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Explaining public preferences for regulating Artificial Intelligence in election campaigns: Evidence from the U.S. and Taiwan

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ABSTRACT

The increasing use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in election campaigns, such as AI-generated political ads, automated messaging, and the widespread availability of AI-assisted photorealistic content, is transforming political communication. This new era of AI-enabled election campaigns presents regulatory challenges for digital media ecosystems, prompting calls for an updated governance framework. While research has begun mapping AI's role in digital media ecosystems, an often-overlooked factor is public attitudes toward regulating AI in election campaigns. Understanding these attitudes is essential as regulatory debates unfold at national and international levels, where public opinion often constrains the leeway of political decision-makers. We analyze data from two cross-sectional surveys conducted in the United States and Taiwan—two democracies with relatively lenient campaign regulations, which held presidential elections in the same year. We examine the role of general attitudes toward AI, psychological dispositions, and partisan alignments in shaping public support for AI regulation during elections. Our findings underscore the significance of psychological and attitudinal perspectives in predicting regulatory preferences. These insights contribute to broader discussions on AI governance within digital media ecosystems and its implications for democratic processes.

1. Introduction

The growing use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in election campaigns all over the world presents new challenges for campaign regulation. From AI-generated political ads to automated messaging and the low-cost AI-assisted generation of photorealistic content, AI-enabled digital media ecosystems are reshaping political communication in ways that demand updating existing regulations and potentially even the establishment of new governance frameworks. Although it is still early days for the use of AI in elections, different ways in which AI contributes to campaigning-related aspects of digital media ecosystems are already being mapped by academics, consultants, and journalists alike (Foos, 2024). We add to the emerging discussion of the role of AI in political digital media ecosystems (Jungherr, 2023; Jungherr & Schroeder, 2023) by highlighting an often-overlooked dimension of this debate—the role of public demand and opposition in shaping regulatory efforts.

Public attitudes toward regulating campaigning uses of AI do not emerge in isolation. Individuals encounter AI both directly

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through personal and professional use and indirectly via media coverage. These direct and indirect encounters shape broader perceptions of AI's risks and benefits. These general attitudes influence how AI is evaluated in domain-specific contexts, including political campaigns. As regulatory frameworks are debated at national and international levels—including within broader discussions on AI governance, media transparency, and electoral integrity—it is crucial to understand the psychological, attitudinal, and political factors driving public support or resistance to AI regulations in elections.

This paper investigates these factors by analyzing public attitudes toward AI regulation in political campaigns through two pre-registered cross-sectional surveys conducted in the United States and Taiwan. We have selected the U.S. and Taiwan as countries because they held presidential elections in 2024, both have relatively lenient campaign regulations (Hersh, 2015; Kaid & Jones, 2004; Tokaji, 2018; You & Lin, 2020), and AI regulation remains an active topic of debate in both countries (Barclay, 2024; National Conference of State Legislatures, 2024; Su, 2025). Examining the views of people in countries with lenient campaign regulations is promising, as it represents a challenging case to observe demands for regulation. If people from generally lenient countries express a demand for AI regulation, then citizens in other countries are likely also to express similar demands for AI regulation.

We examine how general AI attitudes, psychological dispositions on how people see others, and partisan alignments influence preferences for AI regulation in electoral contexts. While cross-national differences emerge, our findings suggest that psychological and attitudinal perspectives offer valuable insights into the conditions under which AI regulation in political campaigns may be publicly accepted. These findings contribute to the broader debate about regulating AI's impact on various aspects of the digital media ecosystem.

In the remainder of the paper, we first discuss the regulation of AI use in campaigns, then examine how psychological factors, AI attitudes, and political partisanship influence support for such regulation. We then introduce the U.S. and Taiwanese cases before outlining our survey design and measures and presenting the empirical results.

2. Regulating the uses of AI in election campaigns

Whenever new technologies emerge, they also reshape how politicians plan their campaigns (Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999). The internet and digital tools have had a lasting impact on campaigning (Howard, 2005; Kreiss, 2012), but they have also triggered concerns about democratic harm. While cases like Cambridge Analytica or Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. election were likely overstated (Karpf, 2019), they fueled alarmist narratives and calls for regulation. We are now witnessing a similar pattern with AI. Deepfakes and other AI-generated content dominate public debate, framed as major threats to democratic integrity (Hung et al., 2024; Jungherr et al., 2025). Yet at this point, the actual impact of AI on election campaigns is likely exaggerated (Simon & Altay, 2025; Simon et al., 2023).

Political parties worldwide are increasingly experimenting with AI in their campaigns (Foos, 2024). Thus, it is very likely that for the first time in 2024, people were exposed to campaign communication involving AI. Together with the increasing media attention on the issue, attitudes among people toward regulating AI begin to take shape. This matters as AI use in elections is not yet widely regulated. Before we discuss how individual-level perceptions shape such attitudes toward regulation, we first examine AI use in political campaigns and the regulation of political campaigning.

2.1. AI use in political campaigns

Parties in Asian countries like Indonesia, India, and Taiwan have embraced AI-enabled systems¹ more openly (Garimella & Chauchard, 2024; Lin, 2023; Raj, 2024) than those in many Western democracies, where uncertainty over public reaction and fears of backlash have led to more cautious experimentation (Dommert, 2023; Sifry, 2024; Swenson et al., 2024). This makes AI's uses in campaigns a promising case for international comparative research.

AI is viewed as a tool with both high expectations and significant risks (Zhang & Dafoe, 2019). Proponents claim AI can enhance campaign operations through automated content generation, donor segmentation, and personalized voter outreach. At the same time, concerns persist over its potential to facilitate deception via deepfakes, misleading content, or automated astroturfing, which have dominated public debate (Hung et al., 2024; Jungherr et al., 2025).

Campaigning uses of AI are thus multifaceted, with both legitimate and illegitimate uses being possible. Understanding these varied uses is essential for developing effective regulatory frameworks. While public imagination and debate strongly focus on deceptive uses of AI, other uses may come to strengthen democratic functions within campaigns. Blanket regulation of AI in campaigns focusing on perceived threats may overshoot and negatively impact the potential positive contributions of AI. Research shows that people being aware of deceptive uses of AI in campaigns support restrictive AI regulation in general, going so far as to demand an overall stop to AI development and deployment (Jungherr et al., 2025). Getting carried away by perceptions of the AI-enabled deception in campaigns thus brings its own risks, especially since the public perception of these risks seems exaggerated and ill-founded (Kapoor & Narayanan, 2024; Simon et al., 2023). Nevertheless, the growing use of AI in campaigns worldwide and associated opportunities and risks raise the

¹ We define AI-enabled systems as technological tools, applications, and services that use AI techniques, such as machine learning, deep learning, natural language processing, computer vision, and generative models to perform tasks intelligently. Intelligence is understood "as that quality that enables an entity to function appropriately and with foresight in its environment." (Nilsson, 2010, p. xii). Current AI systems can learn how to act contextually appropriately and with foresight from data, recognize patterns, make decisions, and generate content autonomously or with minimal human intervention. They are designed to enhance efficiency, productivity, and accuracy across various domains.

importance of public reflection and debate about the opportunities and limits of regulatory oversight. These varied uses raise the question of how, and by whom, they should be overseen, an issue we take up next.

2.2. Regulation of political campaigns

The use of media technology in campaigns is highly regulated. The specifics vary across countries, following differences in political and legal systems. Recent examples of campaign technology regulation include the EU's Digital Services Act (DSA), which establishes a legal framework for managing online content, including provisions targeting disinformation, and the EU's Digital Markets Act (DMA), which imposes obligations on very large platforms, affecting how political campaigns can use these platforms for advertising and outreach. The U.K.'s Online Safety Act (OSA) aims to protect users from harmful content, including misinformation, during election periods. Various regulations in U.S. states, such as those in Oregon and California, require disclosure and limit the use of AI in election campaigns.

There are various approaches and tools in campaign regulation. Regulators can focus on campaign content, such as ads or official statements of campaigns. They can focus on the channels in which content is distributed, such as television or digital platforms. Or they can focus on specific uses of technology, such as data-driven campaigning. AI provides a specific challenge for these approaches.

The multifaceted uses of AI in campaigns mean that blanket regulation of technology, such as in the case of data, is not feasible. The broad availability of open-source models means that regulators cannot rely on controlling and monitoring a few central distribution hubs of political information, as they could with information flows on very large platforms. Finally, reducing the costs of creating professional-looking campaign communication means that (un-)official and weakly aligned actors can push problematic AI-generated content, for example, actively misleading or openly manipulative content. Simply focusing on political actors with regulation might not be enough to stop harm. Therefore, regulators have to navigate a complex set of tensions between their goals and the technical and social conditions of campaigning uses of AI.

Campaign regulation is also subject to public opinion. Especially in the context of digital misinformation and speech moderation, there is a growing awareness in the literature that public opinion and social psychology matter. People are increasingly forming crystallized preferences regarding the regulation of digital technology, information, and speech (Rauchfleisch & Jungherr, 2024). This also matters in the regulation of AI in campaigning. A crucial driver of preferences on campaign regulation will be whether people perceive that campaigning, in general, affects them, others, or society as a whole. Whether any of these regulatory tools gain public traction depends on individual-level perceptions, which we now turn to.

2.3. Explanatory factors

This brings us to our three explanatory factors of demand for or opposition toward strong regulatory interference in the uses of AI in campaigns: psychological factors, AI attitudes, and political partisanship.

2.3.1. Third-person perception

The first factor we consider is people's sense of other people and their susceptibility to campaign communication. This is a variant of the well-established literature on the third-person effect. We focus on this literature because our outcome variable—support for regulation in the context of persuasive communication—is theorized to be driven by third-person perceptions (Baek et al., 2019; Neuwirth & Frederick, 2002; Rucinski & Salmon, 1990). Initially coined by Davison (1983), the third-person effect posits that people believe persuasive messages to have a greater impact on others than on themselves. Davison (1983) showed that people believed that political messages had greater persuasive effects on others than on themselves during election campaigns. In the third-person literature, this difference is typically referred to as the perceptual hypothesis. Some early studies have already extended the perceptual aspect of the third-person effect, focusing on how this perception influences behavior (Rucinski & Salmon, 1990). The most prominent behavioral extension of this concept is the Influence of Presumed Influence (IPI) model by Gunther and Storey (2003). The model holds that people's perceptions of media's influence on others can, in turn, affect their own behavior, such as by increasing support for media regulation. Neuwirth and Frederick (2002) further expanded the framework by introducing a second-person effect, in which both oneself and others are seen as affected by persuasive communication, thereby predicting behavioral outcomes. This means that if people believe communication affects themselves and others, they show stronger support for regulation.

Early research on the third-person effect in electoral contexts consistently found support across diverse national settings for the perceptual hypothesis (Davison, 1983; Duck et al., 1995; Gardikiotis, 2008; Kim, 2016; Rucinski & Salmon, 1990; Salwen, 1998), thus people see others as more affected by persuasive communication than themselves. However, the findings on the behavioral hypotheses, whether such a third-person perception explains support for restrictions and regulation, were mixed. Kim (2016) did not find a direct link between third-person perception and support for restricting pre-election poll communications in the U.S. and South Korea. Salwen (1998), however, found support for the behavioral hypothesis that focused on support for a ban on unfair election coverage in different media.²

² It has to be noted that both studies discussed here (Kim, 2016; Salwen, 1998) measured third-person perception by subtracting the presumed effect on the self from that on others. This difference score approach is problematic, as scholars (Baek et al., 2019; Feng, 2017) have demonstrated that using both variables as an interaction term is methodologically more robust and allows for clearly distinguishing the different potential effects (first, second, or third-person effect).

Baek et al. (2019) offer the most relevant framework for our study. Their study focuses on the presumed effect of fake news during election times and, as a behavioral outcome, support for policies restricting its spread. Similar dynamics have also been found for deepfakes in the Swiss context, where presumed effects on others predicted support for regulation (Vogler et al., in press). While various methodological approaches have been used to test the behavioral hypothesis, Baek et al. (2019) proposed testing the behavioral outcome hypothesis by incorporating the interaction between the presumed effects on self and others into a regression model. This approach helps to clearly discern whether first-, second-, or third-person effects explain behavioral outcomes. Their results support the perceptual hypothesis and indicate a significant second-person effect for the behavioral hypothesis. Thus, citizens with a high presumed effect on both themselves and others expressed stronger support for policies regulating fake news. Baek et al. (2019) argue that, in electoral contexts, fake news is viewed as a collective problem, as evidenced by the second-person effect.

For our study, we hypothesize that similar dynamics apply to the use of AI in election campaigns. First, we propose the perceptual hypothesis.

H1. People will perceive a greater effect of campaigns on others than themselves.

Secondly, for the behavioral hypothesis, similar to Baek et al. (2019), we expect a second-person effect concerning support for regulating AI use in political campaigns.

H2. People who perceive high campaign effects on both themselves and others will show increased support for regulating AI use in campaigns.

2.3.2. Attitudes toward AI

Building on this, people's preferences for regulating AI in campaigns are not only shaped by their perceptions of others, but also by their broader views on AI as a technology. AI is commonly associated with both risks and benefits across different societal domains (Rauchfleisch, Vogler, & de Seta, 2025; Zhang & Dafoe, 2019). For example, Jungherr et al. (2025) show, in the U.S. context, that general perceptions of AI's risks and benefits across domains predict attitudes toward AI use in political campaigns. Similarly, Jungherr & Rauchfleisch (in press) demonstrate that these general perceptions moderate attitudes in deliberative settings. Based on this, we expect support for regulating AI in campaigns to correlate with broader risk and benefit assessments. People who perceive AI as a risk should be more supportive of regulation, while those who emphasize its benefits may be less inclined to support restrictions.

H3. People who perceive AI as carrying risks for society will show increased support for regulating AI use in campaigns.

H4. People who view AI as beneficial to society will exhibit reduced support for regulating AI use in campaigns.

2.3.3. Political partisanship

Finally, campaigning is inherently political. Accordingly, we must consider the possibility that distinct partisan identities are associated with specific preferences regarding the regulation of AI in campaigns. This should be especially pronounced in the U.S., given the highly polarized political environment. However, from a theoretical perspective, we do not have strong expectations regarding how partisan identities align with regulatory preferences, especially for the Taiwanese context. While partisanship often explains regulatory preferences, there appears to be, at least in the early stages, a general bipartisan agreement that AI should be regulated (Schiff et al., 2024). This is also supported by survey data from 2024, which shows that supporters of both parties in the U.S. are concerned about AI's impact on elections (Gracia, 2024). Accordingly, we treat this potential explanatory factor as an exploratory question.

RQ1: What is the role of political orientation and party identification in shaping people's support for regulating AI use in campaigns?

2.4. The U.S. and Taiwan as cases

The U.S. and Taiwan provide promising cases for analyzing attitudes toward regulating AI use in campaigns (for an overview, see Table 1). Both are liberal democracies with highly commercialized media systems. Furthermore, presidential elections took place in both countries in 2024—Taiwan's on January 13 and the U.S. on November 5. In both cases, AI matters not only for politics but also because of each country's local industry. In Taiwan, TSMC, as a semiconductor manufacturer, dominates the local industry and is crucial for the chip supply of companies such as U.S.-based NVIDIA, which produces GPUs required for AI models (Miller, 2022). Although the so-called 'silicon shield' narrative of Taiwan, which assumes the chip industry in Taiwan as a deterrent to a Chinese attack, is contested, it remains a widely cited narrative in both public debates and within policy circles (Weil et al., 2025). Furthermore, Taiwan's government has generally shown openness to AI, as evidenced by the launch of its AI Taiwan Action Plan in 2018 and through public-private partnerships (Ting et al., 2023). Similarly, most of the world's largest tech companies, which heavily invest in AI development are based in the United States. The U.S. remains the leading country in the world in terms of AI development (Maslej et al., 2025). Therefore, we do not expect significant cultural differences in general attitudes toward AI, since both countries play significant roles in its development and commercialization, although regulatory preferences may still diverge due to distinct political and media contexts.

The U.S. and Taiwan have a relatively lenient approach to political campaign regulation compared to other countries. Although in the U.S., there are, of course, regulations regarding campaign financing (Hersh, 2015) or the requirement to disclose the source of a campaign ad (Kaid & Jones, 2004), political campaign regulation is comparatively less strict than in other countries (Tokaji, 2018).

Table 1
Comparison between Taiwan and the U.S.

Dimension	United States	Taiwan
AI-specific rules	Some state-level deepfake bans; labeling requirements in some states	Specific rules regarding AI-generated disinformation
Dominant media narrative	Risk-focused; domestic partisan misuse and deepfake threat	Cross-border disinformation threat from PRC; but also some positive examples
Key tech industry link	Home to major AI firms (OpenAI, Google)	Home to TSMC chip foundry (“silicon shield”)

The same holds true for Taiwan. In general, Taiwan has few restrictions on political campaigns, which starkly contrasts with other East Asian democracies, such as South Korea and Japan, where campaign regulations are much stricter (You & Lin, 2020). You and Lin (2020) conclude that “Taiwan’s approach to campaign regulation is closer to that of Western liberal democracies” (p. 438). We thus consider Taiwan and the U.S. well-suited cases for analyzing attitudes toward AI use in campaign regulation and the factors that shape them.

In the U.S., specific regulations on AI use in campaigns were considered when a petition for rulemaking was submitted to the Federal Election Commission in 2023, but it was rejected in August 2024 (Barclay, 2024). However, several states have introduced laws addressing the deceptive use of AI in campaign materials, requiring disclosure through labeling (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2024). Only Texas (30 days before an election) and Minnesota (90 days before an election) explicitly prohibit the use of deepfake videos to harm candidates, with these regulations also applying to federal elections in these states. Aside from these exceptions, AI use in campaigns remains largely unregulated in the U.S.

Similar to the U.S., Taiwan started to specifically regulate deepfakes during election periods by amending the Presidential and Vice Presidential Election and Recall Act and the Public Officials Election and Recall Act in 2023 (Hung et al., 2024). The amendments introduced penalties for those creating or spreading deepfakes targeting candidates and require platforms and broadcasters to remove flagged content. Chen (2025), however, concludes that enforcement remained challenging during the election due to slow platform responses, limited verification tools, and difficulties tracing anonymous sources. This specific amendment can be interpreted as an extension of the general campaign regulation concerning false statements, which are prohibited if they are both proven to be false and knowingly made by the person in question (You & Lin, 2020). However, a broader AI regulation, in the form of an AI Basic Law, has yet to pass as of early 2025 (Su, 2025). Thus, to date, Taiwan, similar to the U.S., has a few specific restrictions on AI use in campaigns.

AI use has been a widely discussed issue in the U.S. and Taiwan, with public debates primarily focusing on the dangers of generative AI in the form of disinformation (Hung et al., 2024; Yan et al., 2025). Before the 2024 election in Taiwan, several widely discussed cases emerged where AI was used to manipulate content targeting different candidates. The impact of these cases was limited as they were quickly debunked in the media (Huang et al., 2024). However, generative AI has also been used for more positive purposes, especially when targeting supporters of their own party. For example, Chang et al. (2024) show that both Republicans and Democrats have used AI on Instagram to rally their in-group while also attacking the out-group, thus members of the opposing party. Donald J. Trump has also shared many such AI-generated memes on social media (Bond & Inskeep, 2024). In Taiwan, one candidate went even further. In September 2023, Taiwan People’s Party (TPP) presidential candidate Ko Wen-je released a campaign song generated with an AI voice model of his voice (Lin, 2023), along with the model itself, allowing and even encouraging his supporters to create their own content using his voice.

Political actors in both countries have used AI, and the technology has been a topic of discussion in the elections. Both countries have relatively low campaign regulations, which also apply to AI use in elections. Thus, we propose the same hypotheses for the U.S. and Taiwan. However, we might find differences between the countries that other factors can explain, although we do not have strong expectations. This leads to our second exploratory research question:

RQ2: How do the factors explaining support for AI regulation in political campaigns differ between the U.S. and Taiwan?

Because both countries pair comparably lenient rules with high AI salience, they offer a conservative test of whether psychological and partisan factors, not institutional constraints, drive support for regulation.

3. Data and methods

Both studies were approved by the IRBs of the National Taiwan University and the University of Bamberg. For both countries, we planned to have 1200 completed questionnaires. For the U.S., we used the IPSOS online panel. The data for the U.S. were collected between 4 April and 17 April 2024. For Taiwan, we accessed the online panel from TGM Research. The data for Taiwan were collected between January 26 and 29, following the 2024 presidential election. We preregistered power analysis, analysis strategy, hypotheses, and research questions for both countries before the data collection.³

As defined in the preregistration, we removed one case in the U.S. context that had two failed attention checks, which were not

³ Both the U.S. (https://osf.io/exhjn/?view_only=138063bc3aef4c988403cbc1aaba1b7) and Taiwan (https://osf.io/cp6j3/?view_only=ec0e9ed0d2114dc1beec1ebe52efa8b1) were preregistered on OSF. For both countries, we also had a few additional preregistered hypotheses that are not reported in the main paper, as we only have data for one country. The models and results for these hypotheses are reported in Appendix B.2.

automatically filtered out during data collection. Consequently, our final sample size for the U.S. was 1199. For Taiwan, our sample was 1200. We aimed for a sample size of 1200, as it provided a power of above 0.9 for all research questions and hypotheses (see the preregistrations for the power analysis).

After an introductory page where we obtained consent, we presented participants with a definition of AI. We then asked them about their prior experience with AI, their general perception of the risks and benefits of AI, the perceived effects of political campaigns on themselves and others, and their attitude toward supporting the regulation of AI use in campaigns. Almost all items were asked with a 7-point scale (1 = completely disagree; 7 = completely agree).

Presumed campaign effect on 'self' was measured with three items that covered different aspects of the effectiveness of political campaigns (for an overview, see Table 2 and Appendix A.1 for the U.S. and A.2 for Taiwan for the wording of all items and descriptive statistics at the item level). We used the same items to measure the presumed campaign effects on 'others', but instead focused on the perceived effect on voters in general, an approach also used by Baek et al. (2019). We used these two variables to test H1, which focused on third-person perception (comparing the mean difference between them), and H2, for which we used their interaction to test whether we could identify a first-, second-, or third-person effect. Both variables were mean-centered for the analysis. A significant positive interaction term would support a second-person effect. In contrast, if the interaction term is not significant but the presumed media effect on 'others' shows a significant positive estimate and the estimate for 'self' is significant and negative, the data would support a third-person effect.

As the primary outcome variable, we preregistered support for regulating AI use in campaigns in Taiwan with three items and in the U.S. with an additional fourth, negatively worded item ("It is sufficient for parties and candidates to voluntarily commit to ethical principles in AI design and implementation, without the need for formal regulation or external oversight.") that was reverse-coded for this index. However, Cronbach's alpha was 0.65 for the four items and thus below the preregistered threshold. Thus, we followed the preregistered procedure to drop this item, and with the same three items that we used in the Taiwanese questionnaire, the alpha was satisfactory (0.83).

For H3, we operationalized perceived AI risks with three items that we combined into a mean index. The items covered risks for the economy, military, and decision-making. We chose these areas by drawing on research on risk and benefit perceptions of AI (Bao et al., 2022; Zhang & Dafoe, 2019) and technology (Binder et al., 2012; Siegrist & Visschers, 2013). For H4, we used the same three areas to measure the perceived benefits of AI, with three items that were also combined into a mean index.

As the risk and benefit items were the only questions in our survey without forced answers, we expected some missing data and proposed data imputation for all items with missing values in our preregistration. As described in the preregistration, we used the mice package in R (van Buuren & Groothuis-Oudshoorn, 2011) to create 100 datasets with imputed data for the missing values using predictive mean matching (van Buuren, 2018) and report the pooled results of the OLS models estimated on the imputed datasets (for more details about the procedure, see Appendix B.1).

For RQ1, political orientation was measured with a 7-point scale (1 = liberal to 7 = conservative). For the partisan identification, we used a seven-point scale (41.4 % Democrats and 34.9 % Republicans) with a middle option for independents (23.7 %; neither). In the Taiwanese case, we added nine different parties covering both the Pan-Blue (13.9 %; Kuomintang (KMT), People First Party, New Party) and Pan-Green camp (18.8 %; Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), Taiwan Solidarity Union, New Power Party, Green Party Taiwan, Taiwan Statebuilding Party), the TPP (13.6 %), as well as a 'none' option for non-partisans (53.6 %). Our model used the non-partisans for Taiwan and the non-partisans and independents for the U.S. as the reference categories. In Taiwan, the DPP, along with the Pan-Green camp, held a parliamentary majority and the presidency before the election. In the 2024 election, they lost the parliamentary majority to the KMT, which now collaborates with the TPP in parliament. Thus, the TPP and the Pan-Blue camp can be considered challengers during the 2024 election. As defined in the preregistration, education and gender were added to the model as covariates.⁴

4. Results

4.1. Third-person effect

We start our discussion by examining how people's perceptions of others' susceptibility to campaign messages influence their demand for regulation. Building on the extensive literature on the third-person effect, our first hypothesis posits that people in the U.S. and Taiwan should perceive campaigns to have a higher effect on others than on themselves. We found this hypothesis was supported in both countries.

We used a paired *t*-test to compare the presumed campaign effects on others and self for both countries. The results indicated a significant difference in the U.S. ($t(1198) = 18.22, p < .001$) between the presumed effects on others ($M = 4.44, SD = 1.37$) and self ($M = 3.69, SD = 1.64$). Additionally, in Taiwan, the perceived campaign effects on others ($M = 4.83, SD = 1.24$) were significantly higher ($t(1199) = 16.13, p < .001$) than those on self ($M = 4.25, SD = 1.54$). Thus, the perceptual hypothesis (H1) that people presume the effect of political campaigns on others to be larger than the effects on themselves was supported in both countries.

As a summary, we report all estimates for our research questions and hypotheses in Fig. 1. For the complete regression model, see Appendix B.1. The second hypothesis concerns behavioral consequences and builds on work on the second-person effect. People who

⁴ The code and data to replicate our analysis are available on OSF under 'Files': <https://osf.io/jezr4/>.

Table 2
Overview of variables used for analysis.

Variable	U.S.		Taiwan	
	M (SD)	n	M (SD)	n
H1-H4: Support for AI campaign regulation (3 items, $\alpha = .83$ U.S., $\alpha = .86$ Taiwan)	5.09 (1.50)	1199	4.60 (1.55)	1200
H1/H2: Presumed campaign effect on 'self' (3 items, $\alpha = .84$ U.S., $\alpha = .82$ Taiwan)	3.69 (1.64)	1199	4.25 (1.54)	1200
H1/H2: Presumed campaign effect on 'others' (3 items, $\alpha = .87$ U.S., $\alpha = .82$ Taiwan)	4.44 (1.37)	1199	4.83 (1.24)	1200
H3: AI risks (3 items, $\alpha = .78$ U.S., $\alpha = .80$ Taiwan)	5.17 (1.38)	986	5.17 (1.39)	1095
H4: AI benefits (3 items, $\alpha = .84$ U.S., $\alpha = .78$ Taiwan)	4.53 (1.52)	920	5.10 (1.29)	1042
RQ1: Political orientation (1 = liberal; 7 = conservative)	4.19 (1.85)	1199	3.03 (1.75)	1200
Gender (1 = male)	0.55	1199	0.5	1200
Education (1 = Master's degree or higher)	0.14	1199	0.16	1200

perceive strong campaign effects on both themselves and others should support stronger regulation of AI use in campaigns. This hypothesis was only partially supported.

We followed Baek et al.'s (2019) approach by including an interaction effect between the perceived effect on self and others in the regression model (see Fig. 2). In Taiwan, the interaction effect was positive and significant ($b = 0.07$, 95 % CI [0.04, 0.10], $p < .001$). It was not only the presumed campaign effects on others that explained support; presumed effects on self also significantly moderated support for AI campaign regulation. When presumed effects on both others and on self were high, support for regulation was strongest. Thus, H2 was supported by our data from Taiwan (see Fig. 2 for a visualization of the interaction effect).

In contrast, we could not observe a second-person effect in the U.S. ($b = 0.02$, 95 % CI [-0.01, 0.06], $p = .127$). Thus, following Baek et al.'s (2019) approach, we checked instead for a third-person effect. Our data supported a third-person effect as the presumed effect on others was a significant positive predictor ($b = 0.31$, 95 % CI [0.24, 0.38], $p < .001$), and the presumed effect on self was a significant negative predictor ($b = -0.08$, 95 % CI [-0.14, -0.01], $p = .019$). Thus, H2, which assumes a second-person effect, was not supported in the U.S., and instead, we observed a third-person effect.

By following Baek et al.'s (2019) suggested interpretation of the model, in Taiwan, we found that perceptions of campaign effects on self and others were associated with preferences for stricter regulation of AI in campaigns (second-person effect), as shown by the positive and significant interaction effect. In the U.S., however, we observed a third-person effect: the interaction effect was not significant, but at the same time, the presumed effect on others was a significant positive predictor, and the presumed effect on self was a significant negative predictor. In other words, those who perceived campaigns as having strong effects on others, but not on themselves, preferred stricter AI campaign regulation.

4.2. AI attitudes

Attitudes toward underlying technologies should matter when explaining regulatory preferences. In the case of AI uses in campaigns, this means considering people's attitudes toward the general risks and benefits of AI.

With H3, we expect that people who generally associate higher risks with AI will be more likely to support regulating AI use in campaigns. Both in the U.S. ($b = 0.34$, 95 % CI [0.28, 0.40], $p < .001$) and Taiwan ($b = 0.50$, 95 % CI [0.44, 0.56], $p < .001$), we found a significant positive relationship between AI risk perception and support for regulating AI use in campaigns. Individuals with higher AI risk perceptions tended to have stronger support for regulating AI use in campaigns.

Conversely, in H4, we expect that people who associate high benefits with AI will be less likely to demand the regulation of AI use in campaigns. For the U.S., our data supported the hypothesis. The higher the perceived benefits of AI, the lower the support for regulation of AI use in campaigns ($b = -0.12$, 95 % CI [-0.19, -0.06], $p < .001$). However, while the result for Taiwan is also significant, the direction of the estimate is different. The higher the perceived benefits of AI, the higher the support for regulating AI use in campaigns ($b = 0.12$, 95 % CI [0.06, 0.19], $p < .001$). Therefore, H4 was only supported in the case of the U.S., whereas in Taiwan we observed a reverse relationship.

4.3. Political partisanship

The final explanatory factor we considered was political orientation (RQ1). For the U.S. ($b = -0.01$, 95 % CI [-0.06, 0.04], $p = .815$) and Taiwan ($b = -0.02$, 95 % CI [-0.06, 0.03], $p = .462$), political orientation was not a significant predictor of supporting the regulation of AI use in campaigns.

Furthermore, we specifically tested whether partisan identification explains support for regulating AI use in campaigns. In the U.S. case, people who leaned toward the Republican Party ($b = 0.26$, 95 % CI [0.04, 0.48], $p = .020$) and those who leaned toward the Democratic Party ($b = 0.43$, 95 % CI [0.22, 0.64], $p < .001$) were both more likely to support regulation of AI use in campaigns than non-partisans. In Taiwan, the results are slightly different. People who support a party in the Pan-Green camp ($b = 0.25$, 95 % CI [0.05, 0.46], $p = .016$) were likelier to support regulation of AI use in campaigns than non-partisans. However, people who support a party in the Pan-Blue camp ($b = 0.16$, 95 % CI [-0.07, 0.39], $p = .181$) or people who support the TPP ($b = -0.05$, 95 % CI [-0.28, 0.18], $p = .689$) were not significantly different from non-partisans regarding their support for regulation.

Instead of political orientation, partisanship is a better predictor of attitudes toward regulating AI use in campaigns. In Taiwan,

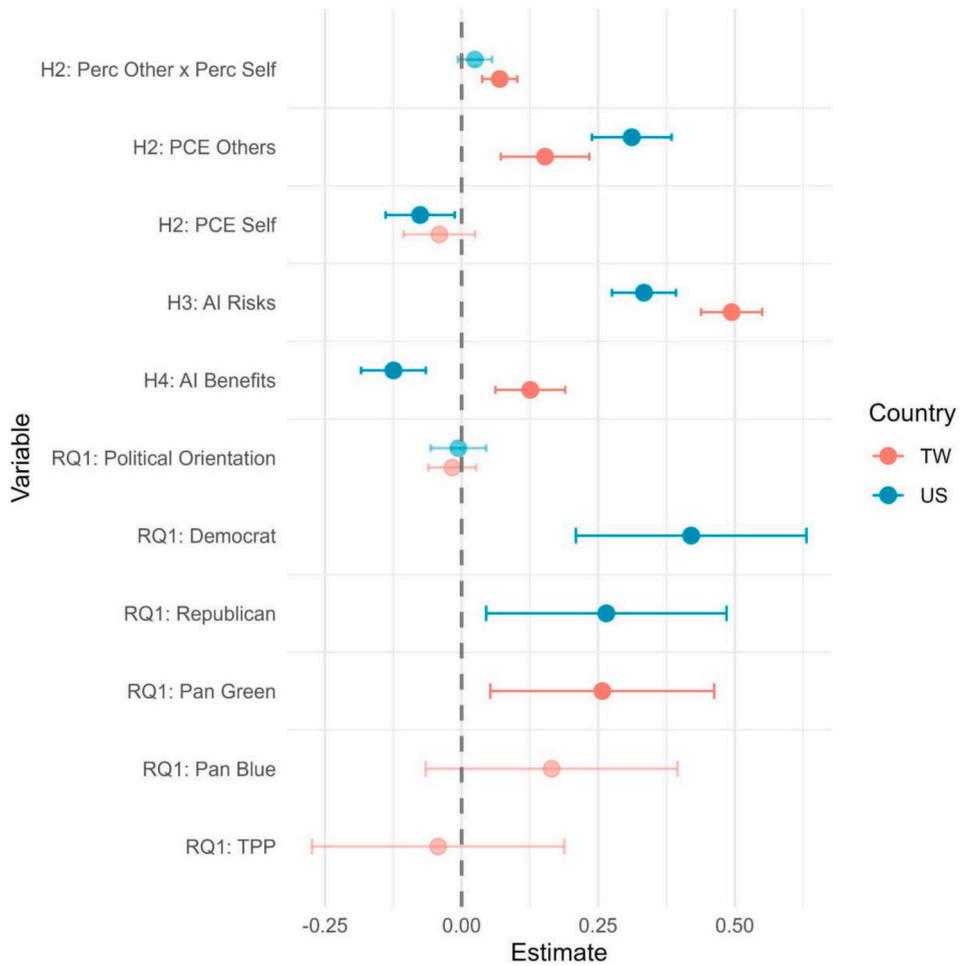


Fig. 1. Forest plot with estimates and 95 % CIs for both countries. If the CIs overlap with zero, indicating non-significant results, the estimates are shown with higher transparency values.

people identifying with the Pan-Green camp, dominated by the DPP and challenged during the election campaign, are more likely to support such regulation. In contrast, in the U.S., both partisan groups showed higher support for AI regulation. We will discuss these results and other findings related to the differences between the U.S. and Taiwan (RQ2) in the following section, as they can be best understood within the local context.

5. Discussion

Our study shows that three factors can explain people’s demand for the regulation of AI in campaigns: their sense of others and themselves, their general attitudes toward AI’s risks and benefits, and political partisanship. We demonstrated this with surveys in the U.S. and Taiwan. While these countries have comparable, lenient campaign regulation regimes, they differ strongly in cultural, political, and legal dimensions. This makes both the shared and diverging findings informative. We observed a difference between Taiwan and the U.S. regarding second- and third-person effects. We found similar results for general AI risks, but different associations for the perceptions of benefits. The cross-national differences in partisanship results can best be understood in relation to these other findings, as we explain below. To highlight the cross-national contrasts, Table 3 summarizes the key results for each explanatory factor.

5.1. The role of psychological factors

Findings from both countries demonstrate the importance of considering how people perceive others in understanding their regulatory preferences. For both the U.S. and Taiwan, our data show that people perceive the effect of political campaigning on others as larger than on themselves. However, we found that this perception translates differently into regulatory preferences. In Taiwan, individuals who perceived a strong influence of campaigns on themselves and others supported regulating AI use in campaigns (the second-person effect). However, in the U.S., we found that people who perceived campaign effects on others but not on themselves

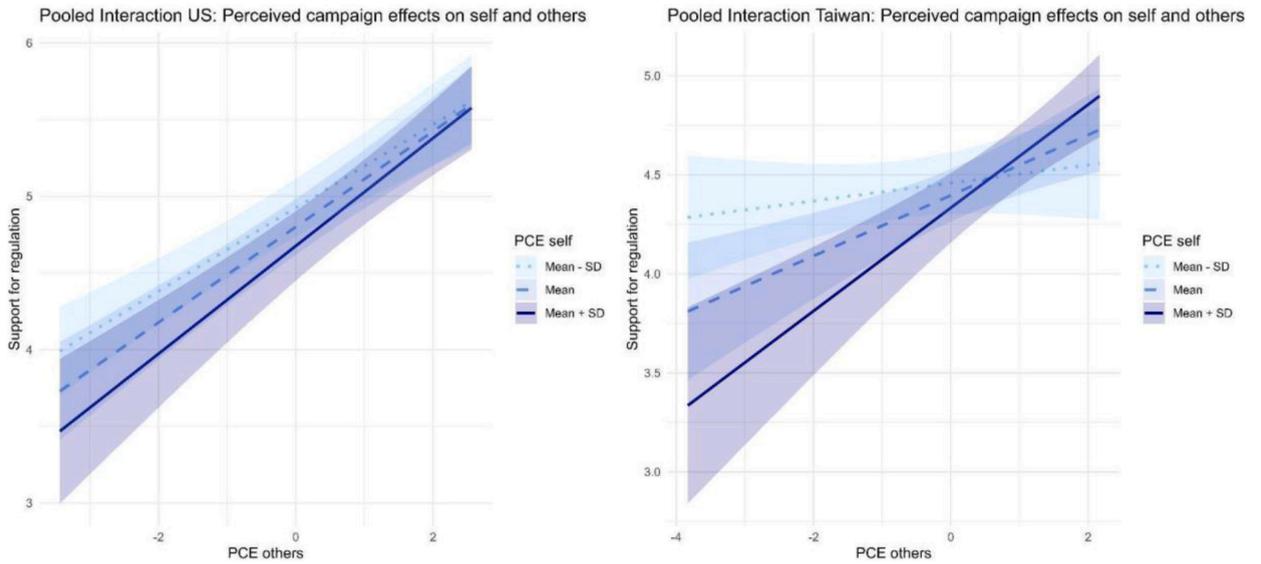


Fig. 2. Interaction effects for perceived campaign effects on self and others. Interaction effect for the U.S. on the left (not significant), for Taiwan on the right (significant).

Table 3

Summary for the key explanatory factors for support for regulation highlighting the differences between Taiwan and the United States.

Explanatory factor	United States	Taiwan
Perceived campaign effects	Third-person effect	Second-person effect
AI risk perception	↑ support for regulation	↑ support for regulation
AI benefit perception	↓ support for regulation	↑ support for regulation
Partisan identification	Democrats & Republicans higher support than non-partisans	Pan-Green higher than non-partisans; Pan-Blue & TPP not higher than non-partisans

were more likely to support the regulation of AI use in campaigns (third-person effect).

One potential explanation for the difference between the U.S. and Taiwan is the way AI has been utilized in campaigns and how people have generally encountered generative AI during that period. In the U.S., the discourse on AI use during the election was primarily focused on the domestic arena with a focus on AI-powered misinformation and its dangers (Yan et al., 2025), and many partisan users, both Democrats and Republicans, used generative AI on social media (Chang et al., 2024). At the same time, Republicans and Democrats were equally concerned about the negative impact of AI on the election (Gracia, 2024). Thus, the third-person effect that explains the support for regulation of AI use in campaigns may be interpreted as follows: people encountered generative AI during the election, with some instances reflecting positive intentions to strengthen their in-group (Chang et al., 2024), but also observed its use by the out-group on social media or in the media coverage (Yan et al., 2025). Prior research on disinformation in the U.S. supports this assumption, as the out-group is usually blamed for spreading disinformation (Li & Su, 2020; Rauchfleisch & Jungherr, 2024). Consequently, the problem of AI use in campaigns that should be regulated is not seen as a problem affecting all, but primarily the out-group. The findings on partisan identification in our study further support this interpretation. Compared to non-partisans and independents, both Republicans and Democrats show stronger support for regulating AI use in campaigns.

In Taiwan, however, we identified a second-person effect, as expected. This means that, just as Baek et al. (2019) concluded in South Korea regarding fake news, the potential negative effects of AI use in campaigns are seen as a problem affecting everyone. Similar to the U.S. context, this perception could be explained by the general discourse on generative AI during the election. While there were many positive examples of how campaigns themselves used AI (Lin, 2023), the general discourse about generative AI was largely negative and strongly focused on the danger of disinformation, mainly stemming from fears of Chinese influence and perceived targeting of the DPP as the incumbent party (Hung et al., 2024). Mainstream media covered several cases of AI-edited videos that were quickly debunked (Huang et al., 2024). Although these cases were not directly tied to campaigns and were often framed as foreign interference, they likely overshadowed the positive examples of AI use in campaigns and influenced people’s overall perception of AI.

5.2. The role of AI attitudes

Regarding general attitudes toward AI, the perceived risks of AI explain the stronger support for regulating AI use in campaigns in both countries. However, our hypothesis regarding the benefits of AI is not supported in Taiwan. Instead, we find significant results

that support the opposite direction from the hypothesized. People who see high AI benefits are more likely to support regulating AI use in campaigns. This result seems counterintuitive. A possible explanation is the general discourse on generative AI during election time. Both people with high-risk and high-benefit perceptions see AI as powerful. While people recognize the benefits of AI in decision-making for government, the economy, and defense, this perception of benefit does not seem to extend to AI use in politics. This result also highlights the importance of distinguishing between risks and benefits (Bao et al., 2022; Binder et al., 2012) and not conflating them into a one-dimensional continuum.

5.3. The role of partisanship

We observe in both countries that partisan identification, rather than political orientation, can, to some extent, explain support for regulating AI. In our statistical analysis, we compare the major parties and political factions with the non-partisans and independents. In the U.S. context, both Republicans and Democrats support regulating the use of AI in campaigns. There are two possible explanations for this result. First, the result is consistent with the third-person effect we identified in the U.S. context. People who perceive the effect of campaign communication on others as high have higher support for regulation. Thus, they most likely perceive it primarily as a problem of others. This perception appears among supporters of both parties. Second, non-partisans, among whom libertarian views may be more common, tend to oppose regulation. Other research shows that libertarianism predicts resistance to regulatory measures (Rauchfleisch & Jungherr, 2024).

In Taiwan, however, the results are more nuanced. People identifying with the Pan-Green camp (the incumbent party) were more likely to support regulating AI use in campaigns. However, people with TPP party identification, whose presidential candidate publicly shared an AI model of his voice (Lin, 2023), as well as those with Pan-Blue identification (primarily KMT), as the contenders during the election challenging the Pan-Green camp (primarily DPP), were not more likely to support regulation of AI use in campaigns than non-partisans. The higher support from DPP partisans most likely stems from their perception that they were primarily targeted by AI-driven disinformation and foreign interference during the campaign (Hung et al., 2024).

5.4. Practical implications for AI regulation of campaigns

As debates about how to regulate AI in both the U.S. and Taiwan—and specifically in election campaigns—are ongoing, the results of our study also have practical implications. For example, in Taiwan, people seem to clearly distinguish between politics and other domains where AI can be used, as those with both high AI benefits and risk perceptions show stronger support for regulating AI use in campaigns. This differentiation between domains should be considered in AI legislation, such as the basic AI law currently under consideration in Taiwan (Su, 2025).

Another aspect with practical relevance is the role of partisanship in both countries. If AI use in campaigns is regulated, some partisan pushback is likely. Although we did not specifically analyze which campaigns relied most heavily on AI, studies and known examples from both elections demonstrate that generative AI plays a significant role outside official campaign activities (Bond & Inskeep, 2024; Chang et al., 2024). For example, Trump did not create AI-generated memes for himself but shared those created by partisan citizens on social media (Bond & Inskeep, 2024). Thus, the regulation specifically targeting AI use in campaign communication will not fully address generative AI's broader, decentralized influence during election time, as the technology enables even ordinary citizens to easily create videos and images of high enough quality to attract the attention of politicians and other citizens. And even with existing regulations such as the one in Taiwan targeting AI-generated disinformation, the enforcement remains challenging (Chen, 2025).

6. Conclusion

Our study examined public support for regulating the use of AI in election campaigns in the U.S. and Taiwan, showing that this support is shaped by third- or second-person perceptions of campaign influence, general AI attitudes, and partisan alignments (see Table 3). By comparing two countries with comparably lenient campaign regulations but different political and media contexts, we highlight both universal and context-specific drivers of regulatory preferences. However, our study also has several limitations. We employed a cross-sectional design, and attitudes toward regulating AI use in campaigns are likely to change in the future. Parts of our results can be explained by the specific circumstances in both elections, and by the cases of AI use during the election that were publicly discussed. Thus, it would be interesting to compare our results with those from other countries or to conduct the same study again in the next election. Still, we expect the results to be relatively stable for the U.S. and Taiwan, as both the partisan element in the U.S. and the discourse on disinformation in Taiwan (Rauchfleisch et al., 2023) are relatively long-standing trends that provide explanations for our results. Secondly, while our results can be generalized to countries with relatively lenient campaign regulations, we anticipate different outcomes in countries with stricter campaign regulations. Still, it would be interesting to see if, in such cases, we would observe the same result as in South Korea (Baek et al., 2019), a country with rather strict campaign regulation (You & Lin, 2020), or if the specific circumstances of the discourse around the election combined with partisanship would lead to a third-person effect for the behavioral hypothesis. Lastly, as we use cross-sectional survey data, we cannot make claims about causality. However, our findings could inform future experiments that attempt to manipulate some of our predictors used in the study, for example, the general potential or risk of AI or, as many experiments in political communication have done before, the partisan cue (Jungherr et al., 2025).

AI is poised to play an ever greater role in digital media ecosystems. One important subfield where this is already playing out is electoral politics. The dynamics of AI's integration into political digital media ecosystems and the associated demands for greater

regulatory oversight offer important insights into the broader debate on the governance of AI in digital media. As our article shows, people base their demand (or disregard) for greater regulatory oversight of AI within this arena on their psychological perceptions of others, their general attitudes toward AI, and partisanship. Therefore, public demand for AI regulation in digital media ecosystems is never only about the technology or the domain. Instead, it is about the complex interplay between psychology, technology, and the domain. Any debate about potentially stricter or more lenient regulatory oversight of AI in digital media ecosystems should account for the underlying factors.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Adrian Rauchfleisch: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Andreas Jungherr:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Conceptualization. **Alexander Wuttke:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Investigation, Conceptualization.

Declaration of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the manuscript preparation process

During the preparation of this work, the authors used ChatGPT 4o for language editing. After using this tool, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the published article.

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Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Supplementary information

Supplementary information (Appendix) to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.telpol.2025.103072>.

Data availability

The code and data to replicate our analysis are available on OSF under 'Files': <https://osf.io/jezr4/>.

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