



# CENTER FOR DEMOCRACY AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

## **Recruiting Veterans and Military Family Members Improves Confidence in Elections**

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**Gregory Isaiah Espinoza**

Research Fellow, Center for Democracy and Civic Engagement  
Ph.D. Student, Government and Politics  
University of Maryland

**Michael J. Hanmer\***

Professor and Michael Miller Endowed Faculty Fellow in Government and Politics  
Director, Center for Democracy and Civic Engagement  
Co-PI Maryland Democracy Initiative  
University of Maryland

\*For questions or more information please contact Mike Hanmer at [mhanmer@umd.edu](mailto:mhanmer@umd.edu).

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## Introduction

This report presents results from a survey experiment designed to examine how information that election officials are hiring veterans and military family members for the elections workforce influences the public's attitudes about elections. The survey was developed by the Center for Democracy and Civic Engagement ([CDCE](#)) at the University of Maryland (UMD) with consultation from [We the Veterans and Military Families](#). The survey was fielded from August 29 through September 9, 2024 on a sample of 1,263 US citizens of voting age purchased from Lucid and drawn to be representative of the US adult citizen population.<sup>1</sup>

After answering several background questions, participants were randomly assigned to read one of two vignettes we described as short excerpts from news stories. These vignettes were not from actual news stories, but they were modeled after relevant published news articles. Both vignettes were set in Maricopa County, AZ and explained that local election officials were seeking to expand the elections workforce in advance of the upcoming presidential elections. We chose Maricopa County, AZ because it was a place where election administration was under close scrutiny in 2020 and could be again in 2024. The vignette of primary interest focused on the recruitment of veterans and military family members from the local community to serve in elections jobs (VMF recruitment), while the comparison condition focused on a standard recruitment of people from the local community without reference to any populations to which they might belong (standard recruitment). Due to the randomization into one of these two groups, any differences in responses can be attributed to the inclusion of information about veterans and military family members. The text of the VMF recruitment and standard recruitment conditions appears in the Appendix. We examined the potential effect of the VMF recruitment vignette on a variety of attitudes about elections in Maricopa County, AZ such as confidence, concern about the potential for violence, and expectations of fraud. **Across all of the questions we asked, information about the recruitment of veterans and military family members to elections jobs led to improved outcomes (such as improved confidence, and less concern about the potential for violence). The implications are clear—elections officials who are recruiting veterans and military family members should publicize this fact and those who are not doing this recruitment should do so.**

The results also lead to the recommendation that election officials seek information about the status of their current workforce, full-time and temporary alike, as members of the VMF community. Given the usual composition of individuals who sign up to be poll workers, it is highly likely that many served in the military themselves or members of their immediate family did so. That is, it is likely that our elections workforce is already populated with significant numbers of veterans and military family members. Where this is the case, our results suggest that publicizing this information can help increase confidence in elections.

## Results

One of the most widely used questions in the study of attitudes about election administration asks respondents how confident they are that votes will be counted as intended. This question gets to the fundamental issue of how the process translates the voter's behavior into the outcome.

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that because the sample is a non-probability sample we focus on the differences across the conditions into which respondents were randomly assigned rather than the overall estimates for either group or the combined groups.

Figure 1 shows that **information that election officials are recruiting veterans and military family members (VMF recruitment) boosts the rate at which respondents indicate they are very confident that votes in Maricopa County, AZ will be counted as intended (by 7 percentage points, from 30% to 37%,  $p < 0.025$ , 1 tailed<sup>2</sup>).**

Figure 1. Confidence Votes Will Be Counted As Intended by Recruitment Condition (VMF Recruitment vs. Standard Recruitment)

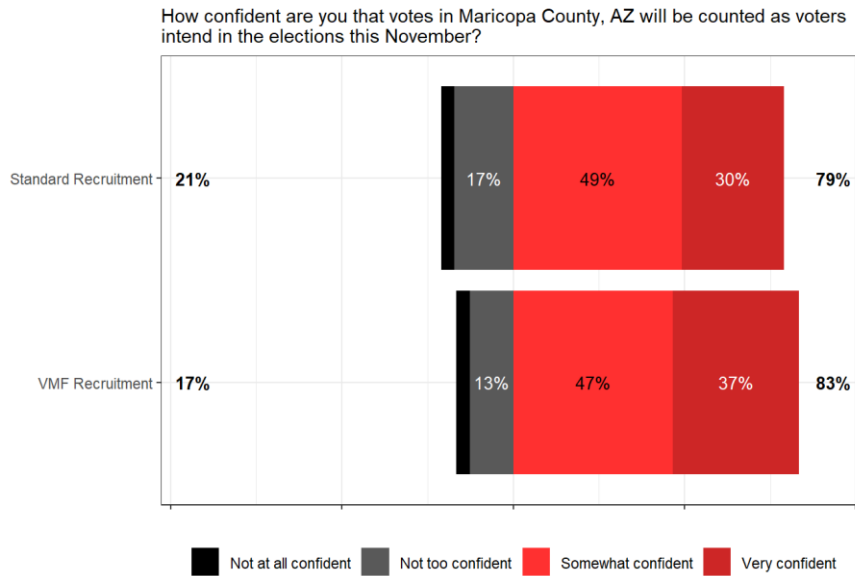
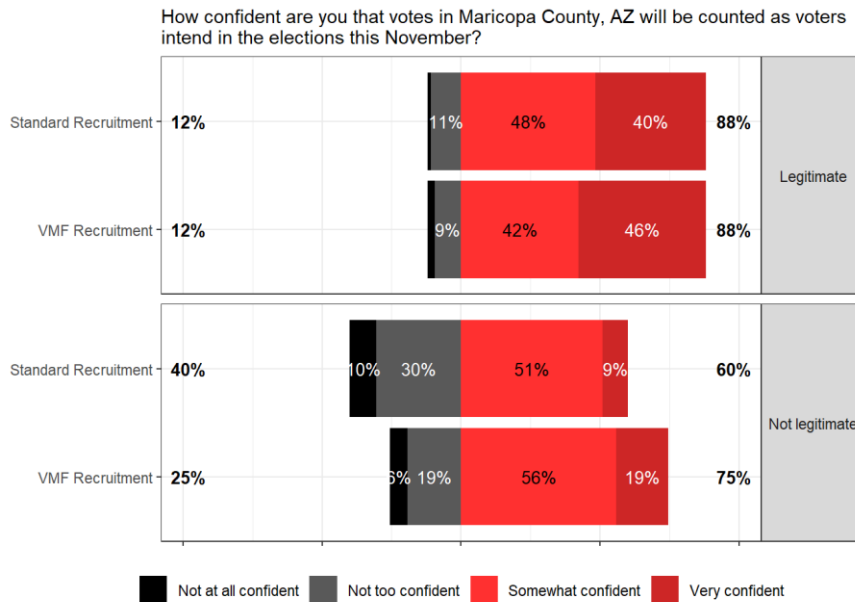


Figure 2. Confidence Votes Will Be Counted As Intended by Recruitment Condition (VMF Recruitment vs. Standard Recruitment) and Biden Election Legitimacy



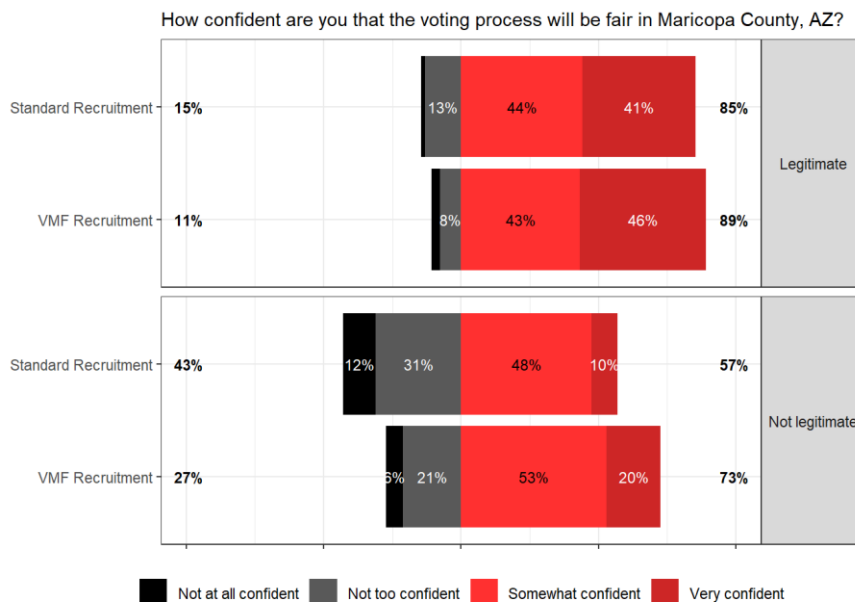
<sup>2</sup> All p values are 1 tailed as we have clear hypotheses that outcomes will be improved when respondents are exposed to information about the recruitment of veterans and military family members. Note also that due to rounding, not all values shown for the totals equal those shown in the shaded areas.

Importantly, the effects are generally even larger among those expected to be the most skeptical. For example, Figure 2 shows that **among those who said that they thought Joe Biden’s election to president was not legitimate, exposure to information about the recruitment of veterans and military family members to elections jobs increases confidence overall by 15 percentage points (from 60% to 75%,  $p<0.025$ )**. The bulk of this increase is driven by a shift in the rate at which respondents feel very confident, going from 9% in the standard recruitment condition to 19% in the VMF recruitment condition.

Veterans and military family members are also regarded highly by the public for their commitment. **Respondents were more likely to say the elections workforce would be very committed to making sure the elections held this November are fair and accurate when they heard that veterans and military family members were being recruited to elections jobs (by 9 percentage points,  $p<0.01$ )**. This increase is especially noteworthy as it brings the percentage of those saying very committed to nearly 50% (from just under 38.5% % to 48%).

**Information that election officials were recruiting veterans and military family members also increased confidence that the voting process in Maricopa County, AZ would be fair (by 7 percentage points,  $p<0.01$ )**. The bulk of this shift comes from an increase in the percentage of people saying they were very confident (6 points,  $p<0.025$ ). **Again, the effect was even larger for those who said that Joe Biden was not elected legitimately (see Figure 3)**. Whereas 57% of those saying Biden’s victory was not legitimate were confident in the standard recruitment condition, this rose 16 percentage points, to 73% in the VMF recruitment condition.

Figure 3. Confidence The Voting Process Will Be Fair By Recruitment Condition (VMF Recruitment vs. Standard Recruitment) and Biden Election Legitimacy



Although outcomes are subject to a wider variety of factors, information about VMF recruitment also increased confidence that the outcomes would be fair (by 4 percentage points,  $p<0.05$ ), with a shift of 7 percentage points in the percentage saying they were very confident ( $p<0.025$ ).

Attitudes relating to election security and safety were also improved as a result of exposure to information that veterans and military family members were being recruited to elections jobs. **The percentage saying they were confident the election would be secure from hacking and other technological threats was 7 points higher ( $p < 0.01$ ) in the VMF recruitment condition.** We assessed perceptions of violence by asking how concerned voters in Maricopa County, AZ should feel about potential violence, threats of violence, or intimidation while voting in person at their local polling place. Figure 4 shows that **the level of concern with potential violence, threats, and intimidation was considerably lower (by 8 percentage points,  $p < 0.01$ ) among those who read that veterans and military family members were being recruited to the elections workforce.** The size of this effect is especially significant because it brings the level of concern (somewhat concerned and very concerned) below the 50% mark. That is, while a majority, 53%, of those in the standard recruitment condition (control) were at least somewhat concerned, this drops to 45% among those who learned that Maricopa County, AZ was recruiting veterans and military family members. **Additionally, those in the VMF recruitment condition were more likely to say they were confident (by 7 points,  $p < 0.01$ ) that polling places would be safe places for voting (see Figure 5).** The latter two survey items use slightly different questions to inquire about the same essential issue—i.e., perceptions of physical safety at the polls. While there was still a hefty proportion of concern over the prospect of violence and general safety at the polls across the board, these results suggest that special efforts to recruit veterans and military family members to work as election staff and volunteers significantly eases such concerns.

Figure 4. Concern About Potential Violence By Recruitment Condition (VMF Recruitment vs. Standard Recruitment)

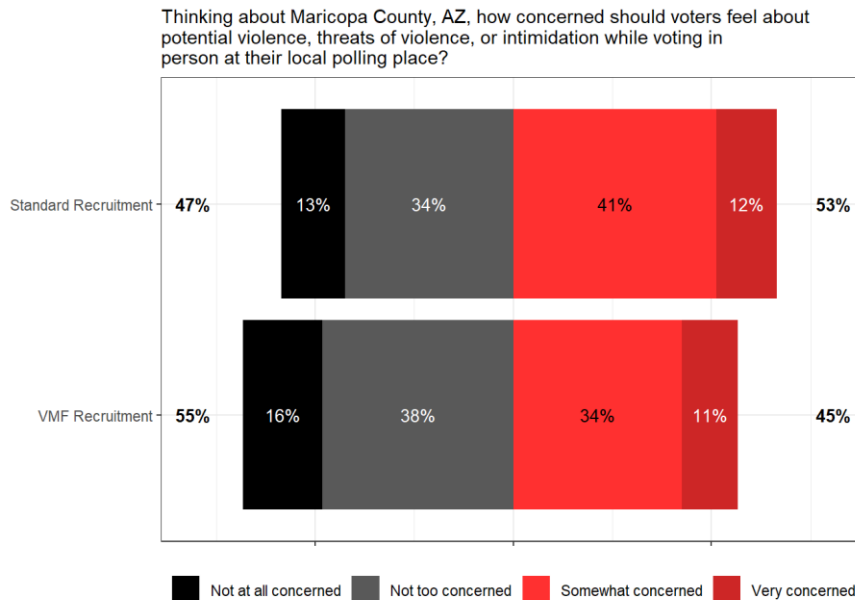
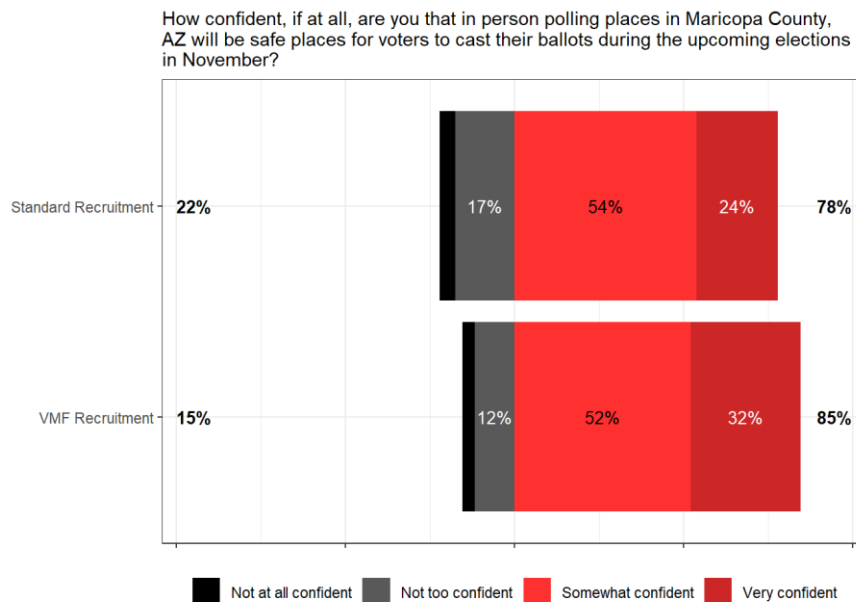


Figure 5. Confidence About Polling Place Safety By Recruitment Condition (VMF Recruitment vs. Standard Recruitment)



Learning that Maricopa County, AZ was recruiting veterans and military family members for elections jobs also led to improved performance ratings for election officials there. In the VMF recruitment condition, those saying they somewhat or strongly approve of the way election officials are handling their jobs was 5 percentage points higher ( $p < 0.05$ ), driven by a nearly 8 point increase in the percentage saying they strongly approve of election officials ( $p < 0.01$ ).

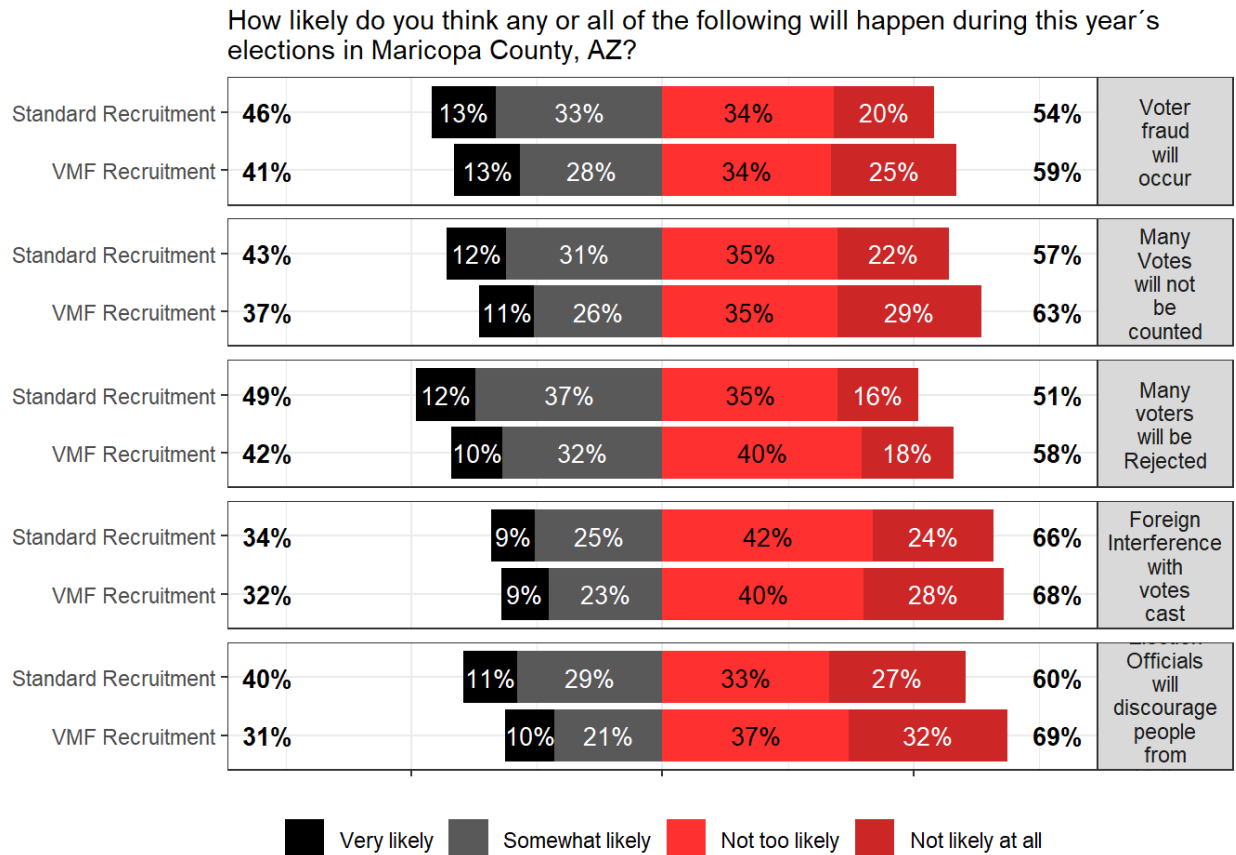
Our survey also asked respondents a series of questions designed to assess individuals' expectations of electoral fraud and voter suppression in Maricopa County, AZ. Five statements, listed below, were prefaced with the question, "How likely do you think any or all of the following will happen during this year's elections in Maricopa County, AZ?". Survey participants gave their expectations of the likelihood that each of the following would occur in Maricopa County, Arizona this election cycle on a scale of "Not likely at all", "Not too likely", "Somewhat likely", and "Very likely." The 5 statements we asked respondents to consider follow.

1. There will be voter fraud, that is, people who are not eligible to vote will vote, or vote more than once
2. Many votes will not actually be counted
3. Many people will show up to vote and be told they are not eligible
4. A foreign country will tamper with the votes cast in this area to change the results
5. Election officials in Maricopa County, Arizona will try to discourage some people from voting

**Those in the VMF recruitment condition were more likely to say that voter fraud was "not likely at all" (by 5 percentage points,  $p < 0.025$ ). The percentage saying that election officials will try to discourage people from voting was not likely to occur in Maricopa County was 8 percentage points higher among those who read that veterans and military family members would be part of the elections workforce ( $p < 0.01$ , with a shift of about 4 points among both**

those saying not too likely and not likely at all). Additionally, in the VMF recruitment condition the percentage saying that it was “not likely at all” that many votes will not actually be counted was nearly 7 percentage points higher ( $p < 0.01$ ), with a similar increase in the percentage saying it was not likely (not too likely and not likely at all) that many people will show up and be told they are not eligible ( $p < 0.01$ ). When we asked about the likelihood that a foreign country would tamper with votes in Maricopa County, AZ a larger percentage of those in the VMF recruitment condition said this was “not likely at all” (by 4 percentage points,  $p < 0.07$ ).

Figure 6. Expectations Of Electoral Fraud And Voter Suppression in Maricopa County, AZ By Recruitment Condition (VMF Recruitment vs. Standard Recruitment)



We also asked a general question about confidence that Maricopa County, AZ elections officials would do a good job conducting elections this November. Those who read about veterans and military family members were more confident that election officials would do a good job conducting the election than those who read about standard recruitment efforts (by 4.5 percentage points,  $p < 0.025$ ).

Before asking a series of questions about election administration in their own community, we asked how much respondents would like to see their local community adopt a program for recruiting elections staff similar to the one they read about in Maricopa County, AZ. Among those in the standard recruitment condition just under 73% said their local area should probably or definitely adopt the policy compared to over 77% in the VMF recruitment condition (difference of 5 percentage points,  $p < 0.03$ ). The difference is driven entirely by an increase in

enthusiasm, that is, the likelihood of saying definitely should adopt is 5 points higher among those who read about VMF recruitment ( $p < 0.025$ ).

After asking about one's local community we asked respondents to report how various features of election administration would: 1) influence their confidence in the fairness and accuracy of elections this November; and 2) influence their confidence that voters would be safe from violence, threats of violence, or intimidation while voting in-person this election. These questions were more general as they did not reference any particular place. One of our primary objectives was to determine whether recruiting veterans was preferable to recruiting lawyers and college students, two other groups that are commonly discussed as potential additions to the elections workforce. Our evidence is clear, **public confidence would increase more when veterans are part of the elections staff and volunteers than when lawyers or college students are.**

Looking first just at those who did not previously read about the recruitment of veterans and military family members in Maricopa County, AZ the results strongly suggest that when it comes to confidence in the fairness and accuracy of elections, veterans are preferred to lawyers and college students. Over 46% said the inclusion of military veterans and their family members would increase their confidence at least somewhat (28% somewhat, 18% a lot), slightly ahead of those saying it would have no impact (44%), and more than 4 times larger than those saying it would decrease confidence (10% overall, 6% somewhat, 4% a lot). By comparison, 38% said including lawyers would increase confidence at least somewhat (25% somewhat, 14% a lot), with 47% saying that including lawyers would have no impact, and 15% saying that including lawyers would decrease their confidence (just 9% somewhat, and over 5% a lot). The results for college students were most similar to the results for lawyers, with 35% saying the inclusion of college students would boost their confidence (19% somewhat, 16% a lot), 48% saying there would be no impact, and 17% saying their confidence would decrease (11% somewhat, 6% a lot).

The results are similar when examining confidence that voters will be safe from violence, threats, and intimidation. When respondents were asked to consider how their views might change if veterans and military family members were part of the elections staff and volunteers, just over 50% said their confidence would increase (30% somewhat, 20% a lot), 37% said there would be no impact, and 13% said their confidence would decrease (9% somewhat, 4% a lot). Significantly fewer (33%) respondents indicated that lawyers in these positions would increase their confidence (20% somewhat, 13% a lot), with 49% saying lawyers would have no impact and 18% saying lawyers would decrease their confidence (over 11% somewhat, over 6% a lot). College students did less to boost confidence about safety with 31% (19% somewhat, 12% a lot) saying their confidence would increase, 48% reporting there would be no impact, and 21% saying their confidence would decrease (14% somewhat, 7% a lot).

The gaps between veterans and lawyers and college students, respectively, were larger for those who read the vignette about recruiting veterans and military family members to elections jobs. Among those in the VMF recruitment condition, nearly 60% said recruiting veterans would boost their confidence in the fairness and accuracy of elections this November, compared to 44% saying this for lawyers, and 36% for college students. Reading the VMF recruitment vignette also increased confidence levels regarding safety, with 58% of respondents in the VMF recruitment condition indicating that veterans would increase their confidence compared to 37% for lawyers, and 33% for college students.



## Appendix

Appendix Figure 1a. Text of the Recruitment of Veterans and Military Family Members Condition (treatment)

### **Local Military Veterans Recruited for Election Jobs in Maricopa County**

PHOENIX (AP) — Election officials in Maricopa County, Arizona, announced a program designed to recruit military veterans and their family members from the community to serve as election administrators, including election polling place workers, temporary workers, and full-time staff. As the U.S. general elections in November near, election officials must fill several thousand temporary positions and hundreds of other open positions to ensure sufficient staffing for the 2024 elections and beyond.

Army veteran Jordan Braxton just joined the elections workforce. Jordan believes their role is important to ensuring a secure, accurate, and transparent election, “Many places are short on staff this election cycle. I served my country in the Army, and I want to do my part as a veteran and a citizen to ensure that everyone trusts the process and the outcome of the election.”

Appendix Figure 1b. Text of the Standard Recruitment Condition (control)

### **Local Residents Recruited for Election Jobs in Maricopa County**

PHOENIX (AP) — Election officials in Maricopa County, Arizona, announced a program to recruit members of the community to serve as election administrators, including election polling place workers, temporary workers, and full-time staff. As the U.S. general elections in November near, election officials must fill several thousand temporary positions and hundreds of other open positions to ensure sufficient staffing for the 2024 elections and beyond.

Jordan Braxton just joined the elections workforce. Jordan believes their role is important to ensuring a secure, accurate, and transparent election, “Many places are short on staff this election cycle. I want to do my part as a citizen to ensure that everyone trusts the process and the outcome of the election.”