# The Importance of Food Prices in 2024 Election: Results from the Gardner Food & Agricultural Policy Survey

**Maria Kalaitzandonakes** and **Jonathan Coppess**

**Department of Agricultural and Consumer Economics**
**University of Illinois**

**Brenna Ellison**

**Department of Agricultural Economics**
**Purdue University**

## Introduction

The election in November returned former President Donald Trump to office. Much of the post-election discussion centered on the impact of inflation, including some mentions on the importance of high food prices (e.g., Horsley, 2024; Lowrey, 2024; Sheffey and Hoff, 2024).

Over the past two years, the Gardner Food and Agricultural Policy Survey (GFAPS) has tracked issues relating to perceptions of food prices, often connecting the results to political preferences. For example, we have previously shown perceptions of affordability continued to drop (*farmdoc daily*, June 10, 2024; September 10, 2023) and concerns about inflation have remained persistently high, especially for Republican respondents (*farmdoc daily*, September 16, 2024). As candidates on the presidential campaign trail made promises to lower food prices, our results showed that the promises were landing with the public and that there was stronger belief that Republicans would be best suited for the job (*farmdoc daily*, August 26, 2024).

In this post, we review results from the eleventh wave of the GFAPS, conducted in November in the days following the presidential election. We specifically asked about what issues – including the economy and cost of living/inflation – impacted individuals' voting decisions.

## Data & Methods

In this post we review the results from the eleventh wave of GFAPS, conducted online in November 2024, following the election. GFAPS is conducted quarterly, and each wave recruits approximately 1,000 U.S. consumers to match the U.S. population in terms of gender, age, household income, and geographic region. Participants are asked questions about their experiences with, and perceptions of, food and agricultural issues.

In this wave, we asked participants a series of questions about the 2024 presidential election. Participants were first asked whether they voted, and 83.5% of participants in our survey indicated they voted. This is higher than the proportion of the general population, which is often estimated to be around 65% of the eligible voting population in recent elections (e.g., Election Lab, 2024). This difference is likely to be the result of both social desirability bias (i.e., people feel that it is more socially desirable to say they voted) and sample bias (i.e., people who participate in online survey panels differ from the general population in some ways).

For those who responded that they had voted, 49.1% indicated they voted for Trump, 48.7% indicated they voted for Harris, and 2.2% indicated they voted for a third-party candidate. This is quite close to the popular vote estimates for the nation, where about 49.9% voted for Trump and 48.4% voted for Harris (AP News, 2024). For those who indicated they did not vote (about 16% of respondents in our survey), participants were asked why they abstained. The most cited reasons were either that they did not like any of the candidates (23.4% of non-voters) or that they felt their vote did not matter (21.1% of non-voters).

Next, participants were asked about the issues surrounding the presidential election. Specifically, we asked about nine common issue areas:

- The Economy

- Cost of Living/Inflation

- Immigration

- Abortion/Reproductive Issues

- Violence/Crime

- Environment

- International Relations

- Candidate's Values

- Candidate's Fitness for Office

Participants who voted were first asked to use a scale to indicate to what extent each of the nine issue areas affected their vote. Additionally, both voters and non-voters were asked what issue they thought was most important to them in the presidential election. The order of issues in both sets of questions was randomized to prevent ordering effects.
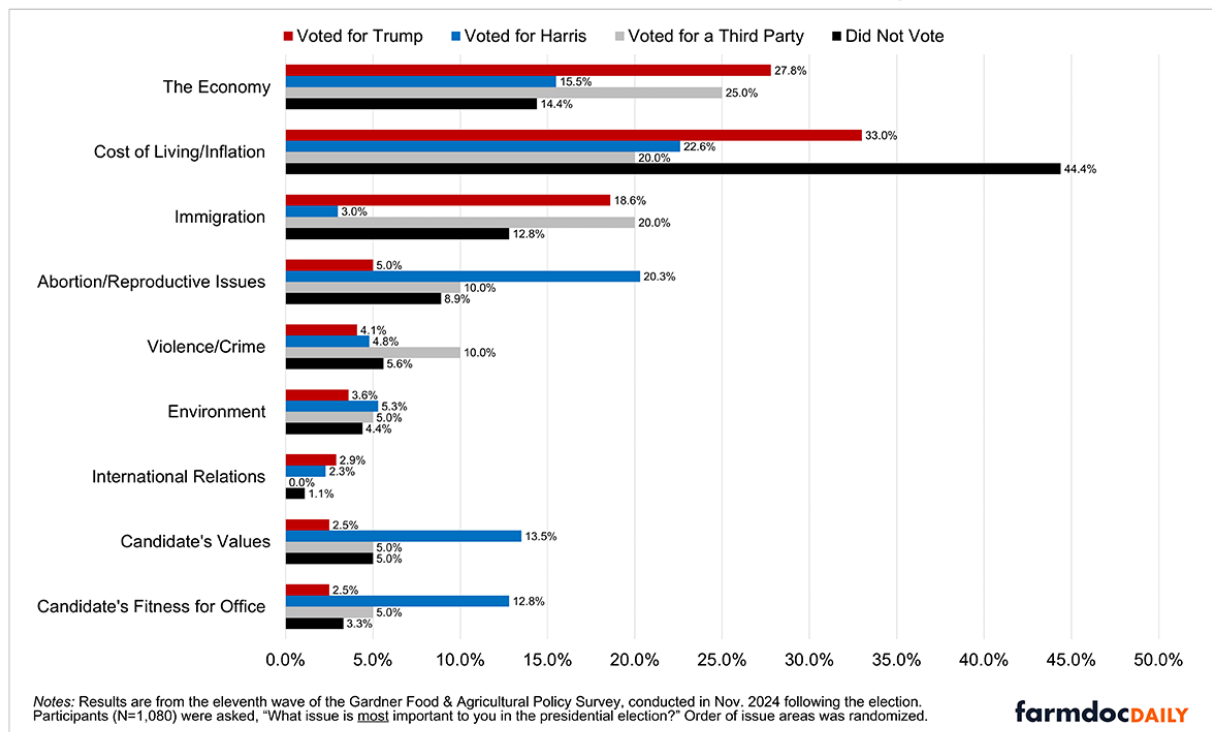
In addition to election-specific questions, participants were asked questions about the extent to which inflation affected them in the last month. This was asked both generally and about five specific expense categories (groceries, eating out, housing, childcare, and transportation). The order of expense categories was randomized to prevent ordering effects.

**Results**

We asked all participants (both voters and non-voters) about what issue area was *most* important to them in the election. Figure 1 shows these results across participants' voting behavior, where red shows the responses of participants who voted for Trump, blue shows the responses of participants who voted for Harris, gray shows the responses of participants who voted for a third party, and black shows the responses of participants who did not vote.

Our results indicate that 60.8% of participants who voted for Trump indicated that either cost of living/inflation (33.0%) or the economy (27.8%) were the most important issue for them in the election. The priorities of those who voted for either Harris or a third party were more split. However, the most common priority for participants who voted for Harris was also cost of living/inflation (22.6%) and the most common priority of participants who voted for a third party was the economy (25.0%). Perhaps most interestingly, cost of living/inflation was also the most important issue for 44.4% of participants who did not vote.

**Figure 1.** Issue participants indicated was <u>most</u> important to them in the 2024 presidential election, across participants' stated voting behavior



*Notes:* Results are from the eleventh wave of the Gardner Food & Agricultural Policy Survey, conducted in Nov. 2024 following the election. Participants (N=1,080) were asked, "What issue is <u>most</u> important to you in the presidential election?" Order of issue areas was randomized.

**farmdocDAILY**

We also asked participants that indicated they voted in the 2024 presidential election to rate the extent to which the nine major issue areas affected their vote, from 0 (did not affect my vote at all) to 10 (strongly affected my vote). Table 1 shows the average ratings for each issue area for participants who voted for Trump, Harris, and for a third party.

Across candidates, participants indicated that both the economy and cost of living/inflation highly impacted their vote. This was clearest for those who voted for Trump and those who voted for a third party. For those who voted for Trump, the issues that affected their votes most on average were the economy (8.7) and cost of living/inflation (8.7). Similarly, for those who voted for a third party, the issues that affected their votes most on average were cost of living/inflation (8.6) and the economy (8.4). Beyond the economy and cost of living, Trump voters were also affected by the issue of immigration (8.2) and third-party voters were affected by the issue of violence/crime (8.1). For those that voted for Harris, the issues that affected their votes most on average were candidate's values (8.2), candidate's fitness for office (7.9), and abortion/reproductive issues (7.7).

*farmdoc daily*

December 5, 2024

**Table 1. Average Rating of Impact of Issue on Participants' 2024 Presidential Election Vote**

| Issue Area | Voted for Trump | Voted for Harris | Voted for a Third Party |
|---|---|---|---|
| The Economy | 8.7 | 7.4 | 8.4 |
| Cost of Living/Inflation | 8.7 | 7.5 | 8.6 |
| Immigration | 8.2 | 6.2 | 7.6 |
| Abortion/Reproductive Issues | 5.2 | 7.7 | 5.7 |
| Violence/Crime | 7.8 | 6.6 | 8.1 |
| Environment | 5.8 | 7.3 | 5.2 |
| International Relations | 7.5 | 6.9 | 7.8 |
| Candidate's Values | 7.3 | 8.2 | 6.8 |
| Candidate's Fitness for Office | 6.9 | 7.9 | 7.3 |

*Notes:* Participants were asked, "For each issue area, please indicate to what extent it affected your vote, from 0 (did not affect my vote at all) to 10 (strongly affected my vote)." Order of issue areas was randomized. Question was asked only of participants who indicated they voted in the 2024 election (n=900).   **farmdocDAILY**

In addition to questions about voting behavior, participants were asked about their experiences with inflation. Participants were first asked to rate the extent to which inflation affected them this past month (from 0, not affected, to 10, highly affected), which GFAPS has been tracking for nine quarters, and then were asked to rate the extent to which inflation affected them specifically for five expense categories (groceries, eating out, housing, childcare, and transportation) in the last month using the same scale. Table 2 shows the average ratings for participants who voted for Trump, Harris, a third party, or did not vote.

We find that participants who voted for Trump reported being much more affected by inflation on average than those who voted for Harris (7.6 versus 6.1). Those who voted for either a third party or did not vote reported being affected by inflation less than those who voted for Trump but more than those who voted for Harris (6.8 and 6.9, respectively).

**Table 2. Average Rating of Effect of Inflation, across Participants' 2024 Presidential Election Vote**

| | Voted for Trump | Voted for Harris | Voted for a Third Party | Did Not Vote |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Inflation Overall** | 7.6 | 6.1 | 6.8 | 6.9 |
| **Inflation for Specific Expenses** | | | | |
| *Groceries* | 7.9 | 6.5 | 6.5 | 7.4 |
| *Eating out* | 7.0 | 5.8 | 6.5 | 6.4 |
| *Housing* | 5.9 | 5.0 | 4.7 | 6.4 |
| *Transportation* | 6.4 | 4.8 | 5.5 | 5.7 |
| *Childcare* | 3.8 | 3.0 | 1.1 | 3.6 |

*Notes*: To gauge participants experience with inflation overall, participants were first asked, "On a scale from 0 (not affected) to 10 (highly affected), to what extent has inflation affected you in the last month?". To gauge participants' experience with inflation for different expense categories, participants were asked "On a scale from 0 (not affected) to 10 (highly affected), to what extent has inflation for each of the following expenses affected you in the last month?" Expenses considered were groceries, eating out, housing, childcare, and transportation. These categories were presented in a random order to prevent ordering effects.   **farmdocDAILY**

Importantly, when we look at inflation for specific categories participants across the aisle report being *most* affected by inflation for their grocery bills. This was highest for those who voted for Trump (7.9) and those who did not vote (7.4). These results are in line with news reports and previous GFAPS results that

highlight frustration with high food prices (e.g., Horsley, 2024; Lowrey, 2024; Sheffey and Hoff, 2024). The felt experience of inflation with groceries is particularly interesting, as while groceries tend to occupy a smaller portion of consumers' total budget than other categories (e.g., housing), the increases in prices have been large over the last few years and the frequent food purchasing increases the salience of price hikes. Additionally, some categories (e.g., childcare) were relevant to only a subset of participants.

**Conclusions**

Using results from the eleventh wave of the GFAPS, conducted in November 2024 just after the election, we explore the importance of different issues for voting behavior. Our results stress the importance of inflation – especially food prices – in the 2024 election.

We find that when asked what issue area was *most* important to them during the election, about 60% of participants who voted for Trump selected either cost of living/inflation (33.0%) or the economy more generally (27.8%). These two areas were also important for participants who voted for other candidates, but at lower rates. Those who voted for Trump also reported that inflation affected them at higher rates in the month before the election than those who voted for other candidates and, in particular, indicated they felt inflation most acutely with grocery prices.

Additionally, as voter turnout has a large impact on election results, we highlight the perceptions of participants who did not vote. Cost of living/inflation was also the most important issue to 44.4% of participants who did not vote, and this group reported higher average impacts of food price inflation. Here, we find that the most common reasons participants gave for not voting in the election were either that they did not like any of the candidates or that they felt their vote did not matter.

Our results underscore the importance of high prices, especially food prices, in the 2024 presidential election. These results are in line with pre-election surveys that highlighted high prices were becoming an increasingly important issue to voters (e.g., Ipsos, 2024) and echo our previous GFAPS reports that perceptions of affordability have been dropping and campaign promises to lower food prices were landing with the public (*farmdoc daily*, August 26, 2024; June 10, 2024). These results are also in line with some post-election surveys that have found Trump was preferred by voters who were more concerned about the economy (e.g., NBC, 2024, Fox News, 2024).

**References**

AP News. (2024). "2024 Presidential Election Results." https://apnews.com/projects/election-results-2024/?office=P

Election Lab. (2024). "United States Voter Turnout." https://election.lab.ufl.edu/voter-turnout/

Ellison, B., M. Kalaitzandonakes and J. Coppess. (2024). "Consumers Continue to Struggle with Inflation and Food Affordability: Results From GFAPS." *farmdoc daily* (14):108, Department of Agricultural and Consumer Economics, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, June 10, 2024. https://farmdocdaily.illinois.edu/2024/06/consumers-continue-to-struggle-with-inflation-and-food-affordability-results-from-gfaps.html

Ellison, B., M. Kalaitzandonakes and J. Coppess. (2024). "Inflation is Cooling, but are Consumers Convinced? Results from GFAPS." *farmdoc daily* (14):167, Department of Agricultural and Consumer Economics, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, September 16, 2024. https://farmdocdaily.illinois.edu/2024/09/inflation-is-cooling-but-are-consumers-convinced-results-from-gfaps.html

Fox News. (2024). "2024 Fox News Voter Analysis." https://www.foxnews.com/elections/2024/general-results/voter-analysis

Horsley, S. (2024). "Why high prices toppled Democrats — and other governments around the world." NPR. https://www.npr.org/2024/11/12/nx-s1-5186615/high-prices-inflation-economy-election-voters

Ipsos. (2024). "What Worries the World – November 2024." https://www.ipsos.com/en/what-worries-world

Kalaitzandonakes, M., J. Coppess and B. Ellison. (2023). "GFAPS Results: Consumer Perception of Food System Affordability Drops." *farmdoc daily* (13):164, Department of Agricultural and Consumer Economics, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, September 11, 2023. https://farmdocdaily.illinois.edu/2023/09/gfaps-results-consumer-perception-of-food-system-affordability-drops.html

Kalaitzandonakes, M., J. Coppess and B. Ellison. (2024). "Lowering Food Prices: Do Consumers Think Politicians Are Able to Reduce Costs?" *farmdoc daily* (14):156, Department of Agricultural and Consumer Economics, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, August 26, 2024. https://farmdocdaily.illinois.edu/2024/08/lowering-food-prices-do-consumers-think-politicians-are-able-to-reduce-costs.html

Lowrey, A. (2024). "The Cost-of-Living Crisis Explains Everything." The Atlantic. https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2024/11/biden-harris-economy-election-loss/680592/

NBC News. (2024). "Exit Polls." https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/2024-elections/exit-polls

Sheffey, A. and Hoff, M. (2024). "Democrats wished the election was about jobs. Trump's win indicates it was about prices." Business Insider. https://www.businessinsider.com/how-trump-won-election-high-prices-cost-of-living-unemployment-2024-11