



AN OVERVIEW OF TIKTOK's MEDIA BAN DEBATE

January 1, 2024 /// May 16, 2024

In April 2024, the US government considered banning TikTok, a popular app owned by China's ByteDance.



33%

33% of online media and 20% of conversations on X focused on US national security risks



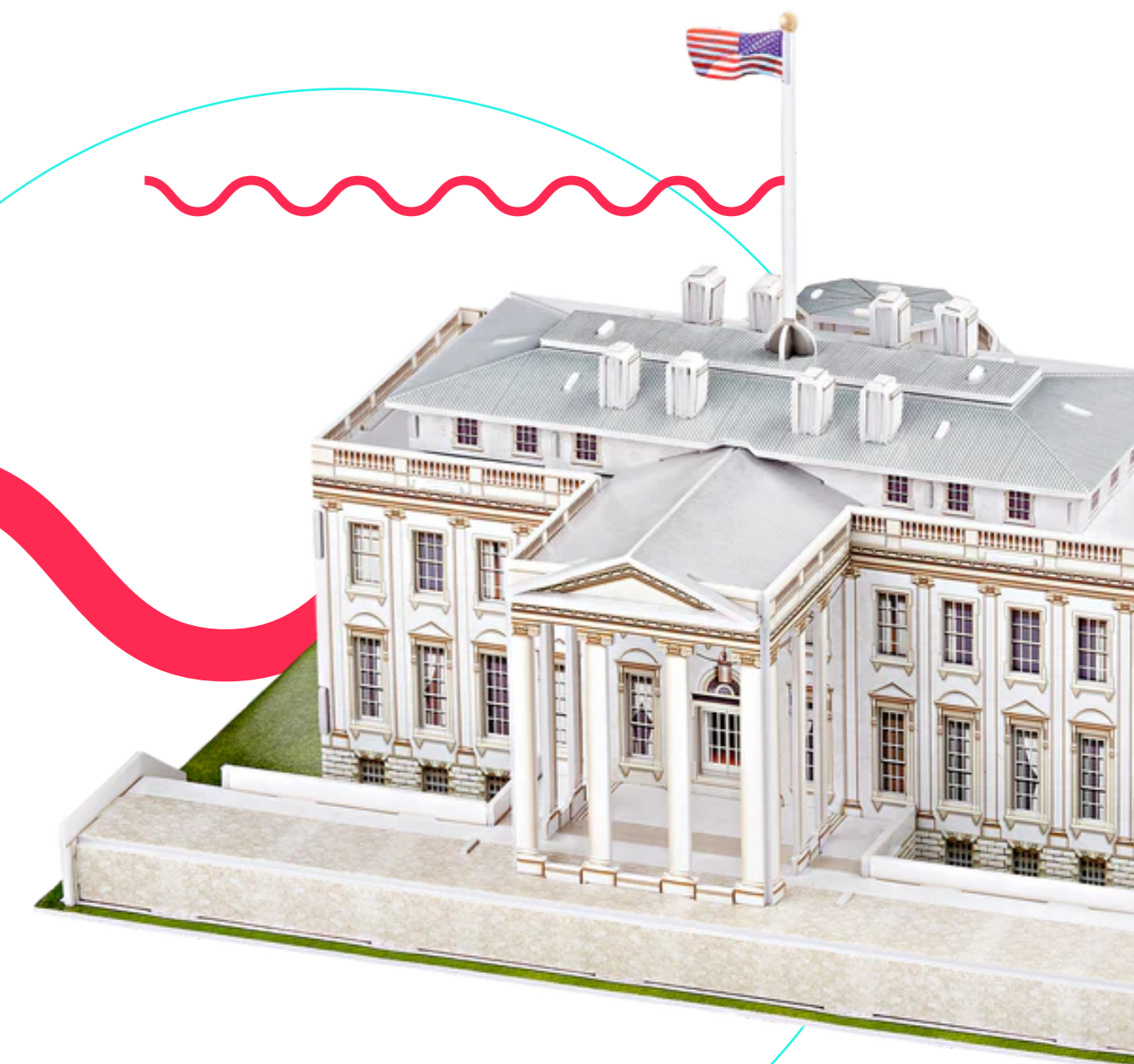
13,751

Articles reported on the TikTok ban 24 hours following the government's announcement



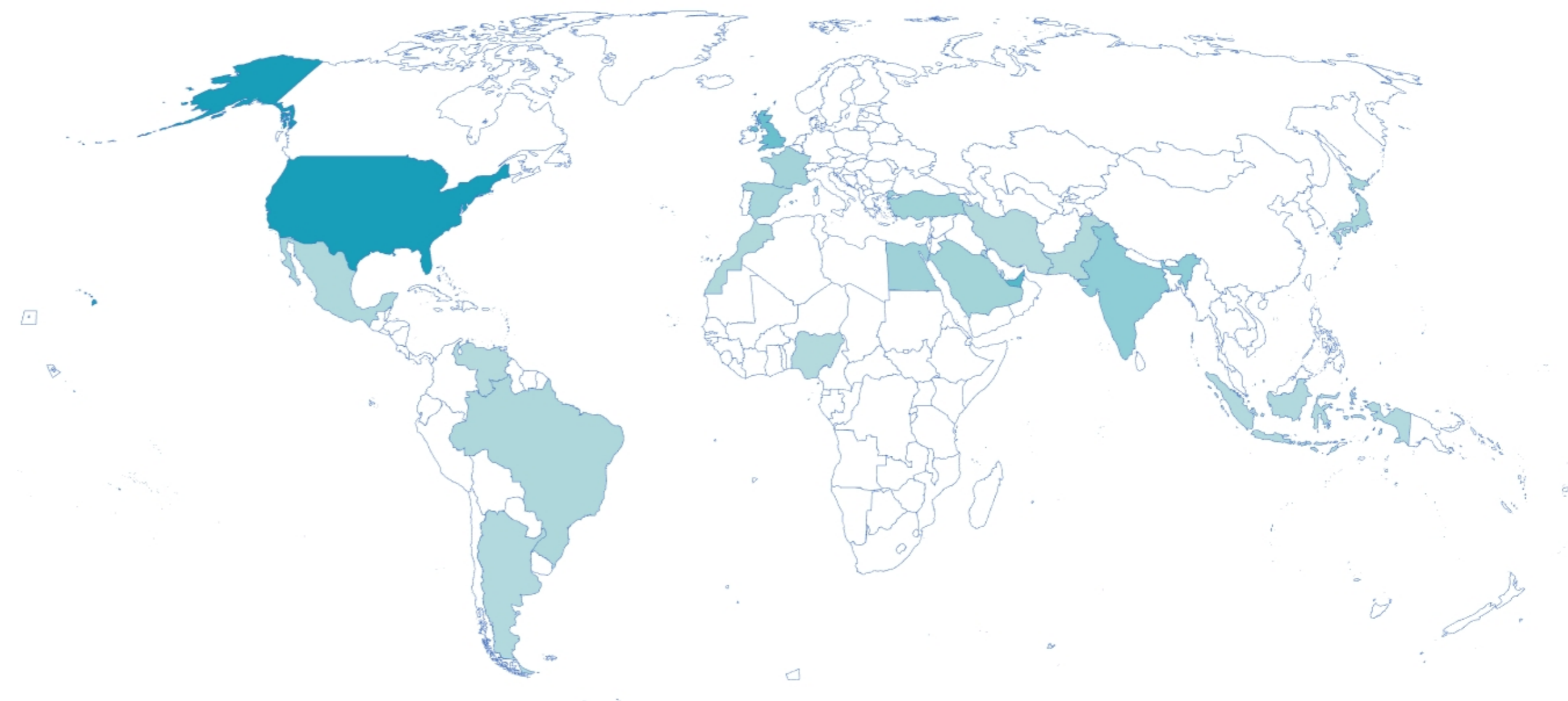
62%

More than 62% of X conversations expressed concerns about political censorship and free speech



Countries leading the debate on banning TikTok, such as the **United States**, **United Kingdom**, and **India**, dominate media coverage

X debate highlights geopolitical dimensions and impacts on marginalized communities, while online media emphasizes broader social and political implications, including freedom of expression concerns.

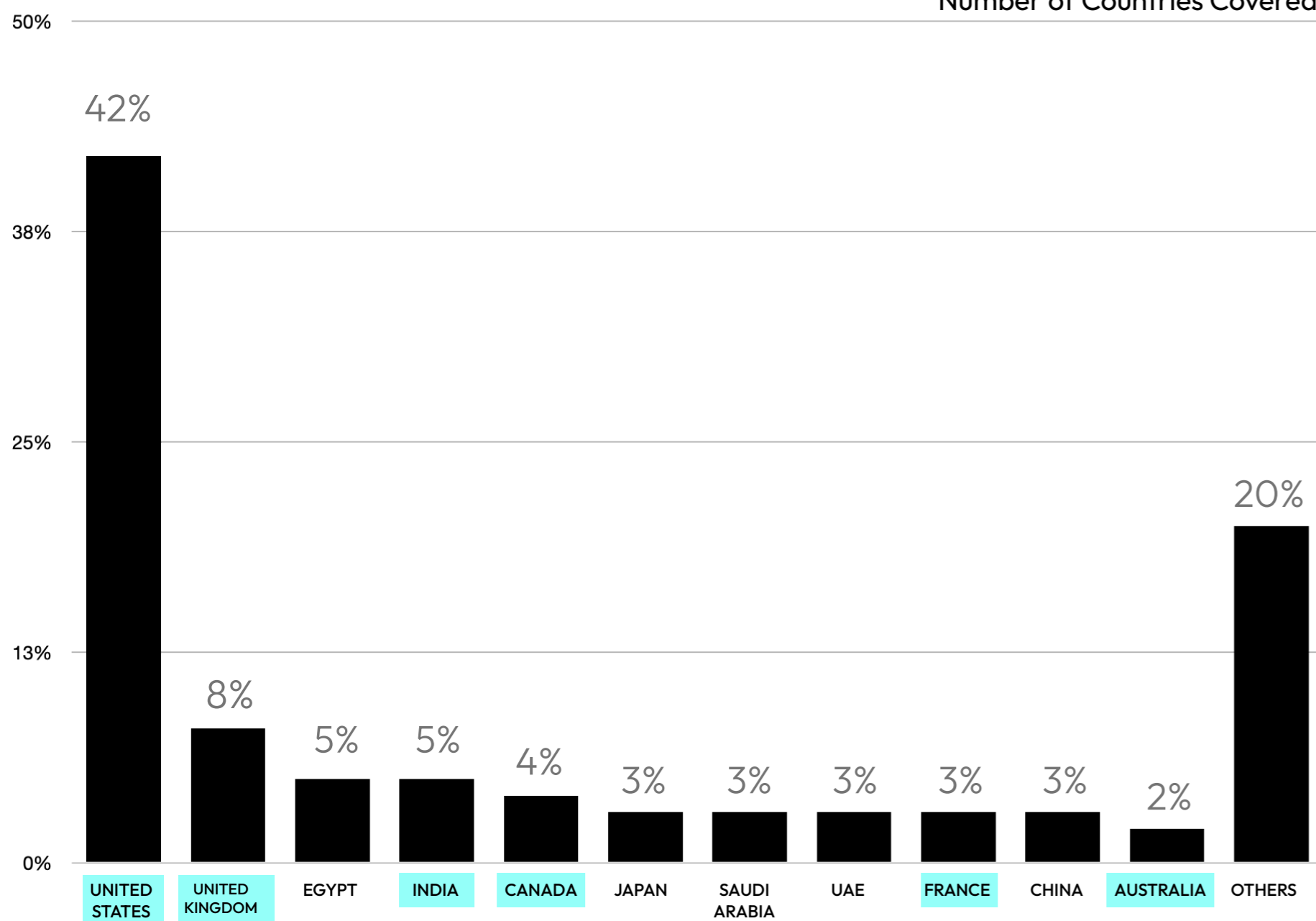


Countries that have **banned** or implemented legislation on TikTok

Top Countries by Media Coverage Discussing the TikTok Ban - Online Media

126

Number of Countries Covered

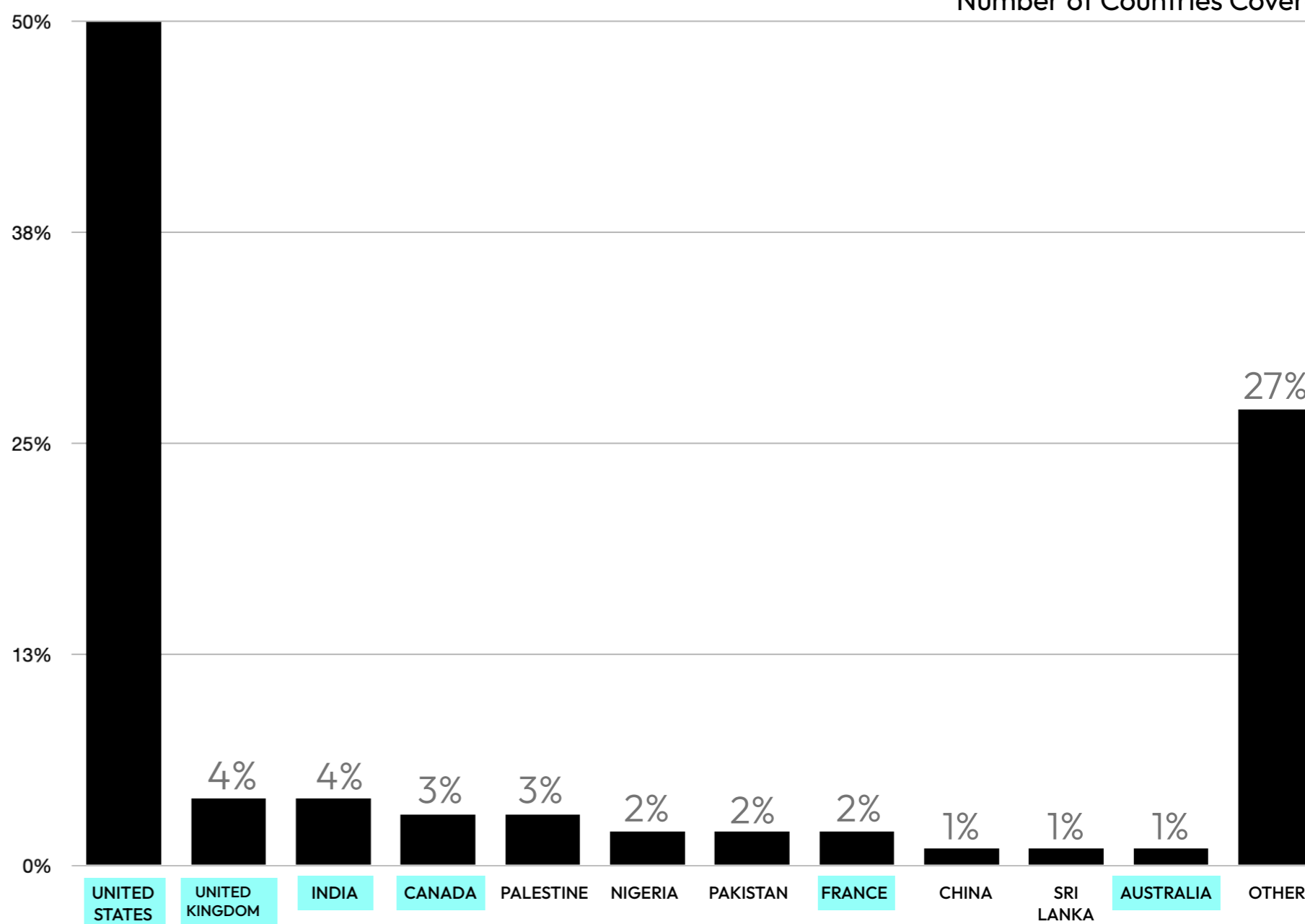


Countries that have banned or implemented legislation on TikTok

Top Countries by Media Coverage Discussing the TikTok Ban - X

180

Number of Countries Covered



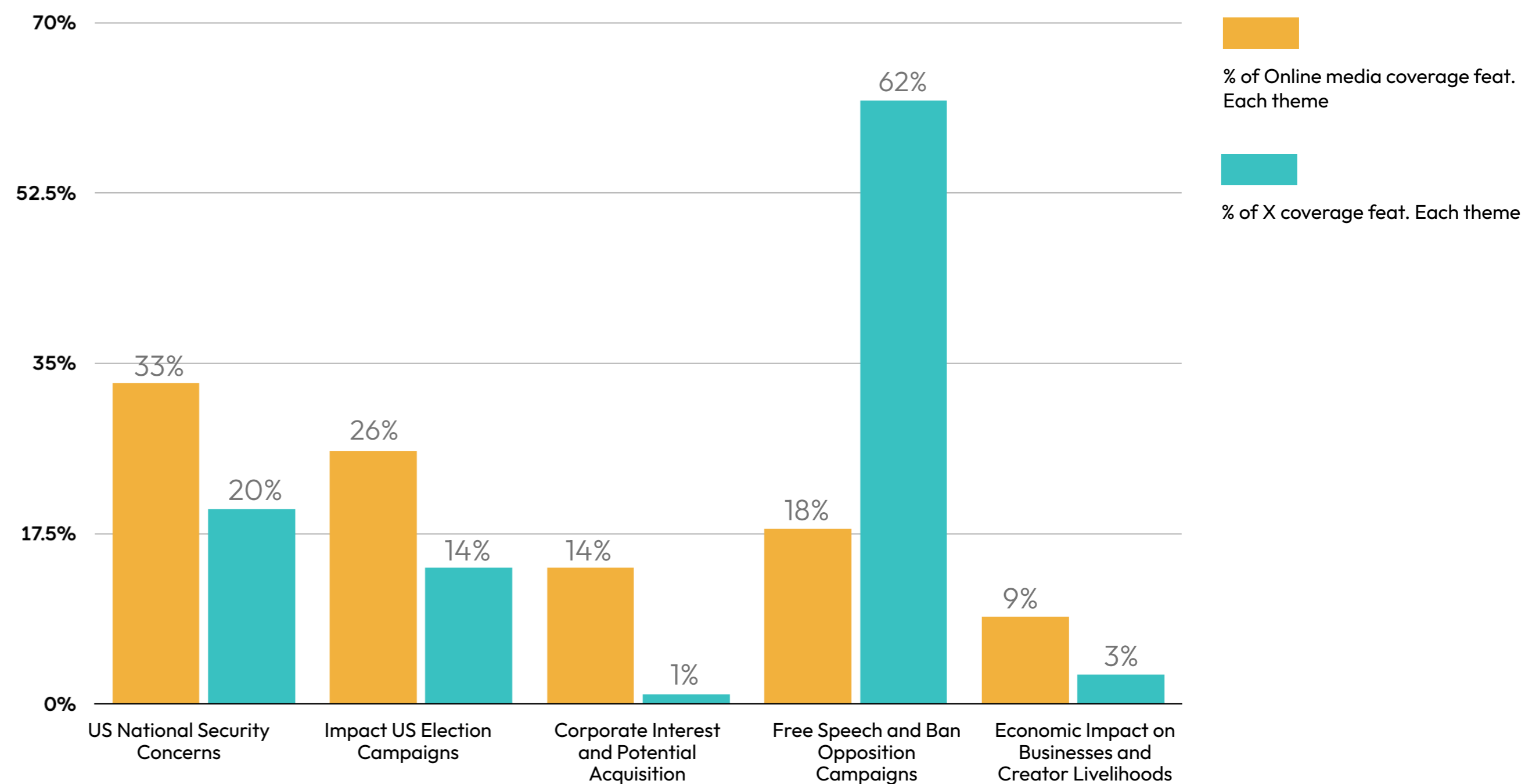
Countries that have banned or implemented legislation on TikTok

While national security is the main focus, it also reflects broader concerns about censorship, government overreach, economic power, and geopolitical tensions.

While media outlets like Fox News and The New York Times amplify the government's narrative of data security risks and potential Chinese influence, voices on X and media handles like The Guardian and The Washington Post raise alarms about censorship and the chilling effect on free speech.

The economic implications for businesses and creators, potentially amounting to billions in losses, are voiced by outlets like USA Today and the BBC, while CNN and The Washington Post delve into the political ramifications, particularly for the 2024 elections.

Comparative Analysis of Online Media and X Coverage on Key Themes





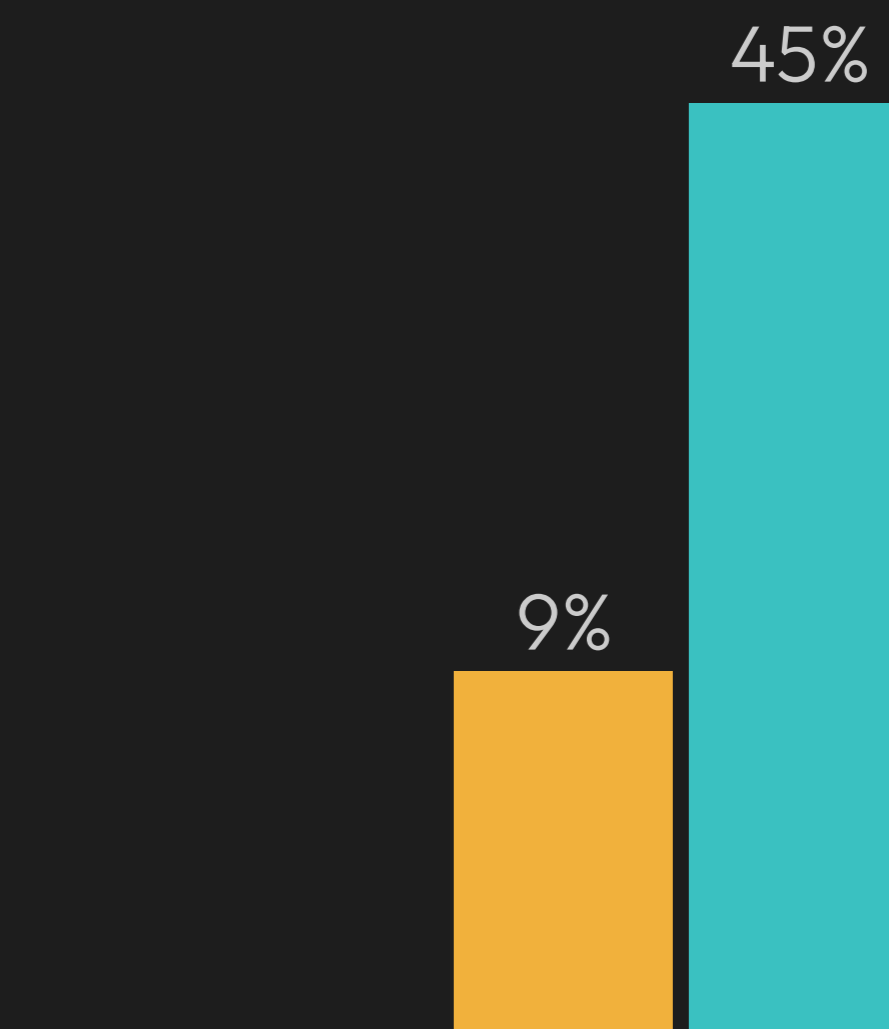
The TikTok ban debate centred on fears of censorship and political motives, amplified by X. A significant sub theme on the platform was the claim that the US pro-Israel lobby was driving the ban to suppress pro-Palestinian content.

This narrative thrived due to existing distrust of authorities and X's rapid spread of alternative viewpoints.

Mainstream media focused on national security and economic impacts. In contrast, X saw discussions about the Israel lobby's influence. On X, 45% of conversations about the proposed ban mentioned the Israel lobby, compared to 9% in online media.

X's younger and politically active user base, and emotionally charged tone amplify alternative narratives, like government overreach and free speech concerns. This shows the platform's power to shape public perception.

Online Media & X Coverage on Israel Lobby's Influence on the Ban



■ % of Online media coverage feat. Each theme
■ % of X coverage feat. Each theme



Analysis from CARMA Insight Consultant

Jennifer Sanchis

The new federal law mandating TikTok divestment from ByteDance is a watershed moment for social media, and therefore for PR practitioners. Never has a social platform been banned by federal law so the implications are significant.

First, the shift in the discourse around the use of TikTok, and social media networks more widely, could accelerate. Geopolitical and security concerns featured prominently in coverage, with a third of online discussions focusing on US national security and on the impact that it could have on the upcoming election. Moreover, more and more outlets outside of the US have increased their scrutiny towards their country's regulations. Our analysis shows that the topics around national security and the use of personal data continue to gain in importance. It is likely that the general public will become more cognisant of the powers and vulnerabilities involving the use of social media.

Secondly, the reporting of the ban highlighted a great divergence of views. On the one hand, proponents of the law argued in favour of enhanced national security measures. On the other hand, constitutional issues of the new law featured prominently, particularly in the context of TikTok users suing the federal government. Additionally, several outlets pointed out the residual impact on users' ability to communicate and companies' means to sell products.

Thirdly, the representation of marginalised groups on TikTok humanised the case. President Biden's signing of this new law not only sparked geopolitical debates but also highlighted Americans' attachment to the app. Specifically, the coverage emphasised the implications for freedom of speech and the broader impact on the visibility of underrepresented groups that TikTok has helped to amplify.

These legislative changes lead communicators into new territories. TikTok may, or may not, remain in the US. In any case, preparedness is paramount. In trying to navigate this rapidly changing environment, PR practitioners should:

Closely monitor the latest developments surrounding the law. Communicators should keep an eye on the various actions – from ByteDance and TikTok users – against the government and monitor the public's divided stances around the app.

Prepare for the transfer of their TikTok activities to other platforms. Depending on the outcome of such regulatory changes, PR teams, in the US and elsewhere, may have to find new ways of maintaining their engagement and redirecting their followers elsewhere.

Adopt a multi-platform communications approach. The TikTok case not only brings attention to the Chinese app but also indirectly influences our perception of other social networks. As governmental organisations consider the potential implementation of stricter regulations in the future, it is essential to vary communications with audiences.

What's Next

Telling a meaningful measurement story is more crucial than ever in today's challenging economic environment. CARMA's team of industry leading communications evaluation consultants work with our clients to help them prove the effectiveness of their communications, uncover real insights, refine strategy and prove real value. This report provides just a small snapshot of how we work with our clients around the world. If you'd like more information on how we could work with you, please get in touch.

Methodology

The analysis drew on data from January 1st to May 16th, 2024, leveraging 55,786 online media articles and 214,837 social media posts from X (formerly known as Twitter). This data was sourced through Boolean searches utilizing CARMA's global online media crawler for online media outlets, and similar searches on X for social volumes.

Note: The identification of countries mentioned on social media (X) depends exclusively on geolocation data from X users. This does not represent the entire sample analysed, as it only includes users who have activated geolocation.

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