

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Where you stand depends on where you sit: inconsistencies in Taiwan legislators' positions on importing US meat

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## Abstract

This study examines the political dynamics that shape legislators' policy positions on importing US meat into Taiwan during the past decade, focusing on the cases of US beef in 2012 and US pork in 2021. The trade policy surrounding this issue has become politically contentious, involving conflicting national interests and constituency preferences. Legislators face a dilemma, torn between prioritizing the interests of their constituents and aligning with their party's interests. The central argument posits that legislators affiliated with the ruling party are more inclined to advocate for or adjust their stances to support the removal of import bans on American meat, while those associated with the opposition party tend to exhibit a greater reluctance to endorse such a stance. Factors such as the legislators' constituent's interests, district vs party-list affiliations, the urban–rural divide, or education level do not consistently explain legislators' positions on the US meat trade policy. To examine these arguments, this study employs a mixed-method approach, incorporating quantitative analysis and two case studies of individual legislators. The findings of this study offer empirical support for the central proposition.

**Keywords:** incumbency; position inconsistency; Taiwan legislators; US meats import

## 1. Introduction

It is a common phenomenon for politicians to backtrack on their pre-election promises. Politicians often criticize existing policies and make convenient commitments to their voters when they are not in power or engaged in election campaigns. However, once they assume power, legislators affiliated with the ruling parties face significant pressure to align with the government's stance. In cases where a policy issue involves a conflict between national interests and constituency preferences, legislators find themselves in a dilemma of choosing to prioritize either the interests of their constituents or their party. This dilemma underscores the intricate dynamics legislators face as they strive to balance their responsibilities towards the electorate with their political allegiances.

Over the past two decades in Taiwan, importing US meats containing ractopamine has been a consistently contentious policy issue for incumbent parties. In 2012, the ruling Kuomintang (KMT) government, led by Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九), and its legislators collaborated to open Taiwan's market to US beef, while the opposition parties, led by the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), strongly opposed this decision. In 2020, when the DPP took power under the administration of Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文), the government and DPP legislators successfully opened the domestic market to US pork containing ractopamine, again facing strong opposition from the KMT and other opposition

parties. Both Ma in 2012 and Tsai in 2020 acknowledged the heavy dependence of Taiwan's economy on foreign trade. To establish a significant role in restructuring the global supply chain, closer economic ties with major economies, particularly the USA, are deemed necessary. Furthermore, in the face of threats from China, Taipei has been actively seeking closer economic, diplomatic, and strategic relations with Washington. The restrictions on importing US meats have been viewed as a significant barrier to be removed in this context. While national interests are important considerations for legislators in Taiwan, supporting the importation of US meats poses a political risk for legislators representing rural or meat-producing constituencies. These legislators are concerned about potential backlash from their constituents, whose livelihoods are tied to the agricultural sector.

This paper explores the underlying political dynamics and their impact on legislators' preferences and behaviours regarding importing US meats. It posits that legislators affiliated with the incumbent party in Taiwan are more inclined to advocate for or adjust their policies in support of removing import bans on American meat. Conversely, legislators associated with the opposition party tend to exhibit a greater reluctance to endorse such a stance. Candidates representing constituencies with significant cattle- or pig-farming activities are more prone to criticize or oppose the lifting of import bans prior to legislative elections. Once elected, legislators affiliated with the incumbent party are more likely to change their positions and align with their party's preferred policy stances. The shift in their positions can be attributed to several factors. First, legislators have more opportunity and time to rebuild support from their constituencies until the next election. Additionally, under the current single-member district system in Taiwan, legislators may face limitations in their ability to resist party discipline, and the ruling party also has greater resources to compensate the affected legislators. This proposition echoes the Miles Law, proposed by Rufus E. Miles Jr., which states that 'where you stand depends on where you sit' (Miles, 1978). It suggests that legislators in Taiwan may alter their policy preferences depending on their role or position.

This paper employs a mixed-method approach to test these hypotheses, incorporating quantitative analysis and two case studies focusing on individual legislators. The study examines the shift in policy stances regarding controversial imports of US beef in 2012 and US pork in 2021. The paper begins with a review of relevant literature, then presents the main proposition. Subsequently, the research design, quantitative findings, and in-depth case studies are presented in separate sections. The paper concludes with a final section that provides conclusions and insights.

## 2. Constituents and party interests in contentious policy issues

The existing literature reveals that within the realm of party politics, members of Congress often encounter a dilemma concerning their policy positions. On the one hand, they represent the interests of their constituents, while on the other, they must also advocate for the interests of their respective political parties or the national interests (Pitkin, 1967; Sheng, 2000). The former is the delegate model of representation, which perceives elected representatives as mere mouthpieces of the people. They are delegated to solely represent their constituencies' interests in the parliament. The latter is the trustee model of representation, which regards representatives as trustees of the voters. These elected trustees possess greater information, knowledge, and long-term vision, granting them the autonomy to make decisions on behalf of most people and prioritize national interests (Eulau *et al.*, 1959). When constituents' interests align with their party's policy positions, Congressmen are spared from the conflicts arising from divergent stances. Nevertheless, it is not uncommon to observe instances where the interests of the represented constituency diverge from the party or national interests, thereby placing Congressmen in a political predicament as they grapple with deciding which sides to support. The situation becomes more challenging when the constituents' interests clash with those of the majority of members within the same political party (Carey, 2007; Davidson *et al.*, 2010).

When faced with such predicaments, congress members' policy positions can often be situated within the spectrum between the interests of their constituencies and those of their political parties (Pitkin, 1967). Miller and Stokes (1963) found that Congressmen tend to advocate for the issues on

which their constituents care a lot or have clear positions while possessing greater autonomy to deviate from constituent interests on issues that their constituents are less interested in or have ambiguous stances. When policy issues strongly resonate with constituents, Congressmen may opt to align with constituent interests while concurrently creating some distance between themselves and their party's political interests. Varying party politics traditions can also influence Congressmen's choice of stance. In contrast to the emphasis placed on representing constituencies' interests in the USA, parliamentarians in European countries tend to prioritize their role as collective representatives of the broader national interest. They exhibit loyalty to their party's agenda and policies, thus ensuring the implementation of the party's platform. Evaluating political parties' overall performance by voters plays a significant role in determining their support for party candidates. Consequently, parliamentarians are more inclined to engage in critical questioning and scrutiny aligned with the overarching stance of their respective political parties (Crowe, 1986; Loewenberg and Patterson, 1988).

The electoral system and institutions may also influence candidates' stances. In theory, politicians' commitments to voters tend to be more moderate when an election employs a single-member district system. Conversely, under a multi-member district system, candidates' preferences tend to be more diverse (Cox, 1990; Adams, 1996). Carey and Shugart (1995) noted that parliamentary members in single-member districts with open candidate lists or under the single non-transferable vote (SNTV) system are strongly motivated by pursuing personal reputation. In contrast, parliamentary members in single-member districts where political parties can control candidate lists and under party-list proportional representation systems are driven by a strong desire to pursue stances that enhance the reputation of their political party. Furthermore, in cases where a political party demonstrates strong party discipline or its party leader wields significant power in selecting district candidates, the candidates or Congressmen are more inclined to prioritize the party's policy positions or national interests over their personal interests (Cox, 1987).

Assuming that there are no substantial changes in the constituency structure, political traditions, electoral systems, or party politics, one would expect the stances of candidates or Congressmen to remain stable regardless of the specific positions they adopt. However, empirical research indicates that their policy preferences can change in certain circumstances. Karol (2009) posits that political parties, which politicians manage, alter their policy positions in response to new demands from traditional supporters, to attract new groups into their coalition, or to improve their public standing. In the realm of trade politics, he discovered that while the constituencies remained relatively constant, their preferences shifted due to the rapidly evolving global economy and the transformation of industrial structures. Yoshinaka and Grose (2011) discovered that legislators facing uncertainty regarding the preferences of their constituents have the incentive to adopt ideologically inconsistent positions. McTague and Pearson-Merkowitz (2015) found that legislators' likelihood of changing their policy positions is influenced by whether the issue in question aligns with their personal values.

In theory, if Congressmen consistently adhere to their policy positions, they are likely to be perceived as trustworthy and have a higher chance of winning re-election. On the contrary, they may suffer a decline in their integrity due to shifting or inconsistent policy positions. Tomz and Van Houweling (2012) found that, on average, candidates who changed their positions performed worse than those who maintained consistency. Similarly, Bernhardt and Ingerman (1985) noted that candidates who make sudden platform changes tend to fare poorly in elections. Conversely, some studies have found the opposite results. Croco (2016) argued that citizens do not always react negatively to leaders who change their positions. Rather, they tend to be indifferent between a consistent and an inconsistent politician as long as the leader supports the citizens' preferred policy in the current time. McDonald *et al.* (2019) posit that political figures need not be concerned about the impact of changes in their foreign policy positions on voter evaluations. Their findings show that voters' party affiliations and pre-existing attitudes towards the political figures are the most crucial factors.

The aforementioned research indicates that when constituents' and party positions diverge, Congressmen's policy preferences tend to fall somewhere in between. The outcome may vary depending on factors such as constituency composition, political traditions, electoral systems, party politics,

or political ideology. Additionally, external factors can occasionally alter the interests of constituents and parties, thereby motivating politicians to adjust their policy positions.

### 3. Explaining Taiwan legislators' position on US meat trade

The research mentioned above provides a valuable foundation for comprehending the policy stances of legislators in Taiwan's US meat politics within the Legislative Yuan, where frequent policy flip-flops among legislators can be observed. Existing literature primarily concentrates on capturing the policy preferences of legislators at a particular moment but falls short in explaining longitudinal changes in politicians' policy positions. Despite the relative stability of the constituent structure, it remains unclear why certain legislators alter their policy positions while others do not. To understand Taiwan legislators' policy stances regarding meat trade with the USA, it is essential to examine the nature of this specific policy debate and the electoral constraints faced by the legislators. Subsequently, we can utilize plausible theoretical explanations, derived from the literature discussed above, to shed light on the legislative politics in this particular issue area.

#### 3.1. Legislative dilemma in trade policy

The controversy surrounding US meat trade in Taiwan falls within the realm of free trade policy, which is inherently contentious and involves a trade-off between the overall benefits of increased access to cheaper and higher-quality foreign products for the average population and the potential harm it may cause to certain districts, sectors, or industries representing minority interests. Consequently, legislators representing constituents adversely affected by free trade may adopt positions different from national interests. For certain legislators representing the interests of animal-farming constituencies, a dilemma arises between defending local interests and prioritizing national interests. This predicament can become particularly pronounced when the legislator's party is in power, as the ruling party is often more inclined to implement open trade policies and requires its party members' support. In countries with a presidential system, where the legislators' voter base is independent of the presidential vote, there is a higher likelihood of inconsistency between legislators and the president. The situation becomes even more challenging if a divided government emerges in a presidential system (Milner, 1997), intensifying the contention and placing legislators more uncomfortable. The effect of structural constraints within a democratic system or political ideology adds further complexity to legislators' positions regarding a state's external economic policies (Bailey *et al.*, 1996; Milner and Judkins, 2004; Jensen, 2008; Jančić, 2017).

The current electoral system and party politics situation in Taiwan exacerbate this dilemma. Since 2005, Taiwan has transitioned its legislative election system, moving from the SNTV employed within a multi-member district framework to a single-member parallel voting electoral system. This new system includes 73 district legislators elected through the first-past-the-post method, six indigenous legislators elected via SNTV, and 34 legislators elected through party-list proportional representation. The current electoral system provides stronger incentives for district legislators or candidates seeking party nominations to align their policy positions with their respective parties. In terms of the party system, Taiwan's government has been alternatively dominated by either the KMT or the DPP since the inception of the first direct presidential election in 1996. Following the transition to the single-member district system, most legislative districts have witnessed intense competition between KMT and DPP candidates. Each candidate is forced to secure majority support in order to ensure victory. While the abandonment of the multi-member district system can motivate legislators or candidates to align their positions with their parties, the single-member district system also presents a dilemma. It creates pressure for legislators to prioritize the majority interests of their respective districts, which may clash with either national interests or the positions of their affiliated parties. Taiwan's contentious legislative politics surrounding US meat serve as a poignant example of this dilemma. Some legislators, representing domestic meat-producing interests, find it challenging to support open meat trade with the USA, despite its potential to improve national interests.

### 3.2. Incumbency and legislative positions

Acknowledging the potential conflicts that arise between legislators' policy stances and national interests within the domain of trade policy, it becomes imperative to delve into the factors that could influence their policy positions. The first factor pertains to the incumbency of the political parties to which legislators are affiliated. Regarding external policy, realist international relations theories posit that the incumbent government prioritizes national interests to enhance the country's capabilities (Mearsheimer, 2001). Additionally, in a democratic system, the incumbent political party may be more inclined to support free trade policies to promote economic growth within the domestic economy (Mansfield *et al.*, 2002; Milner and Kubota, 2005). Examining the case of US meat trade politics in Taiwan, the decision to open markets to US meat providers is perceived as serving national interests by facilitating access to cheaper and more diverse meat consumption options while also strengthening Taiwan's diplomatic and strategic ties with the USA (Wang, 2022; Chen, 2023). Consequently, the opposition party can legitimately criticize the incumbent party's policies that benefit national interests and present itself as a defender of minority interests. Nevertheless, upon assuming power, the former opposition party is likely to back policies that align with the majority interests, even if they had previously opposed them. Conversely, if the once-incumbent party loses power in the election, it may change its stance on contentious policy issues to protect minority interests.

In order to effectively advance a contentious policy like US meat trade in Taiwan, the ruling party must ensure strong parliamentary cohesion to navigate the legislative process. District legislators, who represent diverse interests, may sacrifice their pre-election commitments to align with the party's post-election agenda, which is aligned with national interests. The shift in position by legislators can be attributed to changes in the level of concerns surrounding district interests and the changing structural dynamics of party politics for legislators. Regarding district interests, candidates may prioritize the needs of their electoral districts over party or national interests for various reasons before a legislative election. Political parties strive to optimize their representation in the legislature, thereby often avoiding contentious positions that contradict the stances upheld by electoral districts (Kollman *et al.*, 1998). Even when confronted with unavoidable controversial issues, both incumbent and opposition parties prefer to postpone the passage of legislative bills until after the elections, allowing district candidates greater flexibility in accommodating local interests. Candidates themselves are motivated to secure majority support in their respective single-member districts, compelling them to passionately advocate for their constituents' interests (Fenno, 1978; Dinesen *et al.*, 2021). Even if the party's positions contradict the prevailing opinion within their constituencies, candidates can distance themselves from the party's preferences. Aligning with the party's positions would not only result in a loss of support from many constituents but also provide opponents with ammunition for attack. Consequently, these dynamics significantly influence the likelihood of winning the election. In summary, district candidates prioritize advocating for policy positions that align with the interests of their constituents.

After the election, the elected district legislators are relieved of the pressure to secure majority support from their constituents. If necessary, they gain more freedom to align themselves with their party's policy positions. In the case of opposition party members, they can legitimately remain resolute in defending local interests against national interests, as the opposition party bears less responsibility for safeguarding national concerns (Treib, 2010). Conversely, upon assuming the ruling position, legislators may face the obligation to support bills prioritizing national interests, potentially necessitating the sacrifice of their constituents' interests. Despite the potential for criticism from voters or local politicians, the ensuing impact is expected to be moderate, considering the ample time and opportunities to repair their relationship with the constituency before the forthcoming elections. Furthermore, the ruling government will actively develop remedial plans aimed at minimizing the extent of any loss and aiding in political damage control within the affected constituency (Arnold, 1990; Evans, 2004). Moreover, when the constituency exhibits strong partisan loyalty towards the ruling party, voters are more inclined to stand by the party they support (Tsai, 2008), potentially forgiving legislators for renegeing on pre-election promises (Bauer *et al.*, 2017). The ruling administration is also more

capable of mobilizing resources to frame the unpopular policy in a desired manner, thereby reassuring the anxieties of the affected population. In summary, district legislators have the potential to deviate from constituents' interests to some extent and align themselves with their party's positions.

Concerning the evolving dynamics of party politics for legislators, as mentioned earlier, political parties typically refrain from advocating for contentious bills in the legislature immediately before an election. This allows district legislative candidates more flexibility to accommodate local interests. In such circumstances, political parties are unlikely to enforce strict party discipline or penalize candidates who align with their constituents but deviate from the party's official position. It would be politically detrimental in that constituency to pit district candidates against local interests simply for supporting a party's policy position before the election. Consequently, district candidates are relieved from the political pressure exerted by their affiliated party to firmly support the party's preferred policy position on a contentious issue.

After assuming power following the election, the ruling party encounters domestic and international political pressure to implement public policies that align with national interests. When such policies are contentious, the ruling administration relies on strong cohesion among legislators from the same party to pass the bills. Consequently, the ruling party is more likely to enforce strict party discipline to ensure that legislators representing affected constituencies support the administration's policies. Refusal to cooperate may lead to disciplinary measures such as warnings, public condemnation, suspension, or expulsion. These measures directly impact the legislators' public image and the support they receive from partisan voters. In parties with greater power or discretion in candidate nomination, party discipline significantly influences the likelihood of receiving party nomination in future elections (Siavelis and Morgenstern, 2008; Alemán *et al.*, 2018), particularly in single-member districts where each party only nominates one candidate.

Instead of resorting to punitive measures, if a cooperating legislator is abandoned by their constituency, the ruling party may explore rewarding outside options or offering side payments to mitigate the political repercussions and provide compensatory solutions for the legislator's loss of support. Furthermore, deviating from the ruling party's position may create tensions with other legislators from the same party and affect the potential for support exchange and cooperation within the Legislative Yuan. These dynamics within political parties exert substantial pressure on district legislators to align with the party's position after the election. In short, considering their relationship with the ruling party and its members, district legislators are motivated to move closer to the party's position on contentious policy issues.

Based on these factors, it can be inferred that legislators affiliated with the ruling party may show a stronger inclination to advocate for or modify their previous policy position in favour of removing import bans on American pork and beef containing ractopamine. In contrast, legislators of the opposing party may tend to display a greater reluctance to support such a stance. The primary hypothesis of this study is as follows:

*Hypothesis 1: Legislators affiliated with the ruling party are more likely to advocate for or adjust their policy support regarding the removal of import bans on American pork and beef containing ractopamine, whereas legislators associated with the opposition party will likely exhibit a greater reluctance to endorse such a stance.*

### 3.3. Additional hypotheses

In addition to incumbency factors, there are other political considerations that may elucidate legislators' policy positions concerning US meat trade. These policy positions can vary between legislators representing their constituencies and those representing party lists in Taiwan. In theory, candidate-centred electoral systems tend to produce legislators who are more independent of their party leadership. In contrast, party-centred electoral systems tend to generate legislators who are less likely to disobey the affiliated parties (Hix, 2004). As a result, legislators representing their constituencies may be

more responsive to constituent interests, resulting in a higher degree of consistency in their policy preferences. This is because constituent interests are often based on geographical locations, which are less likely to change frequently. Legislators representing areas with a significant pig-raising industry may consistently advocate for import bans on American meat due to concerns about foreign competition. On the contrary, party-list legislators' legislative seats are determined by their respective political parties. Therefore, their policy stance may be closely linked to their parties and subject to change accordingly. This perspective leads to the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 2: Constituent legislators have a higher degree of consistency in their positions regarding the importation of American pork and beef containing ractopamine than party-list legislators.*

Furthermore, the average constituent attitudes towards importing US meat may differ between rural and urban areas in Taiwan. Opening Taiwan's market to foreign agricultural production could negatively affect the income of rural residents. Therefore, it is likely that rural residents would oppose the ease of importing American pork and beef, regardless of whether it contains ractopamine or not. Even in areas without animal-related agriculture, residents in rural areas may be concerned that opening the market to foreign meat will result in the influx of other agricultural products from abroad.

Additionally, Hainmueller and Hiscox (2006) found that education and exposure to economic ideas and information play a key role in shaping individuals' attitudes towards trade and globalization policies. Scheve and Slaughter (2001) found that individuals' types of jobs can explain their preferences for trade policies, as individuals whose incomes increase with market openness are more likely to favour free trade policies. These policy preferences are more likely to be based on rational and objective evaluations rather than ideological influences. These factors are associated with rural-urban disparities, wherein urban areas, on average, have more residents with higher education and enjoy the benefits of globalization. All these suggest that, irrespective of political parties, legislators representing urban areas in Taiwan are more inclined to support the import of US meat compared to their counterparts in rural areas.

*Hypothesis 3: Legislators representing urban areas display a higher level of support for lifting the import bans on American pork and beef containing ractopamine than their counterparts representing rural areas.*

#### 4. Research design

To examine the aforementioned hypotheses, this study employs a mixed-methods approach, comprising both quantitative analysis and case studies at the level of individual legislators.

##### 4.1. Dependent variables

In the quantitative study, the dependent variable encompasses four dimensions of legislators' trade policy preferences regarding US meat imports in different periods. The first two dimensions pertain to legislators' preferences towards US meat imports before and after elections. We monitored newly elected legislators' public attitudes and positions as candidates through various media sources and publicly accessible platforms. These preferences are operationalized by identifying whether legislators have expressed related attitudes in the media or the Legislative Yuan. To gather data from the media, we used an internet search engine to input legislators' names and keywords such as 'ractopamine' and 'American beef' to identify relevant reporting materials. Moreover, date intervals were utilized to identify legislators who made public statements within specific periods. In the case of the American beef incident, 14 January 2012, the election day, served as the cutoff point to distinguish data before and after the election. As for the American pork incident, the cutoff point was set on 11 January 2020. Most media reports were sourced from reputable online news databases, including Central News Agency, United Daily News, China Times, and The Liberty Times.

To investigate legislators' speeches in the Legislative Yuan, we utilized the Legislative Yuan's database, which records legislators' speeches in the legislature.<sup>1</sup> The speeches were contextually analysed to determine legislators' preferences. For example, legislators who use a more ironic tone when asking questions are coded as not supporting the issue based on the context of their statements. Conversely, legislators who support measures such as import inspections and government management are judged to favour the issue. Legislators were coded as 0 for clear opposition in the media or the Legislative Yuan, 2 for clear support, and 1 for any other stance. For example, a legislator is coded 4 to express clear support for removing the import ban in the media and Legislative Yuan. A legislator is coded 0 for expressing a clear objection to the policy. The first two dependent variables have a five-point scale, ranging from 0 to 4.

The third dimension of the dependent variable examines legislators' voting behaviour on administrative directives related to lifting the import bans on US meat in both cases. In the case of US beef, we selected legislators' voting records on revising Article 11 of the *Act Governing Food Safety and Sanitation (AGFSS)* and the third reading of the Act in July 2012. These two votes were significant in deciding whether to lift the import bans on US beef. Regarding US pork, we selected legislators' voting records on revising Article 15 of the *AGFSS* and approving the administrative directives of Council of Agriculture #1011473960. These two Legislative Yuan votes impacted the standards for residual levels of veterinary drugs and allowed importing US pork containing ractopamine. Legislators were coded as 0 for an opposing vote in each vote, 2 for a supportive vote, and 1 for any other situation (absence/abstention). In the US beef case, legislators were coded as 0 if their votes represented objection to lifting the import ban on both voting occasions. For example, in the US pork case, a legislator is coded 4 for the most supportive stance towards lifting the ban on both voting occasions and 0 for the least supportive stance. This dependent variable also has a five-point scale, ranging from 0 to 4.

The fourth aspect examines the change in preference by calculating the difference between the pre-election preference index (five-point scale) and the voting behaviour index (five-point scale). A higher number indicates a more significant shift in preference from opposition to support, while a smaller number indicates a more significant shift from support to opposition. For example, if a legislator consistently votes in favour of all revisions proposed by the ruling party after the election (coded as 4) but strongly objects to opening the market to US meats before the election (coded as 0), their index of change would be 4. Conversely, the lowest index would be  $-4$ , indicating that a legislator strongly opposes the ruling party's policy position after the election but strongly agrees with opening the domestic meat market before the election. This index aims to identify the consistency of legislators' policy positions on US meat imports before the election to their final decision.

#### 4.2. Explanatory variables

In light of the specified hypotheses above, this study identifies and operationalizes seven explanatory variables for the quantitative analysis. The first variable is whether a legislator belongs to the incumbent party in 2012 for the US beef case or 2021 for the US pork case. The index is operationalized as a dummy variable. The second variable is the density of domestic cattle and pigs raised in a constituency, which serves as an approximation of the level of constituents' interests in opposing the opening of the market to US meat. Official statistics come from the government-sponsored National Animal Industry Foundation. We use township-level to calculate the number of animals raised in each constituency, divided by the constituent population. A higher density is expected to make legislators represented more likely to oppose opening up to US meat imports due to increased concerns about meat competition. For party-list legislators who do not represent the interests of a specific regional constituency, the density is coded as 0.

The third variable considered is the percentage of votes received by legislators during the legislative election. It is hypothesized that legislators who secure a higher percentage of votes possess a stronger

<sup>1</sup>The database is managed by Parliamentary Library of Taiwan's Legislative Yuan. It is accessible at <https://npl.ly.gov.tw/>.



electoral foundation, which grants them a certain degree of flexibility to deviate from constituent interests. Data were sourced from the Central Election Commission of Taiwan. The fourth variable investigates whether legislators serve as constituency or party-list representatives, operationalized as a dummy variable. The fifth variable explores whether legislators represent constituencies within urban municipalities, which are generally characterized by a high level of urbanization. As mentioned earlier, constituencies in large urban areas typically consist of a higher proportion of citizens with advanced educational attainment and receive more economic benefits from free trade. This variable is operationalized by a dummy variable, where legislators representing the six municipalities, as well as Hsinchu city, Chiayi city, and Keelung city, are coded as 1.

The sixth variable examines the educational attainment of legislators, which is expected to have a positive association with support for free trade. It is measured on a five-point scale, ranging from primary education (1) to secondary education (2), high school (3), undergraduate education (4), and graduate education (5). The final variable is a dummy variable representing gender. The data for both variables are collected from the Legislative Yuan. Table 1 illustrates the main variables in the quantitative analysis. Given that all four dependent variables are ordinal variables with more than two levels, the quantitative analyses adopted ordered logistic regression models to estimate the possible associations.

### 4.3. In-depth qualitative case studies

This paper presents a comparative analysis of two cases involving shifts in preferences for US meat import policies. The first case focuses on legislator Su Chih-feng (蘇治芬) from the DPP, who initially opposed the import of US beef in 2012 but later supported the import of US pork in 2020–2021. Su has been a legislator since 2016, following her previous role as Yunlin County Magistrate. It is important to note that Yunlin county is a significant pork production area in Taiwan. As such, both in her previous position as Magistrate and as a legislator, Su likely faced considerable pressure from constituents to object to lifting import bans on US pork.

The second case focuses on legislator Lai Shyh-bao (賴士葆) from the KMT, representing the Taipei constituency. Lai has served as a legislator since 1999, with the exception of a brief hiatus from 2002 to 2004 when he did not succeed in the legislative election. The Taipei constituency is characterized by a high level of urbanization and a population with higher educational attainment. As a legislator representing such an area, Lai may not have faced significant pressure from cattle- or pig-raising constituencies, making him more inclined to support free trade with US meats. However, it is interesting that Lai's stance on US meat imports differs from the general expectation. He strongly supported the import of US beef in 2012 but later opposed the import of US pork in 2020.

In these cases, it can be argued that legislators do not solely consider the distribution problem of winners and losers in trade, and therefore, constituency interests are not the sole consideration. The most significant factor at play is the health concerns associated with the importation of US meats. While this study acknowledges the influence of health factors on legislators' preferences, it emphasizes that opposition parties or legislators representing rural constituencies use health factors to justify their opposition to liberalization. Thus, these health factors are not the primary drivers discussed in this paper that explain changes in legislators' policy positions. Given that concerns about ractopamine

**Table 1.** Variables for quantitative models

Dependent variables	Explanatory variables
Preferences before the election (ordinal)	Incumbent vs opposition party (dummy)
Preferences after the election (ordinal)	Pigs/cattle per capita (numeric)
Voting behaviours (ordinal)	Percentage of votes received (numeric)
Changes in preferences (ordinal)	Constituency vs party-list (dummy)
	Metropolis (dummy)
	Education level (ordinal)
	Gender (categorical)

have remained unchanged in Taiwan, this factor alone cannot adequately explain the shifting preferences of legislators.

Moreover, it could be contended that the US meat cases in 2012 and 2021 exhibit political and contextual disparities, rendering them less suitable for direct comparison. Indeed, comparing these cases does not align with a most similar case design for establishing strong causal inferences. Instead, these cases serve as a diverse case study design, which is likely to be representative to a limited extent. The primary objective is to provide in-depth information for tracing legislators' inconsistent attitudes and behaviours. In this regard, the qualitative approach seeks to complement and augment the quantitative findings.

The subsequent case studies will elucidate that the primary factor contributing to the inconsistent policy positions of Su and Lai is the political context in which they operate, particularly their affiliation with either the ruling party or the opposition party. This study will analyse their statements in news media and the Legislative Yuan as primary sources to examine how political circumstances influence an individual's stance. Through a comparative analysis of these cases, our objective is to provide additional in-depth evidence and support for the quantitative analysis conducted in this study.

## 5. Quantitative analysis

Table 2 illustrates the voting behaviour of legislators during the second and third readings of the proposed revisions to Article 11 of the AGFSS. These revisions provide the legal framework for importing US beef containing ractopamine in Taiwan. It can be observed that nearly all legislators belonging to pan-blue parties, including the KMT, People First Party, and New Party, were in favour of the revisions, while nearly all legislators belonging to pan-green parties, including the DPP and Taiwan Solidarity Union, did not overtly express support for the revisions. The initial findings indicate that most of the legislators affiliated with the ruling party, the KMT, supported the removal of import bans on American beef, while legislators from opposition parties did not.

Table 3 presents the results of quantitative analyses conducted using ordered logistic models. The findings indicate that legislators of the incumbent party, the KMT, maintained their preferences throughout the revision process. Models 1 and 2 reveal that incumbent KMT legislators consistently held positive attitudes towards a further opening to US beef imports before the legislative revision of the AGFSS. Model 3 indicates that incumbent legislators consistently voted for importing US beef containing ractopamine. Model 4 examines the changing preference level and reveals that legislators belonging to the incumbent parties are more likely to transition their preferences from opposition or neutrality to ultimately supporting the proposal.

Furthermore, the results indicate that legislators receiving a higher percentage of votes are more likely to support the law revision. This can be attributed to their ability to garner greater constituent support, enabling them to bear the political costs associated with aligning with the party's desired position. However, cattle density was found to not correlate with legislative support. This is likely because beef is not a significant protein source in Taiwan, and the country is not a major cattle-raising nation. Even in constituencies with the highest cattle density, only minor or insignificant electoral interests are related to the issue. Moreover, the quantitative results do not offer consistent evidence that legislators

**Table 2.** Vote counts on US beef administrative directives in 2012

Regulation	Vote	Pan-blue	%	Pan-green	%
Second read	Yes	62	84	0	0
	No	3	4	6	12
	Others	9	12	43	88
Third read	Yes	62	84	0	0
	No	3	4	7	14
	Others	9	12	42	86

**Table 3.** Alteration in legislators' support for importation of US beef in 2012

	(1) Before the election	(2) After the election	(3) Legislative vote	(4) Position change
Incumbent party	1.274*** (0.450)	1.666*** (0.395)	22.51*** (0.961)	8.528*** (0.945)
Cattles/capita	-27.98 (22.05)	-4.775 (29.32)	-18.51 (26.35)	11.05 (19.30)
Votes received (%)		0.403*** (0.0941)	0.783*** (0.281)	1.176*** (0.212)
Constituency	0.295 (0.632)	0.121 (0.619)	0.881 (0.947)	0.056 (0.620)
Urban area	-0.547 (0.620)	-0.271 (0.537)	-1.312* (0.775)	-0.256 (0.565)
Education level	0.012 (0.277)	-0.241 (0.193)	0.518 (0.451)	0.302 (0.356)
Gender ( <i>female</i> )				
Male	-0.195 (0.457)	0.314 (0.439)	-0.896 (0.855)	-0.257 (0.440)
Observations	123	123	123	123

Note: Standard errors in parentheses.  
\*P < 0.10; \*\*P < 0.05; \*\*\*P < 0.01.

**Table 4.** Vote counts on US pork administrative directives in 2021

Directives	Vote	Pan-blue	%	Pan-green	%	Other	%
Residue limits	Yes	0	0	61	94	0	0
	No	37	95	0	0	9	90
	Others	2	5	4	6	1	10
Ractopamine allowed	Yes	0	0	58	89	0	0
	No	37	95	0	11	9	90
	Others	2	5	7	0	1	10

representing constituents in urban areas support this open trade policy more than those representing rural areas. Similarly, no evidence suggests that constituency legislators prioritize constituency interests more than party-list legislators.

The observed result can be attributed to the contentious partisan rivalry surrounding the US beef policy, where both the incumbent and opposition parties enforce strict party discipline and impose penalties for deviations from official party stances. Additionally, Taiwan's domestic cattle industry represents a relatively small proportion of overall consumption, leading to a lower level of rural-urban division. As a result, factors such as concerns about rural-urban distribution or individual legislators' personal preferences tend to yield to party discipline.

Next, the US pork case in 2020–2021 was examined. Table 4 illustrates the voting patterns of legislators regarding the administrative directives for revising the *Standards for Veterinary Drug Residue Limits in Foods and the Veterinary Drugs Control Act*. The revision lifted import restrictions and established a legal framework for importing US pork containing ractopamine into Taiwan. The distribution of voting patterns is similar to that observed in the case of US beef but in the opposite direction. Nearly all legislators from pan-green parties supported the revision, while the majority of legislators from pan-blue parties opposed it. Most legislators from other parties, including the New Power Party (NPP) and the Taiwan People's Party, also opposed the revision.<sup>2</sup> The initial examination reveals

<sup>2</sup>Some may argue that the NPP can be categorized as a pan-green party. However, while acknowledging that the NPP exhibits a closer alignment with the pan-green ideology and even leans towards an extreme position on the independence vs unification spectrum, it becomes apparent that the party deviates significantly from the pan-green stance in the context of the US

**Table 5.** Alteration in legislators' support for US pork imports in 2021

	(5) Before the election	(6) After the election	(7) Legislative vote	(8) Position change
Incumbent party	-1.391** (0.547)	3.263*** (0.560)	6.870*** (1.056)	6.515*** (1.121)
Pigs/capita	-0.711** (0.313)	0.380 (0.473)	-0.512 (0.401)	0.392 (0.391)
Votes received (%)		-4.322* (2.517)	-3.738 (3.162)	0.003 (2.224)
Constituency	0.780 (0.750)	-0.122 (0.531)	1.216 (1.126)	-0.202 (0.824)
Urban area	-0.871 (0.626)	0.991* (0.580)	0.500 (0.879)	0.735 (0.666)
Education level	-0.071 (0.253)	-0.299 (0.244)	-0.387 (0.380)	-0.096 (0.229)
Gender ( <i>female</i> )				
Male	-0.297 (0.477)	0.405 (0.405)	0.293 (0.658)	0.160 (0.422)
Observations	114	114	114	114

Note: Standard errors in parentheses.

\* $P < 0.10$ ; \*\* $P < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $P < 0.01$ .

that this issue is highly contentious. The pan-green and pan-blue parties have changed their previous positions in the US beef case.

Table 5 presents a slightly distinct pattern compared to the previous case. Model 5 reveals that in the run-up to the 2020 legislative election, candidates affiliated with the incumbent party tended to oppose the removal of import restrictions on US pork containing ractopamine, while candidates from the opposition party tended to adopt a more supportive stance. Additionally, legislators representing major pig-raising constituencies demonstrated a similar inclination, regardless of their party affiliation.

After the 2020 election, models 6 and 7 show that legislators belonging to the incumbent party displayed a higher level of support for and voted in favour of the government's policy of importing US pork than legislators from the opposition party. Interestingly, the previously observed pig density effect became insignificant after the election. In contrast to the US beef case, the factor of votes received is found to be insignificant in the context of the US pork case. These suggest that partisan considerations outweighed constituent interests. Additionally, according to model 8, legislators from the incumbent party were more inclined to openly change their position from opposition or hesitation to support. The findings presented in Table 5 highlight several differences compared to the 2012 US beef dispute, where domestic cattle raising constituted a small portion of overall domestic consumption, while domestic pork accounted for approximately 90% of the total. As a result, the economic consequences of opening the market to US meats were more severe in certain rural constituencies in the case of pork politics. Therefore, in 2021, the legislative dilemma became more pronounced for legislators representing major pig-raising constituencies.

The quantitative analysis of the 2012 US beef and 2021 US pork cases consistently supports hypothesis 1, but not the other hypotheses. The distinction between incumbency and opposition is pivotal in shaping legislators' policy positions on contentious issues. Additional factors, such as the legislators' constituency vs party-list identity, urban-rural distribution, education level, and gender, do not consistently and significantly explain the legislators' positions on US meat trade policy. This finding stems from legislators' diminished concerns for district interests once their affiliated parties

pork politics case. Therefore, we opt for a more conservative classification, designating the NPP as a non-pan-green party in this study.

assume power. Furthermore, the structural dynamics of party politics discussed above compel incumbent legislators to prioritize adherence to their party's positions over considering the interests of their constituents.

## 6. Case studies

This section employs a qualitative analysis approach by examining two case studies. The first case focuses on DPP legislator Su Chih-feng, representing significant pig-farming constituencies in Taiwan. The second case examines the policy position of KMT legislator Lai Shyh-bao, representing a large urban constituency. These two legislators belong to Taiwan's two major political parties, which have alternated in power since 1996. The analysis of these cases reveals that their policy positions are influenced by the shifting dynamics between incumbency and opposition, leading to alignment with the respective positions.

### 6.1. *Su Chih-feng: transitioning from anti-US beef to pro-US pork*

Legislator Su Chih-feng, a DPP politician, embarked on her political journey in Yunlin county early. She has served as a legislator in the Fifth Legislative Yuan since 2001 and held the position of county magistrate in Yunlin county from 2005 to 2014. Following her tenure as a county magistrate, she was re-elected as a legislator representing the first constituency in Yunlin county from 2016 onwards.

Yunlin county holds significant importance in the pig-raising industry in Taiwan, with a population of 682 thousand residents and a pig population of 1.43 million, resulting in an average of more than two pigs per capita. The county boasts the highest density of pigs compared to other regions in Taiwan. Within Su's constituencies, the Mailiao Township stands out as a critical area. With a population exceeding 45 thousand, the township is home to 300,000 pigs, averaging 6.6 per capita. Consequently, Su is faced with the task of addressing the structural constraints related to protecting the interests of the animal-raising constituency when it comes to opening markets to foreign meat imports. As a result, her political decisions and actions are heavily influenced by the concerns and interests of the pig-farming industry.

Before the January 2012 legislative election, the debate surrounding the import of American beef containing ractopamine had been contentious in the Legislative Yuan. In 2009, Taiwan and the USA signed the Taiwan–American Beef Protocol, which relaxed restrictions on importing bone-in beef, offal, and ground meat from US cattle under 30 months old. However, concerns about the potential health risks associated with ractopamine and bovine spongiform encephalopathy persisted among the public and medical community (Hong, 2009). At the time, Su Chih-feng, the head of Yunlin county, had not expressed her opinion on the matter. However, Liu Chien-Kuo, a legislator from the same party representing the second constituency of Yunlin county, voiced his concerns regarding the potential negative impact of easing restrictions on foreign meat, particularly in Yunlin county (Legislative Yuan of Taiwan, 2009). According to official data from 2012, Yunlin county had a cattle population of 3,617, representing approximately 10% of the total cattle population in Taiwan. However, it is important to note that cattle raising is not a significant industry in either Yunlin county or Taiwan.

After Ma Ying-jeou's successful re-election as president in 2012, he was less burdened by electoral pressures and had the freedom to promote controversial policies aimed at advancing national interests. On 4 March of the same year, he initiated the relaxation of restrictions on the importation of American beef. The Executive Yuan issued a statement announcing the conditional importation of American beef (Yang, 2012). This policy triggered significant public debates within Taiwanese society and faced strong opposition from the opposing political party.

Su Chih-feng, the county magistrate of Yunlin at the time, promptly joined forces with other county and city leaders to publicly voice their opposition to importing American beef. While the beef industry did not hold significant economic importance, Su criticized the potential adverse consequences of allowing ractopamine in the animal-raising sector, particularly for Taiwan's cattle

industry. Moreover, she expressed concerns that approving the importation of ractopamine-treated cattle would set a precedent for importing pork treated with ractopamine, undermining the market for higher-priced Taiwanese pork. Su emphasized that Yunlin county ranked second in the country regarding pig production, and she warned of the potential impact on Taiwanese pig farmers if foreign animals treated with clenbuterol were allowed. Consequently, she pledged to travel to the capital and protest alongside pig farmers against the central government's decision. She also highlighted that the Yunlin County Agriculture Department had issued a letter to all pig-farming groups in the county, urging them to abstain from using clenbuterol. This underscored the importance of safeguarding public health and reaffirmed the county government's unwavering opposition to opening the importation of lean meat products, with a specific focus on protecting the interests of local animal farmers (Taiwan Public Television Service, 2012).

In addition to opposing the policy, Su emphasized that Yunlin county would actively promote the consumption of local meat products with a focus on quality. She expressed the county's commitment to collaborating with non-governmental organizations, chain distributors, schools, and other stakeholders to spearhead an 'ethical consumption movement' that actively discourages consuming and purchasing beef containing ractopamine. The aim is to create awareness and encourage the public to make informed choices by refusing to consume or purchase beef products with ractopamine (Wang *et al.*, 2012). In July 2012, the International Codex Alimentarius (CODEX) adopted a residue standard of 10 ppb for ractopamine. In light of this development and their support for the CODEX standard, the DPP changed its stance on importing US beef. For instance, Liu Chien-Kuo, the Yunlin Legislator, revised his position and suggested that while ractopamine could be allowed in imported beef, imported pork should remain free of ractopamine (Liberty Times, 2012). Subsequently, the bill regarding the importation of American cattle was passed in the Legislative Yuan on 25 July, with the KMT, holding the majority of legislators, supporting it (Chen, 2012).

As the county magistrate, Su Chih-feng expressed her position on American cattle. She reiterated her desire to achieve undetectable levels of ractopamine and emphasized the need for government assistance and support in the agricultural sector. She emphasized the importance of local government involvement, as the passage of the US cattle case significantly impacted pig farmers in Yunlin county. Su called for collaboration between the government and the industry to enhance the development of the pig industry (Wang, 2012). In summary, before July 2012, Su Chih-feng strongly opposed the importation of US meat containing ractopamine into Taiwan. Furthermore, her position remained unchanged despite any modifications to the DPP's stance. Ultimately, she focused on achieving undetectable levels of ractopamine and supporting local pig farmers.

Su's position seemed to fluctuate after Tsai Ing-wen was elected president in 2016. During that time, there were speculations that Tsai was considering fully opening the importation of American pork, and even the KMT utilized the slogan 'supporting Tsai Ing-wen is supporting the opening of American pigs' during the presidential election (Liberty Times, 2016). In this context, Su Chih-feng, elected as a legislator in Yunlin, cautiously expressed her agreement to import American pork to Taiwan while maintaining some reservations. She emphasized the need for government control over labelling the sources of meat used in processed products, as the impact of American pork primarily lies in processed meat (Wen, 2016). This shift in her stance towards importing meats containing ractopamine indicated a growing ambiguity.

After Tsai Ing-wen was re-elected in January 2020, the Tsai government announced in August of the same year to lift the 30-month ban on imports of US pork and beef containing ractopamine, following a decision similar to President Ma Ying-jeou's 8 years prior. Despite this policy going against the interests of her constituency, Su Chih-feng took to social media to appeal to the public to prioritize the consumption of Taiwanese pork and support Yunlin farmers. Her focus shifted from debating whether the government should open the market to how the government should protect and guide the pig industry. She consistently emphasized the importance of ensuring the safety and integrity of the domestic pig industry supply chain without adversely affecting farmers. Su also advocated for comprehensive quality control measures to guarantee the consumption of safe and healthy pork. She

promoted the 'Happy Pig model' as a means to differentiate between domestic and foreign pork markets,<sup>3</sup> encouraging the public to trust the government's ability to ensure the safety of food (Legislative Yuan of Taiwan, 2020). Additionally, she expressed hope that a significant amount of Taiwanese pork could be exported globally (Li, 2020). All of these attitudes and remarks indicate her acceptance of the government's policy on importing US pork.

During her legislative interpellation on US pork imports, Su expressed her confidence in the quality of Taiwanese pork. She engaged in discussion with Minister of Economic Affairs Wang Mei-hua (王美花), where they acknowledged the potential for increased international trade agreements and benefits for Taiwan by importing American meat (Legislative Yuan of Taiwan, 2020). Su also highlighted that the government had adopted the CODEX standard, which permits a certain level of ractopamine in pork. Furthermore, she emphasized her agricultural background and reaffirmed her belief in the superior conditions for raising Taiwanese pigs. Su stated, 'As someone from an agricultural county, I have confidence in the advantages of Taiwanese pigs' (Liberty Times, 2020).

On 24 December 2020, the Legislative Yuan voted on executive orders to lift import bans. The command modifies the *Standards for veterinary drug residue limits in foods Act*, allowing more ractopamine residue in certain pork products. According to this regulation, the content of residual ractopamine in beef was initially allowed to be only 0.01 ppm. The amendment to the standards for veterinary drug residue limits in foods approved by the Legislative Yuan for review added the tolerance of swine lysate residues, including muscle and fat (including skin) at 0.01 ppm, liver at 0.04 ppm, and kidney at 0.01 ppm, as well as 0.01 ppm for other edible parts. The bill also involved an amendment to the current residual value of beef lysate. To ensure the passage of this controversial bill, the DPP issued a class A mobilization request, requiring legislators of the same party to be present and vote in favour (Lin *et al.*, 2020). Strict party discipline would be enforced for non-compliance. As a result, the bill passed smoothly, with Su Chih-feng among the legislators who voted in favour of it. In contrast, three DPP legislators who abstained from voting during the legislative session faced penalties, including 1-year suspensions of their party membership rights, which encompass the right to be nominated by the party for public office positions (Ye *et al.*, 2021).

In Su's case, her previous opposition to the trade liberalization of US meats can be understood as a defence of the economic interests of her Yunlin constituency. As a politician from the opposition party before 2016, she faced less political pressure to support contentious policies that aligned with national interests. This allowed her greater freedom to protect the interests of her constituency. However, after becoming a legislator for the incumbent party in 2016, Su started experiencing pressure from her party to support the US pork trade policy. Concerns for party unity and party discipline may have influenced her decision-making process. Additionally, voters loyal to the DPP in her constituency may have shifted their support for the party to a more lenient stance, forgiving her potential neglect of local interests. Figure 1 illustrates a strong and positive correlation between the percentage of votes for the DPP presidential candidate in 2020 and the percentage of votes favouring the market opening to US pork containing ractopamine during the 2021 referendum.

In summary, the shift in Su Chih-feng's stance on meat products containing ractopamine can be attributed to the changing political dynamics. As a legislator for the incumbent party, she encountered structural constraints that required her to align with the party's position, leading to a deviation from the interests of her constituency.

## 6.2. Lai Shyh-bao: transitioning from pro-US beef to anti-US pork

This section examines the position change of Lai Shyh-bao, a senior legislator from the KMT party who has been serving since 1999, with the exception of a brief hiatus from 2002 to 2004. Since implementing the single-member district electoral system in 2008, he has represented the eighth

<sup>3</sup>'Happy pigs' refers to pigs that are raised under environmentally friendly conditions and have no drug residues. The aim is to provide a happy and conducive environment for the pigs, resulting in improved pork quality. For further official information, see [https://theme.coa.gov.tw/theme\\_list.php?theme=storyboard&id=38](https://theme.coa.gov.tw/theme_list.php?theme=storyboard&id=38).

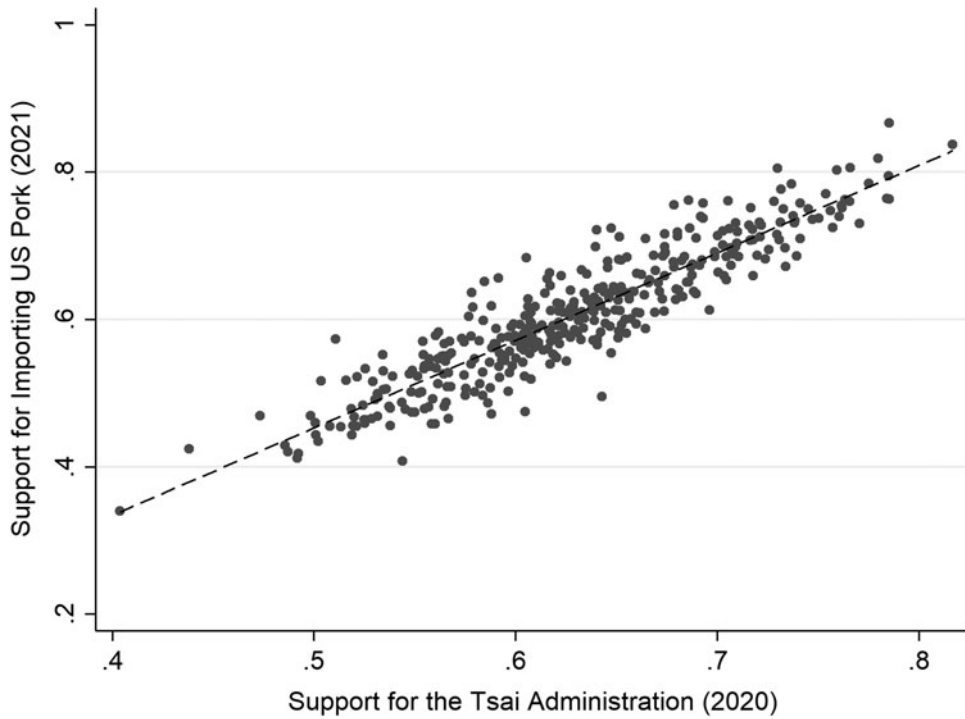


Figure 1. Township-level support for the DPP administration vs importing US pork in Yunlin ( $N=388$ ; correlation = 0.9156\*\*\*).

constituency of Taipei city, an urban area without any significant cattle- or pig-raising industry. Therefore, in theory, Lai's representation does not encompass animal farmers, and his primary concern should consistently be focused on the personal health consequences that the majority of his constituency shares. In reality, Lai initially supported the KMT government's decision to lift import bans on US beef in 2012. However, as the political climate shifted over 8 years, Lai underwent a significant transformation and became known as 'Mr. Anti-Ractopamine'. His unwavering stance in 2020–2021 has created the misconception that he has consistently opposed US beef imports throughout the years.

Before the 2008 legislative elections, when the KMT was in the opposition party, there was limited documentation or evidence to suggest that KMT legislators fully supported lifting the ban on US beef imports. In 2005, 23 legislators led by Lai Shyh-bao believed that the mad cow disease virus had an incubation period of up to 5 years and could be vertically transmitted. As a result, they asked the Executive Yuan to ban American beef imports until the doubts were cleared (Legislative Yuan of Taiwan, 2005). In 2012, when the incumbent KMT administration decided to lift the import ban on US beef, Lai expressed his views on US beef imports to the media. He acknowledged that opening up imports of US beef could provide Taiwan with international benefits, but he also emphasized the need for caution regarding imported meat containing ractopamine. Lai believed that the health of the Taiwanese people should not be compromised in the process. Despite his conservative attitude towards American beef imports, Lai voted in favour of the 2012 US beef import-related bill. During the legislative battle, the KMT issued a class A mobilization request, which mandated that incumbent legislators be present and vote in favour of the party's position. While Lai supported importing US beef containing ractopamine under certain conditions, he generally supported the Ma government's policy.

After the political party alternation in Taiwan in 2016, the DPP contemplated lifting the ban on imports of US pork containing ractopamine. In response, Lai emerged as a prominent critic of ractopamine, consistently expressing opposition to the DPP's policy. In 2016, Lai publicly voiced his discontent on Facebook regarding the DPP's shift in stance on US meat imports. He unequivocally



expressed his disagreement with the alleged willingness of the DPP government to compromise the health of the Taiwanese populace.<sup>4</sup>

Lai also voiced similar concerns during discussions in the Legislative Yuan. In an interpellation, he reiterated his opposition to importing American pork containing ractopamine, emphasizing that legislators and the government should actively resist pressure from the USA. Additionally, Lai proposed that citizens have the right to consume clean, healthy, and safe food, advocating for a complete ban on importing pork containing ractopamine. In 2020, concerns were raised over the import of pork containing ractopamine. Lai emphasized the importance of protecting the health and safety of the public. He called for President Tsai Ing-wen to resign and argued that consuming pork containing ractopamine would negatively impact the quality of life for marginalized communities and that importing it would have no benefits (Cheng, 2020).

It may seem justifiable that Lai's actions in response to health concerns reflect the views of his urban constituency. However, this raises the question of why Lai did not advocate for similar restrictions on importing US beef containing ractopamine in 2012, which was a significant concern among his constituents at the time. Surprisingly, Lai supported the KMT government's decision to import US beef for national interests in 2012. In contrast, he opposes the import of pork containing ractopamine and criticizes the CODEX standards. The inconsistency in Lai's policy positions raises concerns regarding his alignment with the interests of his constituents and national health concerns. It underscores the notion that the changing political landscape, particularly the dynamics between being in the incumbent party vs the opposition, may better explain his inconsistent policy preferences.

## 7. Conclusion

The findings from both quantitative and qualitative analyses suggest that incumbent/opposition partisanship takes precedence over other proposed factors in influencing Taiwan legislators' position on US meat trade policy. Legislators affiliated with the ruling party in Taiwan are more inclined to advocate for or adjust their policies in support of removing import bans on American pork and beef containing ractopamine. Conversely, legislators associated with the opposition party tend to exhibit a greater reluctance to endorse such a stance. Two case studies involving Su Chih-feng and Lai Shyh-bao demonstrate this pattern. They initially opposed the importation of US meats containing ractopamine when they were running for office as members of opposition parties. However, once they represented the ruling parties, both supported the trade liberalization policy for national interests. Notably, after 2016, Lai reverted back to an anti-ractopamine stance when the KMT transitioned to an opposition party. Considering that the electoral system, constituent structure, and public health concerns regarding ractopamine-added meats have remained unchanged since 2008, the most plausible explanation for the policy shifts observed among legislators is the evolving political dynamics between incumbency and opposition. This finding aligns with the main proposition of this study.

The study provides valuable insights into the dynamics of political controversies in Taiwan, extending beyond trade policies to include energy and environmental policies, such as nuclear energy generation. Nuclear energy has the potential to offer clean and affordable electricity to the majority of the population, but concerns about its environmental and health risks persist, particularly for residents living near nuclear power plants and waste treatment facilities. In Taiwan, when the DPP is in opposition, it strongly opposes the use of nuclear energy and the construction of power generation facilities that may cause significant pollution. However, when the party comes into power, it is responsible for formulating the country's overall energy plan and must adopt a more pragmatic approach towards previously opposed energy and environmental policies. Further research could explore the specific policy categories more likely to exhibit inconsistencies in policy positions.

In a democratic presidential system, the executive and legislative branches have distinct sources of constituents, allowing for more pronounced monitoring and balancing between them. Thus, compared

<sup>4</sup>Lai's Facebook post can be found at <https://tinyurl.com/4wmrjhtj> (accessed on 3 January 2023).

to a parliamentary system, the ruling party in a presidential system may have differing policy positions from its party members in Congress, particularly in cases where policies benefit the majority but harm specific electoral districts. This dilemma leaves ruling party legislators uncertain about whether to prioritize the party's policy or defend their constituents' interests.

Previous research has shown that voters generally accept inconsistent policy positions from national leaders or political parties, possibly due to leaders' access to greater resources and alternative options to compensate those affected by policy changes. Ruling parties may adopt previously criticized policies to enhance public support. However, legislators representing smaller regional constituencies face more limited options, as they are primarily bound by their constituents' immediate interests. Nevertheless, the findings of this study indicate that Taiwanese legislators are willing to risk losing votes by aligning with their party's policy positions rather than their constituents' interests. Future research could explore additional structural, ideological factors, and incentives that drive this inconsistent behaviour.

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