

# [***On TikTok, Chinese State Media Pushes Divisive Videos About U.S. Politicians***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:670K-SSS1-JBCM-F3KP-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Length:** 1367 words

**Byline:** Emily Baker-White, Forbes Staff

**Highlight:** Many of the videos attacked specific U.S. politicians before the midterm elections and pushed divisive social issues, without clear labels disclosing they were coming from state-controlled media.

**Body**

**Many of the videos attacked specific U.S. politicians before the midterm elections and pushed divisive social issues, without clear labels disclosing they were coming from state-controlled media.**

TikTok accounts run by the propaganda arm of the Chinese government have accumulated millions of followers and tens of millions of views, many of them on videos editorializing about U.S. ***politics*** without clear disclosure that they were posted by a foreign government.

The accounts are managed by MediaLinks TV, a registered foreign agent and Washington D.C.-based outpost of the main Chinese Communist Party television news outlet, China Central Television. The largest of them are @Pandaorama, which features cute videos about Chinese culture, @The Optimist, which posts about sustainability, and @NewsTokss, which features coverage of U.S. national and international news.

In the run-up to the 2022 elections, the @NewsTokss account criticized some candidates (mostly Republicans), and favored others (mostly Democrats). A video from July began with the caption Cruz, Abbott Don t Care About Us ; a video from October was captioned Rubio Has Done Absolutely Nothing. But @NewsTokss did not target only Republicans; another October video asked viewers whether they thought President Joe Biden s promise to sign a bill codifying abortion rights was a political manipulation tactic. Nothing in these videos disclosed to viewers that they were being pushed by a foreign government.

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<figcaption>

NewsTokss videos commenting on American politicians. Screenshot 11/27/22.

TikTok

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The TikTok accounts run by MediaLinks do provide some information about the entity behind them: Profile bios for the accounts say, Material distributed by MediaLinks TV LLC on behalf of CCTV. More info at DOJ, D.C. But the vast majority of people viewing MediaLinks videos never see this language. According to data posted on LinkedIn by a MediaLinks employee, NewsToks garnered 8.3 million video views between May 8 and July 6, 2022, but only 57,600 profile views during the same 60-day period.

Moreover, American viewers who did visit the accounts bios might not be aware that in this case, CCTV stands for China Central TV, or that this entity is Chinese state media. NewsTokss s More info at DOJ, D.C. disclaimer appears to be an oblique reference to MediaLinks s foreign agent registration.

Chinese state media entities have long sought to use social media to influence U.S. audiences they ve built audiences and bought ads on Facebook and Twitter to disseminate misinformation about topics such as thedetainment of Uyghurs in Xinjiang, the 2019protests in Hong Kongand theRussian invasion of Ukraine. But this is the first report of a Chinese state media entity using TikTok to influence U.S. audiences opinions about U.S. ***politics***.

**Got a tip about TikTok or ByteDance? Or about Chinese state media s social media strategy? We'd like to hear from you. Write Emily Baker-White at** [***ebakerwhite@forbes.com***](mailto:ebakerwhite@forbes.com) **or Iain Martin at** [***iain.martin@forbes.com***](mailto:iain.martin@forbes.com)

TikTok, which is owned by Beijing-based ByteDance, is the first foreign social media app to achieve mass adoption in the U.S. It is also the only major social media platform in the U.S. that does not label videos posted by Chinese state media entities, so that viewers know where their content is coming from. Several of the videos posted by @NewsTokss (including Cruz, Abbott Don t Care About Us ) were also posted by MediaLinks affiliate China Global Television on YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram, where each post and video is labeled as Chinese state controlled media.**(Disclosure: In a previous life, Emily Baker-White, an author of this story, held policy positions at Facebook and Spotify.)**

TikTokhas saidit is developing a global policy to address content posted by state-controlled media outlets. In a statement, TikTok spokesperson Jamie Favazza told**Forbes**: We plan to introduce our state-controlled media policy and corresponding labels globally next year as part of our continued focus on media literacy. As we previously confirmed, the global rollout will include China state media. **Forbes**previously reportedthat according to LinkedIn profiles, more than 300 employees at TikTok and ByteDance previously worked for Chinese state media.

The most popular NewsTokss videos available on TikTok today largely focus on divisive U.S. social issues like guns, abortion and structural racism all topicsthat were also used by Russian election meddlers seeking to divide Americans and weaken confidence in democratic institutions. These topics werealso discussedby fake Facebook and Instagram accounts linked to a China-based election influence operation earlier this year.

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<figcaption>

Newstokss videos discussing racism in American institutions. Screenshot 11/27/22.

TikTok

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But @Newstokss has also found success with other subjects, including conspiracy theorist Alex Jones, Hungarian autocrat Viktor Orban and Russian president Vladimir Putin. In one NewsTokss video, taken from the Conservative Political Action Conference, Orban says the West is at war with itself, and the globalists can go to hell. In another video, Jones says that the judge in the Sandy Hook trial is guilty of tyranny along with all the rest of the New World Order. Jones s media company, Infowars, isbannedfrom TikTok. TikTok spokesperson Favazza said in an email that violative content has been removed, including the video of Jones.

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Newstokss videos discussing Russian president Vladimir Putin. Screenshot 11/27/22.

TikTok

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TikTok is currently negotiating a contract with the U.S. government to mitigate national security threats posed by its foreign ownership. Some U.S. lawmakers have long feared that the Chinese government could use TikTok to harvest private data about American citizens, or use TikTok s recommendation engine to influence what they see on the app. BuzzFeed News previouslyreportedthat ByteDance had instructed employees working on one of its other apps, a now-defunct news aggregator called TopBuzz, to push pro-China messages to U.S. users. ByteDance denied the claims.

On July 5, TikTok s Head of Public Policy for the Americas, Michael Beckerman, fielded questions from CNN s Brian Stelter about national security questions raised by the company s Chinese ownership. Stelter asked whether the Chinese government might use TikTok to put a thumb on the scale in favor of certain political candidates. In response, Beckerman said: I m really glad you raised this issue. Look: We are not the go-to place for ***politics***.

Stelter also asked Beckerman about concerns that the Chinese government could use TikTok to influence Americans commercial, cultural, or political behavior. In response, Beckerman said, Yeah, I just don t see that.

@NewsTokss posted six videos that day: four about mass shootings (one of which is captioned A Uniquely American Plague ), and two about police officers killing an unarmed Black man.

The extent of MediaLinks s operation on TikTok is unclear, but LinkedIn posts by two MediaLinks employees one current and one former provide some sense of scale: In addition to the post claiming that NewsToks generated 8.3 million video views within 60 days, the LinkedIn profile of a different, former producer also said that by March 2022, Pandaorama had accumulated more than 10 million views, and The Optimist had garnered another 4.5 million. Neither producer responded to an interview request.

In addition to these three main accounts, MediaLinks manages several additional TikTok accounts that cross-post its videos, including @PandaoramaTrends, @NewsToks (different from @NewsTokss), and @PandaoramaLink, which is now defunct. Two much smaller Twitter accounts, @PandaoramaLink and @Panda\_Paws, also contain the MediaLinks disclosure in their account bios. Those accounts and their tweets are labeled by Twitter as Chinese state-affiliated media.

Though MediaLinks did not reply to multiple requests for comment, the LinkedIn post containing statistics about the NewsToks TikTok account disappeared shortly after they were sent.

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