I totally
- 25 understand that. And, in Hunter, the Court

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1 actually engaged with that problem to some
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- degree, and what Hunter said is, to avoid that
- 3 problem, we're going to look just to two things.
- 4 One is the state's brief, which I would say is
- 5 the Solicitor General's brief by comparison
- 6 here, and the text of the law.
- 7 And, here, that's the only thing I
- 8 need to rely on to get you to the place that
- 9 they wouldn't have announced -- wouldn't have
- 10 enacted this --
- 11 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, it get -- it
- 12 gets you to the -- it gets you to the place that
- this was part of what motivated Congress, but
- 14 why does it get you home?
- 15 MR. FISHER: Well --
- 16 JUSTICE ALITO: Particularly when
- there's a severability clause in this Act.
- 18 MR. FISHER: -- it can't be only part
- 19 of it. It has to be enough to sustain the
- 20 entire Act or at least the parts that you
- 21 wouldn't sever from the Act.
- 22 And so I think the reason why is
- 23 because it's not just the content recommendation
- 24 algorithm part that can be theoretically, I
- 25 guess, severed out. It's also the covered

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1 company provisions, and it's just the whole
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- 2 approach of the statute that is based on
- 3 content, not on data security.
- 4 JUSTICE ALITO: All right. Thank you.
- 5 MR. FISHER: So -- okay.
- 6 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
- 7 Sotomayor?
- 8 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: No. I'll save it
- 9 for the SG.
- 10 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice Kagan?
- 11 Justice Gorsuch?
- 12 Justice Kavanaugh?
- Justice Jackson?
- JUSTICE JACKSON: One quick question.
- 15 You -- you repeatedly say that the -- from your
- 16 perspective, the government's motivation is that
- 17 the content might be too anti-American or too
- 18 pro-China, et cetera.
- 19 MR. FISHER: Uh-huh.
- JUSTICE JACKSON: So that's why you
- 21 think this is a content-based restriction.
- 22 But I guess I'm curious if you would
- 23 say the same thing if the government had
- 24 articulated its rationale as saying, you know,
- our motivation is to limit foreign -- foreign

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      interference --
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                MR. FISHER: Yeah.
                JUSTICE JACKSON: -- in American
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      social media platforms or discourse. Isn't that
 4
      a different motivation --
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                MR. FISHER: I wouldn't -- I --
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 7
                JUSTICE JACKSON: -- from the
      standpoint of how we characterize this?
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 9
                MR. FISHER: I agree, but then the
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      question I would ask if the government said
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      that, which I think kind of in the reply brief
12
      maybe the government does say that, is that how
13
      on earth are you then serving a national
14
      security interest?
15
                You know, if all you're doing is just
16
      saying we don't like a foreign country
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      rearranging cat and dance videos, like, it's
18
      hard to come in and make a national security
19
      argument.
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                So the only way you get to national
21
      security, which is the government's own
2.2
      argument, is to look at the substance that's
23
      being rearranged and say we don't like the way
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      the substance is going to be rearranged and --
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and curated differently.

1	JUSTICE JACKSON: Thank you.
2	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
3	counsel.
4	General Prelogar.
5	ORAL ARGUMENT OF GEN. ELIZABETH B. PRELOGAR
6	ON BEHALF OF THE RESPONDENT
7	GENERAL PRELOGAR: Mr. Chief Justice,
8	and may it please the Court:
9	The Chinese government's control of
10	TikTok poses a grave threat to national
11	security. No one disputes that the PRC seeks to
12	undermine U.S. interests by amassing vast
13	quantities of sensitive data about Americans and
14	by engaging in covert influence operations, and
15	no one disputes that the PRC pursues those goals
16	by compelling companies like ByteDance to
17	secretly turn over data and carry out PRC
18	directives.
19	Those realities mean that the Chinese
20	government could weaponize TikTok at any time to
21	harm the United States. TikTok collects
22	unprecedented amounts of personal data. And, as
23	Justice Sotomayor noted, it's not just about the
24	170 million American users but also about their
25	non-user contacts, who might not even be

- 1 engaging with the platform.
- 2 That data would be incredibly valuable
- 3 to the PRC. For years, the Chinese government
- 4 has sought to build detailed profiles about
- 5 Americans, where we live and work, who our
- friends and coworkers are, what our interests
- 7 are, and what our vices are.
- 8 TikTok's immense data set would give
- 9 the PRC a powerful tool for harassment,
- 10 recruitment, and espionage. On top of that, the
- 11 Chinese government's control over TikTok gives
- it a potent weapon for covert influence
- operations. And my friends are wrong to suggest
- 14 that Congress was seeking to suppress specific
- 15 types of content or specific types of
- 16 viewpoints.
- 17 Instead, the national security harm
- 18 arises from the very fact of a foreign
- 19 adversary's capacity to secretly manipulate the
- 20 platform to advance its geopolitical goals in
- 21 whatever form that kind of covert operation
- 22 might take.
- The Act addresses the threat of
- foreign adversary control with laser-like focus.
- 25 It requires only divestiture of TikTok to

- 1 prevent Chinese government control, and that
- 2 divestiture remedy follows a long tradition of
- 3 barring foreign control of U.S. communications
- 4 channels and other critical infrastructure.
- 5 So, no matter what level of First
- 6 Amendment scrutiny applies, this Act is valid
- 7 because it's narrowly tailored to address
- 8 compelling national security threats.
- 9 Now my friend, Mr. Fisher, just
- 10 emphasized and I acknowledge that millions of
- 11 Americans enjoy expressing themselves on this
- 12 platform. But the important thing to recognize
- is that the Act leaves all of that speech
- 14 unrestricted once TikTok is freed from foreign
- 15 adversary control.
- 16 The First Amendment does not bar
- 17 Congress from taking that critical and targeted
- 18 step to protect our nation's security.
- I welcome the Court's questions.
- JUSTICE THOMAS: Is there any
- 21 difference between content manipulation by a
- 22 non-U.S. company as opposed to a U.S. company?
- 23 I didn't hear Mr. Fisher make a distinction
- 24 between the two.
- 25 GENERAL PRELOGAR: Yes. And I think

- 1 the important thing to recognize is that the Act
- 2 here is targeting covert content manipulation by
- 3 a foreign adversary nation.
- 4 Now I understand my friends to say --
- 5 JUSTICE THOMAS: What difference does
- 6 that make?
- 7 GENERAL PRELOGAR: The -- the
- 8 difference is that there is no protected First
- 9 Amendment right for a foreign adversary to
- 10 exploit its control over a speech platform.
- 11 JUSTICE THOMAS: No, I mean the
- 12 difference -- the difference between covert and
- 13 non-covert.
- 14 GENERAL PRELOGAR: So I think that --
- that Congress's concern with a covert operation
- was that a foreign adversary could effectively
- weaponize this platform behind the scenes in
- order to achieve any number of geopolitical
- 19 goals.
- 20 Here -- here are some of the examples
- 21 that come to mind. One of the pages out of the
- 22 playbook here is for a foreign adversary to
- 23 simply try to get Americans arguing with one
- 24 another to create chaos and distraction in order
- 25 to weaken the United States as a general matter

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1 and distract from any activities that the
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- 2 foreign adversary --
- JUSTICE KAGAN: I guess, what --
- 4 GENERAL PRELOGAR: -- might want to
- 5 conduct on the world stage.
- 6 JUSTICE KAGAN: -- what do you mean by
- 7 "covert," though? I mean, does "covert" just
- 8 mean it's hard to figure out how the algorithm
- 9 works? Because we could say that about every
- 10 algorithm.
- 11 GENERAL PRELOGAR: No. The covert
- 12 nature of it comes from the fact that it's not
- apparent that the PRC is the one behind the
- scenes pulling the strings here and deciding
- 15 exactly what content is going to be made to
- 16 appear on the site.
- 17 And another way that the PRC --
- JUSTICE KAGAN: It's just because we
- 19 don't know that China's behind it? That's what
- 20 "covert" means?
- 21 GENERAL PRELOGAR: Well, I think --
- JUSTICE KAGAN: It doesn't have
- anything to do with the difficulty of figuring
- out what the algorithm is doing? It's just
- 25 because people don't know that China is pulling

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1 the strings? That's what "covert" means?
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- 2 GENERAL PRELOGAR: What it means is
- 3 that Americans are on this platform thinking
- 4 that they are speaking to one another, and this
- 5 recommendation engine that is apparently so
- 6 valuable is organically directing their speech
- 7 to each other. And what is covert is that the
- 8 PRC, a foreign adversary nation, is instead
- 9 exploiting a vulnerability in the system to
- 10 suppress and silence views --
- 11 JUSTICE KAGAN: Well, that's all it
- means, that, like, people don't know that
- 13 China's behind it? Like, everybody now knows
- 14 that China is behind it.
- 15 (Laughter.)
- 16 GENERAL PRELOGAR: No, but it -- but
- 17 it's the specific -- the specific content that's
- 18 being manipulated would be unapparent. And so I
- 19 think that --
- JUSTICE KAGAN: Well, that's true of
- 21 every search engine. I mean, you can -- you can
- 22 take any of these algorithms, whether it's X or
- 23 whether it's, you know, you name it -- what are
- 24 the new ones, Bluesky -- I mean, none of
- 25 these -- none of these are apparent, right?

1 You -- you get what you get and you think that's

- 2 puzzling. And --
- 3 (Laughter.)
- 4 JUSTICE KAGAN: -- and it's all a
- 5 little bit of a black box. So you can't just
- 6 mean it's a black box, it's covert. They're all
- 7 black boxes. And if you just mean what's covert
- 8 is the fact that there's China behind it, I
- 9 mean, honestly, really, like, everybody does
- 10 know now that there's China behind it.
- 11 So I just don't get what this "covert"
- 12 word does for you.
- 13 GENERAL PRELOGAR: I think the problem
- 14 with just saying, as a general matter, China has
- this capability and might at some point be able
- 16 to exercise it and manipulate the platform is it
- doesn't put anyone on notice of when that
- influence operation is actually happening, and,
- 19 therefore, it doesn't guard against the national
- 20 security harm from the operation itself.
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: General, isn't that
- 22 a pretty paternalistic point of view? I mean,
- 23 don't we normally assume that the -- the best
- 24 remedy for problematic speech is counter-speech?
- 25 And, you know, TikTok says it could even live

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1 with a -- a disclaimer on its website saying
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- 2 this can be covertly manipulated by China in --
- 3 in case anybody were left in doubt after today
- 4 about that possibility. So -- you're saying
- 5 that won't work because?
- 6 GENERAL PRELOGAR: That won't work
- 7 because it is such a generic generalized
- 8 disclosure that it wouldn't put anyone
- 9 reasonably on notice about when it's actually
- 10 happening. And the example I've --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: That's your best --
- 12 GENERAL PRELOGAR: -- been thinking
- 13 about is --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- that's your best
- argument, is that the average American won't be
- 16 able to figure out that the cat feed -- feed
- 17 he's getting on TikTok could be manipulated even
- 18 though there's a disclosure saying it could be
- 19 manipulated?
- 20 GENERAL PRELOGAR: But imagine if you
- 21 walked into a store and it had a sign that said
- 22 one of one million products in this store causes
- 23 cancer. That is not going to put you on notice
- 24 about what product is actually jeopardizing your
- 25 health. And I think that's roughly equivalent

- 1 to the type of disclosure they're contemplating
- 2 here.
- 3 They brought up the example of the
- 4 Foreign Agents Registration Act, FARA.
- 5 JUSTICE GORSUCH: If that -- if that's
- 6 true --
- 7 GENERAL PRELOGAR: There, you have to
- 8 disclose the actual content.
- 9 JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- if that's true,
- 10 then that -- wouldn't that be true for all
- 11 social media companies for all content? I mean,
- 12 every editor, every newspaper in its editorial
- 13 room makes decisions about what it's going to
- run and how it's going to say it. And every
- algorithm has preferences, whether it's domestic
- or foreign. And nobody really knows exactly
- 17 when those editorial decisions are being made or
- how, but they're generally aware, and we think
- 19 that that's enough.
- 20 GENERAL PRELOGAR: I think, though,
- 21 that there is a real risk that when a foreign
- 22 adversary has control of that kind of mechanism
- and a speech platform in the United States, it
- 24 could weaponize -- weaponize that platform to
- 25 harm United States interests. And one of the

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1 key ways that the PRC --
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- JUSTICE GORSUCH: I'm -- that --
- 3 that -- I'm -- I'm --
- 4 GENERAL PRELOGAR: -- flexes its
- 5 muscle is to suppress speech.
- 6 JUSTICE GORSUCH: General, I'm sorry
- 7 to interrupt you, but I'm -- I'm -- again, I'm
- 8 not -- not -- not -- we're not arguing about the
- 9 compelling interest. We're arguing about the
- 10 tailoring.
- 11 GENERAL PRELOGAR: Right. And so I
- 12 guess what I would say -- you began by saying
- 13 the -- the cure for concerning speech is
- 14 counter-speech. Here, I dispute the premise
- that Congress was specifically concerned about
- 16 any particular subject or any particular
- 17 viewpoint. It wanted to close off the
- 18 capability of a foreign government.
- But, in any event, it's very hard to
- 20 engage in counter-speech when you don't know
- 21 because someone is secretly manipulating the
- 22 platform behind the scenes. And, in particular,
- 23 what the PRC has the capability to do --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: Well, wouldn't the
- 25 same thing be true --

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1
                GENERAL PRELOGAR: -- is simply
 2
      silence American voices.
 3
                JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- with a newspaper
      owned by a foreign company and a foreign
 4
      government? You wouldn't know when it's
 5
      exercising editorial discretion about this
 6
 7
     article or that article or how it's doing it, so
     maybe we just need to shut down the Oxford
 8
      University Press in America or, you pick it, any
 9
      other foreign-owned -- Politico I was told today
10
11
      is owned by Germany.
12
                GENERAL PRELOGAR: So what that --
13
                JUSTICE GORSUCH: That would all be
14
      okay on your theory so long as Congress
15
     designates that country a foreign adversary?
16
                GENERAL PRELOGAR: We are not asking
17
      the Court to articulate bright-line rules to
     govern all kinds of hypothetical situations.
18
19
                JUSTICE GORSUCH: I -- I understand
20
      that, but I am testing --
21
                GENERAL PRELOGAR: And --
2.2
                JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- I am testing your
23
      argument.
                GENERAL PRELOGAR: Yes. And in -- and
24
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what I want to acknowledge is that sometimes the

- 1 Court has recognized that a speaker-based
- 2 preference might reflect a content-based
- 3 preference. And in the context of ownership of
- 4 a newspaper, for example, in part, because a
- 5 newspaper is a one-way channel of communication
- 6 and is generally understood to represent to some
- 7 extent its publisher's views, maybe the Court
- 8 would more readily infer that a regulation
- 9 targeting that is actually aiming to target
- 10 conduct -- content.
- 11 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Again, I'm talking
- 12 about the --
- GENERAL PRELOGAR: But I don't think
- that the Court could draw the same conclusion
- 15 here.
- 16 JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- I'm not talking
- about the compelling interest or any of that.
- 18 GENERAL PRELOGAR: Right.
- 19 JUSTICE GORSUCH: I'm talking about
- 20 the tailoring. And -- and you're saying we have
- 21 no alternative but to stop this speech
- 22 altogether. We can't -- we can't rely on
- 23 disclosure. But you say that wouldn't apply to
- 24 Politico or to the Oxford University Press
- 25 because?

1	GENERAL PRELOGAR: In the circumstance
2	where you have a newspaper that is understood to
3	reflect its publisher's views, then you might
4	think that disclosure would be a more adequate
5	remedy there because it's not just holding
6	itself out as a forum for speech between other
7	people.
8	I think social media platforms do
9	raise distinct interests in this regard because
LO	what people think when they're engaging with
L1	TikTok is that it's organically feeding them
L2	videos based on the recommendation engine. And
L3	if actually China is behind the scenes engaging
L4	in this kind of covert operation, it does
L5	prevent a distinct national security risk.
L6	Of course, the other big difference
L7	with a newspaper is it's not likely to be
L8	collecting sensitive personal information about
L9	170 million-plus people and then having the
20	capacity to send that back to a foreign
21	adversary.
22	JUSTICE BARRETT: General Prelogar,
23	can I
24	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Counsel
25	JUSTICE BARRETT: Oh. Go ahead.

1	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: I was just
2	going to say, did I understand you to say a few
3	minutes ago that one problem that Byte is it
4	ByteDance might be, through TikTok, trying to
5	get Americans to argue with each other?
6	GENERAL PRELOGAR: That it might be
7	just trying to foment disruption or dissent.
8	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: If they do, I
9	say they're winning.
10	(Laughter.)
11	GENERAL PRELOGAR: That that might
12	very well be true, Mr. Chief Justice, and I
13	think the point I'm trying to make is that China
14	is a foreign adversary nation that looks for
15	every opportunity it has to weaken the United
16	States and to try to threaten our national
17	security. And if it has control over this key
18	communications channel, it's hard to predict ex
19	ante exactly how it's going to use that as a
20	tool to harm our interests.
21	But we know it's going to try first
22	and foremost by seeking to get the data of these
23	American users, which would be of a piece of all
24	of the activity the PRC has already undertaken
25	to breach our laws, back OPM, for example, and

- 1 exfiltrate the background files and security
- 2 clearances of 20 million government employees,
- 3 the breach of Equifax to get sensitive financial
- 4 data, Anthem to get sensitive healthcare data.
- We know that the PRC has a voracious
- 6 appetite to get its hands on as much information
- 7 about Americans as possible, and that creates a
- 8 potent weapon here because the PRC could command
- 9 that ByteDance comply with any request it gives
- 10 to obtain that data that's in the hands of the
- 11 U.S. subsidiary.
- 12 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you.
- JUSTICE ALITO: Suppose --
- JUSTICE BARRETT: General Prelogar --
- 15 go ahead.
- 16 JUSTICE ALITO: Suppose that TikTok
- 17 had no connection whatsoever with any foreign
- 18 government. It was owned instead by an
- immensely, immensely rich multinational
- 20 corporation, and Congress concluded that this
- 21 multinational corporation really has it in for
- 22 the United States and is going to use this
- 23 extremely popular platform to do everything it
- 24 can to undermine the United States in all the
- 25 ways in which you think that TikTok may -- may

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1 pursue at the direction of the PRC.
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- Would this -- would that be the same
- 3 case?
- 4 GENERAL PRELOGAR: I think there would
- 5 be a first-order question of whether the
- 6 multinational -- corporation itself has First
- 7 Amendment rights.
- 8 JUSTICE ALITO: All right. It's a --
- 9 it's an American corporation.
- 10 GENERAL PRELOGAR: So, if it were an
- 11 American corporation, I think that -- and
- 12 Congress disagreed with the viewpoints or
- 13 content the corporation would display,
- obviously, that's a direct regulation of
- 15 protected speech, and it would trigger strict
- 16 scrutiny.
- 17 I think that's different in kind from
- 18 what Congress was worried about here, which was
- 19 not regulating speech as such but instead
- 20 regulating foreign adversary control and --
- 21 JUSTICE ALITO: So your whole -- your
- 22 argument depends on the fact that what is at
- 23 bottom here is the -- the People's Republic of
- 24 China using TikTok. That's what your argument
- 25 depends on. If this were an American

1 corporation, it would be an entirely different

- 2 thing.
- 3 GENERAL PRELOGAR: Exactly. And the
- 4 reason we know this statute is different is
- because all of the same speech that's happening
- 6 on TikTok could happen post-divestiture. The
- 7 Act doesn't regulate that at all. So it's not
- 8 saying you can't have pro-China speech, you
- 9 can't have anti-American speech. It's not
- 10 regulating the algorithm. TikTok, if it were
- able to do so, could use precisely the same
- 12 algorithm to display the same content by the
- 13 same users.
- 14 All the Act is doing is trying to
- 15 surgically remove the ability of a foreign
- 16 adversary nation to get our data and to be able
- 17 to exercise control over the platform.
- 18 JUSTICE BARRETT: General Prelogar --
- 19 oh, sorry.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I'm sorry.
- JUSTICE BARRETT: I just wanted you to
- 22 respond to Mr. Fisher's argument about the
- 23 rights of Americans to receive information, say,
- from the PRC or anyone else and that even if
- 25 ByteDance did not itself have First Amendment

- 1 rights, that Americans would have a First
- 2 Amendment right to -- to receive that
- 3 information in the Lamont sense.
- 4 GENERAL PRELOGAR: Yes. So I -- I
- 5 think that Lamont reflected a principle that
- 6 there can be a right of American listeners to
- 7 receive information. And if Congress is
- 8 directly regulating that based on disagreement
- 9 with the speech that's being sent into this
- 10 country, that's obviously going to trigger
- 11 heightened scrutiny under the First Amendment.
- But, here, I think the users have to
- 13 be asserting a different type of interest
- 14 because what Congress was safeguarding against
- was not the ability of TikTok to continue to
- operate or the users to post content. It was
- focused only on foreign adversary control.
- 18 And so the users would have to
- 19 demonstrate that they have some unqualified
- 20 First Amendment right to post on a platform
- 21 that's controlled by a foreign adversary, which
- 22 could use that access to then threaten our
- 23 nation's security by gathering data on tens or
- 24 hundreds of millions of Americans and also use
- 25 it for covert influence operations of whatever

- 1 form.
- 2 And I don't think there's a First
- 3 Amendment right to do that.
- 4 JUSTICE KAGAN: I was trying to think
- of whether there's a historical analog here, and
- 6 this is what I came up with, and you can tell me
- 7 whether it's fallacious.
- 8 You know, in the mid-20th century, we
- 9 were very concerned about the Soviet Union and
- 10 the -- what the Soviet Union was doing in this
- 11 country. And the Communist Party of the United
- 12 States at that time was integrally attached to
- 13 the Communist International, which was
- 14 essentially a Soviet operation, right?
- So, if Congress had said: Well, it's
- 16 very nice, we can have the Communist Party
- 17 U.S.A., but it has to divest, it has to
- 18 completely divorce itself from the Comintern and
- 19 from any international ties that it has, do you
- 20 think that that would have been absolutely fine?
- 21 And so, if the answer is yes, yes, it would have
- 22 been fine, it's just like this case, or, if the
- answer is no, why is it not like this case?
- 24 GENERAL PRELOGAR: So I quess I think
- 25 I would need to know info -- more information

- 1 about how the international organization is able
- 2 to exercise control over the American affiliate
- 3 and if it had the capacity, for example, to, in
- 4 an unqualified fashion, gather data from that
- 5 affiliate in a way that was going to jeopardize
- 6 our nation's security or --
- 7 JUSTICE KAGAN: Well, I -- I'm talking
- 8 more about --
- 9 GENERAL PRELOGAR: Yeah.
- 10 JUSTICE KAGAN: -- sort of the
- 11 content. Let's put --
- 12 GENERAL PRELOGAR: Yeah.
- 13 JUSTICE KAGAN: -- the data collection
- 14 piece of this aside, which seems not very
- 15 pertinent to my 1950s analog.
- But, you know, we were very concerned
- 17 about the kind of speech that the Communist
- 18 Party was making in the United States, and it
- 19 turns out that that content was pretty well
- 20 scripted someplace else.
- 21 GENERAL PRELOGAR: I think, if it was
- 22 specifically a concern about the content, then
- that would trigger heightened scrutiny under the
- 24 First Amendment. We're not trying to run away
- 25 from that principle here. Instead, we're

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1 making, I think, a narrower argument.
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- 2 JUSTICE KAGAN: Well, then I think
- 3 that -- that you're a little -- I think you've
- 4 just given your thing away because content
- 5 manipulation is a content-based rationale.
- 6 We think that this foreign government
- 7 is going to manipulate content in a way that
- 8 will -- that concerns us and may very well
- 9 affect our national security interests. Well,
- 10 that's exactly what they thought about Communist
- 11 Party speech in the 1950s, which was being
- 12 scripted in large part by international
- organizations or directly by the Soviet Union.
- 14 GENERAL PRELOGAR: I disagree that the
- 15 concern with covert content manipulation is
- itself content-based or that it looks anything
- 17 like the kinds of laws this Court has previously
- 18 said are content-based.
- 19 The Court most recently in City of
- 20 Austin said you only have a content-based law
- 21 when Congress is setting out to discriminate
- 22 against particular subject matters or particular
- viewpoints.
- 24 So it's not enough that the law is --
- 25 is regulating in the space that involves content

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in some way. You have to have this motive by --
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- 2 Congress to actually want to suppress speech on
- 3 certain topics or certain viewpoints.
- 4 Here, Congress just wants to cut the
- 5 PRC out of the equation altogether, and all of
- 6 the same speech could continue to happen on the
- 7 platform.
- 8 It's like patching up a backdoor
- 9 vulnerability that the PRC has that we can't
- 10 totally see around all the corners to imagine
- 11 how it could use it against our interests, but
- 12 we know the PRC will do whatever it can to try.
- 13 And I think that is different in kind
- 14 from imputing to Congress some motive to
- specifically get more speech on certain topics
- or with certain viewpoints. You know, this law
- was passed by broad bipartisan majorities in
- both houses of Congress, and our legislatures --
- 19 our legislators don't always agree on
- 20 everything. I think it's unlikely that all of
- them had exactly the same views about what's
- 22 good content on TikTok or what are good
- viewpoints. They weren't united on that.
- 24 What they were united around was the
- idea that it is a grave threat to our nation if

- 1 the PRC can itself behind the scenes be
- 2 controlling how this platform operates.
- JUSTICE ALITO: Why doesn't this --
- 4 why doesn't this Act classify on the basis of
- 5 speaker?
- 6 GENERAL PRELOGAR: I do think that
- 7 when it comes to the PRC and ByteDance, you
- 8 could treat this as a speaker-based restriction.
- 9 JUSTICE ALITO: And -- and aren't
- 10 speech -- speaker-based restrictions almost
- 11 always viewpoint-based restrictions,
- 12 content-based restrictions?
- 13 GENERAL PRELOGAR: The Court has said
- it depends. It hasn't applied an inflexible
- 15 rule that anytime you are regulating certain
- 16 speakers you are invariably regulating based on
- 17 content. Instead, the Court has said it
- 18 warrants closer consideration.
- 19 And, here, if you look at the U.S.
- 20 speakers, TikTok U.S. and the users, none of
- them are being regulated in a way that suggests
- its disagreement with their content. It's all
- about what our foreign adversary is doing with
- 24 respect to the platform.
- 25 JUSTICE ALITO: It's hard for me to --

- 1 it's hard for me to think of situations, maybe
- 2 they exist, where a classification based on
- 3 speaker is not viewpoint- or content-based
- 4 restrictions.
- I mean, somebody says Joe can't talk
- 6 anymore. We're going to shut Joe up. And we
- 7 don't know what he's going to say tomorrow or
- 8 two weeks from now. We don't know what he's
- 9 going to discuss. But whatever he says is bad
- 10 because Joe is a bad person.
- I mean, that's -- that's viewpoint-
- 12 and content-based, isn't it?
- 13 GENERAL PRELOGAR: I think, when it
- comes to a foreign adversary, it's not right to
- view it that way, and the reason for that again
- is this is a sophisticated adversary nation, and
- we can't just simplistically say: Oh, what the
- 18 PRC is going to want is to see more pro-China
- 19 content on this app.
- 20 As Chief Judge Srinivasan observed,
- 21 there are various ways that the PRC could try to
- 22 create some kind of false flag operation and
- actually promote anti-China content, not to
- 24 dictate how Americans should think about things
- 25 but simply to create some trumped-up

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1 justification for a military or economic action
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- 2 that the foreign adversary wants to take against
- 3 us.
- 4 And I don't think a concern with
- 5 trying to ward off that capability --
- 6 JUSTICE GORSUCH: Why -- why isn't
- 7 that -- why isn't that viewpoint or content
- 8 still? We don't know what the content's going
- 9 to be, but we know it -- Joe is bad.
- 10 GENERAL PRELOGAR: Because I think the
- 11 better classification is to recognize that what
- we're trying to prevent is not the specific
- 13 subject matter, the specific viewpoints, but the
- 14 technical capability of a foreign adversary
- 15 nation to use a communications channel against
- 16 this.
- 17 JUSTICE GORSUCH: I guess I'm just
- 18 struggling how covert content manipulation isn't
- 19 content-based restriction.
- 20 GENERAL PRELOGAR: So, again, it's
- 21 because --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: I mean, the word --
- 23 it's kind of hard to avoid the word "content" --
- 24 GENERAL PRELOGAR: I don't --
- 25 JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- and it's kind of

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hard to avoid the word "viewpoint" here, isn't
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- 2 it?
- 3 GENERAL PRELOGAR: I don't dispute
- 4 that it's related to content, but I don't think
- 5 it reflects Congress seeking to set out in
- 6 advance what kind of speech we should have
- 7 reflecting certain views on certain topics.
- 8 Instead, it's about trying to close
- 9 off a vulnerability that our foreign adversary
- 10 nation could exploit.
- 11 And I would be remiss if I didn't
- 12 point out that even if you thought this was
- 13 content-based, all that means is that we're in
- 14 strict scrutiny. And, as the D.C. Circuit
- 15 recognized here, we think that this law serves
- 16 compelling national security concerns that sound
- in some of the same arguments I'm making here
- and that have a -- a longstanding correspondence
- 19 to history and tradition --
- JUSTICE GORSUCH: And then we get to
- 21 the --
- 22 GENERAL PRELOGAR: -- of trying to
- 23 prevent foreign control.
- 24 JUSTICE GORSUCH: -- and then we get
- 25 to the question whether there's a -- less

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1 restrictive means, I get that, and whether
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- 2 disclosure might suffice.
- 3 On -- on -- on the data security
- 4 point, your friends on the other side make the
- 5 argument that if that were the concern, Congress
- 6 could ban TikTok U.S. from sharing data with
- 7 anyone on -- on pains of penalties that would
- 8 put people in prison and shut the company down
- 9 in the future, as the government did, for
- 10 example, with Arthur Andersen.
- 11 Why -- why isn't that a less
- 12 restrictive means available?
- 13 GENERAL PRELOGAR: So I was surprised
- to hear Petitioner offer that up today because
- there was a long course of discussion between
- the executive branch and ByteDance and TikTok
- 17 leading up to Congress's enactment of this Act
- 18 that spanned over four years, an extensive
- 19 conversation about what limitations could be
- 20 placed to protect Americans' data.
- 21 And it was never a suggestion that
- there would be any way to create a true firewall
- that would prevent the U.S. subsidiary from
- sharing data with the corporate parent.
- 25 And the reason for that sounds in the

- 1 technological features of this application. I
- 2 think there can be no reasonable dispute that
- 3 the source code development and the maintenance
- 4 of this algorithm rests in China, which is why
- 5 China has sought to try to control export
- 6 restrictions with respect to the algorithm. And
- 7 what that means is you need substantial data
- 8 flows between the companies in order to continue
- 9 to modify that algorithm, refine it and so
- 10 forth.
- 11 So I don't think that that was an
- option ever on the table, including with respect
- to the proposed national security agreement that
- 14 was insufficient in -- in protecting our data
- 15 privacy and security concerns.
- 16 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: That didn't come
- 17 across enough in the briefs. If we are in the
- 18 world of data protection --
- 19 GENERAL PRELOGAR: Yeah.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: -- as opposed to
- 21 content -- content control, I think the -- it's
- 22 hard to get around the post-divestiture
- 23 provision that says you can't do business with
- them on the algorithm because that very much is
- 25 content-based. It's a content-based

- 1 restriction.
- 2 But what you're saying is you can't do
- 3 it for a data control reason, meaning that you
- 4 can't really run their algorithm without sharing
- 5 the very data that we are concerned about as a
- 6 threat, correct?
- 7 GENERAL PRELOGAR: That's right,
- 8 Justice Sotomayor. And you don't have to take
- 9 my word for it. You can look at the specific
- 10 terms of the national security agreement that
- 11 ByteDance itself proposed. The relevant
- definition of the accepted data is at JA 239 to
- 13 240, and it references categories of information
- that would of necessity, technological necessity
- and business necessity, have to flow back to
- 16 China.
- 17 And the relevant categories are in the
- 18 sealed appendix, but I would really encourage
- 19 the Court to look this up because it's
- 20 eye-opening. It is at the court of appeals
- 21 sealed appendix, 249 to 252 and 254.
- 22 If you look at that information, it
- 23 was a wealth of data about Americans that was
- 24 going to have to go back to China in order for
- 25 the platform to just continue its basic

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1 operations. And there's a legitimate commercial
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- 2 justification for that, but it creates this
- 3 gaping vulnerability in the system because, once
- 4 that data is in China, the PRC can demand that
- 5 ByteDance turn it over and keep that assistance
- 6 secret.
- 7 And the one final point on this is
- 8 that ByteDance was not a trusted partner here.
- 9 It wasn't a company that the United States could
- simply expect to comply with any requirements in
- 11 good faith. And there was actual factual
- 12 evidence to show that even during a period of
- time when the company was representing that it
- 14 had walled off the U.S. data and it was
- protected, there was a well-publicized incident
- 16 where ByteDance and China surveilled U.S.
- 17 journalists using their location data -- this is
- 18 the protected U.S. data -- in order to try to
- 19 figure out who was leaking information from the
- 20 company to those journalists.
- 21 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: General, you
- 22 want us to look at that and you get to look at
- 23 it, but your friends on the other side don't get
- 24 to look at it. That doesn't seem fair.
- 25 GENERAL PRELOGAR: That's the sealed

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1 appendix, Mr. Chief Justice, so it's their
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- 2 information. They can look at it. It's just
- 3 under seal to protect their proprietary business
- 4 information.
- 5 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Okay.
- 6 JUSTICE BARRETT: General, so I want
- 7 to go back to the discussion about content
- 8 discrimination and, we're going to shut Joe up.
- 9 Here, it seems to me like we are saying to
- 10 ByteDance, we want to shut you up. And so let's
- 11 say that I think that that is content
- 12 discrimination based on speaker.
- Tell me -- if -- if I think that, tell
- 14 me if I have to conclude that it is also
- 15 speaker-based discrimination and content-based
- 16 discrimination for TikTok.
- 17 GENERAL PRELOGAR: No, it is not, and
- 18 the reason for that is because it would be an
- 19 anomalous principle to say that an entity
- 20 outside the United States that can't assert its
- 21 own First Amendment rights can somehow
- 22 manufacture that right through the expediency of
- forming a U.S. subsidiary, especially one that
- 24 it wholly controls.
- 25 JUSTICE BARRETT: So you don't have to

- 1 stand on that argument that you were having with
- 2 Justice Alito and Justice Gorsuch to still have
- 3 your point about content discrimination?
- 4 GENERAL PRELOGAR: That's right. And
- 5 I think, if you're focusing in on the relevant
- 6 U.S. entities here, TikTok U.S. and the users
- 7 themselves, this Act isn't regulating them in
- 8 any way. It's not trying to dictate the
- 9 algorithm that TikTok U.S. can use. And, in
- 10 fact, Congress, I think, was doing everything it
- 11 could to preserve access to TikTok in the United
- 12 States, in recognition that Americans enjoy
- expressing themselves and building community on
- 14 the site.
- JUSTICE BARRETT: One last quick
- 16 question --
- 17 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, I don't know,
- 18 General --
- 19 JUSTICE BARRETT: Sorry, just one last
- 20 quick question.
- JUSTICE ALITO: No, no, go ahead.
- 22 JUSTICE BARRETT: Justice Gorsuch had
- 23 asked your friends on the other side whether the
- 24 new administration on January 20th could extend
- 25 the deadline. What's the -- your position on

- 1 that?
- 2 GENERAL PRELOGAR: So I think it tees
- 3 up a statutory interpretation question of
- 4 whether there can be an extension after the time
- 5 period for divestiture has lapsed. I would
- 6 think the Court might start with its decision in
- 7 the HollyFrontier case, which did recognize the
- 8 ability to get an extension after a lapse like
- 9 that.
- 10 JUSTICE BARRETT: So it's your
- 11 position that they could?
- 12 GENERAL PRELOGAR: We have not run it
- to ground, in part, because it's simply not
- 14 presented here, and I'm not prepared to take a
- position on that statutory interpretation
- 16 question.
- I do want to emphasize, though, that
- 18 my friends have pointed to January 19th or nine
- days from now as a moment when TikTok might go
- 20 dark. At the outset, of course, Congress was
- 21 hoping to prompt a divestiture, but I think the
- 22 more important thing to -- to focus on now is
- that even if that were to happen, Congress
- 24 specifically anticipated it and provided
- 25 authority to lift these restrictions as soon as

- 1 there's a qualified divestiture.
- 2 And the reason for that is because
- 3 foreign adversaries do not willingly give up
- 4 their control over this mass communications
- 5 channel in the United States, and I think
- 6 Congress expected we might see something like a
- 7 game of chicken, ByteDance saying we can't do
- 8 it; China will never let us do it.
- 9 But, when push comes to shove and
- 10 these restrictions take effect, I think it will
- 11 fundamentally change the landscape with respect
- 12 to what ByteDance is willing to consider, and it
- might be just the jolt that Congress expected
- the company would need to actually move forward
- 15 with the divestiture process.
- JUSTICE ALITO: Well, that's --
- 17 GENERAL PRELOGAR: So it's not
- 18 irrevocable.
- 19 JUSTICE ALITO: That -- that's an
- interesting point, and I hope Mr. Francisco or
- 21 Mr. Fisher, whoever's delivering the rebuttal,
- 22 will address it.
- So, if we were to affirm and TikTok
- 24 were forced to cease operations on January 19th,
- you say that there could be divestiture after

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1 that point and TikTok could again begin to
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- 2 operate the way -- continue to operate?
- 3 GENERAL PRELOGAR: That's exactly
- 4 right. There's nothing permanent or irrevocable
- 5 that happens on January 19th. And I think that
- 6 Congress might have thought that we get in a
- 7 situation here where a foreign adversary is
- 8 doing whatever it can to just not comply. It's
- 9 hoping the United States is going to blink first
- 10 through our court system or through the
- 11 executive branch getting cold feet about
- 12 enforcing the law. But Congress set a deadline
- and I think it thought that deadline would have
- 14 a forcing function.
- 15 JUSTICE ALITO: Let me ask you a
- 16 question about your -- your effort to draw a
- 17 distinction between ByteDance's speech and
- 18 TikTok's speech.
- 19 So suppose that the -- the People's
- 20 Republic of China funds a movie and -- and there
- is a -- an entity in the United States, a U.S.
- 22 corporation, that thinks, wow, this is a great
- 23 movie. And while the PRC would not have a First
- 24 Amendment right to show it in the United States,
- would you say that the American company would

- 1 not have a First Amendment right to do that
- 2 because whatever expression there is in that
- 3 movie, it's the PRC's expression; it's not their
- 4 expression?
- 5 GENERAL PRELOGAR: No. No, I wouldn't
- 6 make that argument. And I want to be really
- 7 careful --
- 8 JUSTICE ALITO: I thought that was the
- 9 argument that was being made. No?
- 10 GENERAL PRELOGAR: No. So our
- 11 argument is that this is not a direct regulation
- of protected speech in the first place, or at
- most, it would warrant intermediate scrutiny
- 14 because of the indirect effects that it might
- 15 have on the American users or on the U.S.
- 16 subsidiary. We're not suggesting that if
- 17 Congress sought to directly regulate and
- 18 prohibit speech in the United States based on
- 19 concerns about its content or viewpoint, that's
- 20 somehow immune from First Amendment scrutiny
- 21 just because it comes from a foreign source.
- 22 Obviously, that kind of law is going
- 23 to trigger strict scrutiny. And I imagine it
- 24 would be a different constitutional analysis
- 25 because it's hard to imagine the same profound

- 1 national security harms that would exist in that
- 2 scenario as compared to what we have here.
- JUSTICE ALITO: Thank you.
- 4 JUSTICE JACKSON: General, isn't the
- 5 whole point of the divestiture requirement that
- 6 the content on TikTok would be different if it
- 7 was owned by a different company? I'm still
- 8 struggling with your insistence that this is
- 9 content-neutral versus content-based when we
- 10 have that kind of circumstance.
- 11 GENERAL PRELOGAR: The reason that I
- 12 am continuing to try to hold the line on that is
- because there is nothing in the Act that would
- 14 directly dictate any different mix of content on
- 15 TikTok. The U.S. subsidiary could use the same
- 16 algorithm, show the same content by the same
- 17 users in exactly the same order. It's not about
- 18 trying to interfere with the U.S. subsidiary's
- 19 exercise of editorial judgment in any relevant
- 20 sense.
- 21 Instead, all Congress was doing was
- 22 homing in on the problems of having a foreign
- adversary be able to interject itself and be
- 24 able to harvest the data or exercise --
- JUSTICE JACKSON: But your friends on

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1 the other side say -- that the motivation for
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- 2 doing that is because the foreign adversary
- 3 might influence or change the content. So
- 4 content is -- I mean, content matters, doesn't
- 5 it?
- 6 GENERAL PRELOGAR: I -- certainly, I
- 7 think that content was relevant to Congress's
- 8 concern about an adversary having control over
- 9 the communications channel. I think not, again,
- 10 because of any particular concern about
- 11 viewpoints or subjects --
- 12 JUSTICE JACKSON: But isn't that
- 13 relevance --
- 14 GENERAL PRELOGAR: -- but just that
- 15 this would be a --
- 16 JUSTICE JACKSON: -- isn't that
- 17 relevance enough to trigger at least some
- 18 scrutiny, a heightened scrutiny, from the
- 19 standpoint of our legal tests?
- 20 GENERAL PRELOGAR: I certainly
- 21 understand that intuition, and if the Court
- thought that it were prudent to simply try to
- 23 rule narrowly here and not dictate broader First
- Amendment principles, we have no problem with
- 25 the Court assuming that heightened scrutiny

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1 applies. We think the law easily satisfies it.
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- 2 We do think that intermediate scrutiny is a more
- 3 appropriate framework for this kind of law
- 4 that's not directly targeting protected speech.
- But, in any event, there's a
- 6 compelling national security interest here, and
- 7 the law isn't just narrowly tailored; it's
- 8 precisely tailored. It's trying to fix the
- 9 thing that's creating the problem, which is the
- 10 PRC's involvement and the Chinese government's
- 11 ability to exercise this control over the
- 12 corporate entities.
- 13 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: How are we
- 14 supposed to think about the two different
- 15 rationales here and how they interact, the data
- 16 collection rationale, which seems to me at least
- 17 very strong; the covert content manipulation
- 18 rationale, as the hypotheticals have
- 19 illustrated, raise much more challenging
- 20 questions for you about how far that goes.
- 21 And if that alone -- if you didn't
- 22 have the data collection piece, you only had the
- 23 covert content manipulation piece, and then
- 24 Mr. Fisher's point, Mr. Francisco's, that
- 25 Congress would not have enacted this just based

- on the data collection rationale alone, just
- 2 your understanding of how the two arguments fit
- 3 together.
- 4 GENERAL PRELOGAR: Sure. And -- and
- 5 let me walk through our defense of the data
- 6 protection rationale and why we think it's a
- 7 full justification for this law and the Court
- 8 could stop there and then be responsive to their
- 9 arguments that somehow the interest in
- 10 preventing covert manipulation somehow taints
- 11 it.
- 12 So just on data protection, I think
- 13 that it should be beyond dispute that, of
- 14 course, our nation has an enormous interest in
- 15 keeping the sensitive data out of the hands of
- our foreign adversary. And it should also be
- 17 beyond dispute that our foreign adversary has an
- 18 existing capability through its laws and through
- 19 the way that these companies are integrated to
- 20 get its hands on that data.
- 21 There is no question that Congress was
- 22 sincerely motivated by that concern. There's a
- 23 whole lead-up to the statute here where the
- 24 executive branch across two different
- 25 presidential administrations was expressing

- 1 concerns about the data problems. Congress was
- 2 extensively briefed on those problems.
- 3 It passed a companion data protection
- 4 statute at the same time that was intended to
- 5 prevent selling data to foreign adversary
- 6 nations. The statute is shot-through with
- 7 protections that I think are key to this concern
- 8 about closing off the vulnerability of access to
- 9 the data.
- 10 So that's a sincere justification for
- 11 Congress's desire here to act. We think it's a
- 12 compelling interest and it's narrowly tailored.
- Then you get to the question of what
- 14 to do about the fact that there's also this
- interest in covert content manipulation. And in
- 16 the First Amendment context, this Court in cases
- 17 like Heffron has made clear that once you have a
- 18 justification that satisfies the First
- 19 Amendment, you don't need to go further and look
- at other justifications to decide whether they
- 21 would independently satisfy First Amendment
- 22 scrutiny.
- So I think it's not necessary for the
- 24 Court to go on and probe whether it thinks that
- 25 covert content manipulation itself independently

- 1 justifies the law.
- Now my friends say that's all fine and
- 3 good, but they think covert content manipulation
- 4 is just per se illegitimate. And I honestly
- 5 don't understand how that argument could carry
- 6 the day because just imagine if Congress passed
- 7 a law that said the PRC can't covertly
- 8 manipulate TikTok. Obviously, that law's not
- 9 going to violate any constitutional principle.
- 10 It's a laudable goal, I think, for our
- 11 legislature to protect us from foreign adversary
- 12 interference like that. And so there's nothing
- 13 something -- there's nothing that's in --
- inherently impermissible about wanting to guard
- 15 against that risk.
- Maybe you could say that it sweeps in
- 17 too much protected speech in the way it's
- 18 operationalized in the Act here, but there's
- 19 certainly no fundamental taint -- taint or
- 20 anything akin to racial discrimination to call
- 21 into question whether Congress could seek to
- vindicate that as one of many interests.
- 23 So I guess, to just kind of bring it
- 24 all together, what I would say to the Court is
- 25 they have basically acknowledged that data

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1 protection is a compelling interest. That was
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- 2 Congress's real interest. It provides a
- 3 sufficient basis on its own to uphold this law.
- 4 The Court could say just that and -- and affirm.
- 5 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I don't know how
- 6 we do that unless we accept your argument that
- 7 the post-divestiture provision that stops them
- 8 from conferring on the algorithm is not a speech
- 9 impediment, meaning it -- it very hard for me to
- 10 say that it's not motivate -- to decide that
- 11 question, that it is a speech impediment and one
- that on its face itself has to be analyzed
- 13 separately from the data.
- 14 GENERAL PRELOGAR: So, Justice
- 15 Sotomayor, let me begin by saying again that we
- do think that an interest in preventing any
- operational agreement between the U.S.
- 18 subsidiary and ByteDance, which is the relevant
- 19 provision you're talking about, is justified by
- 20 data protection alone. And that includes with
- 21 respect to cooperation on a content
- 22 recommendation algorithm specifically because of
- 23 the concern that it necessitates data flows
- 24 between the companies.
- So I think that as a factual matter,

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      that could justify Congress enacting --
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                JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: So, if it's --
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                GENERAL PRELOGAR: But -- but, to the
      extent that you think that actually the
 4
     prohibition on coordinating with respect to an
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     algorithm reflects some kind of impermissible
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 7
      content-based problem with the statute, the
      statute has a severability clause.
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                And I certainly don't think that it
10
      would give the Court a basis to invalidate this
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      law or to -- or to stop it from operating with
12
     respect to all of the provisions that operate to
     protect data security. At most, it would
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14
      suggest that that little piece of the law has to
15
     be on its own severed from the rest of how the
16
      statute operates.
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                JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: How does that
18
     affect whether we would apply -- because,
19
      assuming it's data protection, then I would
20
     think that strict scrutiny wouldn't necessarily
      apply. I could understand applying intermediate
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2.2
      scrutiny.
23
                But how do we do that with respect to
24
      this part, the algorithm issue? How do we get
      to intermediate scrutiny with respect to that?
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1	GENERAL PRELOGAR: The way you get to
2	intermediate scrutiny there is to recognize that
3	prohibiting foreign adversary control over the
4	operations of the platform, including with
5	respect to the fundamental backbone of the
6	system, is not based on any protected speech
7	or or content-based in the relevant sense.
8	I've been thinking of it as akin to
9	something like a piece of software you might
LO	have on your phone that would allow the Chinese
L1	government to listen in on every American
L2	conversation. If Congress wanted to enact a law
L3	that patched up that vulnerability and said you
L4	can't use that piece of software or you can't
L5	coordinate with Chinese companies with respect
L6	to it, clearly, we would recognize that closing
L7	off that capability of China is a laudable and,
L8	in fact, compelling government interest.
L9	And I think, when it comes to the
20	risks that foreign adversary control pose here,
21	it's similar in kind. It's simply trying to
22	prevent access by the Chinese government to the
23	TikTok system writ large, and that includes
24	through the use of the algorithm.
2.5	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Thank you.

Τ	JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Could the
2	president say that we're not going to enforce
3	this law?
4	GENERAL PRELOGAR: I think, as a
5	general matter, of course, the president has
6	enforcement discretion.
7	JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: And would that
8	then adequately would that be binding, in
9	other words, protect the regulated community
LO	such that it could rely on that under due
L1	process principles going forward?
L2	GENERAL PRELOGAR: That raises a
L3	tricky question, so I think there would be a
L4	strong
L5	JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Well, then it's
L6	not going to be adequate, right?
L7	GENERAL PRELOGAR: Well, I think I
L8	think there is a strong due process argument
L9	that the third-party service providers could
20	invoke if there were enforcement action based on
21	a period of time when the president said the law
22	wouldn't be enforced. The con kind of
23	canonical case
24	JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: They're not going
25	to take that risk unless they have the assurance

- 1 that a presidential statement of non-enforcement
- 2 is, in fact, something that can be fully relied
- on because the risk is too severe otherwise,
- 4 right?
- 5 GENERAL PRELOGAR: I think that they
- 6 might judge that based on this Court's precedent
- 7 in the due process space and principles of
- 8 entrapment by estoppel, maybe they have a
- 9 sufficient safeguard here to allow them to
- 10 continue to operate.
- I would think, even before a
- 12 non-enforcement policy were announced, of
- 13 course, the President-Elect would want to review
- all of the updated national security information
- 15 that has come in over the last four years that
- 16 undergird Congress's judgment here.
- 17 But the final thing I would say is
- 18 that even if you think the third-party providers
- 19 are simply going to choose not to continue to
- 20 provide these services because it's too much of
- 21 a risk to take on, again, that's not anything
- 22 permanent or irrevocable, and that might be just
- what the PRC and ByteDance need to start taking
- 24 seriously some of the -- the public reporting
- about interest in acquiring the company.

	l JUSTICE ALITO: At one point,	, IvI1	ır
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- 2 Francisco suggested that what we might want to
- 3 do and what he would regard as certainly
- 4 preferable to a decision affirming on the merits
- 5 was -- is to issue an injunction pending, I
- 6 guess, consideration of what we now regard as
- 7 the -- as the cert petition that was filed here.
- 8 What do you think of that suggestion?
- 9 GENERAL PRELOGAR: So I think this
- 10 Court doesn't have any basis to enter a
- 11 temporary injunction unless it thinks
- 12 Petitioners are likely to succeed on the merits
- of their First Amendment claim.
- 14 And, to be honest, you know, I -- I
- 15 would -- I think that there is no argument to be
- 16 made that you should find that likely success.
- 17 This is an act of Congress. This isn't some
- 18 unilateral action by the executive branch, but
- it actually was action in parallel between the
- 20 Executive and Congress where Congress took
- 21 action to close up a loophole in some of our
- 22 laws. The Executive had tried to force
- 23 divestiture of TikTok under the Trump
- 24 administration, but that had gotten tied up in
- 25 litigation about those authorities.

1	So Congress came in and provided
2	additional authority based on a substantial
3	record, including with respect to the data harm.
4	And I don't see any basis for this Court to
5	displace the deadline that Congress set without
6	finding that actually there is a potential First
7	Amendment problem here.
8	JUSTICE ALITO: Do do you think we
9	have the authority to issue an administrative
10	stay, as we have done in in other cases, or
11	do you think that the January 20 deadline
12	prohibits us from doing that?
13	GENERAL PRELOGAR: I don't think this
14	Court has a formal basis to not issue an
15	administrative stay if it believed that that was
16	necessary to assist in the Court's own
17	consideration of the case.
18	I would obviously defer to the Court
19	and whether it has a sufficient time to resolve
20	the case, but we are here ready to submit the
21	case today. And I think it is in the interest
22	of Congress's work and our national security to
23	resolve the case and allow the statute to take
24	effect.
25	JUSTICE ALITO: Can I just test

- 1 your -- to see whether your recollection of what
- 2 Mr. Francisco said about a warning is consistent
- 3 with mine? I did not hear him say -- he can
- 4 address this in -- in rebuttal -- that it would
- 5 be acceptable to his client if Congress had said
- 6 there has to be a stark warning on every TikTok
- 7 such as: Warning, Communist China -- Communist
- 8 China is using TikTok to manipulate your
- 9 thinking and to gather potential blackmail
- 10 material. Did you hear him say that that would
- 11 be okay?
- 12 GENERAL PRELOGAR: I don't think he's
- made that concession, but, even if he had, I
- don't think that would address the government's
- 15 national security concerns.
- 16 And one of the -- the points here is
- 17 that it's not just data privacy. So, even if
- 18 you could somehow put users on notice that the
- 19 PRC could obtain their data and they choose to
- 20 disregard that, it's not a data privacy
- interest. It's a national security interest.
- There's a distinct sovereign harm to
- the United States if our foreign adversary could
- 24 collect this massive data set about 170 million
- 25 Americans. And, as Justice Kavanaugh touched

- on, you know, there are a lot of teenagers using
- 2 TikTok today who might ignore a warning like
- 3 that and not really care, but they're going to
- 4 grow up and they might become members of our
- 5 military, they might become senior government
- 6 officials. And for the -- the Chinese
- 7 government to have this vast trove of incredibly
- 8 sensitive data about them I think obviously
- 9 exposes our nation as a whole to a -- a risk of
- 10 espionage and blackmail.
- 11 JUSTICE ALITO: Thank you.
- 12 GENERAL PRELOGAR: I did want to touch
- 13 briefly on the questions about history and
- 14 tradition here because my friends have said
- 15 several times that the Communications Act of
- 16 1934, which we think is roughly analogous to the
- 17 type of restriction that Congress was seeking to
- 18 enact here, is justified entirely by concerns
- 19 about scarcity, how you can't have sufficient
- 20 bandwidth.
- 21 And I, of course, recognize that
- 22 scarcity is what created the need for a
- 23 licensing regime in the first place, but I think
- 24 it's important to clarify the historical record
- 25 here that in choosing to limit foreign control

- of radio stations, of broadcast stations,
- 2 Congress specifically cited a concern about
- 3 national security. That is written into the
- 4 statute. National defense was one of the listed
- 5 purposes of having that kind of restriction.
- 6 And so I don't think my friends can
- 7 succeed in being dismissive of that concern
- 8 about history and tradition and what it shows
- 9 about the national security judgments that
- 10 undergird this law.
- 11 The one other factual point I wanted
- to make to be responsive to a few points that my
- 13 friends have touched on relates to whether
- 14 TikTok U.S. has the ability to alter this
- algorithm, whether divestiture is feasible, how
- 16 ByteDance has manipulated the platform in the
- 17 past.
- 18 With respect to the algorithm, I think
- 19 we're simply talking past each other. We don't
- 20 dispute that TikTok U.S. might engage in some
- 21 functions in the United States to customize the
- 22 algorithm for a U.S. audience. The thing we're
- worried about is happening long before that,
- over in China, where ByteDance is developing the
- 25 source code, creating the basic backbone and

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1 functioning of the system, and is then blasting
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- 2 out the algorithm for use by the various
- 3 subsidiaries in their home country.
- 4 So we're not seeking to regulate any
- 5 activity that TikTok U.S. is engaged in here.
- 6 Instead, what Congress is doing is trying to
- 7 close off the vulnerability of PRC access
- 8 abroad.
- 9 With respect to the feasibility of
- 10 divestiture, my friends have said it would have
- 11 been impossible to do this within 270 days. You
- 12 know, at the outset, obviously, there's no
- inherent impediment to divesting a social media
- 14 company. We just saw Elon Musk buy X, or
- 15 Twitter, in about six months from offer to
- 16 completion.
- 17 And even with respect to this
- 18 particular company, I think my friends are not
- well positioned to complain about the timeline
- 20 because they've been on notice since 2020 that
- 21 unless they could satisfy the federal
- 22 government's national security concerns,
- 23 divestiture might be required.
- But, in any event, I don't think that
- 25 the Court should fault Congress for trying to

- 1 balance competing interests here in making sure
- 2 that there was a period for compliance and
- 3 trying to preserve access to the platform for
- 4 Americans while taking steps to safeguard
- 5 against the risk to national security.
- 6 Finally, with respect to the question
- of whether ByteDance has taken action on the
- 8 PRC's demands, there is evidence in the record
- 9 that Congress consulted to demonstrate that
- 10 outside of China, ByteDance has taken action to
- 11 misappropriate data at the PRC's request. That
- included efforts to track dissidents in Hong
- 13 Kong, protestors there, to track Uyghurs in
- 14 China itself. We know that ByteDance has
- misappropriated U.S. data with respect to
- 16 surveilling of U.S. journalists. And there was
- 17 evidence in the record reinforcing the
- 18 conclusion that ByteDance has been asked by the
- 19 PRC to undertake efforts to censor content and
- 20 manipulate the platform at the behest of the
- 21 Chinese government.
- 22 So I don't think there is a factual
- 23 basis to dispute the record that Congress had
- 24 before it.
- 25 If the Court has no further questions.

1	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice
2	Thomas?
3	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I have a question.
4	General, if I understood correctly,
5	under President-Elect's first term, he passed ar
6	executive order requiring divestiture, correct?
7	GENERAL PRELOGAR: That's right.
8	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: And this that
9	was challenged in court and stayed as a result
10	of him exceeding his executive power to do that
11	But this bill followed a bipartisan
12	investigation, correct?
13	GENERAL PRELOGAR: Yes, that's right.
14	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I am a little
15	concerned that a suggestion that a
16	president-elect or anyone else should not
17	enforce the law when a law is in effect and has
18	prohibited certain action, that a company would
19	choose to ignore enforcement on any assurance
20	other than the change in that law. But putting
21	that aside, on the 19th, if it doesn't shut
22	down, there is a violation of law, correct?
23	GENERAL PRELOGAR: Yes.
24	JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: And whatever the
25	new president does doesn't change that reality

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1 for these companies?
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- 2 GENERAL PRELOGAR: That's right.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: How long is the
- 4 statute of limitations in effect? Assuming that
- 5 they violated it that day and later continued to
- 6 violate it, but how long does the statute of
- 7 limitations exist for a civil violation --
- 8 GENERAL PRELOGAR: It --
- 9 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: -- of this sort?
- 10 GENERAL PRELOGAR: It would be a
- 11 five-year statute of limitations.
- 12 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: All right. Thank
- 13 you.
- 14 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
- 15 counsel.
- 16 Rebuttal?
- 17 REBUTTAL ARGUMENT OF NOEL J. FRANCISCO
- ON BEHALF OF PETITIONERS TIKTOK, INC., ET AL.
- 19 MR. FRANCISCO: Thank you, Mr. Chief
- Justice. Four points, all of which go to why we
- 21 think this would law -- law would fail whether
- 22 you applied intermediate scrutiny or strict
- 23 scrutiny.
- I'd like to begin with the least
- 25 restrictive alternative, simply prohibiting

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1 TikTok, Incorporated, from disseminating any of
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- 2 the sensitive user data to anyone, including
- 3 ByteDance, under the threat of massive
- 4 penalties. That is definitely a less
- 5 restrictive alternative.
- 6 Now my friend pointed to the NSA
- 7 negotiations. Well, the sensitive user data
- 8 that we're talking about and that were of
- 9 concern in the NSA negotiations were not the
- 10 type of technical data that she's talking about.
- 11 The NSA did allow certain types of nonsensitive
- 12 technical data to go back and forth, but that
- 13 wasn't anybody's concern. And, as we say in
- 14 20 -- page 23 of our briefs, they simply cut off
- 15 the negotiations without ever raising those
- 16 concerns.
- 17 But, to be clear, if that's a concern,
- 18 sweep that into the ban too. Put in that
- 19 nonsensitive technical data into the ban too.
- 20 We'll deal with that. It's a lot better than
- 21 simply being forced to shut down. So that is
- 22 most definitely a less restrictive alternative
- 23 that would address data security.
- 24 We talked about the
- 25 under-inclusiveness in Temu and Shein, the two

- 1 large e-commerce sites. Justice Kagan, you
- 2 might have seen Temu during the Super Bowl. It
- 3 was heavily advertised. It's got -- it's one of
- 4 the most popular e-commerce applications in the
- 5 United States. It's got 70 million users.
- 6 Justice Sotomayor, you were asking
- 7 what they collect. This is from Joint Appendix
- 8 339 to 343, the U.S./China Economic and Security
- 9 Commission Review Report. Shein relies on
- 10 tracking and analyzing user data, draws on
- 11 customer data and search history with the
- 12 assistance of artificial intelligence
- 13 algorithms. It requests users share their data
- and activity from other apps, including social
- 15 media. So they apparently go into your social
- media apps and suck up all of the information.
- 17 Because they're e-commerce apps, they take
- names, addresses, and credit card information.
- 19 If you look at the privacy policies on
- 20 their website, they were -- they collect
- 21 location data. It -- it looks like they might
- 22 even collect at some level GPS location data.
- 23 So they collect massive amounts of data.
- 24 Point 3: Their mere covertness
- 25 argument makes no sense for the reasons that the

- 1 Court explored. If mere covertness were the
- issue, a disclosure would make perfect sense.
- 3 Yet they're not concerned about mere covertness.
- 4 They're concerned, as my friend suggested, with
- 5 getting Americans to argue with each other.
- 6 Well, you know, as far as I can tell, that's
- 7 what news organizations do in this country every
- 8 single day. That's what we call editorial
- 9 content. That's what we call content itself.
- 10 And so it's trained directly on the content.
- But, even if you thought somehow that
- 12 the mere covertness were the issue, that
- definitely could be addressed through a risk
- 14 disclosure. So the data-sharing ban, the risk
- disclosure, those are obvious less restrictive
- 16 alternatives. And had the government considered
- them and rejected them, we would be in a
- 18 different position. But, if you look at this
- 19 record, those are two less restrictive
- 20 alternatives that the government did not address
- 21 at all.
- Whether you apply strict scrutiny or
- intermediate scrutiny, that is fatal because,
- under both standards, restricting speech has to
- 25 be the last resort, not the first one. And when

- 1 you fail to consider less restrictive
- 2 alternatives, you fail under either standard.
- 3 My final substantive point is we
- 4 absolutely think this Court has the authority to
- 5 enter an administrative stay. I didn't
- 6 understand my friend to disagree with that. We
- 7 think that given the enormity of this decision,
- 8 given the complexity of this case, it would make
- 9 perfect sense for this Court to enter an
- 10 administrative stay.
- I also think you could enter a
- 12 preliminary injunction. Yes, likelihood of
- 13 success is one standard, but you don't have to
- 14 determine ultimate success. And, as you do in
- other related contexts, like with respect to
- 16 stays, you often make clear that you're not
- 17 addressing the merits of the case. I think you
- 18 could do that here.
- 19 The bottom line, Your Honor, is this
- 20 case ultimately boils down to speech. What
- 21 we're talking about is ideas. And my friends on
- the other side, when you cut through everything
- 23 else, are ultimately worried that the ideas that
- 24 appear on the TikTok platform could in the
- 25 future somehow manipulate Americans, could

- 1 somehow persuade them, could somehow get them to
- 2 think something that they ought not be thinking.
- Well, that whole notion is at war with
- 4 the First Amendment. If the First Amendment
- 5 means anything, it means that the government
- 6 cannot restrict speech in order to protect us
- 7 from speech.
- 8 That's precisely what this law does
- 9 from beginning to end, whether you look at its
- 10 text, whether you look at the government's
- justifications in its brief, where they talk
- 12 about being worried about speech criticizing our
- 13 leaders or undermining democracy.
- It's what you see in the House report,
- which turns specifically on the dangers of
- misinformation, disinformation, and propaganda.
- 17 And it's what you see in this legislative record
- writ large, which is saturated with objections
- 19 to -- to TikTok's existing content.
- We ask that you reverse the Court
- 21 below. Thank you, Your Honor.
- 22 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
- 23 counsel.
- 24 The case is submitted.

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                (Whereupon, at 12:38 p.m., the case
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      was submitted.)
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## Official

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