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Voters in Colorado's battleground district are wary of AI — and party affiliation doesn't much matter

Poll in 8th Congressional District shows a bipartisan desire for more artificial intelligence regulations



Data center server racks are shown in a modern server room. (Quantic69 / Getty Images)

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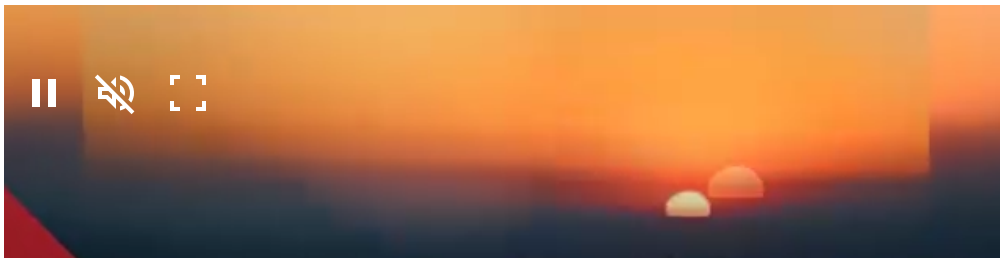
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Voters in [Colorado's 8th Congressional District](#) want more oversight and regulation of artificial intelligence — regardless of which major party they most align with, according to a recent poll conducted in the ultracompetitive district north of Denver.

The survey of 500 voters found remarkable unanimity between voters leaning left or right on the question of AI regulations, with support for some types of oversight or regulation exceeding 80%. The findings come from a poll conducted in May and June by the School of Public Policy at the University of Maryland through its [Program for Public Consultation](#), which shared the data with The Denver Post.

“Voters are intrigued by AI, but they have a lot of anxieties as well,” Steven Kull, director of the Program for Public Consultation, told The Post. “They agree it’s not enough for the tech companies themselves to regulate AI — they want the government to have a role.”

The goal of the program’s surveying is to identify solutions supported by voters to major public policy issues. It has conducted polls this year both nationally and in more than two dozen competitive U.S. House districts, including Colorado’s 8th, which covers a stretch of the Front Range from Commerce City to Greeley.



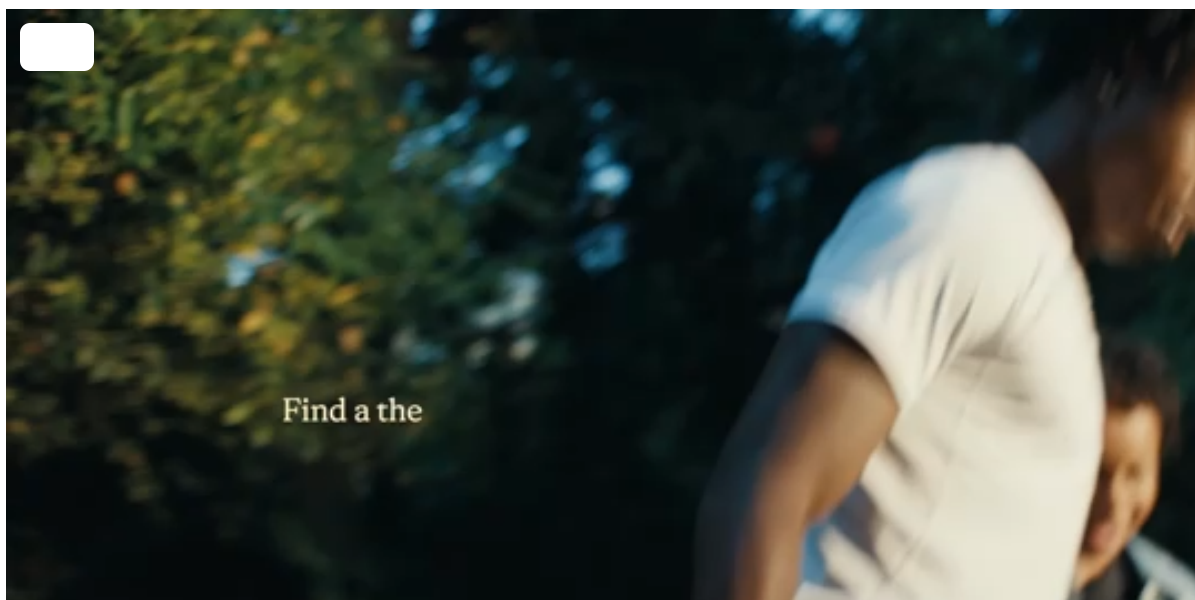


Artificial intelligence has [become a searing topic across the country](#) in the last few years as the powerful technology has seeped into numerous facets of life, spurring fears of jobs lost to computer automation and the potential for algorithms, instead of human beings, to adjudicate critical healthcare claims and loan application decisions.

And money from tech companies with an interest in AI development [has begun to shape and fuel](#) the 8th District race, which [pits Republican incumbent U.S. Rep. Gabe Evans against](#) the Democratic nominee, state Rep. Manny Rutinel, in November.

"Not only are Democrats and Republicans on the same side of this issue, but the majorities are large majorities," Kull said of the public perception of AI borne out in the poll. "There's substantial anxiety about it. Voters think this thing needs to be contained."

Eighty percent of voters leaning Democrat and 84% of voters leaning Republican in the 8th District said they favored the creation of a new federal agency to oversee the burgeoning technology. Meanwhile, 80% of Republicans and 84% of Democrats in the district want new AI programs to pass a "government-designed test" before being implemented.



Most of the respondents in the 8th District poll were categorized as Democratic or Republican based on either their actual affiliation or, for unaffiliated voters, their lean toward one side or the other.

When it comes to “deepfakes” — video or images that are digitally altered or repurposed to deceive viewers — the poll showed little tolerance from 8th District voters. Eighty-nine percent of voters from both sides of the aisle said AI-generated content on TV or online should be required to carry a label identifying it as such.



Democratic nominee Manny Rutinel, left, and U.S. Rep. Gabe Evans, who is seeking a second term representing Colorado's 8th Congressional District. (Photos by Hyoung Chang/The Denver Post, left, and Brice Tucker/Greeley Tribune)

The vast majority of voters — again, 89% among those leaning to either side — were even less tolerant of the use of deepfakes in the political arena, saying such content should be prohibited altogether in campaign ads.

“People have enough trouble figuring out what’s true as it is,” Kull said.

State lawmakers in 2024 [passed a law requiring campaign ads](#) that use AI to disclose that fact. When it comes to broader regulations on AI, the legislature has struggled to reach consensus. It passed a groundbreaking law two years ago that attempted to regulate the use of AI by companies and other organizations in ways that might discriminate against people, but the law was delayed as lawmakers, Gov. Jared Polis and outside interests debated changes.

In May, Polis [signed a significant rewrite of the earlier law](#). At the national level, the Trump administration has threatened to challenge individual state regulations while calling for a national regulatory framework that hasn’t passed Congress.

The Program for Public Consultation poll also asked 8th District voters about the dystopian potential of machine-controlled weapons being deployed one day. That question prompted 80% of voters on the Democratic side and 84% on the Republican side to agree the United States should work with other

A majority of district voters — 81% from each party's leaners — also favored the U.S. signing an international treaty “to regulate large-scale AI programs.”

While the poll did not ask specifically about the recent explosion in data center development, Kull said the cloud computing facilities that have rattled communities with concerns about their environmental impacts — [particularly water and electricity consumption](#) — “have become somewhat of a symbol” of the larger AI issue.

Both Rutinel and Evans have weighed in on artificial intelligence and related issues.

Rutinel has sponsored bills in the state Capitol that would place guardrails around the technology, including [the 2024 measure](#) that required a developer of a “high-risk artificial intelligence system” to use reasonable care to protect consumers from “algorithmic discrimination.” He also was among the sponsors of [this year's law](#) that rewrote those regulations.

Last month, Evans helped introduce a bill in Congress called the [Ratepayer Protection Act](#), which would ensure Americans “are not left footing the bill for the grid upgrades and increased energy generation required to develop new data centers.”

“I don’t see significant numbers of voters saying they don’t want anything to do with AI,” Kull said, “but they are looking for candidates who are responsive to public concerns about the downsides of AI.”

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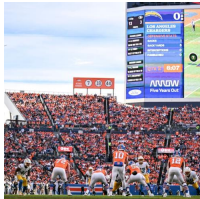
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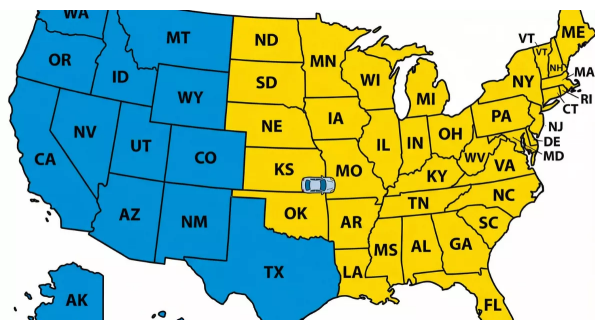
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