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Digital political campaigning: Regulatory effectiveness through the eyes of citizens

Gabriela Borz

Elena Cristina Mitrea

Thomas Montgomerie

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Executive summary

This report discusses the effectiveness of EU regulation on digital electoral campaigns as perceived by European citizens. Regulating digital risks to fundamental democratic rights, principles and procedures should be a core institutional pillar of democratic resilience. **How do citizens perceive the regulation of digital campaigning and how do they evaluate its impact in their daily online activity?** In a context of a fragmented EU legislation ([DIGIEFFECT data visuals](#)) and of a national regulation lagging behind the rapid developments of digital campaigning, academic debates highlight the need for a harmonised EU electoral law that clearly addresses the digital aspects of campaigning, its multiple actors and activities involved.

We present aggregate results from the cross-European 2025 citizen survey (N=27,255 respondents) conducted by Mercury research under [DIGIEFFECT](#) project. First, we provide an overview of public attitudes towards stricter or more relaxed regulation. Second, we assess preferences regarding regulatory responsibility. Third, we present cross-European data on the perceived effectiveness of digital regulation.

This report addresses the following **questions**:

- ***What is the level of public support for stricter regulation of digital political campaigning?***
- ***Which actors should be responsible for regulating digital campaigning?***
- ***How effective is EU regulation on digital campaigning perceived to be?***

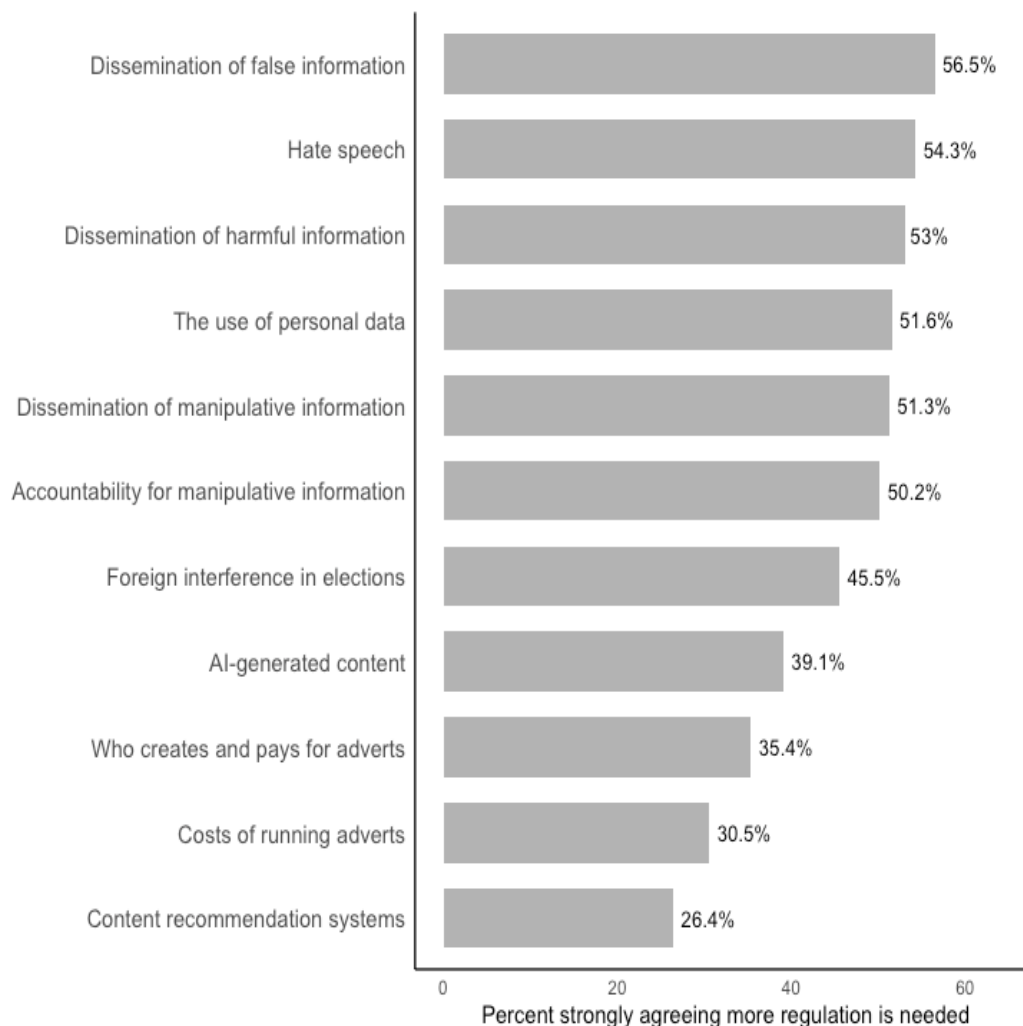
The DIGIEFFECT 2025 citizen survey reveals:

- *Overwhelming support for stricter regulation of the dissemination of false information, hate speech or harmful information (Figure 1)*
- *Young generations support stricter regulation only moderately*
- *Older generations favour stricter regulation of the risks associated with digital political campaigning*
- *Support for regulating AI-generated content increases with age (Figure 2)*
- *Overwhelming preference for national governments to (further) regulate digital campaigns*
- *Higher support for regulation in Central and Southern European countries compared to the Western counterparts (Figure 3)*
- *More positive evaluations of EU digital regulation concerning the quality of information (Table 1)*

1. Aspects of digital campaigning requiring stricter or more relaxed regulation by the public

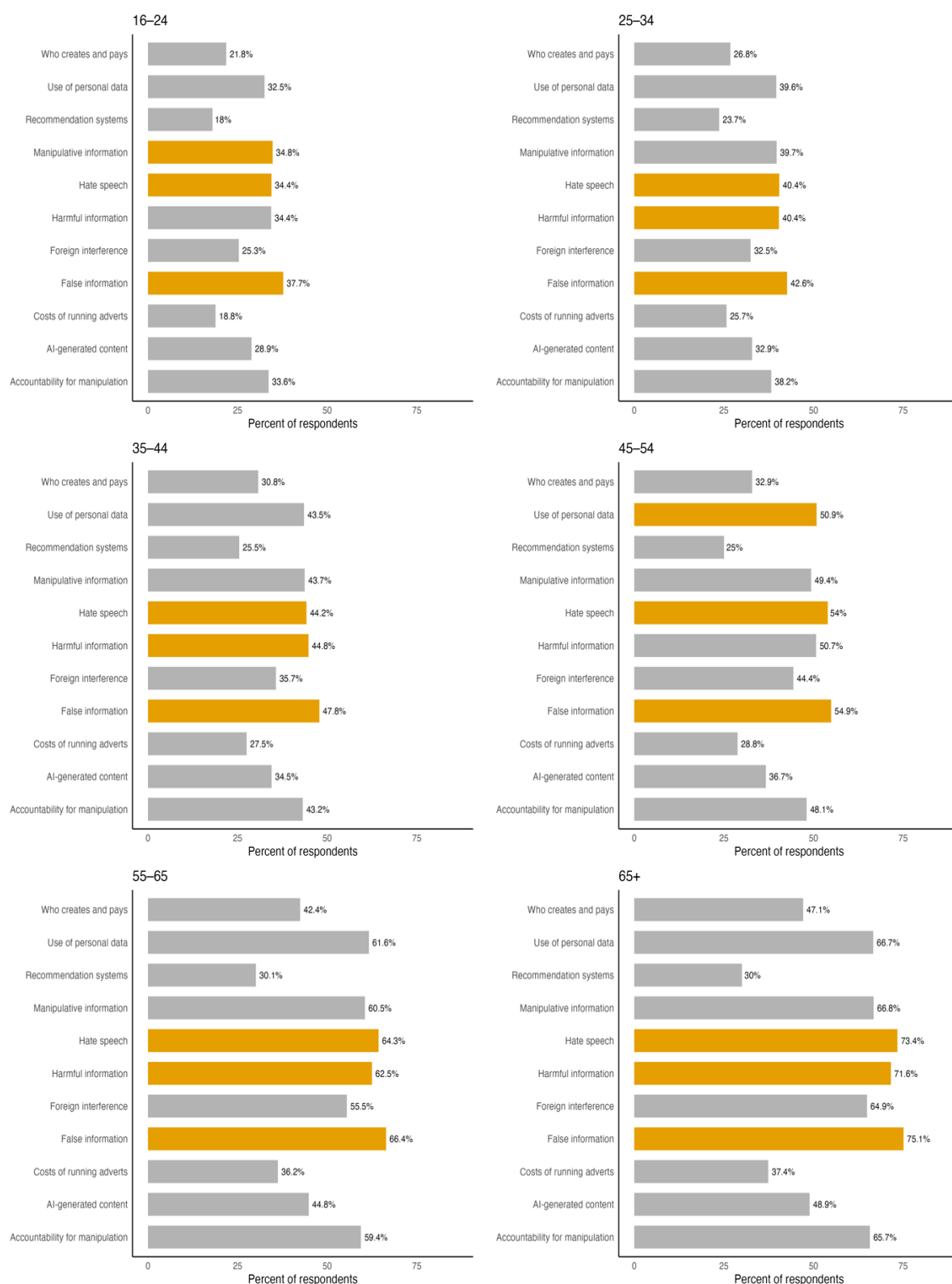
Respondents were asked to evaluate whether several aspects of digital campaigning should be more strictly regulated. The **strongest support** for more regulation is expressed for **the dissemination of false information (56.5%), hate speech (54.3%), and harmful information (53%)** (Table 1 below). Slightly lower but still substantial support is expressed for stricter rules on the use of personal data (51.6%), manipulative information (51.3%), and accountability for manipulative content (50.2%). By contrast, **support is more limited** for regulating transparency regarding **who creates and pays for adverts (35.4%), the costs of running adverts (30.5%) and content recommendation systems (26.4%)**.

Figure 1. Public support for stricter regulation of different aspects of digital campaigning (N=27,000 survey respondents across all EU member states)



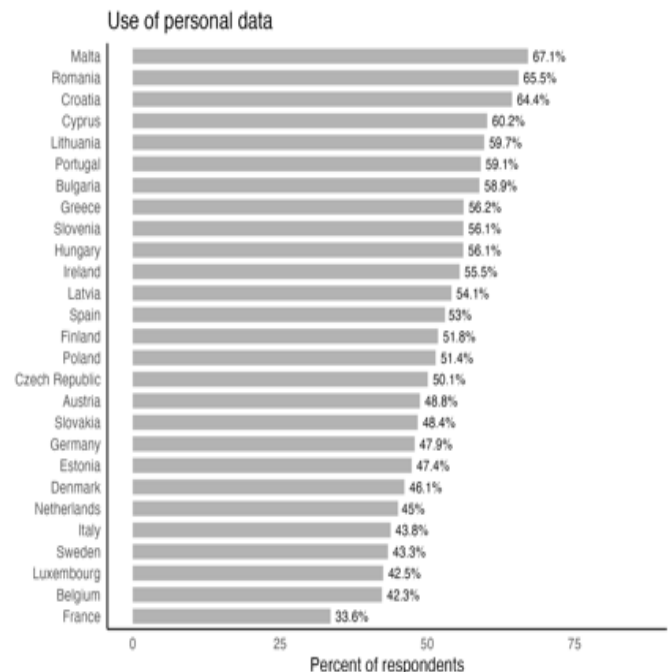
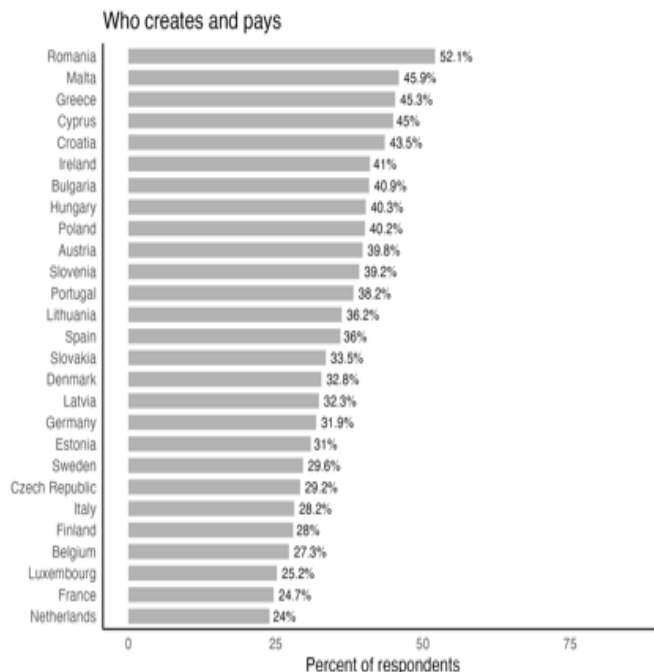
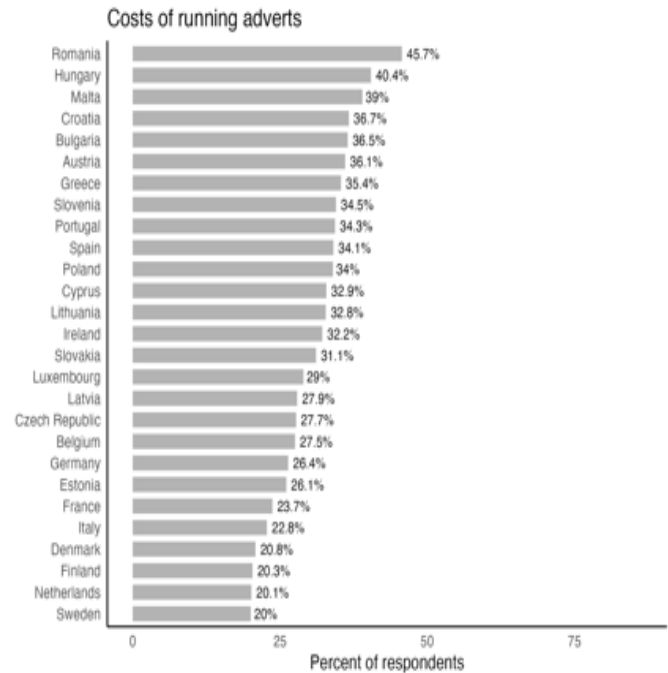
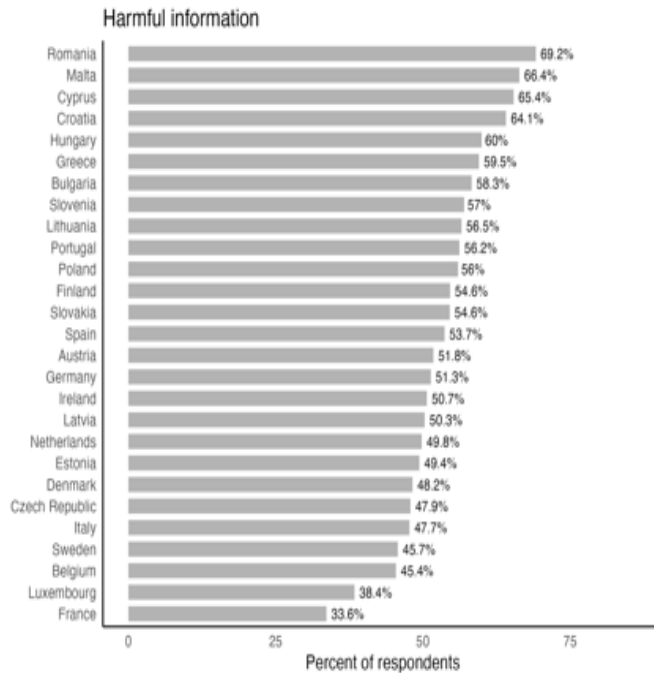
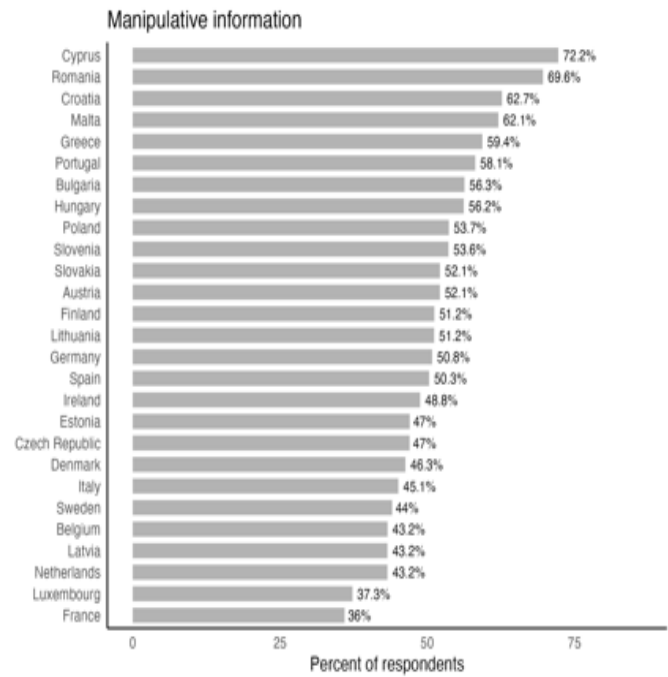
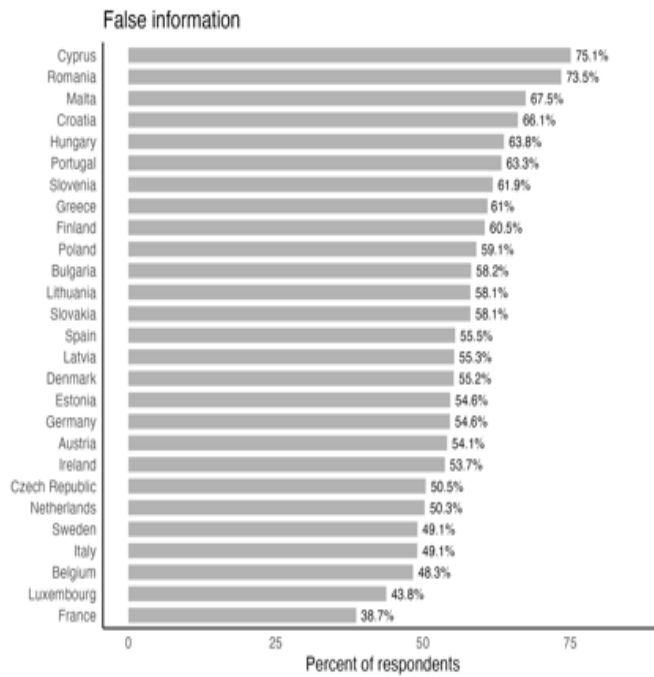
The share of respondents who strongly support more regulation of different aspects of digital political campaigning increases with age. Among younger respondents, particularly those aged 16–24 and 25–34, the percentages expressing strong support for more regulation remain more moderate across most regulatory domains. In contrast, middle-aged and older respondents report considerably higher levels of strong support, particularly for regulating false information, hate speech, and harmful information. Across all age groups, these areas consistently attract the highest levels of strong support, while more technical aspects, such as recommendation systems and the costs of running online adverts, receive lower percentages. Overall, the pattern suggests a **clear generational trend, with older citizens more likely to strongly favour stricter regulation of the risks associated with digital political campaigning (Table 2).**

Figure 2. Public support for stricter regulation of digital campaigning by age group

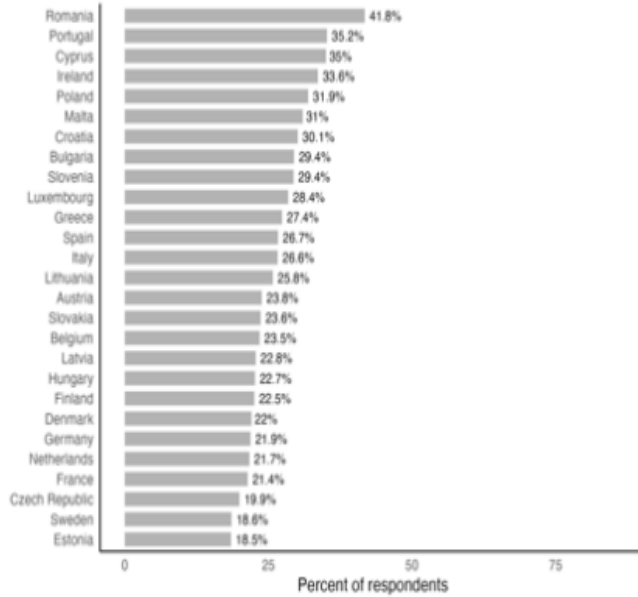


Across countries, the strongest support is observed for regulating false information, hate speech, manipulative information, and harmful information. By contrast, more technical aspects of digital campaigning, such as recommendation systems and the costs of running online adverts, attract lower levels of support for stricter regulation. In general, **Central and Southern European countries tend to show higher support for regulation across most measures, while Western and Northern European countries, including France, the Netherlands, Sweden, and Denmark, often appear toward the lower end of the distribution.** Overall, however, majorities in many countries favour stronger regulation of key risks associated with digital political campaigning.

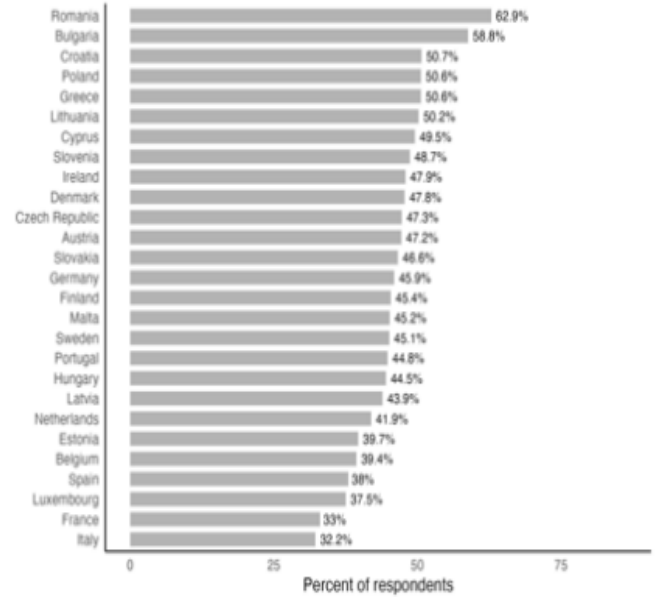
Figure 3. Public support for stricter regulation of digital campaigning by country



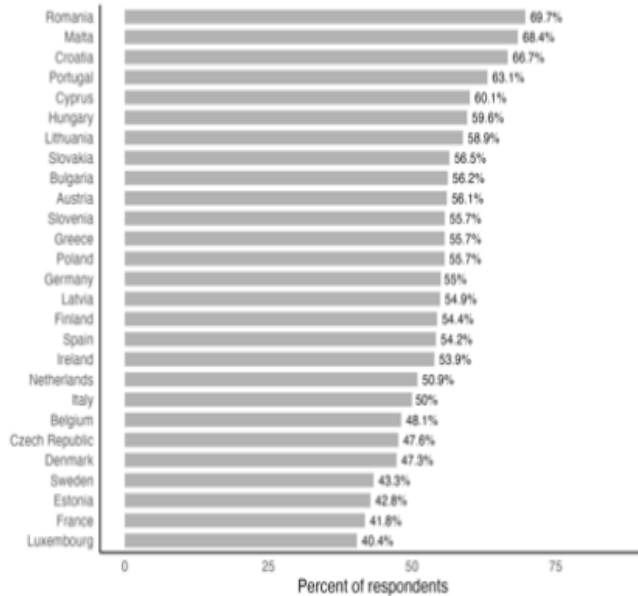
Recommendation systems



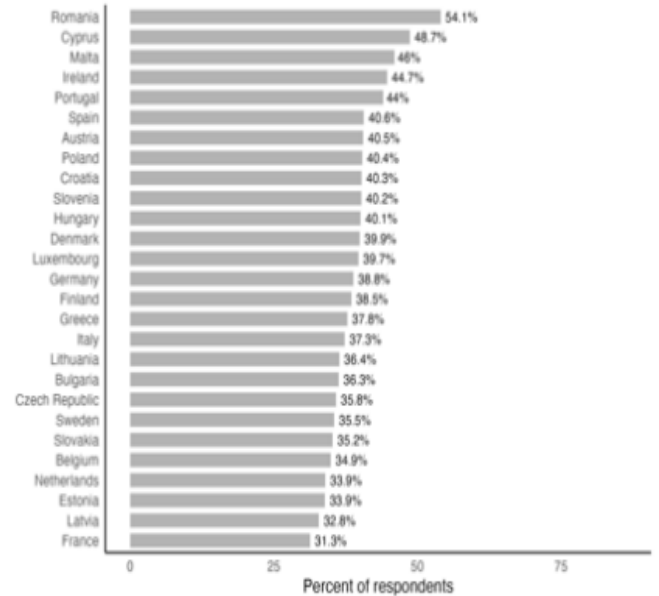
Foreign interference



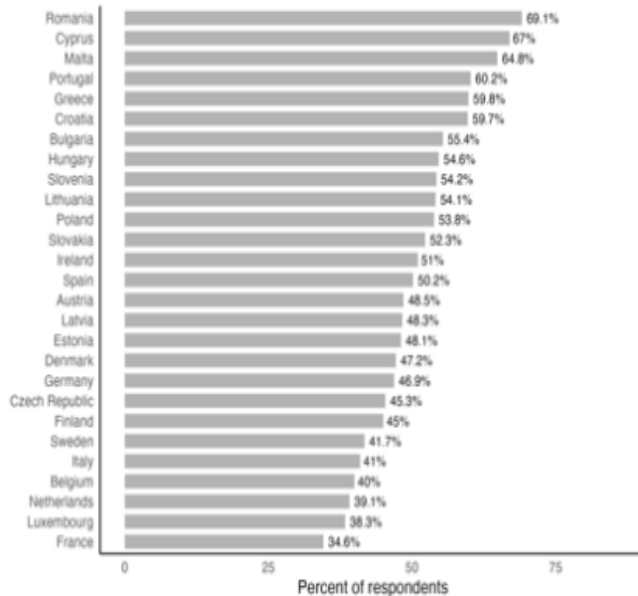
Hate speech



AI-generated content



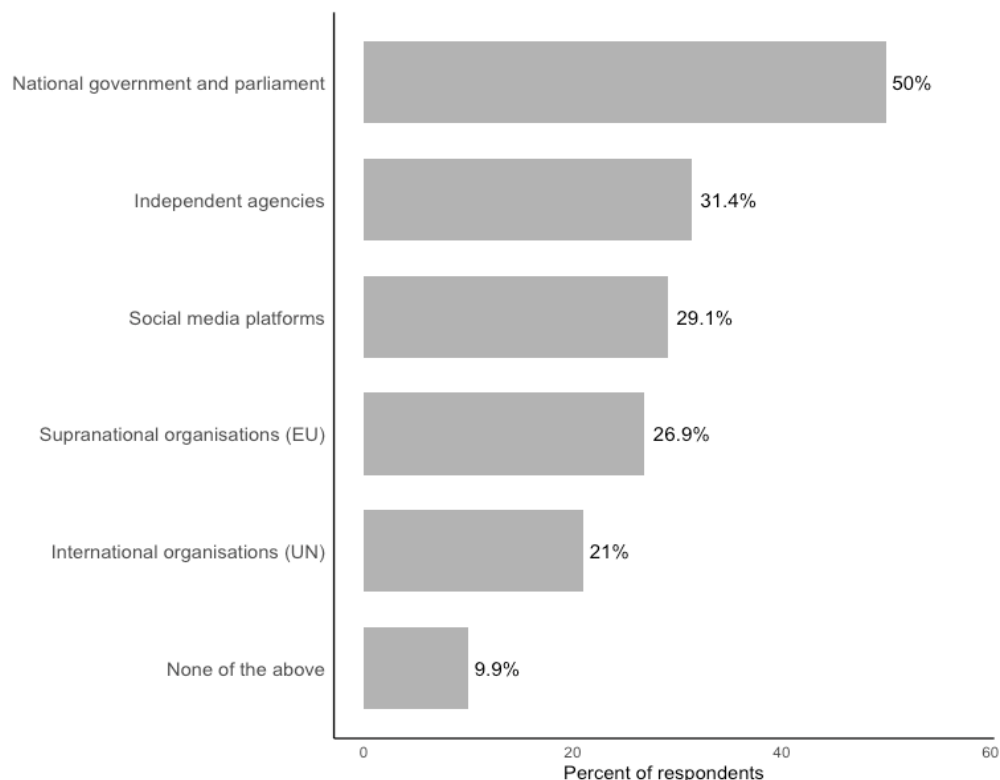
Accountability for manipulation



2. Regulatory responsibility for AI and digital campaigning

When asked which actors should be primarily responsible for regulating digital campaigning, half of the respondents (50%) identify national governments and parliaments, followed by independent agencies (31.4%) and social media platforms (29.1%). Supranational organizations such as the European Union are mentioned by 26.9% of respondents, while international organizations such as the United Nations receive support from 21%. Only a small minority (9.9%) believe that none of the listed actors should be responsible for regulating digital political campaigns. **These results point towards a strong preference for national public authorities to take the leading role in regulating digital political communication.**

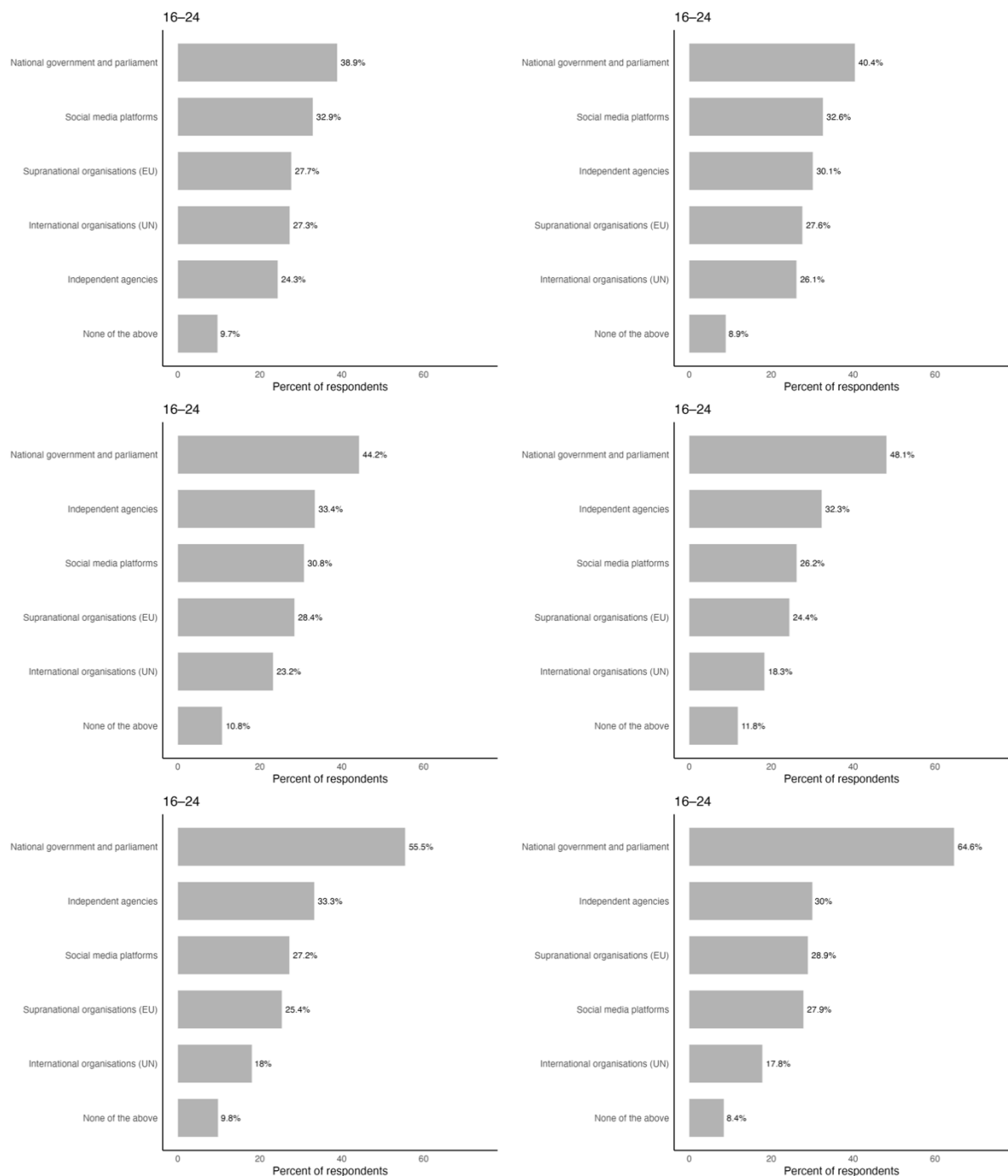
Figure 4. Preference for actors responsible for regulating digital political campaigning



Comparing preferences across age groups reveals a clear generational pattern. **Support for national governments and parliaments increases steadily with age**, rising from about 39% among respondents aged 16–24 to nearly 65% among those aged 65 and over. Support for social media platforms is highest among younger groups (around one-third) and declines slightly with age, while support for international organisations decreases more clearly across age groups. Support for independent agencies and EU-level

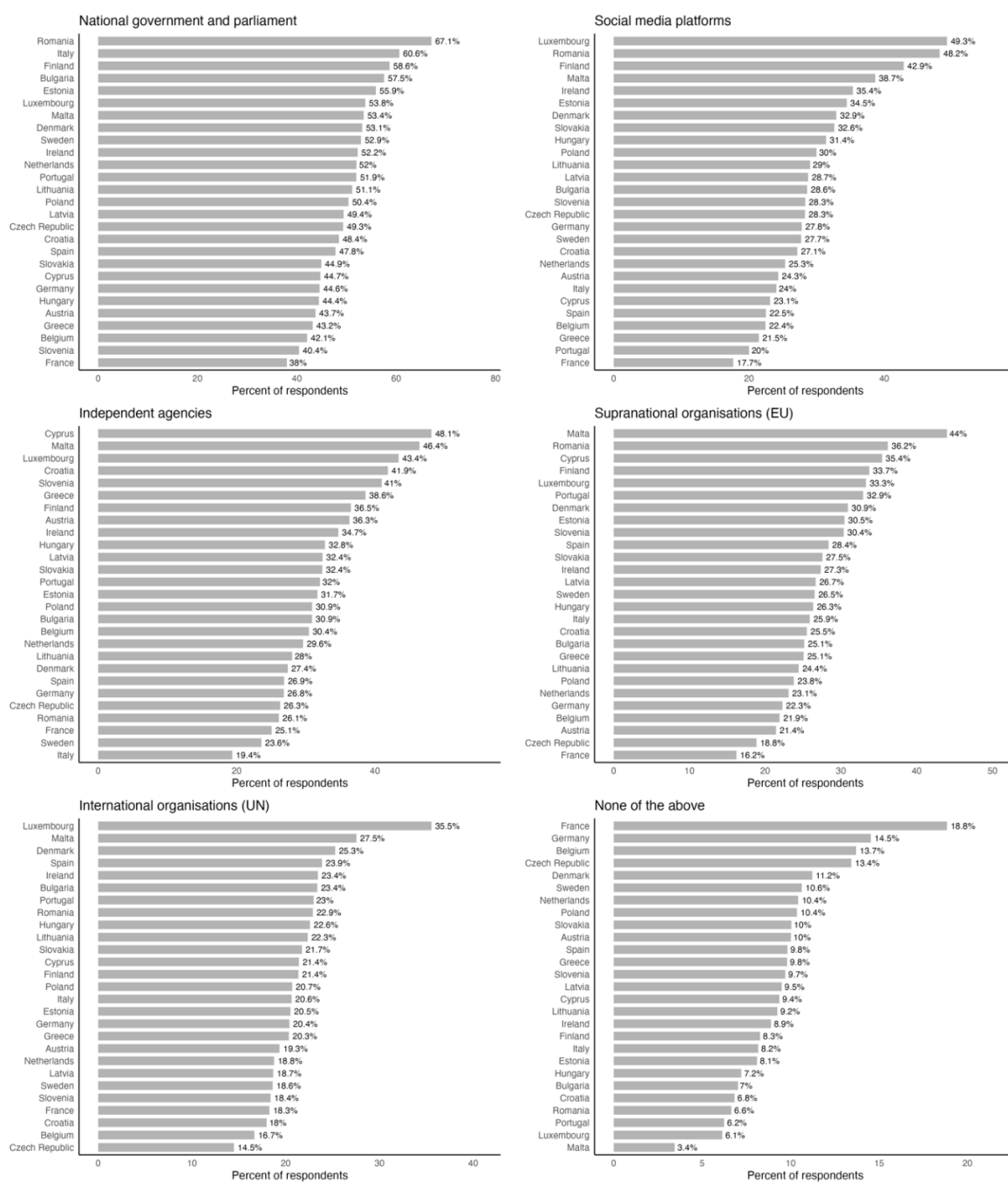
regulation remains relatively stable across age groups. **Overall, the results suggest a generational divide: older citizens tend to prefer national regulation, while younger citizens are somewhat more open to platforms and international actors sharing responsibility.**

Figure 5. Preference for actors responsible for regulating digital political campaigning by age group



Comparing preferences across countries reveals a clear regional pattern. In several **Central and Eastern European countries (such as Romania, Bulgaria, Estonia, Poland, and Latvia) citizens show particularly strong support for national governments and parliaments taking the lead in regulating digital political campaigning**, indicating greater trust in state-led regulation. By contrast, in many Western and Northern European countries, including the Netherlands, Germany, Belgium, France, and Sweden, support for national governments is more moderate, and respondents appear more open to a broader mix of regulatory actors.

Figure 6. Preference for actors responsible for regulating digital political campaigning by country

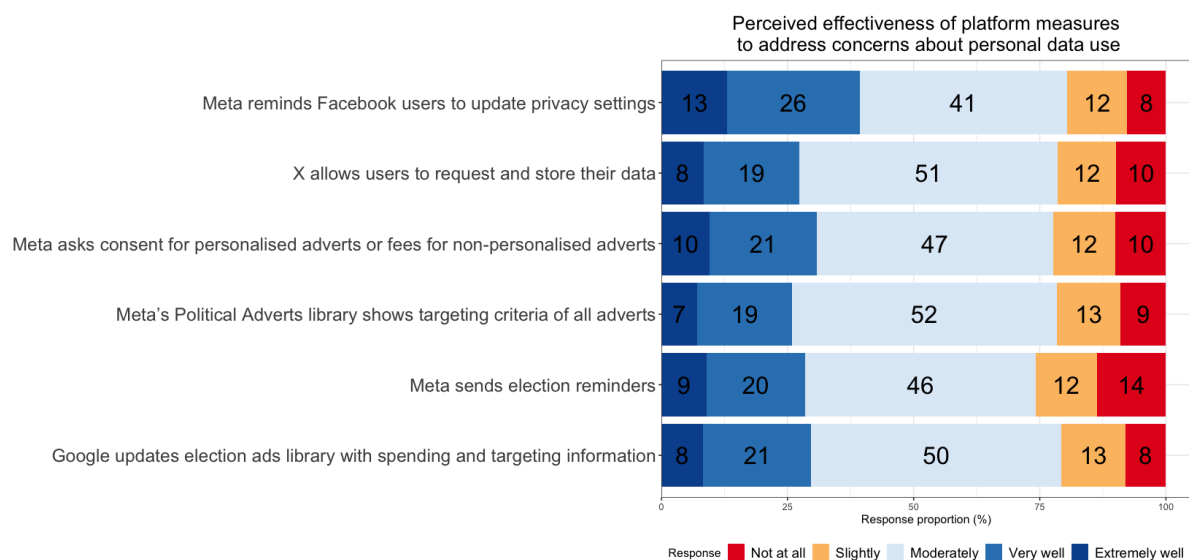


3. Perceived effectiveness of EU digital regulation related to digital campaigning

In recent years, the European Commission has introduced a range of binding and non-binding regulatory initiatives to strengthen electoral integrity and transparency during digital political campaigns. In response, online services adopted new measures to address public concerns about the use of personal data, and the quality of political information circulated online. As part of DIGIEFFECT’s citizen survey, **respondents were asked to evaluate the perceived effectiveness of several measures** introduced by online services and platforms to address these concerns. In summary, citizens view both sets of measures as moderately effective, but actions improving the quality of political information online are evaluated slightly more positively overall than those addressing the use of personal data.

Across platforms **measures related to personal data, most respondents felt that each action at least moderately addressed their concerns** (41-52 percent), while between 27-39 percent viewed them as working either “very well” or “extremely well”. Among these, **Meta reminding Facebook users to update their privacy settings was considered the most effective action**. However, **Meta sending election reminders received the lowest evaluation overall**, although only between 20-26 percent of respondents evaluated all measures poorly (“slightly” or “not at all”).

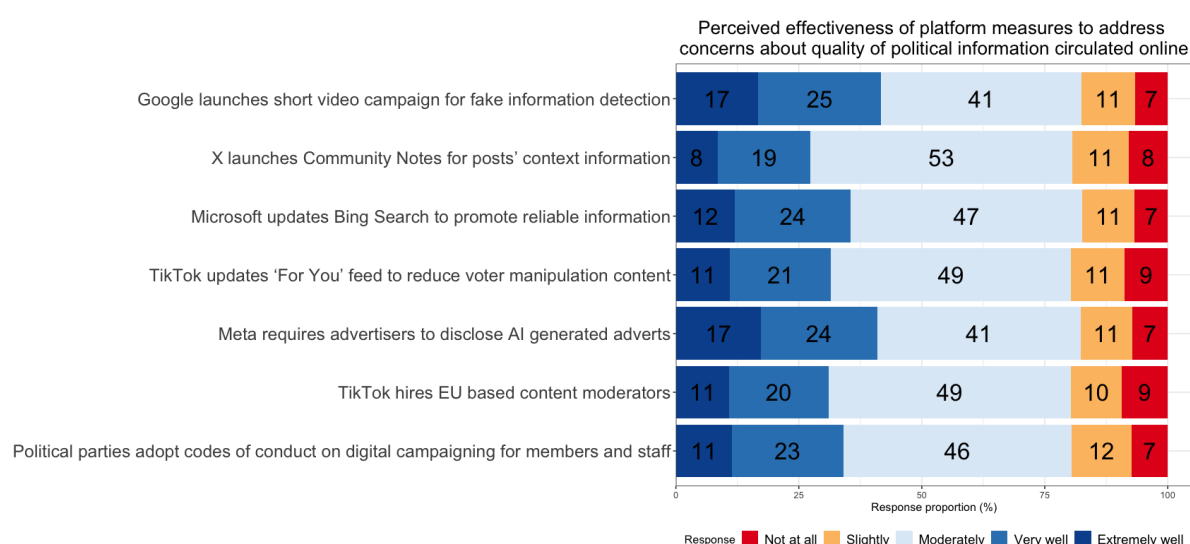
Figure 7. Effectiveness of platform measures on personal data use



By contrast, **measures targeting the quality of political information** online received somewhat **more positive evaluations by citizens**. While “moderately well” remains the most common response across all measures (41-52 percent), the share of respondents evaluating these measures either as “extremely well” or “very well” is slightly higher overall compared to measures addressing personal data concerns (27-42 percent). For

example, **Google’s video campaign to detect false information and Meta’s requirement for advertisers to disclose AI-generated content received the most positive actions.** At the same time, poorer evaluations are comparatively lower, ranging between 18-20 percent.

Figure 8. Effectiveness of platform measures on data quality



The various measures discussed in the survey reflect platforms’ response to a mixture of binding EU regulatory frameworks (hard) and voluntary or co-regulatory initiatives (soft), illustrated in the table below. Our findings however do not reveal a direct relationship between the nature of the binding or non-binding nature of EU regulation, the online service measures implemented in response and their perceived effectiveness among citizens. In other words, actions related to binding laws (e.g., GDPR, DMA, DSA) and non-binding laws (CPD, response to EP elections) were generally evaluated by most respondents as “moderately effective”, with only specific measures aimed at improving the quality of political content spread online deemed slightly more effective. This suggests that **citizens’ assessments are driven more by the perceived utility of specific actions regardless of whether the measure itself derived from hard legislation or soft non-binding initiatives.** It is important to note, though, that the survey captures citizens’ *perception* of effectiveness, rather than measuring the *actual* impact of these actions in practice, such as improvements made to citizens’ digital political literacy skills (see [DIGIEFFECT data visuals on digital political literacy](#)) or their ability to detect false and/or misleading political information online.

4. Aligning regulation, compliance measures and citizens evaluations

Finally, we place each regulatory framework in line with the individual risk addressed, the corresponding platform compliance measure and citizens' evaluations. **Measures addressing the quality of political information circulated online are evaluated more positively than those addressing personal data use.** As observed from Table 1, the best-rated measures fall in the former category, namely **Google's short video campaigns helping users detect false information** (42%) and **Meta's requirement that advertisers disclose AI-generated political adverts** (41%), which both arise from soft or voluntary frameworks. On the other hand, X's measures rank among the lowest in both domains (27% for both data storage and Community Notes), which may, however, also reflect aspects surrounding the platform's reputation.

Aggregating across the table, platform compliance measures stemming from soft or voluntary regulation (averaging around 34%) are evaluated slightly more positively than those stemming from hard regulation (roughly 31%). This might reflect the fact that the former consist of more visible interventions for users (education campaigns, AI labels, election reminders) compared to the technical mechanisms stemming from hard regulation (ad libraries, targeting transparency).

Table1. Citizens evaluations, regulatory compliance measures and risks addressed

Concern/Risk addressed	Platform measure	EU regulatory framework /voluntary initiative	Type	Citizen evaluation (addressed very well + extremely well %)
Personal data use	Meta reminds Facebook users to update privacy settings	General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR, 2018)	Hard	39
	Meta asks consent for personalised adverts or offers a fee-based alternative for non-personalised adverts	Digital Markets Act (DMA, 2022)	Hard	31
	Google updates election ads library with spending and targeting information	Platform response during the European Parliament elections (2024)	Soft / voluntary	29
	Meta sends election reminders Platform response during the European Parliament elections (2024)	Digital Services Act (DSA, 2023)	Soft / voluntary	29
	X allows users to request and store their data	General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR, 2018)	Hard	27
	Meta's Political Adverts Library shows targeting criteria of adverts	Digital Services Act (DSA, 2023)	Hard	26

Quality of political information circulated online	Google launches short video campaigns to help users detect false information	Strengthened Code of Practice on Disinformation (2022)	Soft	42
	Meta requires advertisers to disclose AI-generated political adverts	Platform response during the European Parliament elections (2024)	Soft / voluntary	41
	Microsoft updates Bing Search to promote reliable information	Strengthened Code of Practice on Disinformation (2022)	Soft	36
	Political parties adopt codes of conduct on digital campaigning	Voluntary electoral integrity initiatives / party codes of conduct	Soft	34
	TikTok updates the “For You” feed to reduce misinformation or voter manipulation content	Strengthened Code of Practice on Disinformation (2022)	Soft	32
	TikTok hires EU-based content moderators	Digital Services Act (DSA, 2023)	Hard	31
	X launches Community Notes allowing users to contextualise posts	Strengthened Code of Practice on Disinformation (2022)	Soft	27

To conclude, citizens’ risk regulatory priorities move from necessity of regulatory measures on data protection to regulatory measures on information integrity. Citizens displayed the strongest support for stricter regulation of the dissemination of false information, hate speech and harmful content, while more technical dimensions of digital campaigning (advertising transparency, costs and recommendation systems) attracted considerably less support. **These evaluations vary with age and depend on citizens’ hands-on experience with digital platforms and digital campaigning.** Older citizens are consistently more likely to favour stricter regulation and to entrust national governments with the leading regulatory role, whereas younger citizens remain more moderate and more open to platforms and international actors sharing responsibility. A regional divide also emerges, with Central, Eastern and Southern European countries expressing stronger support for regulation and for state-led oversight than their Western and Northern counterparts. Regarding perceived effectiveness, citizens evaluate user-facing interventions addressing the quality of political information more positively than technical compliance mechanisms, irrespective of whether they derive from hard legislation or voluntary initiatives.

These findings carry important implications for the ongoing efforts to regulate digital political campaigning. Public support for regulating the main risks of digital campaigning is strong, but citizens clearly prefer national authorities to take the lead. Finally, since citizens judge regulation by its visible, everyday benefits, regulators and platforms should prioritise measures that people can directly experience in their online lives.