



TikTok: Security Threat or Political Pawn

By

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In modern politics, decisions often seem driven more by narrow interests than by a genuine concern for the public good. A prime example of this is the evolving stance on TikTok in American political discourse.

In 2020, President Donald Trump led a [campaign to ban](#) TikTok, citing national security risks stemming from its Chinese ownership and compromise of private data by the Chinese government. Four years later, Trump [delayed the removal](#) of TikTok from the American market as he looks to find an American buyer for the popular app. This apparent reversal raises the question, is this change motivated by legitimate considerations or political advantage?

The 2020 Ban: National Security or Politics?

During his first term, President Trump pushed to ban TikTok. This effort was framed as a national security measure. Concerns were raised that the app's parent company, ByteDance, was sharing user data with the Chinese government, posing a threat to American citizens and government operations.

While these concerns were legitimate, critics argued the move was also a political maneuver. It allowed Trump to position himself as tough on China, appealing to his base and broader nationalistic sentiments during an election year. Few analysts considered that both can be true. Politics, particularly those surrounding a beloved video app, were too divisive.

2024: The Return of TikTok?

Fast forward to 2024, and the reported pivot to support TikTok's return appears incongruous. The core issues cited in 2020—national security and data privacy—have not fundamentally changed. In fact, Americans better understand what it means to have sensitive personal data captured and potentially used for nefarious purposes by an adversary state. Highly contentious congressional testimony by the leaders of social media companies in 2024 only shined a further spotlight on how such firms do not work for the good of users.

Why then would President Trump seek to save the platform? One possible explanation is the platform's immense popularity, particularly among younger demographics—a voting bloc Trump struggled to capture. Saving TikTok from the US Supreme Court's [ruling](#) and ensuring its sale to an American firm could signal an attempt to appeal to these voters, making the move less about the app's merits and more about electoral politics.

Is It about the Public Good?

President Trump's changing perspective on TikTok may reveal a broader trend in modern politics—the prioritization of optics over substance. Leaders often take contradictory stances to align with prevailing public opinion or to cater to specific constituencies. In the case of TikTok, the narrative seems less about resolving genuine concerns and more about capitalizing on its



cultural ubiquity. If national security was a pressing concern in 2020, the question remains why it would be any less urgent today.

Ironically, users fleeing from TikTok prior to its designated cutoff date did not flock to American social media platforms as some might expect, but other Chinese platforms similar to TikTok. It seems Americans are angrier and more concerned that Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat are manipulating them than anything the Chinese Communist Party may do. Whether this is the wisest choice is yet to be determined.

Political Rhetoric or Pragmatism?

Ultimately, the fluctuating stance on TikTok underscores the blurred line between political rhetoric and pragmatic governance. Decisions on complex issues like technology and national security require consistency and transparency, yet they are often reduced to tools for political gain. This is a bipartisan issue that was not invented by President Trump. It has a long tradition dating back to the early days of the Republic. In fact, it is endemic to democratic systems.

Whether Trump's recent position reflects a genuine change of heart or strategic posturing, it highlights the broader issue of political inconsistency. Leaders across the political spectrum often adjust their positions based on electoral strategy rather than principle, yet accountability for these shifts is rare. For example, former Vice President Kamala Harris initially endorsed "Medicare for All" during the 2020 Democrat primary, only to later soften her stance to appeal to moderate voters. These shifts demonstrate how political beliefs are easily adjusted to maximize votes. Whether on healthcare, national security, or technology policy, such reversals can erode public trust if not clearly explained to the electorate.

The ultimate resolution of TikTok's future will depend on whether the app is sold to an American firm, as President Trump has stipulated, or whether it continues operating without a sale. Given the heightened concerns over data security and foreign influence, a lack of clarity on this issue could further weaken public confidence. While political reversals are common, abrupt shifts without clear explanations can make leadership appear inconsistent or opportunistic. Greater transparency from President Trump regarding his rationale would not only provide insight into the decision-making process but could also help mitigate skepticism about his motivations. At a time when trust in government is already fragile, reinforcing accountability and open communication is critical to maintaining public confidence.

The TikTok saga serves as a reminder that political decisions, especially those framed as national security concerns, are often entangled with strategic interests. In an era where public trust in government is fragile, transparency and consistency are essential. Without them, shifting narratives risk further eroding confidence in leadership—not just on TikTok, but on the larger issues that shape democracy itself.

Offering further explanation into President Trump's plan and thinking would give the American people a better understanding of the variables under consideration and could potentially assuage some of the speculation into his motivation. Democracies require open communication between the citizenry and their representatives. TikTok is an example of just that.

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