

Young Americans Dovish Not Only on TikTok but Also on Other China-Policies

By Alexandra Guisinger and Anurag Jain

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In December 2022, Congress passed the first national-level regulation in the U.S. concerning the Chinese social media app TikTok. The regulation, signed into law by President Joe Biden as part of the [Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023](#), has a narrow scope, restricting TikTok on U.S. government devices. Congress continues to debate broader restrictions—see, for instance, the 2023 [DATA Act](#) and the 2022 [ANTI-SOCIAL CCP Act](#)—which would effectively ban TikTok within the United States.

How would the American public respond to a broader TikTok ban? In recent years, U.S. government policies have tried to balance against China’s growing [economic](#) and [political](#) power, often with mixed [public responses](#). However, unlike many U.S. policies targeting Chinese firms and China itself, broader regulation of TikTok would be readily apparent to an estimated 95 million U.S.-based users. The average American adult spends [48 minutes](#) a day on TikTok, in fact. And about half of young adults in the U.S. (ages 18–29) are on TikTok.

To better understand the public response to a TikTok ban in the context of other recent U.S. policies targeting the Chinese government and Chinese firms, the Foreign Policy in a Diverse Society project surveyed 1,000 Americans on the relative importance of policies targeting China. Fielded through NORC’s [AmeriSpeak platform](#) in April 2023, the survey used a sample designed to be representative of the U.S. adult population.

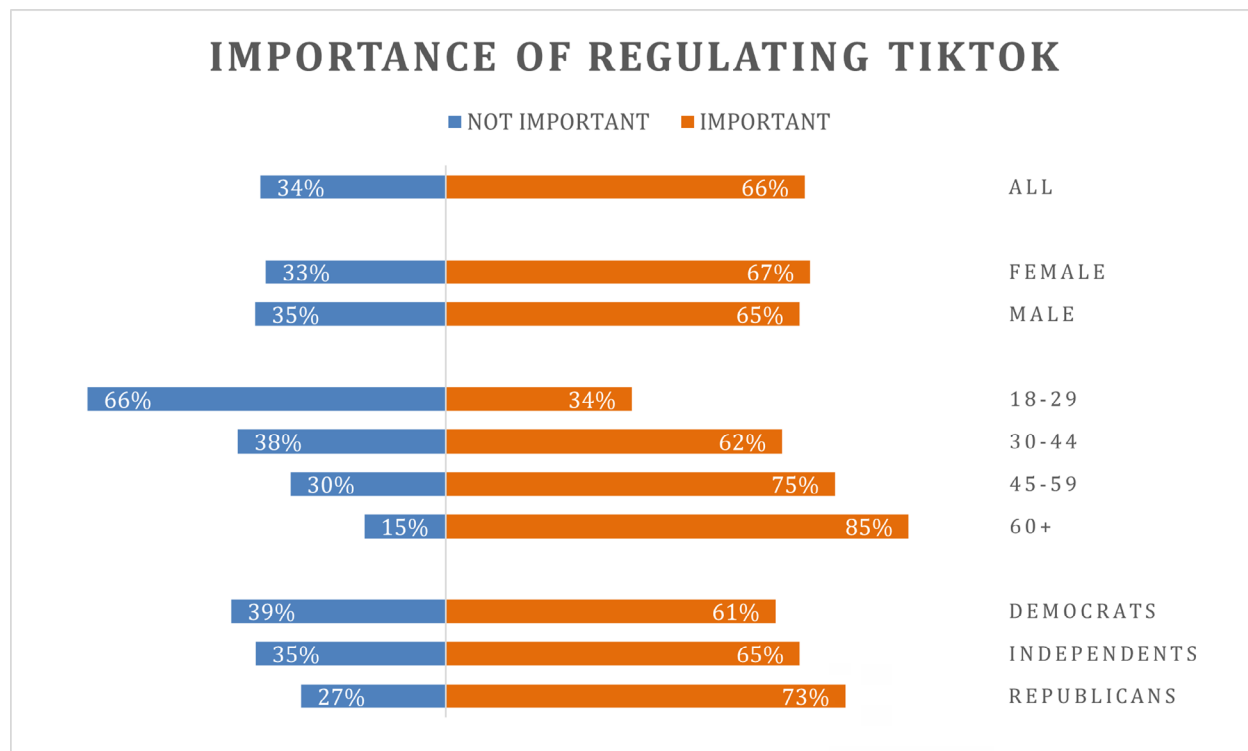
It turns out that young people do not just dislike policies that restrict the ways they can use their phones—our data also show they are less supportive of many other government policies.

Younger Americans Do Not Think It Is Important To Regulate TikTok

Perhaps not surprisingly, when asked how important they felt it is for the government to take action on “regulating Chinese social media apps like TikTok,” respondents’ answers significantly differed by age category—but less so by partisanship and gender (Figure 1). Overall, two-thirds of all respondents answered that regulation was either somewhat or very important, with female respondents only slightly more likely to answer that regulation was important than male respondents (67% vs. 65%). The majority of respondents identifying as Republicans and those identifying as Democrats stated that regulation was important, although relatively more Republicans (73%) valued regulation as important than either independents (65%) or Democrats (61%).

Figure 1: More than gender or partisanship, age divides Americans on the perceived importance of regulating TikTok

% of U.S. Adults who rank TikTok regulations as...



Question “Recently, the U.S. government has considered a variety of policies pertaining to China. How important do you feel it is for the government to take action on the following: Regulating Chinese-owned social media apps like TikTok: not at all important, a little important, somewhat important, or very important?”

The strongest cleavage lies with respect to age – older Americans were more likely to say it is important to regulate TikTok. Only one-third of the Americans in the 18-30 age group felt that way, compared to about 85% of the Americans aged 60 and above. Our findings are in line with the age gap in support for regulation exposed in studies carried out by [YouGov](#) and [Pew Survey](#). In particular, the Pew Survey found TikTok users particularly opposed to regulation.

Younger Americans Are More ‘Dovish’ on Other China Issues

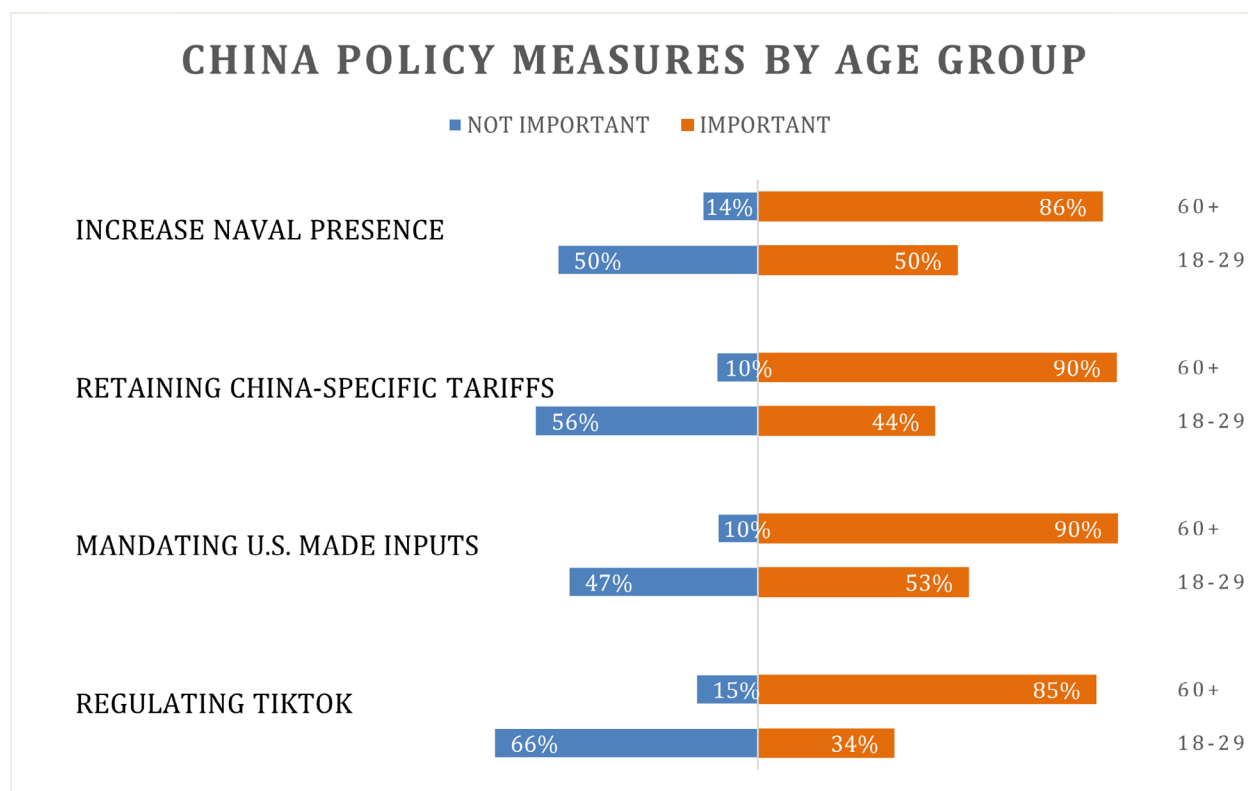
Does the difference in support for regulating TikTok just reflect young people’s love of social media? Our survey suggests that the generational differences are not simply driven by technology usage but a broader gap in preferences for foreign policy measures directed towards China.

In addition to asking about the importance of regulating TikTok, we asked more broadly how participants viewed other U.S. economic and security policies targeting China: increasing the U.S. naval presence in the Pacific, retaining [China-specific tariffs](#), and requiring certain U.S. industries to use U.S. made inputs.

The oldest cohort (people aged 60 and above) overwhelmingly identified China policies as important, especially tariffs (90%) and mandating the use of U.S.-made inputs (90%). In this group’s evaluation, regulating TikTok (85%) ranked just behind an increased naval presence in the Pacific (86%). In contrast, the majority of the youngest cohort (ages 18–29) ranked most of these policies as not important—mandating the use of U.S.-made inputs (53%) was the lone exception where a majority of respondents felt the policy was important.

Figure 2: Youngest and oldest American cohorts differ across the board on China-related policies

% of U.S. Adults who rank China-related policies as...



While [many analysts](#) were quick to note the immediate negative correlation between social media usage and support for TikTok bans, our analysis exposes a deeper divide on U.S. foreign policy. Recent studies have found differences in how [young people](#) wish to [engage in the world](#) and on which [topics](#). Their response to the proposed TikTok bans closely follows the broader pattern of showing less concern about great power competition and a preference for less conflict in foreign policy, whether or not they can post it on TikTok.

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