

research article

How cultural world views moderate policy framing on Universal Basic Income

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Universal Basic Income (UBI) has gained global attention as a potential policy response to the AI revolution, yet public support remains divided. While existing research highlights the role of political predisposition in shaping attitudes towards UBI, such explanations rely on the presence of partisan/ideological cues. In contexts where UBI is not yet politicized, ideological alignment may offer limited explanatory power. This article examines how individuals' cultural predispositions, as conceptualized by Cultural Theory (CT), shape responses to different UBI framings in Taiwan, a non-Western democracy where partisan cues on UBI are less salient. Using an online survey experiment, the article tests how cultural world views interact with framing conditions to influence support for UBI. Findings demonstrate framing effects are conditioned by cultural orientations, supporting CT that individuals filter policy information through stable value lenses. This study advances a theoretical framework for understanding how public opinion forms in the absence of partisan cues.

Keywords Cultural Theory • Universal Basic Income • value predispositions • policy preference • policy framing • experiment • Taiwan

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Introduction

Political predispositions are among the most conventional predictors of individuals' policy preferences. Yet, such predictive power often relies on the presence of partisan or ideological cues. What happens, then, when a policy issue has not yet been politicized? How can we identify the underlying dispositions that shape individual preferences in the absence of clear political signals? This study addresses this question by examining public attitudes towards Universal Basic Income (UBI), a policy that remains relatively novel and contested in many contexts. Drawing on Cultural Theory (CT), this article offers an alternative framework for capturing deep-seated predispositions that influence policy preferences beyond conventional partisan alignment.

Since the 2010s, the idea of UBI has garnered substantial global political momentum. In many Western democracies, discussion surrounding UBI has already entered public discourse (Perkiö et al, 2019; Perkiö, 2020). The economic shocks brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic have further fuelled interest in assessing the political feasibility of UBI in the US and other countries (Richards and Steiger, 2021). There have been small-scale experiments conducted in various European and US urban contexts to assess its viability (Samuel, 2020). Results from pilots show that basic income has increased flexibility and autonomy for recipients while it does not really create negative impacts on individuals' involvement in the labour market (Holder and Ghaffary, 2024).

The core idea of UBI is 'income paid to individuals without income-test and without work test' (Van Parijs, 2004). The definition of UBI entails five necessary components: cash benefit; regular payment; individual-based; income-test free; and work-test free. Even though existing small-scale UBI pilots are showing promising outcomes, its political feasibility still relies on broadening public support and narrowing strong opposition. The investigation of determinants of public support towards UBI is timely and necessary. Empirically, most existing empirical studies on UBI focus on evidence drawing from Western democracies, where the issue of UBI is already politicized (Legein et al, 2018; Roosma and van Oorschot, 2020; Rossetti et al, 2020; Stadelmann-Steffen and Dermont, 2020). Probably not surprisingly, politically left and the liberals are usually more supportive UBI, while politically right and the conservatives in general are more opposed towards UBI (Parolin and Siöland, 2020; Roosma and van Oorschot, 2020; Jordan et al, 2021; Yeung, 2022; Thomas et al, 2023).

However, the extent to which these empirical findings are generalizable beyond Western democracies remains questionable. In many non-Western democratic contexts, political cleavages do not align neatly with the traditional left-right ideological spectrum, and instead emerge around non-economic issues such as ethnicity, religion and identity, making political ideology a less salient predictor of attitudes towards UBI. Furthermore, in Western democracies where UBI has already become politicized, political ideology may serve as a proxy for deeper value orientations. This raises an important and underexplored question: are there more fundamental predispositions, beyond ideology, that shape support for UBI and can offer a more generalizable framework for understanding its social foundations across different national and political contexts?

In this article, we argue that CT can be beneficial to capture individuals' value predisposition to studying public support for UBI in Taiwan, a non-Western democracy and advanced economy. Applying CT to UBI research allows us to systematically assess how different world views, as predispositions, influence reactions to policy framing. By leveraging CT's grid-group framework, this study offers a parsimonious yet comprehensive approach to understanding an individual's predisposition. Rather than relying on broad ideological labels or political identification, CT provides a structured way to measure how people perceive social order, hierarchy and group belonging, allowing for a more precise analysis of how these orientations shape policy preferences. Specifically, this research empirically examines these dynamics using an online survey experiment in Taiwan, a context that contrasts with the European settings where much of the existing research has been conducted. We aim to answer the research question: how do cultural world views, as conceptualized by CT, shape individuals' responses to different framings of UBI?

Literature

Individual ideology and value orientation in UBI support

UBI is one of the few policy issues that can garner support from individuals across the ideological spectrum. On the left, support for UBI typically stems from principles of social justice, equality and rights-based thinking. Advocates argue that access to an income sufficient to meet basic needs should be recognized as a fundamental individual right and, therefore, income should be disconnected from work. On the right, some support for UBI comes from those who emphasize individual freedom and the promotion of equal opportunity as a path to self-responsibility. In short, individuals' pre-existing value orientations and ideological commitments can strongly shape how they perceive UBI and the reasons they may choose to support it.

Research has already shown that political belief and orientation play an important role in shaping attitudes towards UBI. In the United States, democrats and liberals show more significant support for UBI compared to Republicans and conservatives (Jordan et al, 2021). Conservatives in general are more opposed to any cash-based social transfer because they tend to view welfare recipients as lazy and undeserving, and such an association extends to their attitudes towards UBI (Yeung, 2022; Thomas et al, 2023). The same trend is identified in Europe too. Political left and egalitarianists are found to be more supportive of UBI (Parolin and Siöland, 2020; Roosma and van Oorschot, 2020).

Because universality and work unconditionality are two of the most fundamental, and arguably most controversial, features of UBI, a growing body of research has sought to understand whether public preferences for these principles influence support for UBI.

Universality implies that everyone, regardless of socio-economic status, receives the same cash payment. This raises normative questions about whether individuals with higher incomes deserve such benefits. However, empirical studies suggest that support for universalism does not necessarily translate into greater support for UBI (Roosma and van Oorschot, 2020; Lee, 2021). In contrast, studies have shown that limiting eligibility, effectively narrowing the scope of universalism, can increase public support for UBI (Rincon, 2023; Stadelmann-Steffen and Dermont, 2020).

Similarly, work unconditionality, which allows individuals to receive UBI regardless of employment status, raises concerns about whether those who are unemployed or not participating in the labour force, often perceived as less productive, should be entitled to such benefits. Public attitudes towards work ethics appear to be a significant factor. Richards and Steiger (2021) demonstrate that value orientations shape support for UBI: many respondents view work as more than a source of income and believe UBI would not reduce their own or others' motivation to work. However, individuals who believe that UBI would discourage work are less supportive of the policy. Similarly, Lee (2021) finds that those who favour unconditional benefits are more likely to support UBI.

Other than the value of universalism and work unconditionality, studies find that the redistributive motive targeting the poor and the guarantee of minimum income for the poor is what attract people's support (Roosma and van Oorschot, 2020; Lee, 2021). In other words, public support for UBI is motivated by the traditional goal of alleviating financial hardship for the poor. Together, these findings underscore

the importance of both normative beliefs and value orientations in shaping public attitudes towards UBI's core principles.

Contextual factors: the role of policy framing

Individual value orientations and ideologies do not operate in a vacuum. Rather, the macro-level policy context plays an important role too in shaping, and potentially reinforcing or altering, how individuals perceive UBI.

A growing body of research highlights how the design and presentation of UBI policies can interact with individual political values to influence public attitudes. In particular, survey and experimental studies show that specific attributes of UBI and how the policy is framed can significantly affect levels of public support (Jordan et al, 2021; Rincon, 2023; Stadelmann-Steffen and Dermont, 2020; Yeung, 2022; Thomas et al, 2023). The common framings of UBI include highlighting the cost of introducing UBI (that is, the financing aspect and its relation with the existing welfare system) (Stadelmann-Steffen and Dermont, 2020; Rincon, 2023), highlighting the controversial attribute of the programme (Legein et al, 2018; Bidadanure, 2019; Stadelmann-Steffen and Dermont, 2020), or highlighting policy impacts of UBI (Roosma and van Oorschot, 2020; Lee, 2021).

Using both policy-effect frames and value-based frames embedded in the design of UBI, Jordan et al (2021) finds that Republicans and conservatives are more responsive to negative framing than to positive framing. This article clearly shows that partisan predispositions significantly condition how individuals respond to different framings of UBI. However, while the study provides important insights, the design may blur the distinction between policy effects and value-based framing, making it difficult to disentangle the two. For example, framing UBI as a tool for reducing income inequality can be interpreted both as a value-oriented argument and as a positive policy outcome. This raises the question of whether such framing appeals primarily to normative values or also to perceived instrumental benefits. It is preferable to test policy-effect frames and value-based frames separately and independently, as doing so allows for a clearer understanding of how each framing mechanism independently influences public attitudes towards UBI.

Given that conservatives are often seen as a major obstacle to building a political coalition for UBI, some studies have specifically examined whether conservative-friendly framing can increase support for UBI among conservative voters (Yeung, 2022; Thomas et al, 2023). However, existing research remains inconclusive.

Prior research has shown that individual predispositions play a critical role in shaping preferences for UBI, with political ideology commonly used as a proxy to measure these predispositions. Discussions of UBI's political feasibility thus inevitably engage with individuals' normative views on redistributive justice and equality, and how they view the role of work in society. Studies further demonstrate that policy framing can generate heterogeneous effects, depending on individuals' underlying value orientations. However, more research is needed to identify which types of frames are most effective in shifting the attitudes of which groups.

These studies generally adopt a bounded rationality or thick rational choice perspective, emphasizing how cognitive constraints influence individuals' evaluations of UBI. From this perspective, accurately identifying and measuring predispositions is

essential for explaining and predicting public attitudes towards UBI. However, most of the existing empirical evidence comes from European contexts, where political cleavages primarily align with the left–right ideological spectrum and where UBI has already become a highly politicized issue, making political ideology an essential predisposition to moderate framing effects. In non-Western democracies, political ideology may not effectively capture predispositions, especially in cases like Taiwan, where UBI remains largely depoliticized. Therefore, we argue that employing CT offers a more robust and generalizable framework for analysing attitudes towards UBI. By drawing on CT, this study provides a universal lens to examine how deeply held world views shape policy preferences, which allows for broader applicability across national and cultural contexts (Liu, 2018b; 2020).

Cultural Theory

CT, originally developed by Mary Douglas and Aaron Wildavsky (Douglas and Wildavsky, 1982) and further refined by other scholars (Thompson et al, 1990; Coyle and Ellis, 1994; Hood, 1998; Verweij and Thompson, 2006), provides a two-dimensional framework for understanding individuals' world views and policy preferences (Coyle and Ellis, 1994; Swedlow et al, 2024). The framework consists of the grid and group dimensions, which define how individuals or groups perceive social organization and governance. The grid dimension refers to the extent to which social norms, rules and institutional constraints regulate individual behaviour (Douglas, 1992; Coyle and Ellis, 1994; Swedlow et al, 2020). A high grid orientation (Hierarchism and Fatalism) implies strong external constraints on individual choices, while a low grid orientation (Individualism and Egalitarianism) suggests greater personal autonomy and fewer imposed rules (Boyle and Coughlin, 2019). The group dimension captures the extent to which individuals identify with and prioritize collective membership (Douglas, 1992; Coyle and Ellis, 1994). A high group orientation (Hierarchism and Egalitarianism) signifies a preference for group cohesion and collective decision-making, whereas a low group orientation (Individualism and Fatalism) reflects a preference for individual autonomy and decentralized authority (Maleki and Hendriks, 2015). Although the term 'cultural' is used, CT does not primarily describe cultural traditions in the conventional sense of culture. Instead, it serves as a theoretical framework for understanding individuals' or groups' world view orientations, particularly in relation to policy preferences (Coyle and Ellis, 1994; Swedlow et al, 2020). CT has been widely applied to various policy domains, including, but not limited to, public health policies (Song et al, 2014; Butler, 2022) and campaign finance regulation (Jorgensen et al, 2015).

CT offers a structured way to understand and expand bounded rationality by categorizing individuals into distinct world views. These orientations shape not just policy preferences but also how people react to different framings of the same policy. Traditional rational choice models assume a thin version of rationality, where individuals make decisions based on a straightforward calculation of costs and benefits. However, CT aligns more with a thick version of rationality, which recognizes that people's decision-making is shaped by cognitive and normative constraints (Chai and Wildavsky, 1994; Chai, 1997; Chai et al, 2011; Liu, 2018b; Simmons, 2018). This means that instead of responding to policy arguments based purely on instrumental self-interest, individuals interpret messages through the lens of their deeply held cultural

world views. In this sense, bounded rationality is not just about cognitive limitations in processing information but also about the ways in which cultural predispositions structure what individuals see as rational or legitimate (Chai and Wildavsky, 1994; Chai et al, 2011).

CT research in East Asia

A growing body of research in Asia, particularly in Taiwan (Liu, 2018a; 2018b), China (Dang, 2020; Yuan, 2022; Yuan et al, 2022; 2023; 2024), Japan (Takagi and Takeda, 2025) and South Korea (Shin et al, 1989; Kim and Kim, 2019; Borozdina et al, 2024; Han et al, 2024), has demonstrated both the explanatory promise and contextual challenges of applying CT beyond Western societies (Liu, 2020). These studies have revealed that, although CT ‘travels’ across cultural boundaries (Swedlow et al, 2020; Borozdina et al, 2024), its specific manifestations and measurement properties differ in significant ways (Maleki and Hendriks, 2015; Borozdina et al, 2024).

Specifically, CT has been most frequently employed in East Asia to analyse environmental politics and risk management (see Xue et al, 2016; Liu, 2018a; Kim and Kim, 2019; Yuan et al, 2022), areas where traditional ideological or partisan cleavages are weak (Liu, 2018a; Yuan et al, 2022). In Taiwan, CT was used to explain how the public evaluates environmental activism initiated by environmental non-profit organizations and the author concludes CT provided greater explanatory power than conventional predictors such as partisanship, which suggests that in depoliticized contexts, cultural predispositions can offer a more meaningful account of behaviour (Liu, 2018a). Studies in China have found that egalitarianism increases environmental concern while fatalism suppresses it (Xue et al, 2016; Yuan et al, 2022), and that hierarchism structures patterns of public participation in ways that reflect institutional constraints on civic engagement (Dang, 2020; Yuan et al, 2022). Research in South Korea and China further demonstrates CT’s value for analysing risk perception and public health behaviours (Yang, 2015; Kim and Kim, 2019; Zeng et al, 2022; Guo et al, 2023; Borozdina et al, 2024; Yuan et al, 2024). In South Korea, cultural world views explained a notable portion of the variance in perceived environmental and technological risks, with egalitarians consistently more risk-averse (Yang, 2015; Kim and Kim, 2019). In China, CT integrated with the other models showed that hierarchism increased trust in institutions and protective behavioural intentions during the COVID-19 pandemic, while fatalism reduced both trust and protective action (Guo et al, 2023; Yuan et al, 2024). Findings indicate that the predictive direction of hierarchism and individualism can be consistent across the US and China, but the mechanisms, such as the role of trust in the state, differ substantially (Yuan et al, 2024).

These studies collectively reveal that while CT retains explanatory coherence across diverse societies, the distribution, salience and reliability of cultural biases vary markedly in East Asia. Cross-national validation efforts have shown that hierarchism demonstrates inconsistent factor structure in the Korean sample compared to the US. These findings show that although CT may be manifested differently in the East Asian context, the predictive power remains.

The utility of CT in studying attitudes towards and support for UBI in Taiwan

Against this backdrop, Taiwan represents not merely a replication site but a theoretically strategic case to investigate how CT operates in a collectivist and yet highly modernized democracy where political ideology provides limited guidance on novel policy issues like UBI. Taiwan is a distinctive case in many respects, particularly regarding its underlying value systems.

On the one hand, as a Chinese-speaking society, Taiwan is often regarded as being culturally influenced by Confucianism (Zakaria, 1994), which would predict that people of Taiwan possess certain collectivism-oriented cultural traits. Confucianism places limited emphasis on individualism and greater weight on communal and collective values. This world view would predict that people in Taiwan tend to exhibit stronger orientations towards hierarchical and egalitarian value systems.

On the other hand, research (Zhang et al, 2005) suggests that Taiwan's endorsement of Confucian values differs in important ways from that of China. Specifically, they found that while young people in China, Korea, Japan and Taiwan all valued interpersonal harmony, which is a central Confucian principle, Taiwanese participants showed weaker adherence to hierarchical norms than Chinese respondents and resembled the more egalitarian orientation found in Japan. Moreover, the island's encounters with multiple colonizing powers (from the Dutch to the Japanese), combined with indigenous traditions and the Confucian heritage introduced by Han Chinese migrants, have produced a hybrid cultural identity. Three decades of democratization have fostered more individualistic and progressive modes of thinking (Yeh and Hsieh, 2025), making it an exceptional case within the Asian context. Such profound social transformations suggest an emerging orientation towards individualism or even fatalism, both of which are associated with lower group-oriented world views.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, political cleavages in Taiwan do not align with the conventional left-right ideological spectrum. Instead, questions of national identity and cross-strait relations largely define electoral competition, with political parties distinguishing themselves primarily through their positions on China (Achen and Wang, 2017). Beyond identity politics, rather than adhering to consistent ideological principles, parties tend to adopt policy stances that maximize electoral support (Wong, 2004).

The distinctive configuration of Taiwan's cultural and political landscape, therefore, provides a theoretically meaningful setting to test CT. The coexistence of modified Confucian hierarchism, emergent individualism and persistent fatalism creates a pluralistic value environment where citizens may draw on multiple, and sometimes conflicting, cultural logics when evaluating policy proposals.

CT, framing and UBI support

As mentioned, the framing of UBI can alter individual perception of the proposed policy. People categorized in different CT groups may condition the effects of different framings, creating heterogeneous framing effects. Existing studies employing policy framing to examine UBI have largely focused on three dimensions: the potential impact of introducing UBI on existing welfare systems (Stadelmann-Steffen and Dermont, 2020; Rincon, 2023); the effects of policy design features on public

support for UBI (Legein et al, 2018; Bidadanure, 2019; Stadelmann-Steffen and Dermont, 2020); and the outcomes, positive or negative, of implementing UBI (Jordan et al, 2021).

Following this literature, we adopt three framings corresponding to each of these dimensions: the cost framing, which emphasizes that UBI would consolidate all existing welfare programmes into a single scheme; the unconditionality framing, which highlights the absence of work-test requirements, an attribute often viewed as the most controversial aspect of the UBI idea; and the redistribution framing, which stresses the potential of UBI to reduce income inequality, reflecting the positive effects frequently attributed to the policy and has been empirically shown to be the reason motivating support for UBI. By disentangling how people respond to cost-related, unconditionality-related and redistribution-related framings, we can capture the distinct cognitive and value-based mechanisms through which cultural orientations shape policy preferences. Later, we detail our theoretical expectation of how different cultural world views/orientations may moderate the effect of the three common UBI framings in shaping support.

Hierarchs (high group/high grid) tend to favour policies that enhance state-controlled policy (Jorgensen et al, 2015) and administrative efficiency, particularly when they streamline governance and reduce redundancy in welfare distribution. When UBI is framed as a cost replacement for existing welfare programmes, it may be perceived as reinforcing state authority and improving bureaucratic efficiency. By consolidating fragmented welfare programmes into a single, structured system, this framing aligns with hierarchs' preference for rule-based order and predictable governance. Moreover, in Taiwan, hierarchical values emphasizing harmony, role obligations and deference to authority are deeply ingrained (Zakaria, 1994; Park and Chesla, 2007). Citizens with hierarchical orientations often perceive bureaucratic order as a moral good that sustains social stability. Therefore, when cost framing presents UBI as a fiscally disciplined, state-coordinated reform rather than a redistributive departure from existing structures, it would increase individuals with higher hierarchical orientation to support UBI more.

H1: Individuals with a higher hierarchical orientation are more likely to support UBI than those with a lower hierarchical orientation when the cost framing is provided.

Egalitarians (high group/low grid) share a preference for collective action but reject hierarchical structures. Their core value is equality, and they advocate for minimizing disparities within society. Policies that promote social and economic equality, such as wealth redistribution or universal access to essential services, align with their world view (Thompson and Wildavsky, 1982; Ney and Verweij, 2014; Jorgensen et al, 2015). Conversely, policies perceived to exacerbate inequality or reinforce social stratification are likely to be met with opposition.

When it comes to UBI preference, because egalitarians prioritize reducing disparities and ensuring universal access to resources, they are especially likely to support policies that emphasize inclusivity and redistribution. When UBI is framed as unconditional, which means that it is provided to all individuals regardless of employment status, it aligns with egalitarians' rejection of hierarchies and their belief

in equality. Similarly, when UBI is framed as redistributive and explicitly targeting the reduction of economic inequality, it directly reinforces egalitarians' core values. In Taiwan, egalitarianism often manifests as communal concern for fairness and inclusion within harmonious social relations rather than adversarial equality (Yeh and Hsieh, 2025). This means that egalitarians may interpret unconditional and redistributive framings as policies that sustain social solidarity while minimizing class conflict. As a result, we hypothesize that:

H2a: The difference in UBI support between individuals with high and low egalitarian world views is more pronounced when UBI is framed as unconditional (that is, provided to all individuals regardless of employment status).

H2b: The difference in UBI support between individuals with high and low egalitarian world views is more pronounced when UBI is framed as redistributive.

Individualists (low group/low grid) prioritize personal autonomy and market-driven mechanisms over group coordination or institutional constraints (Jorgensen et al, 2015). They believe that society flourishes when individuals are free to pursue their own interests with minimal external interference. Competition, entrepreneurialism and deregulation are central to their world view (Jorgensen et al, 2015). Because individualists emphasize personal autonomy and market-driven solutions, their support for UBI is likely to be contingent on whether it aligns with self-interest and economic freedom rather than collective welfare. Unlike hierarchs or egalitarians, individualists may not have a strong ideological attachment to redistributive policies or state-managed welfare. Instead, their evaluation of UBI may depend on pragmatic considerations, such as whether it enhances individual choice or reduces bureaucratic constraints. Also, individualism in Taiwan and other East Asian contexts is less ideological and more situational. People often value personal independence, but they tend to express it within family and social expectations rather than in opposition to them (Zhang et al, 2005). Because of this, the individualist world view may have a weaker influence on policy preferences in Taiwan, where autonomy is balanced by obligations to others. Therefore, CT expects smaller differences between people with high and low individualist orientations across all framing conditions. Given this, the framing of UBI – whether unconditional, redistributive or cost – may not systematically influence their support, leading to minimal differences in UBI preferences between high and low individualists across framing treatments.

H3: The difference in UBI support between high and low individualists is not significant under every framing treatment.

Fatalists (low group/high grid) perceive themselves as constrained by external rules while lacking meaningful agency in shaping social or political outcomes. Unlike hierarchs, who see rules as essential for maintaining order, fatalists view these constraints as arbitrary or imposed by external forces beyond their control (Jorgensen et al, 2015). Given their perceived lack of influence over decision-making, fatalists often display unclear or inconsistent policy preferences, as they see little personal stake in the policy

process (Jenkins-Smith, 1994; Liu, 2018a). Their responses to policy issues tend to be shaped more by immediate survival concerns than by ideological commitments.

However, when it comes to UBI, fatalistic orientation may influence the level of support. Individuals with a high fatalistic orientation may exhibit greater support for UBI than those with a lower fatalistic orientation. Since fatalists perceive most situations as beyond their control, a UBI policy may serve as a critical means of addressing their survival concerns. In this case, the specific framing of UBI may be less relevant to fatalists; the mere assurance of a guaranteed income may be sufficient to secure their support. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

H4: Individuals with a strong fatalistic world view may support UBI under all framing.

One thing that is worth noting is that these four cultural types are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Individuals may exhibit high scores in more than one cultural orientation, even when these orientations appear contradictory.

Methods

Research design

In order to test the hypotheses constructed based on CT to understand how individuals' cultural orientations/world views interact with different UBI framings to affect their support for UBI in Taiwan, we examine three commonly utilized framings that are features of UBI: cost, unconditionality and redistribution. The three treatment groups read the core feature and receive additional prompts that highlight various policy attributes of a UBI programme. The cost treatment stresses that the UBI programme 'would replace other existing social welfare programmes and will be financed through tax revenue'. The unconditionality treatment highlights that 'Regardless of whether a person is employed, they will receive the same amount of money. People can still keep any additional earnings from work or other sources'. Given that work ethic, or how individuals perceive the role of work, may significantly influence attitudes towards UBI, we aim to investigate how pre-existing ideological and value predispositions shape individuals' responses to the unconditionality component of UBI. Given that existing literature has found that preferences for redistribution motivate support for UBI (Roosma and van Oorschot, 2020; Lee, 2021), we include this dimension in our experimental design. Specifically, we introduce a redistribution treatment that primes respondents with the idea that UBI can help reduce income inequality in Taiwan.

These three framings are added to a baseline description of the fundamental aspects of UBI: 'Some countries are currently discussing the implementation of a Basic Income Programme, which would provide every adult citizen with a fixed monthly income sufficient to cover basic living expenses'. It is worth noting that the statement includes all the important attributes of UBI: it is cash, it is regular payment, it is to all adult citizens with no strings attached, and the goal is to meet basic living expense needs.

Our research design aims to identify whether there is a statistically significant discrepancy in support for UBI between individuals who score high versus low on a given cultural orientation under different framings of UBI. The goal is not to examine

how different framings, in and of themselves, shape public support for UBI but rather to understand how cultural world views condition individuals' responses to particular justifications of UBI. In other words, we are interested in the heterogeneous framing effects. We investigate whether certain framings of UBI resonate more strongly with individuals who hold specific cultural orientations, thereby moderating the effect of framing on policy support.

To assess individual cultural type, we utilize the four statement-based measures developed by Jenkins-Smith et al (see [Trousset et al, 2015](#) and the Appendix). The statements represented the hierarchical, individualistic, egalitarian and fatalistic perspectives, respectively. Participants were asked to rate each statement on a ten-point scale based on how accurately it described their way of life. Among existing CT instruments, Jenkin-Smith's four cultural statement measures are not necessarily the highest in overall construct validity but remain among the most predictively robust across policy domains. Although their face and content validity are considered moderate, comparative assessments confirm their convergent and discriminant validity and demonstrate that they capture the behavioural tendencies implied by CT ([Swedlow et al, 2020](#)). [Trousset et al \(2015\)](#) used these statements in a national US survey and the findings strongly align with CT predictions. This predictive consistency has also been replicated in Taiwan ([Liu, 2018a; 2020; Liu and Morris, 2022](#)). Thus, cultural statements remain a theoretically coherent and empirically validated tool for identifying value predispositions.

Before the experiment, the respondents first answered a series of questions related to personal finance, political ideology and work. An attention check is embedded right before the experiment section, and only those who pass the check can proceed and enter the experiment. After the experiment, the respondents had to answer a manipulation check question in which they were asked to identify the core features of UBI. The respondents then answer basic demographic questions, including partisanship, the level of national identity and income levels. Following the experimental design, support for UBI is measured using a four-point scale survey item that elicits respondents' support levels towards the proposed policy.

Operationalizations of cultural type

Because our primary focus is on how cultural attributes condition the effects of different UBI framings on public attitudes, the operationalization of CT is likely to have a substantial impact on our findings. Scholars have long debated the validity of CT survey instruments, particularly regarding how well they capture CT's relational and institutional foundations. [Swedlow et al \(2020\)](#) conducted a systematic construct validity assessment comparing several common CT measures and concluded that although these instruments exhibit acceptable convergent, discriminant and predictive validity, they display weaker face and content validity because their wording does not fully reflect CT's relational structure. [Johnson et al \(2020\)](#) also examined the four long cultural statements in comparison with other CT and Cultural Cognition Theory measures and found that, although they cannot be factored independently, they load coherently with the CT items on the expected world view dimensions. Extending this debate, [Johnson and Swedlow \(2024a; 2024b\)](#) demonstrated that even when the same items are used, alternative classification rules (mean split, median or midpoint) yield

divergent distributions of cultural identification, underscoring that operationalization decisions can meaningfully shift interpretive conclusions. Similarly, [Borozdina et al \(2024\)](#) noted that hierarchism performs inconsistently in East Asian samples.

To guard against the possibility that our results might vary under alternative operationalizations of CT, we conduct two analyses using different operationalization strategies. The first strategy estimates all models using respondents' raw ten-point ratings for each cultural statement, thereby preserving the full continuous variation in world view endorsement. This specification explicitly tests the moderating effect of a given cultural orientation on support for UBI, holding all else constant. By avoiding coding decisions or scaling choices, this approach ensures that the findings are not driven by measurement simplifications. To estimate the independent effect of each cultural type, we control for all other cultural statements, accounting for their potential effects while simultaneously examining subgroup variation associated with the focal cultural attribute in each model.

Our second operationalization strategy is to treat different cultural orientations as dimensions rather than mutually exclusive categories. Instead of identifying each participant's dominant cultural type, we aimed to capture the extent to which respondents align with each world view orientation. This approach aligns with CT's idea that individuals simultaneously hold multiple cultural predispositions rather than being classified into a single type, although the relative strength of each may vary ([Thompson et al, 1990](#)). Specifically, based on respondents' ratings, we generated four dummy variables: if a respondent rated a world view statement higher than the sample average, they were classified as high in that cultural orientation; otherwise, they were classified as low. In this sense, CT does not predict the presence of a single world view but rather the mixture and relative salience of orientations that together shape collective reasoning and policy evaluation. Our coding strategy, therefore, seeks to allow multiple world views to be simultaneously 'activated' for a single individual rather than trying to find one dominant cultural type for each individual.

Data collection

We collected data through Rakuten Insight, which maintains a panel of 230,000 Taiwanese respondents, representing approximately 1 per cent of Taiwan's population. Rakuten Insight is part of the Rakuten Group, a Japanese conglomerate with over 70 businesses. With more than 25 years of history, Rakuten Insight is recognized as one of the pioneers in recruiting Asian online samples for market research. It is widely regarded as one of the leading survey-based research companies in Asia. To ensure demographic representativeness, we applied quotas for gender, age and location. Data collection took place between 21 April and 16 May 2023, yielding a total of 1,197 respondents.

The treatment groups are balanced in terms of job status, age, residential location, education and party identification. As is typical in online survey experiments, approximately 66 per cent of respondents passed the manipulation check. Higher education levels correlate with a greater likelihood of passing the manipulation check. However, in this sample, income was negatively associated with passing the check.

We conducted regression analyses using both the full sample and the subsample of respondents who passed the manipulation check, and the results are consistent

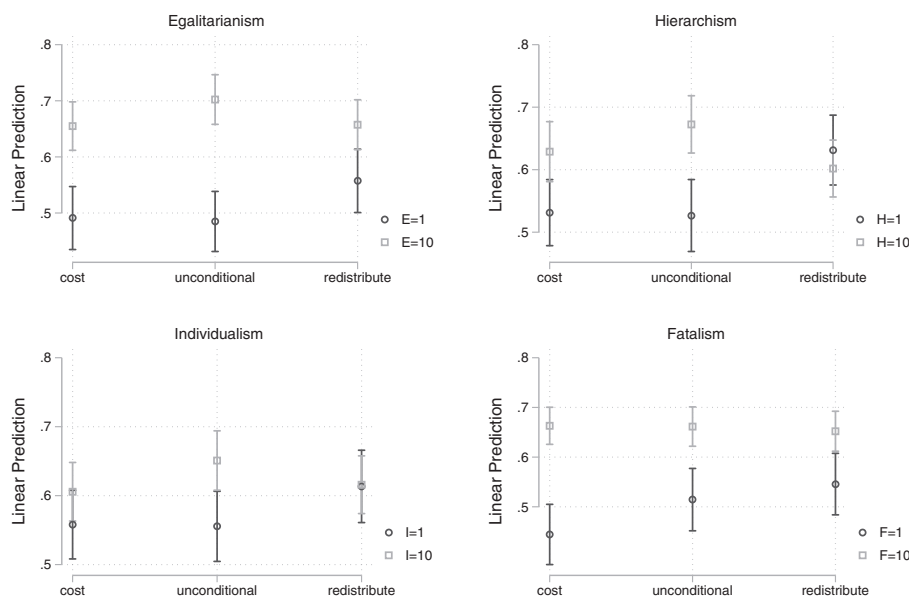
across both. In the empirical results section that follows, we report findings based on the subsample that passed the manipulation check, while full regression results for both samples are provided in the Appendix.

Results

To test our hypotheses, we estimate ordinary least squares (OLS) models that include interaction terms between treatment groups and cultural attributes. All statistical analyses in this study were conducted using the conventional 95 per cent significance level. The corresponding regression results are fully reported in the Appendix. In this article, only visual results are presented for easy visual detection. For the figures, we chose to display the 83 per cent confidence intervals rather than the conventional 95 per cent, following established statistical practice (Maghsoodloo and Huang, 2010). This is because, when comparing mean differences across two groups visually, overlapping 95 per cent confidence intervals may still mask statistically significant differences. Using 83 per cent intervals improves our ability to accurately detect visually whether treatment effects differ significantly across cultural groups. The analyses presented herein are based on the subsample of respondents who passed the manipulation check.

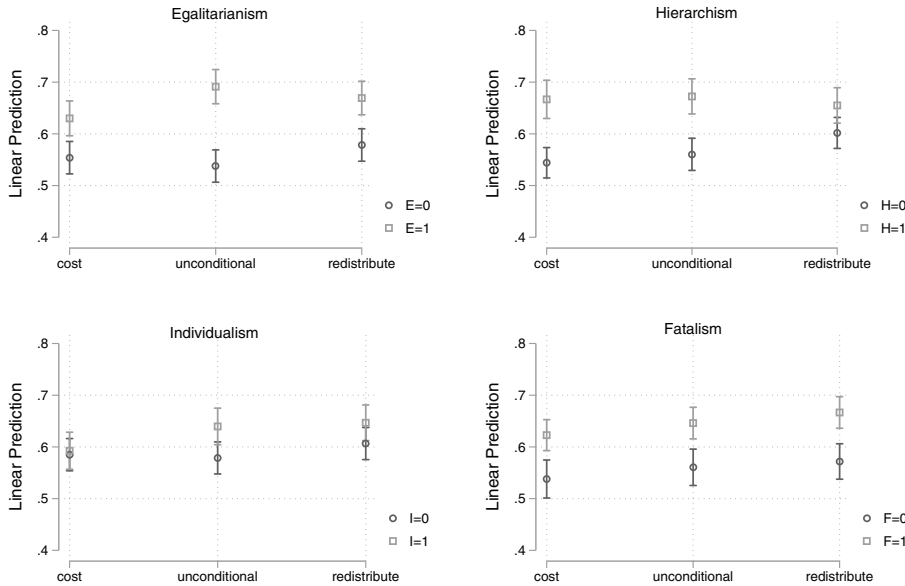
Figure 1 presents the marginal effect of a given cultural orientation at its lowest and highest values on the continuous scale (that is, the first operationalization strategy), controlling for all other cultural orientations. This constitutes a stricter test of

Figure 1: Predicted policy support across treatment groups by highest and lowest levels of different cultural orientations



Note: The figure presents the predicted levels of support (highest and lowest level on a specific cultural trait) based on regression models that treatment groups interacted with a specific cultural orientation while controlling for all other cultural orientations. All cultural orientations are operationalized using continuous scales. The bars indicate 83 per cent confidence intervals.

Figure 2: Predicted policy support across treatment groups by high and low levels of different cultural orientations



Note: The figure presents the predicted levels of support based on a regression model that includes treatment groups interacted with different cultural orientations using whether a rated world view statement is above or below the sample mean to capture the relative strength of different cultural world views. The bars indicate 83 per cent confidence intervals.

our hypotheses. [Figure 2](#) presents the corresponding results using the operationalization that captures the relative importance of each cultural orientation (the second operationalization strategy).

First, if Hypothesis 1 is valid, we should observe differences in support for UBI between individuals with high and low hierarchical orientations when the cost frame is presented. Hypothesis 1 is only partially supported: a statistically significant difference in UBI support under the cost frame emerges between individuals with high and low hierarchical orientations only when hierarchical orientation is measured in terms of its relative, rather than absolute, importance.

By contrast, there is robust evidence across operationalizations that individuals with a hierarchical orientation respond positively to the unconditional frame. This suggests that emphasizing the unconditional nature of a UBI programme can increase support among individuals with hierarchical cultural attributes.

Second, if Hypotheses 2a and 2b hold, support for UBI should differ between individuals with high and low egalitarian orientations, particularly under the unconditional and redistributive frames. We find strong and consistent evidence for the unconditional frame. Regardless of how CT is operationalized, individuals with high egalitarian orientations express significantly greater support for UBI than those with low egalitarian orientations. Evidence for the redistributive frame is more limited, as the effect appears only when egalitarian orientation is measured in relative, rather than absolute, terms.

In addition, we find that individuals with egalitarian orientations also respond positively to the cost frame. When the cost frame is presented, individuals with high egalitarian orientations exhibit significantly greater support for UBI than those with low egalitarian orientations across various operationalizations.

Next, if Hypothesis 3 holds, there should be no significant difference in UBI support between individuals with high and low individualistic orientations. Across all framing conditions – cost, unconditional and redistributive – we find no statistically significant differences in UBI support between respondents scoring high versus low on the individualistic world view. This null finding is consistent across operationalizations, providing robust support for Hypothesis 3 and strengthening confidence in the conclusion that individualism does not condition responsiveness to UBI framing.

Finally, Hypothesis 4 predicts that individuals with a high fatalistic orientation will exhibit greater support for UBI regardless of framing. Across all three framing conditions, respondents with high fatalistic orientations consistently report higher support for UBI than those with low fatalistic orientations. This pattern is largely robust across operationalizations. Although confidence intervals for high and low fatalism groups slightly overlap under the redistributive frame when fatalism is measured in an absolute manner, the direction of the effect remains consistent. Controlling for other cultural orientations, the results provide support for Hypothesis 4.

Discussion

Our results indicate that individuals' cultural orientations significantly influence the extent to which framing affects their support for UBI. Specifically, individuals with strong hierarchical world views were more likely to be persuaded by the cost frame. This finding aligns with CT's expectations, as individuals with a hierarchical orientation tend to value rule-based governance, institutional authority and administrative capacity in policy planning and implementation. The cost framing probably enhances the perceived legitimacy of UBI among those with a hierarchical orientation by reinforcing the notion that the policy is well structured and fiscally responsible.

In addition, we found that unconditional framing also differentiates support levels among individuals with high versus low hierarchical orientations. Although this result was not explicitly hypothesized, one possible explanation is that individuals with hierarchical world views prioritize social order. The unconditional framing, which guarantees UBI to all individuals regardless of employment status or socio-economic position, may reduce concerns about social conflict arising from selective distribution. This framing may make UBI more acceptable to people who are hierarchs because they emphasize stability and structured governance.

The interaction between the egalitarian world view and framing aligns with the expectations of CT. Egalitarians prioritize equity and the reduction of disparities within their group or society. Therefore, when unconditional framing, which guarantees UBI for all individuals regardless of pre-existing economic conditions, and redistributive framing, which emphasizes UBI as a tool for alleviating income inequality in Taiwan, are presented, the legitimacy of UBI is enhanced for individuals with a strong egalitarian orientation. These two framings align with the core values of egalitarianism by reinforcing the principles of fairness and equal access.

In addition to these expected results, we also found that cost framing differentiates UBI support among individuals with high versus low egalitarian orientations. This effect was not initially hypothesized, but a plausible explanation is that egalitarians perceive social welfare programmes as essential for ensuring social equality. The cost framing, by emphasizing that UBI will serve as a replacement for traditional social welfare, may reassure egalitarians that UBI will continue to fulfil the role of reducing disparities. As a result, cost framing increases UBI support among egalitarians through a mechanism different from that of hierarchs.

Interestingly, cost framing enhances UBI legitimacy for both hierarchs and egalitarians, but the underlying mechanisms through which it does so may differ. For hierarchs, cost framing probably reinforces the importance of structured governance, financial planning and institutional legitimacy, ensuring that UBI is implemented in a way that maintains administrative order and fiscal responsibility. In contrast, for egalitarians, cost framing may reaffirm the function of UBI as a vital social welfare mechanism and alleviate concerns that the introduction of UBI would weaken the government's commitment to economic redistribution. Despite their differing ideological priorities, both groups respond favourably to cost framing because it assures them that UBI will reinforce rather than undermine their core values.

For individualists, the framing effects align with CT predictions. None of the framing conditions significantly increased their support for UBI compared to those with lower individualist orientations. For fatalists, the results align with the predictions of CT. Across all framing conditions, individuals with a strong fatalistic orientation demonstrated statistically higher support for UBI compared to those with a low fatalistic orientation. This finding confirms our hypothesis that fatalists, who often perceive their lives as constrained by external forces, socially imposed rules and decisions made by others, are particularly receptive to the idea of UBI. Their primary concern is often basic survival rather than long-term financial planning or systemic economic structures. Given this world view, UBI becomes inherently appealing to fatalists because it guarantees a baseline level of income without any conditions or personal effort required. This form of economic security aligns with their perception that life is unpredictable and that external support is necessary for survival. Moreover, fatalists often view external aid as acts of luck rather than strategic policy interventions. From this perspective, the guaranteed and unconditional nature of UBI may be seen as a stroke of good fortune and reinforce their reliance on external forces rather than personal agency.

In addition, our analysis that controls for all four cultural orientations simultaneously yields a more stringent test of CT's assumptions and reveals how cultural logics interact within specific case. When the influence of other orientations is held constant, the moderating effects of hierarchy and egalitarianism become less distinct, while fatalism and individualism remain stable. This pattern may imply that, in collectivist societies such as Taiwan, hierarchical and egalitarian predispositions are not fully independent but often coexist through shared moral expectations of harmony, reciprocity and deference. Prior research in East Asia has shown that the grid and group dimensions tend to often overlap rather than operate independently, which reflects relational rather than individualistic understandings of social order (Liu, 2018a; Kim and Kim, 2019; Borozdina et al, 2024). Differences across operationalizations reflect distinct theoretical mechanisms. However, fully disentangling how cultural overlap, contextual norms

and framing jointly shape salience requires comparative and measurement-focused designs beyond the scope of this article. Future research should examine how these mechanisms vary across policy domains and national contexts.

Our findings also extend the theoretical utility of CT by clarifying how its core propositions operate in non-Western, collectivist contexts. While CT's fundamental premise, that individuals interpret policy through enduring cultural predispositions, remains valid, our results imply that the strength and independence of these orientations vary across social structures and value systems. In Taiwan, hierarchical and egalitarian logics coexist, rather than compete, and may produce hybrid effects that are sensitive to framing and measurement specification.

Conclusion

In non-politicized issue contexts, party identification and ideological orientation, two commonly used measures of political predisposition, are often weak predictors of policy attitudes since such issues lack partisan cues. In contrast, CT offers an explanatory framework that is less dependent on political and institutional context (Swedlow, 2014). It captures deeper and stable patterns of value orientation and explains how individuals interpret policy messages and framings. By examining how individuals with different cultural world views respond to UBI under different framings, this study highlights the capacity of CT to explain individual-level variation in policy support beyond conventional predictors.

Our results confirm CT's core prediction that individuals with strong adherence to a particular cultural orientation are more likely to be activated by specific policy framings than individuals with weak or inconsistent orientations. In an environment where UBI is depoliticized, our study offers a richer understanding of how policy legitimacy can be constructed and how public support for UBI can be cultivated at the early stages of policy discourse by analysing the interaction between cultural world view and framing.

The findings have important implications for both theory and practice. Theoretically, they underscore the explanatory utility of CT in depoliticized policy contexts, where conventional political predispositions are less predictive. Policy makers and advocates may benefit from tailoring communication strategies that resonate with specific cultural world views. In addition, these findings suggest that framing strategies that appeal to overlapping moral logics, for instance, emphasizing the unconditionality aspects of UBI, may be particularly effective in East Asian settings.

Finally, this study represents an early attempt to apply CT to a policy issue that is not yet politicized and to examine its explanatory power in a non-Western context. While we discuss how CT may manifest differently across East Asian societies based on existing studies, the present research does not directly compare Taiwan with other national contexts. Future studies could build on this work by systematically testing different CT measurement models and validating their predictive capacity in explaining policy preferences in Taiwan and other East Asian societies. Such comparative and measurement-focused research would not only clarify how CT operates under different cultural and institutional settings but also strengthen the theory's cross-cultural validity and its applicability to emerging policy domain.

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Contributor statement

Wei-Ting Yen and Li-Yin Liu contribute equally to the conceptualization, survey designs, and manuscript writing and revision. They share first authorship. Wei-Ting Yen was responsible for funding, data collection and data analysis for the article. Li-Yin Liu was responsible for conceptual framing, research design and theoretical construction for the article.

Data availability statement

The authors take responsibility for the integrity of the data and the accuracy of the analysis. Replication data and documentation are available at: <https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/YZBC4>

Research ethics statement

This research received IRB approval from Franklin & Marshall College. The application number is R#_3qwdEHAFOPKsZGs.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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