Introduction
Governments across the globe have piloted i-voting

The utility of i-voting has been demonstrated during the Covid-19 pandemic when electoral authorities across the world postponed elections because of fears of transmission.

What features of digital voting methods attract public support and inspire trustworthiness in the electoral process?

Research Design
Attitudes towards digitising the electoral process are multidimensional and, as we identify via a systematic review of i-voting trials, include concerns related to: method, cost, security, integrity, expected benefits, accessibility, administrative oversight, and private IT sector involvement.

To understand these multidimensional components, we fielded a pre-registered conjoint experiment in the UK that isolates the multidimensional attributes that determine:

- support for i-voting reforms
- the perceived trustworthiness of these reforms

Sample:
A total of 1200 respondents were recruited via a representative sample of online panel respondents on Prolific. The sample was recruited on quota-based sampling based on the gender, age, education and racial makeup of the UK population.

Individuals chose between two policies five times, meaning we have 12,000 observations

Pre-registered hypotheses and pre-analysis plan available here

What do people want?
- In order of importance -

Benefits of implementation:
Pilots that increase participation in socially deprived areas enjoy the highest level of public support

Risk of fraud:
Pilots that show reduced (increased) risk of fraud substantively increase (reduce) support for i-voting

Cost:
Citizens significantly penalise i-voting reforms that increase cost of elections yet don’t significantly reward reforms that reduce costs

Voting method:
Reforms that allow voting online are desired the most, plans for voting via a smartphone or SMS are supported, but voting on the phone is opposed

Where successful trials have happened:
Support is highest when i-voting trials have taken place in wealthy western nations (Switzerland and Germany)

Voter registration:
Automatic pre-registration preferred over all required opt-in options

Does digital inequality matter?

Does partisanship matter?

Conclusions
- Results show that one of the strongest determinants of support is that i-voting increases participation in socially deprived areas.

- Respondents also prefer implementation which has automatic registration, have been piloted in wealthy European countries, and allow voting online (rather than via SMS or phone).

- Whilst respondents penalise reforms that cost more, they don’t reward policies that reduce the costs of elections.

- Against pre-registered hypotheses, we do not find significant subgroup heterogeneity, for instance regarding partisanship, trust or (perceived) access to internet.

- Results do show, however, that those who are dissatisfied with how elections are currently run view i-voting reforms, on average, as more trustworthy.

- Altogether, our results highlight features of i-voting that will be supported or opposed by the public, and that these beliefs are quite widespread.