

Rethinking Election Funding

Ryan D. Williamson, PhD
rwilliamson@rstreet.org

America's Elections Are Underfunded, Placing Election Security at Risk

- Elections cost taxpayers **\$2 billion per year and may hit \$5 billion** in the near future
- And yet, elections are insufficiently funded
- The federal government has spent just \$880 million since 2018—**less than 9% of the estimated cost of elections** during this time
- Hackers from Russia, China, Iran and other foreign adversaries are targeting our elections and **putting our election security at risk**
- Unfortunately, **many states and counties struggle to fund elections**, and do not have access to best practices or other resources to address these threats
- Election workers see the need—**more than 75%** would like the federal government to increase its support for elections

The Federal Government and States **Must Work Together**

- Elections are a state-based, but **the federal government has a role to play**—after all, federal offices are on the ballot too
- The federal government is also responsible for foreign threats, including **cybersecurity**
- Federal funding should be broad, with the **fewest strings attached and clear oversight**
- At the same time, **states must prioritize election funding** and provide vital resources to their counties

Case Study: **New York**

- Election administration in New York notoriously **leaves much to be desired**
- Under a \$500 million annual plan, **New York would receive \$25 million per year**
- This money could be used to **enhance security**, establish a **truly independent redistricting commission**, properly implement **RCV**, and **provide better training and resources** for election workers

Recommendations: **So What Can Be Done?**

- State and federal governments should **prioritize election funding** to increase security and integrity
- States reforms should implement reforms like **independent redistricting commissions** and **ranked choice voting** to make spending **more efficient and effective**
- Funds should be appropriated in **set amounts** and at **regular intervals** to ensure that localities can maximize fund efficacy

Case Study: **Alabama**

- Under a \$500 million annual plan, **Alabama would receive \$8 million per year**
- Instant runoff would **save the state at least \$5.5 million** per statewide runoff, of which there were five in the last decade
- Better, fairer map drawing could **save the state \$1 million in litigation costs**
- These reforms would allow Alabama to spend an **additional \$108.5 million on elections**

