

# Trust In Elections: Assessing the Public's Reaction to Messaging by Election Officials

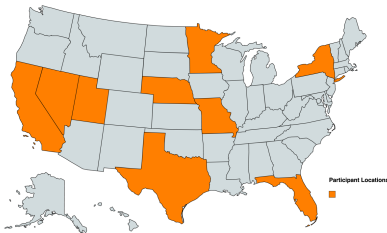
Mitchell Brown, Soren Jordan, Kathleen Hale, Bridgett King, Ryan Williamson  
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## PROJECT PURPOSE & OVERVIEW

Between 2020 and 2021 we collected election officials' messages to the public. We then engaged in a two-part study to examine public reaction to those messages. In the first part, we convened national focus groups to discuss trust in elections and elicit responses and conversations about a variety of these messages. In the second part, we selected four of those messages that garnered the most positive reaction and engaged in a national survey experiment to determine whether there was an impact on trust in government by message and messenger.

## SUMMARY OF FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

Focus groups were held in May 2022, and participants were recruited through election office social media site requests. Focus groups took a survey on trust in government and completed a 90-minute Zoom focus group and were compensated \$75. A total of 5 focus groups were held and the size of the groups ranged from 4-13. Participants were primarily White, female, and the average age was likely over 50.



General findings suggest that:

- Neutral messages produced neutral responses
  - An exception to this was the "neutral message + election officials are your neighbors"- response was universally positive
- Shaming messages were unpopular
- Responses to clever/humorous messages varied and whether respondent "got it" depended on culture and age
  - Responses were universally negative when the respondent didn't "get it"
- Messenger matters
  - Well-known election officials within election "circles" are not well known outside of those circles and bring no value to messaging to the general public
  - Positive responses when the election official is relatable and/or from their local area
  - Politicians are only believed by partisan-affiliated respondents
  - Older, White respondents reacted negatively to seemingly neutral messages when the messenger was an African American male
- I Voted stickers need equal Red/Blue or are seen as partisan
- "#TrustedInfo" produced less trust except when messenger was known to participant AND with the same political affiliation

## NATIONAL SURVEY MESSAGES

Based off of the results of the national focus groups, we

- Tested 4 messages: election officials as neighbors, election officials as rule followers, voting as civic duty, and professional experience
- Standardized the message platform to Twitter
- Used typical naming for messengers and related county
- Used two types of messengers: middle-aged White woman and middle-aged African American man
- Included a control message about French fries



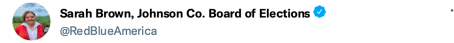
Just tried the "improved" fries at Wendy's. Can't say I'm that impressed.

2:57 PM · Sep 13, 2022



Election workers are your neighbors, teachers, aunts, grandparents, students--they come from all walks of life and participate in our democracy. If you haven't cast your ballot, and plan to vote in person on Tuesday, thank the election workers when you cast your ballot.

2:57 PM · Sep 13, 2022



Elections are guided by a system of rules issued by your legislature: rules about what ballots can be used, when they can be cast, how they are counted, and who is eligible to receive them. Even if you don't like the rules, trust the election worker. Their job is to follow the rules.

2:57 PM · Sep 13, 2022



Voting is the foundation of democracy, and the cornerstone of this foundation is the election worker who spends their life working as hard as possible to ensure your right to vote in a free and fair election. The next time you vote, trust and thank the worker who keeps your rights safe and protects democracy.

2:57 PM · Sep 13, 2022



Did you know: the average election worker has over 15 years of experience processing registrations, administering polling places, and counting ballots? They are experts: so when you're wondering who to trust for election information, trust the people who do it all day, every day.

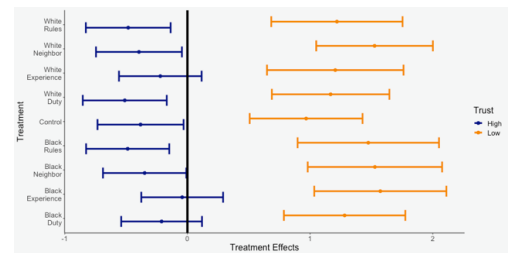
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## SURVEY RESULTS

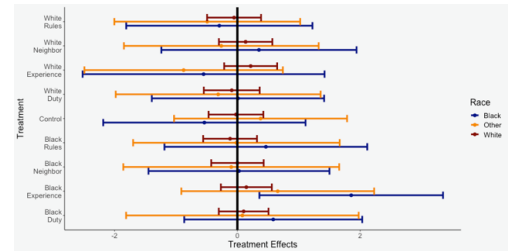
Our national survey sample was collected using the Qualtrics platform during the two-week period prior to Election Day 2023 and closed the day of the election. Total sample size is ~5,500.

Respondents were assigned to 1 of 9 conditions and administered with a brief intervention or control. Three pre-post trust measures were included, along with a battery of trust in government and elections, correlates, and demographic questions.

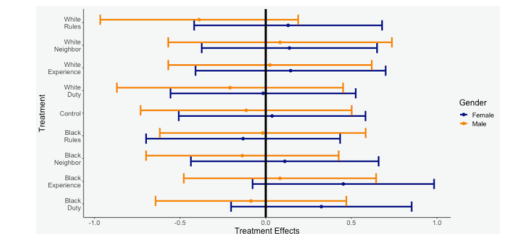
HIGH v LOW TRUSTERS  
 (within condition diff of means)



RESPONDANT RACE  
 (within condition diff of means)



RESPONDANT GENDER  
 (within condition diff of means)



LIKELY v UNLIKELY VOTERS  
 (within condition diff of means)

