

# The Cost of Electoral Confidence

Joseph Loffredo, Alejandro Flores, and Charles Stewart III

MIT Election Data + Science Lab

June 2023

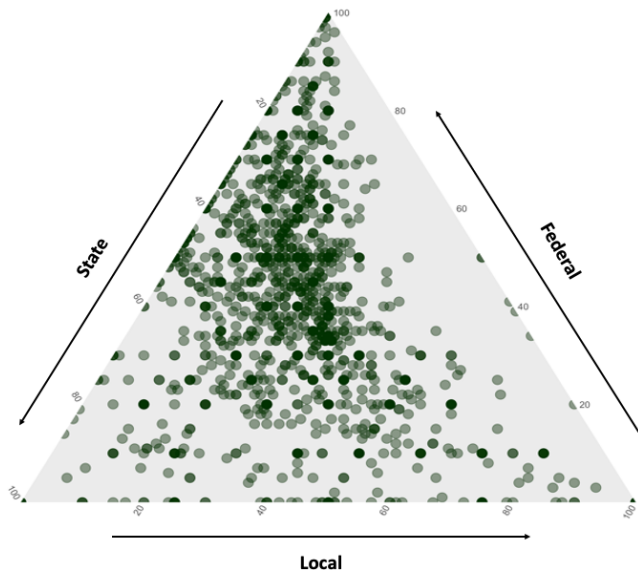
Election administrators must make budgetary tradeoffs (Mohr et al. 2018, Stewart 2022):

- administrative costs of maintaining infrastructure, planning for the future
- costs of conducting each election

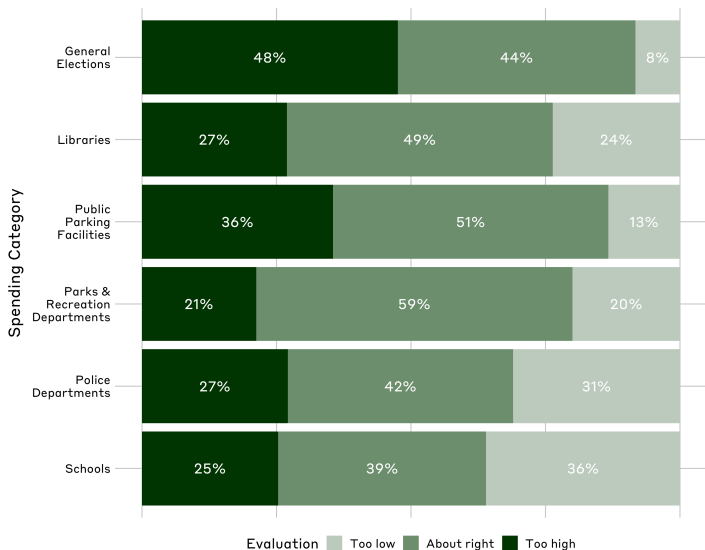
Can the "price-quality" heuristic apply to the conducting of elections?

- Consumers perceive higher priced products as higher in quality, even after direct experiences with products
  - ▶ Rao and Monroe 1989; Hsee 1996; Compeau and Grewal 1998; Shiv et al. 2005; Plassmann et al. 2008; Gneezy et al. 2014; Cheslock and Riggs 2021

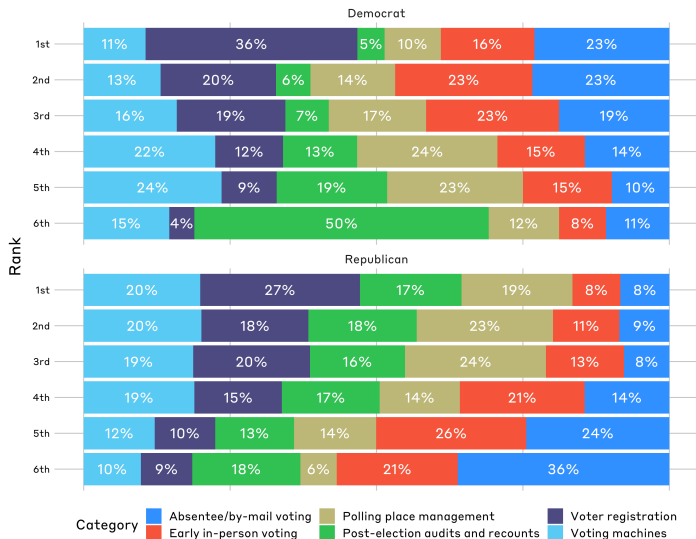
# Voter are misinformed about how we fund elections



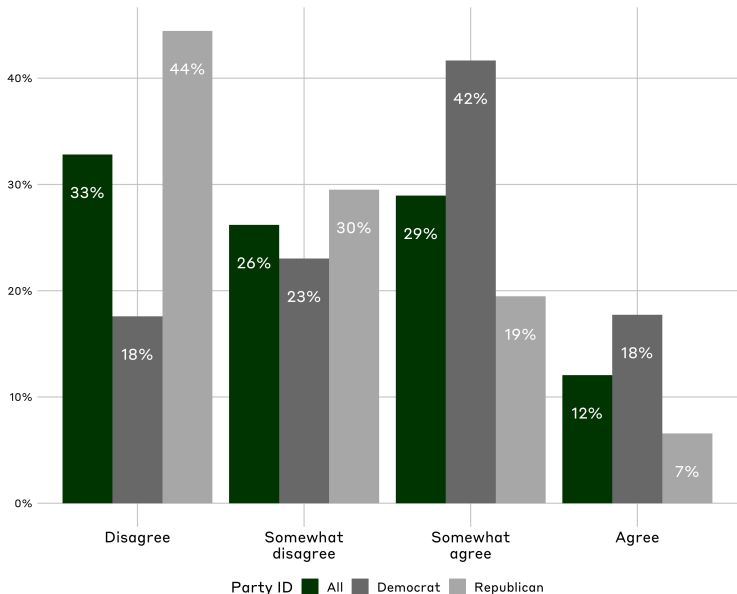
# Evaluating Local Government Spending



# Prioritizing LEO Time and Money (by Party)



# Does ↑ funding → ↑ confidence?



## (1) Changing the framing of current spending levels have no effects on voter confidence

A recent report issued by researchers at MIT indicated that the cost of administering a presidential election nationwide is about [**\$5 billion / \$30 per voter**]

Please indicate how confident you are that this level of spending makes elections [**more accurate / more convenient / more secure**].

## (2) Changing the framing and magnitude of proposed funding increases does not increase public support

Suppose lawmakers were considering a proposal to increase election spending by [**5% / 40%**], going from the present [**raw \$ amount change (ex. \$5 billion to \$5.25 billion)**].

If this proposal is approved, how elections are run in this country will...**Worsen a lot** → **Improve a lot** (scaled 0-1).

## Main conclusions:

- 1 Voters believe we spend too much to conduct elections
- 2 There is a partisan divide in relative priorities of how election administrators can improve elections
- 3 Mixed evidence for the relevance of the "price-quality" heuristic in global evaluations of election administration
  - ▶ Evidence of partisan variation
  - ▶ Translates into voter evaluations of the accuracy, security, and convenience of state elections



Please reach out with any questions/comments.

Joe Loffredo ([loffredo@mit.edu](mailto:loffredo@mit.edu))

Alex Flores ([aflores410@mit.edu](mailto:aflores410@mit.edu))

Charles Stewart III ([cstewart@mit.edu](mailto:cstewart@mit.edu))

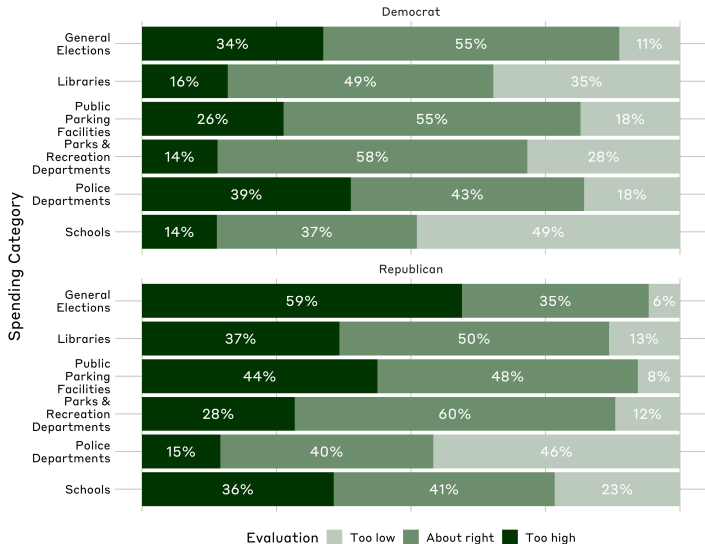
## Sample:

- Survey fielded by YouGov (February 27 - March 3, 2023)
- $n = 2,000$

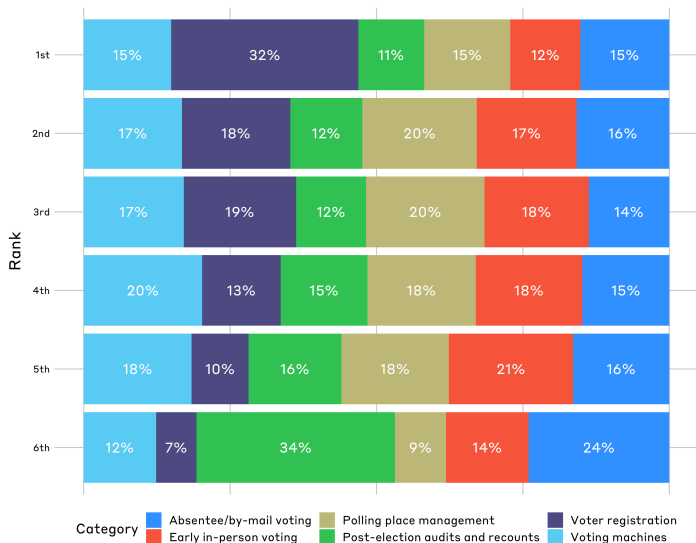
## Survey design:

- Descriptive questions:
  - ▶ Evaluating, comparing spending levels; ranking election administration priorities
- Experimental treatments:
  - ▶  $1 \times 2$  design: framing current spending levels
  - ▶  $2 \times 2$  design: support for spending proposals by framing and size of proposed increase

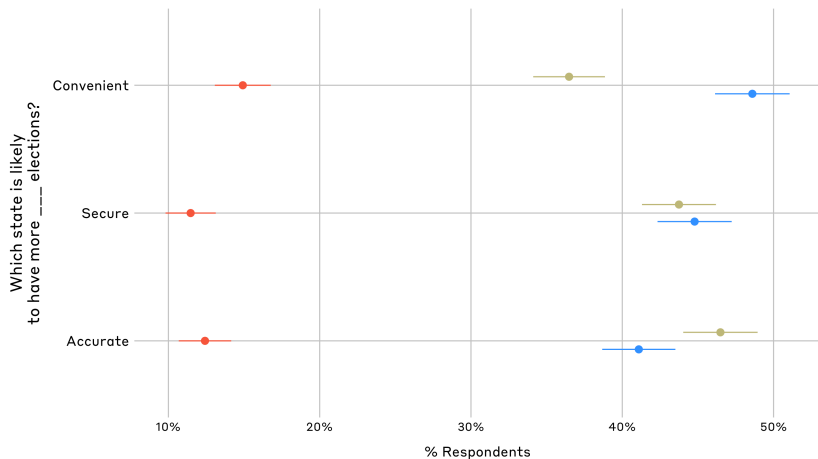
# Evaluating Local Government Spending (by Party)



# Prioritizing LEO Time and Money



# Comparing States



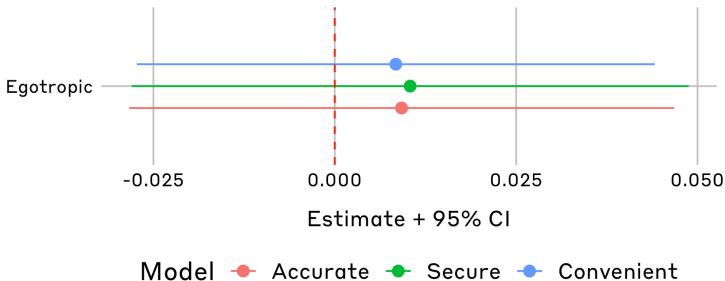
- State A (\$10 per voter)
- State B (\$2 per voter)
- Both states about even

# Experiment 1

## Framing Current Costs

A recent report issued by researchers at MIT indicated that the cost of administering a presidential election nationwide is about **[\$5 billion / \$30 per voter]**

Please indicate how confident you are that this level of spending makes elections...

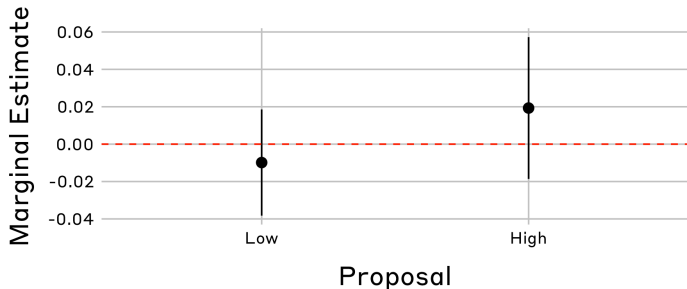


# Experiment 2

## Supporting New Spending Proposals

Suppose lawmakers were considering a proposal to increase election spending by [5% / 40%], going from the present [Egotropic / Sociotropic  $\Delta$ ]

If this proposal is approved, how elections are run in this country will... **Worsen a lot**  $\rightarrow$  **Improve a lot** (scaled 0-1).



## Experiment 2

Would you support this proposal to increase the amount of money spent on running elections by [5% / 40%]?

