

Americans' attitudes towards TikTok change: nearly half support banning or forced sale

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Demonstrations held on Capitol Hill against legislation to crack down on TikTok.

WASHINGTON — A new poll shows that nearly half of Americans support banning TikTok or forcing it to be sold to an American company. A survey released by U.S. business news network CNBC on Wednesday (March 27) showed that nearly half of Americans surveyed are worried about the threat TikTok poses to national security and support a ban, its removal, or forcing the sale of its services to Non-Chinese companies.

This is a significant increase from polls conducted days after the House of Representatives overwhelmingly passed the bipartisan bill on March 13, which showed support for banning TikTok. In an Associated Press/NORC Center for Public Affairs Research [poll](#) last month, 31% supported banning TikTok, while 35% opposed it. In the latest poll, less than a third of people oppose the ban.

The U.S. House of Representatives recently passed a bill overwhelmingly requiring TikTok's parent company ByteDance to sell its business in the United States, otherwise it will face a complete ban. The bill now heads to the Senate for consideration. The White House has expressed support for the bill.

In addition, while TikTok is facing strong pressure from Congress, the U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC) is also reportedly investigating and considering prosecuting TikTok. The U.S. political news website [Politico](#) reported on Tuesday, citing people familiar with the matter, that the FTC has been

investigating TikTok's privacy and data security over the past few years and may decide to file a lawsuit in the coming weeks.

CNN quoted anonymous FTC sources as saying that the FTC is investigating whether TikTok violated the provisions of the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act, which requires companies to notify parents and obtain their data before collecting data from children under 13 years old. In addition, TikTok admitted to Congress in 2022 that employees in China had access to U.S. user data, but it also denied that anyone in China could access its user database. The federal agency responsible for protecting consumers will also investigate whether TikTok committed "unfair or deceptive" business practice laws.

"This may well mark the beginning of the end—one way or another—of the app's continued livelihood in America" former senior White House official Harry Broadman told VOA.

Opposition grows stronger

As the Senate is about to vote on the relevant bill, an [Associated Press](#) report on March 25 said that in a message from North Carolina Senator Thom Tillis, since the House of Representatives passed the bill this month, they have received about 1,000 calls about TikTok, including messages with death threats.

At present, TikTok's fate in the Senate does not seem to be very certain, and relevant issues fall under the supervision of several different committees. Commerce Committee Chair Maria Cantwell, D-Wash., has so far been reserved, advocating for hearings first and suggesting the House version would need to be rewritten.

There are divisions even among Republicans who have traditionally been critical of China. Sen. Rand Paul of Kentucky said on social media platform X, formerly known as Twitter, that the House ban "suppresses free speech, tramples on constitutional rights and disrupts the economic pursuits of millions of Americans."

Although the House of Representatives bill emphasizes the need for TikTok to divest its relationship with its Chinese parent company, critics point out that in the end it is still supported by a ban, which is contrary to the spirit of the United States and will undermine Beijing in the context of the US-China rivalry.

"One cannot help but wonder if Xi Jinping is chuckling at the irony of how statist Washington has become in dealing with these issues, rather than facilitating the ingenuity of the private sector to create a competitive alternative to TikTok, whether for use in the U.S. alone or elsewhere in the world as well," said Broadman, a former official on the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS).

As the controversy intensifies, parent company ByteDance has also sent out a seemingly tough signal, saying it would rather withdraw from the US market than give up TikTok. Caixin Global reported, citing multiple sources familiar with the matter, that ByteDance founder and major shareholder Zhang Yiming is firmly opposed to the sale and would rather withdraw from the U.S. market if forced to spin off TikTok's business.

Counting nearly half of the U.S. population, TikTok is engaged in massive lobbying, including providing links to phone numbers on its platform urging its users to call lawmakers in their districts.

On the same day that the House of Representatives passed the TikTok bill with a high vote, TikTok released a research report from Oxford Economics, stating that nearly 40% of small and medium-sized enterprises said TikTok was crucial to their survival. The study funded by TikTok also said that they are

even important to the U.S. economy as a whole and are a major contributor, and that “TikTok has become an integral part of the fabric of American society.”

Long and tough legal challenge

Even if the Senate passes it and the president signs it into effect, the ban will almost certainly face legal challenges primarily based on the First Amendment.

“It’s very, very difficult for the government to ban an app that is used by so many people as a form of speech, communication and expression,” Caitlin Chin, a technology regulation researcher at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), a Washington think tank. U.S. Zhiyin said it expects TikTok to file a lawsuit, and its users or advertisers will also file lawsuits. “Then I believe the whole incident may drag on for several years.”

Allegra Harpootlian, a communications strategist at the American Civil Liberties Union, said in response to a written question from VOA that the House bill is actually a ban on TikTok. “Directly or indirectly banning TikTok violates the First Amendment because it would stifle free speech and limit public access to important information.”

So far, there are two precedents for lawsuits related to TikTok in the United States, and TikTok appeared to win both cases. In November, an Indiana judge dismissed a lawsuit against TikTok over youth safety concerns, in part because downloading the app for free did not constitute a “consumer transaction” under the Indiana Deceptive Consumer Sales Act.

In another case that occurred almost at the same time, a federal judge in Montana temporarily halted a ban on TikTok, saying that the ban may be unconstitutional. In May last year, Montana Governor Greg Gianforte signed a bill banning TikTok from operating in the state. This is the most stringent ban in the United States to date.

Judge Donald Molloy said in the decision, “By blocking TikTok, the legislature not only harmed the First Amendment rights of users, but also cut off a source of income that many people rely on.”