

2024 TIK TOK SYNTHESIS
ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION
SECTION II

Question 1

Suggested reading and writing time - 55 minutes

It is suggested that you spend 15 minutes reading the question, analyzing and evaluating the sources, and 40 minutes writing your response.

Note: You may begin writing your response before the reading period is over.

(This question counts as one-third of the total essay section score.)

According to its home page, “TikTok is the leading destination for short-form mobile video. Our mission is to inspire creativity and bring joy.” Although that mission sounds simple enough, some people believe that ByteDance, Tik Tok’s Chinese-owned parent company, doesn’t do enough to protect its users’ data and may even be used for intelligence gathering and for the spread of misinformation. Several countries and nearly half of the states in the U.S. have blocked the use of TikTok on government-owned devices.

Carefully read the six sources, including the introductory information from each source. Write an essay that synthesizes material from at least three of the sources and **develops your position on the extent to which the American government should take action on TikTok.**

Source A (Nover)

Source B (Bisset)

Source C (Newell)

Source D (Pew Research Center)

Source E (Madhok)

Source F (Heller)

In your response you should do the following:

- Respond to the prompt with a thesis that presents a defensible position.
- Select and use evidence from at least 3 of the provided sources to support your line of reasoning. Indicate clearly the sources used through direct quotation, paraphrase, or summary. Sources may be cited as Source A, Source B, etc., or by using the description in parentheses.
- Explain how the evidence supports your line of reasoning.
- Use appropriate grammar and punctuation in communicating your argument.

Source A

Nover, Scott. "The Grim Reality of Banning TikTok." *Time Magazine*. 15 Mar. 2024.
<https://time.com/6952889/tiktok-ban-freedom-of-speech-essay/>

The following is an excerpt of an article from a popular American magazine.

TikTok stands accused of being a conduit for the Chinese Communist Party, guzzling up sensitive user data and sending it to China. There's not much evidence to suggest that's true, except that their parent company ByteDance is a Chinese company, and China's government has its so-called private sector in a chokehold. In order to stay compliant, you have to play nice. In all of this, it's important to remember that America is not China. America doesn't have a Great Firewall with our very own internet free from outside influences. America allows all sorts of websites that the government likes, dislikes, and fears onto our computers. So there's an irony in allowing Chinese internet giants onto America's internet when, of course, American companies like Google and Meta's services aren't allowed on Chinese computers.

And because of America's robust speech protections under the First Amendment, the U.S. finds itself playing a different ballgame than the Chinese government in this moment. These rights protect Americans against the U.S. government, not from corporations like TikTok, Meta, YouTube, or Twitter, despite the fact that they *do* have outsized influence over modern communication. No, the First Amendment says that the *government* cannot stop you from speaking without a damned good reason. In other words, you're protected against Congress—not TikTok.

The clearest problem with a TikTok ban is it would immediately wipe out a platform where 170 million Americans broadcast their views and receive information—sometimes about political happenings. In an era of mass polarization, shutting off the app would mean shutting down the ways in which millions of people—even those with unpopular views—speak out on issues they care about. The other problem is that Americans have the constitutional right to access all sorts of information—even if it's deemed to be foreign propaganda. There's been little evidence to suggest that ByteDance is influencing the flow of content at the behest of the Chinese government, though there's some reports that are indeed worrying, including reports that TikTok censored videos related to the Tiananmen Square massacre, Tibetan independence, and the banned group Falun Gong.

Still, the Supreme Court ruled in 1964 that Americans have the right to receive what the government deems to be foreign propaganda. In *Lamont v. Postmaster General*, for instance, the Court ruled that the government couldn't halt the flow of Soviet propaganda through the mail. The Court essentially said that the act of the government stepping in and banning propaganda would be akin to censorship, and the American people need to be free to evaluate these transgressive ideas for themselves.

There is legitimate concern in Washington and elsewhere that it's not the government that controls so much of America's speech, but private companies like those bred in Silicon Valley. But the disappearance of TikTok would further empower media monopolists like Google and Meta, who already control about half of all U.S. digital ad dollars, and give them a tighter choke hold over our communication. There's already a paucity of platforms where people speak; removing TikTok would eliminate one of the most important alternatives we have.

Source B

Bissett, Victoria. "America's happiness score drops amid a youth 'midlife crisis.'" *The Washington Post*, March 3 2024. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wellness/2024/03/20/us-world-happiness-report-youth/>

The following is an excerpt of an article from a popular American newspaper.

The United States fell from 15th in 2023 to 23rd in this year's World Happiness Report, which was released Wednesday to mark the United Nations' International Day of Happiness. The country's results varied dramatically among different age groups, however, with young people under age 30 ranking 62nd out of 143 countries for happiness, while U.S. adults age 60 and above ranked 10th.

This is the first time the United States has slipped out of the top 20 since the report was first launched in 2012. But a similar downward trend in youth well-being is also seen in Canada, which ranked 15th overall but 58th among young people this year.

Jan-Emmanuel De Neve, director of the University of Oxford's Wellbeing Research Center and an editor of the report, said in an interview Wednesday that the findings are concerning "because youth well-being and mental health is highly predictive of a whole host of subjective and objective indicators of quality of life as people age and go through the course of life..."

The report found that happiness has decreased for all age groups in the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand since 2006 to 2010, with a particularly notable drop for young people — and young females recorded even lower scores than males. Youth happiness has also fallen in Western Europe, albeit less dramatically.

De Neve said the findings for youth in the United States in particular were "really striking." He said questions remain about the reasons behind the trend.

There's "no real smoking gun" that explains this drop in youth happiness, which began just over a decade ago, he said. Issues such as polarization, social media use and growing health and income disparities could play a role, he said.

Many young adults began college or a career amid a pandemic and have faced high housing prices, misinformation exacerbated by social media, and a loneliness epidemic, as *The Washington Post* has previously reported.

The researchers met Tuesday with U.S. Surgeon General Vivek H. Murthy, who "spoke of K-12 high school students ... talking about sort of a change in culture where there's no longer a culture of speaking to each other," De Neve added. "And that is really horrible because we all know from well-being science that nothing's more important than your social capital — having quality connections and people to rely on and speak with on a very frequent basis."

The study found that "social support" and "social interactions of all kinds" are important for happiness and reducing loneliness. But in many countries, including the United States and Canada, loneliness is "significantly higher for the Millennials than for the Boomers" — a pattern also seen in Southeast Asia and Western Europe, but not in Central or Eastern Europe, the report said.

Source C

Newell, Jim. "Look, Senators Insist, We're Not 'Banning' TikTok, OK?" *Slate*. 21 Mar. 2024. Available: <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2024/03/tiktok-ban-update-senate-house-bill-bytedance.html>

Following a 352 to 65 House of Representatives vote in favor of giving China-based Byte Dance 180 days to divest (remove) itself from ownership of TikTok, or face the prohibition of the app in the United States, Senator Richard Blumenthal responded to the use of the word "ban."

The Senate supporters of House-passed legislation targeting TikTok have a message for anyone who would call it a "ban": Get that *filthy* word out of your mouth.

"We are talking about a transition in ownership, not a ban, not elimination of TikTok—a transition of ownership that puts it in different hands but permits it to continue to exist," Connecticut Sen. Richard Blumenthal said Wednesday. "We're not talking about messing with it; we're not talking about screwing around with an asset; we're not talking about disabling it. We're talking about disarming it."

Blumenthal was among the senators who attended a classified briefing Wednesday morning on national security threats posed by TikTok, the social video app that's a subsidiary of China-based ByteDance. The House last week [passed a bill](#) that would give ByteDance 180 days to divest from TikTok or see the app, well, "prohibited" in the United States. The House vote [was an overwhelming](#) 352 to 65 in favor, a margin wide enough that supporters hoped that it would put pressure on the Senate to act...

While the app waits, though, the bill's Senate supporters are spending a great deal of time emphasizing that this is not a "TikTok ban," a shorthand that many are using for the bill—and the way TikTok is characterizing the legislation in existential warnings to its users. The app is, after all, used by more than 100 million Americans, and disproportionately younger Americans at that. The last thing those senators who support wresting control of the app from Chinese state influence want is for young Americans to think that the lawmakers [are taking away](#) their favorite digital hobby in a fit of pique...

"This legislation is not about banning TikTok," Warner told reporters, *very* early in his remarks, following the briefing. "It's making a transition from the current control by the Communist Party of China to some other owner. And, frankly, there are a lot of American investors in TikTok/ByteDance, and they could roll into the new ownership structure." Pennsylvania Sen. John Fetterman, similarly, stressed that the bill would be about "divorcing" TikTok's relationship with "the Chinese Communist government."

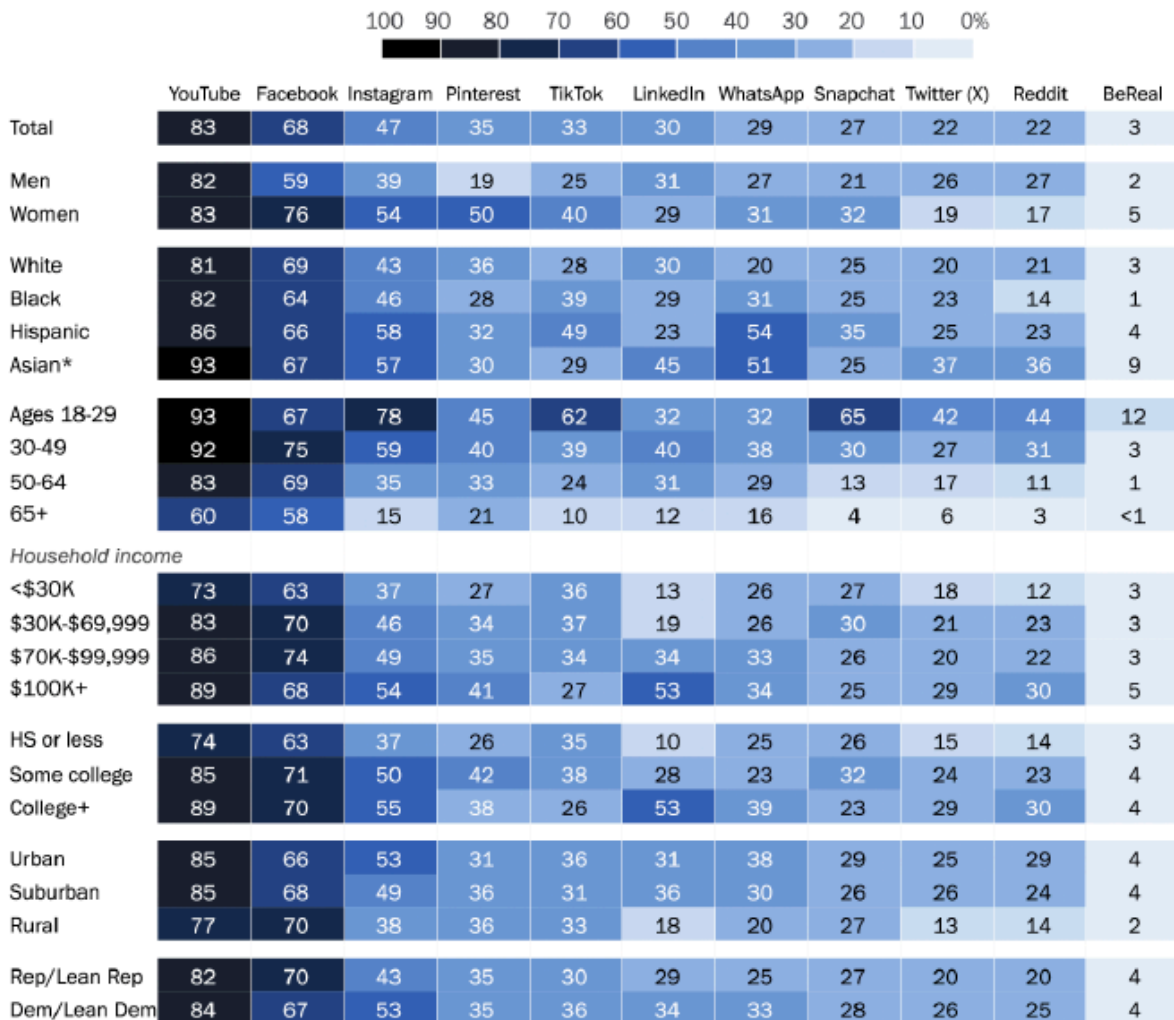
Source D

“How Use of Online Platforms-- Such as Facebook, Instagram, or TikTok-- differs among some U.S. Demographic Groups.” *Pew Research Center*. 26 Jan. 2024. Available: https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2024/01/31/americans-social-media-use/pi_2024-01-31_social-media-use_00_04/

The following is a chart from an American nonpartisan think tank that studies current issues, attitudes, and trends.

How use of online platforms – such as Facebook, Instagram or TikTok – differs among some U.S. demographic groups

% of U.S. adults who say they *ever* use ...



Source E

Madhok, Diksha. "What Happened When the World's Most Populous Nation Turned off TikTok." *CNN*. 15 Mar. 2024. Available: <https://www.cnn.com/2024/03/14/tech/india-us-tiktok-ban-analysis-intl-hnk/index.html>

The following is an excerpt of an article from a popular American news outlet.

In June 2020, after a violent clash on the India-China border that left at least 20 Indian soldiers dead, the government in New Delhi suddenly banned TikTok and several other well-known Chinese apps.

"It's important to remember that when India banned TikTok and multiple Chinese apps, the US was the first to praise the decision," said Nikhil Pahwa, the Delhi-based founder of tech website MediaNama. "[Former] US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo had welcomed the ban, saying it 'will boost India's sovereignty.'" While India's abrupt decision shocked the country's 200 million TikTok users, in the four years since, many have found other suitable alternatives.

"The ban on Tiktok led to the creation of a multibillion dollar opportunity ... A 200 million user base needed somewhere to go," said Pahwa, adding that it was ultimately American tech companies that seized the moment with their new offerings...

A ferocious fight ensued between US tech giants and domestic startups to fill the gap. Within a week of the ban, Meta-owned Instagram cashed in by launching its TikTok copycat, Instagram Reels, in India. Google introduced its own short video offering, YouTube Shorts.

Homegrown alternatives such as MX Taka Tak and Moj also began seeing a rise in popularity and an influx in funding.

Those local startups soon fizzled out, however, unable to match the reach and financial firepower of the American firms, which are flourishing.

Citing independent findings from consulting firm Oxford Economics, a Google spokesperson said that "the YouTube creative ecosystem" contributed roughly \$2 billion to the Indian economy in 2022.

According to Ray, Indian content creators swiftly moved all the old content they had shot for TikTok to Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts. "Some Influencers were uploading seven Reels a day and gaining four to five million subscribers a year," he said.

But not everyone was able to build a significant following on these platforms.

"Many users and creators slipped into a deep, dark space after the ban, and some have still not emerged from that space," said Clyde Fernandes, executive director— artist management at Opraahfx, an influencer marketing and management firm. "The way one was gaining reach and followers on TikTok is [still] incomparable to any other platform out there at the moment," he added.

Source F

Heller, Joe. "TikTok Is Sinister and Needs to Be Sold, or We Will Ban It." *The Week*. 17 Mar. 2024. Available <https://theweek.com/cartoons/cartoons-tiktok-showdown>

The following is an editorial cartoon drawn by an American artist that appeared in several newspapers.



(Image credit: Joe Heller / Copyright 2024 Hellertoon.com)