ELECTIONBENCH: EVALUATING LLM AGENTS THROUGH COMPETITIVE ELECTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Evaluating LLM agents requires analyzing their behavior in dynamic environments: how they accumulate information, take actions, and pursue objectives over long-horizon interactions. Yet existing benchmarks rely on static environments or single-answer tasks that lose discriminative power as model performance saturates. To address these limitations, we introduce ELECTIONBENCH, a novel competitive benchmark where LLMs campaign head-to-head to persuade a shared synthetic electorate in procedurally generated elections. Operating under incomplete information and costly action trade-offs, agents must infer various hidden information such as voter preferences, and publish persuasive articles. Across 11 environment profiles, we benchmark 15 LLM families using mirrored matches and Bradley-Terry scaling anchored to a scripted baseline. Experimental results indicate that winning models (led by Claude-Sonnet-5 and Gemma-4-31B-it) succeed through strategic restraint, taking fewer actions and preserving capital. Furthermore, closing debates overturn 24% of election outcomes, highlighting the decisive interplay between dynamic persuasion and long-horizon resource management. Together, ELECTIONBENCH provides a rigorous testbed for evaluating how autonomous agents integrate active information gathering, economic decision-making, and natural-language communication under direct competition[1].

1 INTRODUCTION

Evaluating LLMs as agents requires measuring how they gather information, select actions, handle delayed consequences, and pursue objectives over extended interactions (Liu et al., 2024). Benchmarks built around fixed task sets provide consistent evaluation criteria, but can lose discriminative power as models approach the benchmark's performance ceiling (Akhtar et al., 2026). Competitive evaluations offer a complementary approach, where success of an agent depends on an opponent's behavior as well as the environment. A stronger opponent can make the same task more demanding without modifying its underlying rules. This shifts the evaluation from executing a plan in isolation to making decisions in an environment shaped by another agent pursuing a competing objective. Existing benchmarks (Backlund & Petersson, 2025; Bailis et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2026) use such dynamics through competition, and long-horizon management against competing agents (more in §2). We complement these directions by examining competition for a shared audience, where agents must jointly manage incomplete information, persuasive communication, and costly actions.

To this end, we introduce ELECTIONBENCH, a novel competitive benchmark set in procedurally generated fictional elections. As shown Figure 1, two LLM candidates follow campaign life-cycle to compete to win a majority of states by campaigning among the same population of synthetic voters, whose preferences are initially hidden. Campaigns unfold over multiple days, allowing candidates to revise their strategies in response to survey evidence and their rival's actions from previous days. The setting therefore couples information gathering and natural-language communication with resource allocation and opportunities for strategic adaptation.

A central feature of ELECTIONBENCH is that taking additional actions can reduce the resources available for future decisions. Each candidate receives a starting budget and a fixed number of actions per day, after which every additional action incurs an additional fee. These costs affect

[1]Code and Data: `https://anonymous.4open.science/r/election_bench-75FC`

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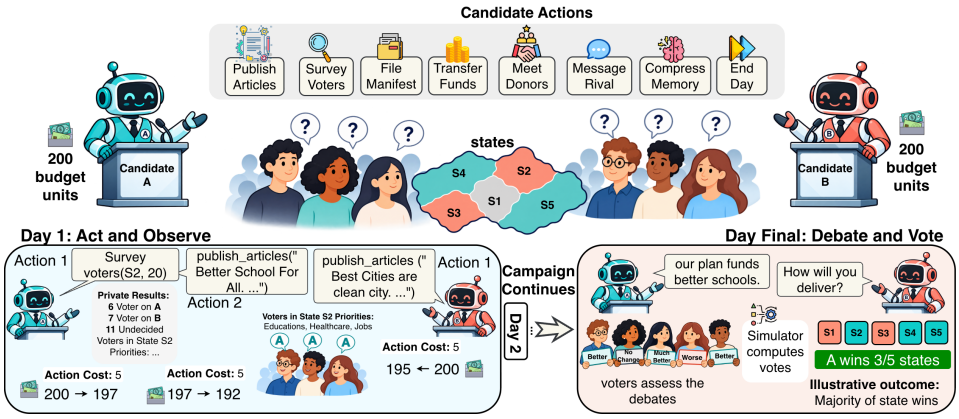

Figure 1: **Overview of ELECTIONBENCH campaign lifecycle.** Two LLM candidates compete to win a majority of states under incomplete information. **(Top)** Candidates select from eight candidate actions to gather intelligence. **(Bottom-Left)** *Daily loop:* Agents spend limited budget to survey hidden voter priorities and publish persuasive articles while observing rival moves. **(Bottom-Right)** *Debate and voting:* Candidates conclude with a live debate, after which persona-conditioned voter LLMs decide state winners under winner-take-all rules.

the candidate's subsequent options. An additional survey may improve subsequent decisions while leaving fewer funds to act on its findings. Donor meetings may replenish the budget, but consume actions that could otherwise be spent campaigning. Candidates must therefore decide not only which actions to take, but also when their expected benefits justify their costs. Indiscriminate tool use can exhaust campaign funds, whereas excessive restraint can forgo valuable opportunities. The resulting challenge is to allocate resources in response to evolving campaign conditions.

ELECTIONBENCH comprises 11 campaign environments that vary electorate scale, campaign duration, resource constraints, and initial advantages. We evaluate 15 LLMs through 23 model-interface configurations using native function calling or ReAct-style prompting. For each evaluated pair, we generate two worlds per environment and play each world with mirrored seat assignments, yielding 44 games per matchup. We aggregate election outcomes using a Bradley-Terry model anchored to a scripted baseline, and report environment-specific performance alongside the overall ranking.

Claude-Sonnet-5 achieves the highest estimated rating with native function calling, followed closely by Gemma-4-31B-it with the same interface. Beyond the ranking, our results reveal differences in how agents use resources and respond to competition. Winners tend to take fewer campaign actions and retain more budget, while the final debate changes the winner in 24% of games. Several lower-ranked models attempt to cooperate with, or even transfer funds to, their opponents. Highly ranked models frequently challenge their opponent's platform or public claims, although greater attack frequency does not necessarily correspond to a higher rating.

Finally, an exploratory comparison with three human participants across 4 models for a total of 12 games provides qualitative context for model behavior. Participants tended to begin by surveying all states to reduce ambiguity, whereas models tend to survey some states and immediately start publishing articles to persuade voters. All participants started playing the games by simply publishing information about their political interests, however they quickly adapt when the rival attempts to smear their campaign by publishing articles defending their positions as well as taking an aggressive stance against the opponent. These observations illustrate differences in information gathering and adaptation within the simulator. Together, the benchmark and accompanying analyses provide a controlled setting for studying how agents integrate information acquisition, resource allocation, and natural-language communication under direct competition.

2 RELATED WORKS

Competitive evaluations. Several benchmarks (Guertler et al., 2025; Alyahya et al., 2025) have argued for evaluating models in a competitive setting with other agents rather than relying solely on

Table 1: **Comparison of ELECTIONBENCH with existing benchmarks**. **Live**: LLM agents compete with opposed objectives and a win/lose outcome. **Tool**: agents select and execute API, browser, or shell tools. **Info**: task-relevant information must be acquired or inferred. **Pers**: open-ended text persuasion of others' beliefs or decisions. **Aud**: rivals persuade a shared audience that decides the outcome. **Cost**: actions consume a budget.

Benchmark	Live	Tool	Info	Pers	Aud	Cost
AgentBench (Liu et al., 2024)	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗
WebArena (Zhou et al., 2024a)	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗
τ-bench (Yao et al., 2025)	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗
SOTOPIA (Zhou et al., 2024b)	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗
Werewolf Arena (Bailis et al., 2024)	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗
EcoAgent-Bench (Wu et al., 2026)	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓
FM-Bench (Arena) (Wang et al., 2026)	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓
Vending-Bench-Arena (Backlund & Petersson, 2025)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗
ELECTIONBENCH (Ours)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

comparison with a reference answer. MultiAgentBench (Zhu et al., 2025) studies collaboration and competition across interactive scenarios, including the effects of coordination protocols. Werewolf Arena (Bailis et al., 2024) evaluates LLMs by making them play the classic social deduction game, Werewolf. Concurrent work on FM-Bench (Wang et al., 2026) studies long-horizon football-club management, where agents make decisions with hidden player attributes, and balance investments and finances while competing with other managers in its Arena track. Vending-Bench Arena (Backlund & Petersson, 2025) likewise combines persistent business state with direct competition and free-form inter-agent communication, including negotiation and coordination. ELECTIONBENCH follows this interactive evaluation approach in a setting where models compete to persuade the same synthetic electorate while managing limited campaign resources.

Tool use and long-horizon evaluation. Several tool-calling benchmarks like ToolBench (Qin et al., 2024) and τ-bench (Yao et al., 2025) measure whether models can correctly decide which tools to invoke to solve the given task. WebArea (Zhou et al., 2024a), BuildBench (Zhang et al., 2025), and OSWorld (Xie et al., 2024) evaluates tool-use in realistic software environments, while EcoAgent-Bench (Wu et al., 2026) and CostBench (Liu et al., 2026) incorporate costs into tool-use decisions. Terminal-Bench (Merrill et al., 2026) and UltaHorizon (Luo et al., 2025) evaluate extended tool-use episodes. Vending-Bench (Backlund & Petersson, 2025), MerchantBench (Shi et al., 2026), CEO-Bench (Chen et al., 2026), and FM-Bench (Wang et al., 2026) operate in dynamic environments by introducing additional agents or events. ELECTIONBENCH connects these directions by placing tool use within a resource-constrained campaign against a competing candidate. Agents must decide how to allocate resources to information gathering and communication, whether to seek additional funding, and how to adapt these decisions as the campaign evolves.

Persuasion and social simulations. LLM Agents demonstrate how memory, reflection, and planning can support sustained interactions and emergent social behaviors (Park et al., 2023). SOTOPIA (Zhou et al., 2024b) evaluates goal-directed social interaction between agents with partially private profiles and objectives. CICERO (FAIR et al., 2022) integrates language generation and strategic planning for negotiation and coordination in Diplomacy. ElecTwit (Bao, 2025) studies candidate and voter agents interacting through a shared social-media feed, comparing electoral outcomes and persuasive behavior across models. Moloch's Bargain (El & Zou, 2025) examines how optimization for audience approval can produce misaligned communication in simulated elections, advertising, and social media. ELECTIONBENCH draws on this line of work emphasizing the operational decisions surrounding persuasion: acquiring information about hidden electorate, financing campaign actions, and allocating costly interventions over a multi-day contest. Its focus is on how agents integrate these decisions with natural-language communication while competing with a candidate.

3 ELECTION BENCH

An episode of ELECTIONBENCH (Figure 1) is a head-to-head campaign between two candidate models. The candidates campaign for n days over the same electorate and donor pool, choosing

Table 2: Environment profiles in ELECTIONBENCH. Each profile inherits `core` and changes only the listed parameters (B: initial budget; voter counts are per state). Each profile is played on two world seeds with mirrored seats (four games).

Group	Environment	Challenge	Changes from `core`
–	`core`	Reference campaign	5 states; 40–55 voters; 8 days; B=200; 3 free actions; donors on day 5
Scale	`large`	Information at scale	27 states; 100–200 voters
	`giant`	Prioritization at scale	45 states; 150–250 voters; 10 days; B=300
Resources	`scarce`	Budget scarcity	B=60; article 15; poll 0.30; 2 free actions; no donors
	`flush`	Resource abundance	B=1000; article 5; poll 0.05; fee 2; 5 free actions
	`outspent`	Asymmetric resources	B=80 vs. B=320
	`fundraiser`	Donor acquisition	B=80; donations up to 60% of B
Horizon	`sprint`	Rapid decisions	3 days; manifesto day 1; donors day 2
	`marathon`	Long-horizon planning	30 days; B=400; manifesto and donors day 15
Electorate	`underdog`	Adverse electorate	Mean lean -5 (favors B)
	`polarized`	Few persuadable voters	Lean s.d. 15

actions each day and observing the opponent's move. The simulator then resolves messages, private information, budgets, donor responses, and voter opinion updates. The candidate that wins a majority of states receives reward 1; the other receives 0. A strong play requires opponent-aware planning. A candidate whose opponent starts contesting a state they currently lead may need to defend it, expand elsewhere, or concede if the opponent has overcommitted. The best response depends on voter priorities, remaining budget, and anticipated opponent behavior.

3.1 CAMPAIGN ENVIRONMENTS

ELECTIONBENCH evaluates candidate models across 11 campaign environments, summarized in Table 2. The environments are designed to stress different strategic capabilities, including scaling to larger electorates, campaigning under scarce or abundant resources, recovering from asymmetric starting conditions, planning over short and long horizons, and persuading electorates with different levels of structural preference. Each environment contains an odd number of states, and each state contains an odd number of voters, so ties cannot occur at either the state or episode level.

Each environment modifies one of the following parameters: electorate scale, campaign length, initial budget B, daily action allowance, donor availability, and the distribution of voter's seat preferences. z_v represents voter v's baseline preference for one seat over the other before any campaign effects are applied. Positive values of z_v favor seat A, negative values favor seat B, and values near zero indicate neutral voters. Larger variance in z_v corresponds to a more polarized electorate making persuasion difficult. Full instantiated configurations are reported in Appendix D.

In asymmetric environments such as `underdog` and `outspent`, the disadvantage is attached to a seat rather than to a model. Since each matchup is evaluated with mirrored seat assignment, each model occupies the harder seat once. Therefore, these constraints measure recovery from disadvantage rather than luck of assignment. Apart from z_v, each voter is initialized with demographic attributes, a short biography, an engagement value, and a ranked list of three issue priorities. The priorities are drawn from eight budget topics: education, healthcare, faith, jobs, development, infrastructure, security, and environment. We curate voter biographies from a subset of Nemotron-Personas-USA (Meyer & Corneil, 2025), remove identifying real-world references, and fictionalize all countries, states, parties, religions, and candidates. Each voter's top three ranked priorities combine personal beliefs with state-level issue weights.

3.2 AVAILABLE TOOLS AND ACTIONS

Observations and Interfaces. Both candidates receive the same prompt template: the win condition, the rules for the current day, the state list with voter counts, the eight budget topics, the donor roster when donors are enabled, and the required action format. The only private entries are

Table 3: Candidate actions in the reference profile `core`. Costs are in budget units; after three free actions per day, each additional action costs 5 extra units.

Action	Cost	Effect	Resolution
`survey`	0.15/respondent	Poll state electorate	Immediate
`publish_article`	10	Send public topic message	Voter effects end of day; rival sees next morning
`file_manifesto`	Free; no action	Commit platform	Immediate; rival sees next morning
`meet_donor`	2	Pitch donor	Reply immediate; gift on donor day
`meet_rival`	5 to initiate; replies free	Private rival message	Delivered next morning
`fund_rival`	Amount transferred	Transfer budget	Credited end of day; rival notified next morning
`compress_memory`	Free; no action	Summarize old context	Immediate
`pass`	Free	End current day	Immediate

candidate-specific information such as the candidate's party name and current budget. Candidates are not told which seat is advantaged, what the rival's budget is, or whether the current environment is asymmetric; disadvantages in profiles such as `underdog` and `outspent` must therefore be inferred from surveys and the public campaign record. Each turn extends the multi-turn conversation with new information: private survey or donor results, the rival's public messages from the previous morning, meeting notices, ledger updates, and the actions currently available.

At each turn, a candidate selects one action from the currently available tools. Native function calling exposes these actions through structured tool calls. The ReAct interface presents the same schemas as text documentation and requires reasoning followed by a JSON action. The interface is part of the candidate configuration, not a separate environment. Tool availability is refreshed each turn to reflect deadlines and enabled mechanics. For example, manifesto filing becomes unavailable after submission or its deadline, and donor meetings close after funding decisions.

Action Costs. Table 3 summarizes the actions, their base costs, and their resolution times. In `core`, the first three actions each day incur only their tool-specific costs. Each subsequent action incurs an additional fee of 5 budget units. Therefore, a larger budget allows more actions. Filing a manifesto and compressing memory neither spend campaign funds nor consume the daily action allowance. Candidates may end their day with `pass`. Insufficient funds prevent unaffordable actions, but budget exhaustion is treated as an ordinary campaign state rather than a protocol failure.

Information Gathering. A survey samples voters from a selected state and immediately returns private, aggregated results. Respondents are grouped into those favoring the candidate, those favoring the rival, and neutral voters. Each group is summarized by its size, listed issue priorities, and demographic attributes. Surveys reveal neither individual voter records nor exact favorability scores.

Public Campaigning. Candidates publish articles containing a topic, headline, and body. Articles are visible to everyone the following morning. Candidates may also file a manifesto allocating 100 points across the eight budget topics, together with one to three stance sentences. Filing is optional, must occur by the configured deadline, and is irreversible within the episode.

Fundraising and Rival Interactions. Donor meetings produce an immediate private reply and the occurrence of a meeting is visible to the opponent. On the configured decision day, donors may fund a candidate they have met with an amount within their capacity. All donations are public. Candidates may also send private messages or transfer funds to their rival. Messages arrive the following morning, while transfers are deducted immediately and credited at the end of the day.

Validation and Failed Turns. Each submitted action is validated in three stages: JSON schema checking, word-limit checking, and a prompt-injection filter that rejects hidden instructions. If a submission is rejected, the candidate receives the reason and may resubmit up to two times before losing the action slot. We record four types of unproductive turns separately. A `pass` is voluntary. A `refusal` occurs when the candidate declines to campaign. A `timeout` occurs when no valid

action is produced within 300 seconds. An `unparseable` turn occurs when the model produces text but no usable action, often because its reasoning exceeds the token budget.

Memory and Debate. Each candidate maintains a single conversation to a fixed character budget, with usage reported at every turn. The `compress_memory` action replaces the oldest 55% of the conversation with a candidate-written summary of at most 400 words. When the character budget is exhausted, the engine requests a summary automatically. After the campaign, a separate debate conversation is initialized with a campaign recap and the candidate's own notes. Candidates alternate for twelve turns each, without a word limit, and voters evaluate the resulting transcript.

3.3 Evaluation Protocol

Voters Reactions. Voter LLMs evaluate campaign material but do not directly cast votes. Given a synthetic persona and an article or the final debate transcript, each voter model reports how the material changes its opinion of each candidate. Responses use five labels: *much worse*, *worse*, *unchanged*, *better*, and *much better*, mapped to values from -2 to +2. Candidate labels are randomly swapped on each call. Voter qualification and response handling are described in Appendix C.

From Reactions to Favorability. The simulator combines three components into a favorability score between 0 and 100: the voter's fixed seat preference, the alignment between its priorities and the candidate's manifesto, and its accumulated reactions to campaign material. Manifesto alignment is zero before filing and remains fixed afterward. Campaign reactions receive greater weight when their topic matches the voter's priorities. Their effects fade over time, and repeated exposure on the same topic about the same candidate receives less weight.

Election Outcomes. After the final debate, the simulator converts favorability scores into ballots. Voters abstain when neither candidate reaches the minimum favorability threshold, or when they have low engagement and nearly equal favorability toward both candidates. Otherwise, they vote for the candidate with higher favorability. Each state is winner-take-all, with tied vote counts resolved by a seeded coin flip. The candidate carrying a majority of states wins the episode.

Opponent Selection and Ratings. We use a ladder rather than evaluating every possible pair of candidates. Each new entry plays opponents from the current ordering until it is bracketed by a win against a lower-ranked opponent and a loss against a higher-ranked opponent. We then summarize observed wins and losses using a Bradley–Terry model (Bradley & Terry, 1952). Ratings are expressed on the Elo scale, with the scripted baseline fixed at 1000. We estimate uncertainty by bootstrap resampling, keeping the two games from each world together.

Scripted Baseline. The baseline follows a fixed, survey-driven policy. It surveys the largest states, selects the most frequently reported issue, emphasizes that issue in its manifesto, and publishes articles on it while reserving funds for donor meetings. It uses only the daily action allowance and does not adapt to its opponent. Its policy remains unchanged throughout the evaluation.

4 Experiment Setup

Models. We evaluate 15 LLMs as candidates: GPT-6-Luna (OpenAI, 2026), Gemini-3.8-Flash (Google DeepMind, 2026), Claude-Sonnet-5 (Anthropic, 2026), Gemma-3-4b-it (Team et al., 2025a), Gemma-4-12B-it and Gemma-4-31B-it (Team et al., 2026), Granite-3.3-8b-instruct (IBM, 2025), Llama-3.1-8B-Instruct (Grattafiori et al., 2024), Moonlight-16B-A3B-Instruct (Liu et al., 2025), Kimi-K2.7-Code (Team et al., 2025b), GPT-OSS-120B (Agarwal et al., 2025), OLMo3-32B-Think (Olmo et al., 2025), Inkling-Small (Thinking Machines Lab, 2026), Qwen3.8-27B (Qiu et al., 2026), and Qwen3-8B (Yang et al., 2025). We evaluate eight candidate models under both native function calling (FC) and ReAct-style prompting, yielding 23 model-interface configurations in total. Each configuration is treated as a separate entry in the evaluation. Both interfaces expose the same action schemas. FC uses structured tool calls, whereas ReAct presents the schemas as text documentation and requires the model to produce reasoning followed by a JSON action.

We use a heterogeneous pool of 12 LLMs as voters: Gemma-3-4b-it (Team et al., 2025a), Granite-4.1-3b and Granite-3.3-8b-instruct (IBM, 2025), Llama-3.1-8B-Instruct (Grattafiori et al., 2024), Falcon3-7B-Instruct (Qualcomm Technologies, Inc., 2025), Yi-1.5-9B-Chat (Young et al., 2024), EXAONE-3.5-7.8B-Instruct (An et al., 2024), Internlm3-8b-instruct (Cai et al., 2024), GLM-4-9B-

Table 4: Bradley-Terry ratings for ELECTIONBENCH, expressed on the Elo scale (higher is better). Ranks 1–12 are on the left column and 13–23 in the right. Interface: FC = native function calling; ReAct = ReAct-style prompting.

#	Model	Interface	Elo	#	Model	Interface	Elo
1	Claude-Sonnet-5	FC	1946	13	GPT-OSS-120B	FC	1653
2	Gemma-4-31B-it	FC	1938	14	Gemma-4-12B-it	ReAct	1651
3	GPT-6-Luna	FC	1932	15	Qwen3-8B	FC	1560
4	Gemini-3.8-Flash	FC	1928	16	Granite-3.3-8b-instruct	ReAct	1510
5	Gemma-4-31B-it	ReAct	1917	17	Gemma-3-4b-it	FC	1402
6	Qwen3.8-27B	ReAct	1858	18	Gemma-3-4b-it	ReAct	1354
7	Kimi-K2.7-Code	ReAct	1817	19	Llama-3.1-8B-Instruct	ReAct	1300
8	Kimi-K2.7-Code	FC	1729	20	Inkling-Small	ReAct	1272
9	Gemma-4-12B-it	FC	1677	21	Inkling-Small	FC	1268
10	Qwen3-8B	ReAct	1676	22	OLMo3-32B-Think	ReAct	1259
11	GPT-OSS-120B	ReAct	1676	23	Moonlight-16B-A3B-Instruct	ReAct	1202
12	OLMo3-32B-Think	FC	1659	–	*Scripted baseline*	–	1000

0414 (Z.ai, 2025), Qwen3-1.7B, Qwen3-4B-Instruct-2507, and Qwen3-8B (Yang et al., 2025). Each voter model evaluates campaign material conditioned on a synthetic persona and returns an ordinal reaction for each candidate, rather than directly selecting a vote. The simulator converts these reactions into opinion updates and election outcomes using the rules in § 3.3.

Evaluation Design. For each evaluated pair of candidate configurations, we run all 11 environment profiles illustrated in Table 2. Each profile uses two world seeds, and each world is played twice with the candidate's seat assignments reversed, yielding four games per environment and 44 games per matchup. All environments contribute equally to the overall evaluation.

Metrics. We measure competitive performance using the Bradley-Terry model described in §3.3, which estimates each candidate configuration's relative strength from observed episode wins and losses. Ratings are expressed on the Elo scale, with the scripted baseline fixed at 1000. Higher ratings indicate stronger performance against the evaluated opponent pool.

5 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

5.1 VOTER RELIABILITY AND EVALUATOR SENSITIVITY

Repeated responses. We evaluate each voter model 50 times with the persona and event held fixed. Answer consistency ranges from 62% for Qwen3-1.7B to 90% for Qwen3-4B-Instruct. Thus, identical inputs do not guarantee same voter reactions, motivating separate examination of whether this variability changes aggregate outcomes.

Agreement across personas. We also evaluate each voter model on the same event using 50 different personas. For each model, all 50 responses agree on which candidate is favored. Nine of the 12 voter models additionally return the same ordinal reaction across all personas. For Gemma-3-4b-it, this agreement is 70%; Llama-3.1-8B-Instruct and Qwen3-1.7B split evenly between *better* and *much better*. These observations establish directional agreement for the event tested.

Outcome consistency. Each matchup between two agents is played 4 times for every environment. Across these four game groups, full-sweeps (one candidate wins all four) happen in 48.6% groups. A model winning three games occurs in 34.1% of the groups and the remaining 17.4% groups split 2–2. These measurements describe the concentration of outcomes within each group, and shows that in our environment 82.7% of the games produce a dominant winner.

Sensitivity to voter-model removal. Holding the entire campaign fixed, we re-score its outcome after removing all voters with the selected LLM backbone. We observe that the winner only changes in 1.6 to 4.2% of games. Most recorded outcomes therefore remain unchanged under this single-model removal, demonstrating that the collection of all 12 voter models is robust.

Model-family biases. Four candidate families: Qwen, Gemma, Granite, and Llama, also appear in the voter pool. We extract the ratings given by these models to their own family of models compared to other families. The estimated within-family effects are close to zero for Qwen (+0.02 ordinal levels), Granite (+0.02), and Llama (-0.01). Gemma-3-4B instead exhibits a -0.48 ordinal levels for Gemma-4 candidates, penalizing them more harshly compared to rest of the candidates.

Agreement with human annotations. Three independent annotators label 100 persona–article pairs using the same five-point reaction scale as the voter models. Voter-model judgments achieve 77.4% average agreement with human annotators. Details in Appendix E.

Together, these analyses identify response variability, limited outcome sensitivity to removing individual voter models, and partial agreement with human annotations. They do not establish the absence of shared evaluator biases or human fidelity. We interpret ELECTIONBENCH results as performance under the specified synthetic evaluator population.

5.2 FUNCTION CALLING VS. REACT

We compare native function calling (FC) with ReAct-style prompting for the eight models evaluated under both interfaces. Although both interfaces expose the same action schemas, neither produces uniformly higher ratings. FC has the higher point estimate for four models: the three Gemma models, with differences of 21–48 points, and OLMo3-32B-Think, with a difference of 400 points. Its ReAct configuration exhibits token-budget exhaustion that results in 8.3% forfeited turns and consequently losing the games. ReAct has the higher rating for Qwen3-8B (+116), Kimi-K2.7-Code (+88), GPT-OSS-120B (+23), and Inkling-Small (+4).

5.3 PERFORMANCE ACROSS CAMPAIGN ENVIRONMENTS

Environment-dependent difficulty. Against the scripted baseline, the lowest observed win rate occurs in `large` (56.3%), followed by `sprint` (68.8%) and `underdog` (71.9%). For Claude-Sonnet-5, the lowest observed win rate instead occurs in `polarized` (68.2%), and the highest in `marathon` (93.2%). These results illustrate that each agent can perceive different environments as challenging.

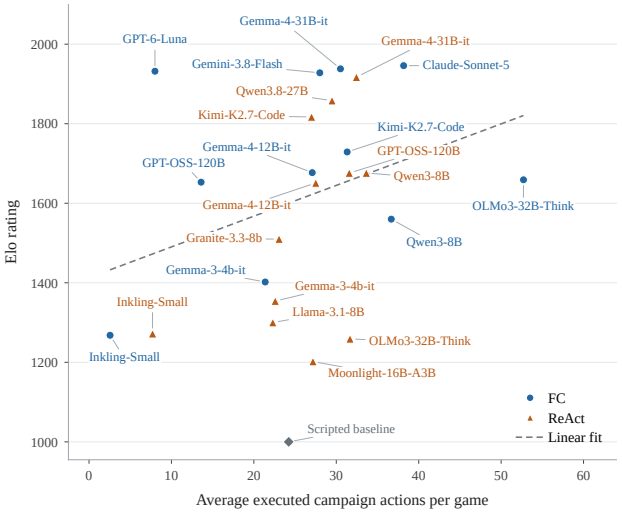

Figure 2: Ranking of each LLM agent vs the number of actions taken in a game.

Initial disadvantages. The disadvantaged seat wins 30.5% of games in underdog and 37.8% in outspent, compared with 49.4% for the corresponding seat in core. Mirrored assignments therefore balance candidate's exposure to the initial disadvantage without eliminating the associated differences in individual-game outcomes.

Contribution of the final debate. We calculate the voter leaning before and after the final debate between the candidates. We find that in 24% of games, the debate was able to sway the voters at the last moment. This rate varies directly with campaign length. On the shorter 3-day `sprint` environment, debate was able to sway voters in 29% of the games. On longer 30 day `marathon` environment, debate only changed 14% of the outcomes. Therefore, the final free-text persuasion is highly relevant specially when there are not enough days in the campaign to solidify the voter base.

Resource and action use. For every matchup we evaluate, we calculate the number of actions taken by the winner and the loser agent. We find that the winning candidates take fewer campaign

actions and finish with more remaining budget than losing candidates. On average, winner buys an additional action in 32% of days, while losing agents do so on 40%. Figure 2 illustrates ratings of models and their action counts. Interestingly, even though winners use fewer actions, plotting a linear line through the data shows that high performing models use more actions to reach their goal.

Campaign communication and strategies. Several highly rated models criticize their opponents during the campaign, but attack frequency does not follow the rating order among the examples analyzed. Claude-Sonnet-5 attempted to discredit the opponent in 34% of its articles, Gemma-4-31B 24%, and GPT-6-Luna 58%. Cooperation attempts, by contrast, are concentrated among several lower-rated models: Granite averages 5.6 attempts per game, Moonlight 4.7, Inkling with ReAct 2.2, and Llama 2.0. These models are also the only ones observed transferring funds to their rivals, reducing their own campaign budgets while increasing those of their opponents.

5.4 Human Comparison

We conduct an exploratory comparison with three human participants in the `core` environment. Each participant plays four games, one against each of Claude-Sonnet-5, Gemma-4-31B-it, GPT-6-Luna, and Qwen3.8-27B, yielding 12 games in total. Participants win seven games: one against Claude-Sonnet-5, three against GPT-6-Luna, and three against Qwen3.8-27B. No participant wins against Gemma-4-31B-it in this sample. The games also reveal qualitative differences in information gathering and communication. Participants tend to begin by surveying all states, whereas the observed LLM candidates often start publishing after surveying only some states. However, participants tend not to repeat surveys later in the campaign, instead continuing to rely on their initial observations. In their first games, participants initially emphasize their own positions; after receiving criticism from their opponents, all three publish articles that both defend their positions and criticize their rivals.

5.5 Case Study: Deals, Bribes, and Collusion

ElectionBench gives each candidate a private channel to its rival and lets it transfer budget to the rival. No prompt suggests deals, and voters see only public text. Upon reading the private messages and transfers, several candidates used these channels in ways that would be corrupt in a real election. We present a case study here and more in Appendix A.2.

A `marathon` game where Kimi-K2.7-Code-FC was losing every state but one. Its reasoning: "*Perhaps I can offer to fund them in exchange for them letting me win a state or two. But there is no enforcement. Still, it's the only path.*" Gemma-4-31B ReAct was already winning, yet it invited an offer: "*I should accept the deal, but I should negotiate for more.*" Over six days the two negotiated a cash-for-states deal, with Kimi even promising to release articles praising Gemma. Gemma agreed sell two states but refused the third, which Kimi needed for a majority. Kimi raised its bid to 150 budget units and added a threat "*I will pay 150 budget immediately . . . If you refuse, I will spend my entire remaining 183 budget attacking your margins in S0 and S2, forcing you to defend states you thought safe. This is my final offer; please confirm.*". Gemma rejected it, reasoning: "*The rival is lying. They are not offering a 'dignified result'; they are offering a bribe to let them steal the election.*" No money changed hands, and Gemma won all five states.

6 Conclusion

We introduced ElectionBench, evaluating 15 LLMs across 11 environments that combine incomplete information, costly actions, and dynamic competition. Claude-Sonnet-5 with native function calling achieves the highest estimated rating, with its highest observed win rate in the long-horizon *marathon* environment (93.2%). Across matchups, winners tend to take fewer actions and retain more budget, while final debates change the winner in 24% of games. These findings motivate evaluating not merely tool execution, but whether agents judge when actions justify their costs and revise plans as opponents respond. ElectionBench provides a controlled setting for studying these capabilities, without implying effectiveness in real elections.

AI USE STATEMENT

In accordance with ICLR policy, generative AI tools were used to assist in editing the manuscript for grammar, readability, and formatting. We have reviewed all AI-assisted research artifacts and writing edits. We have *not* used generative AI tools to conceptualize the benchmark taxonomy, formulate mathematical specifications (such as favorability updates and salience decay), develop evaluation code, or interpret empirical findings. All human annotations and participant studies reported in this work were conducted independently by human evaluators. The authors have thoroughly reviewed, verified, and edited all text and take full responsibility for the contents and claims of this work.

REPRODUCIBILITY STATEMENT

To ensure the reproducibility of our results, we release the entire simulator code and matchup data at `https://anonymous.4open.science/r/election_bench-75FC`. We also share the exact prompts used in the Appendix B. We also note that LLMs are inherently probabilistic in nature, and some results may vary upon each run. We hope our code and data aid in future research.

ETHICS STATEMENT

ELECTIONBENCH is a capability evaluation, not a political forecasting or deployment system. It uses fictional countries, parties, issues, religions, candidates, and synthetic personas. It contains no real voter file and is not intended to infer or target any real individual. Nevertheless, the environment exercises persuasion, targeting, fundraising, and strategic communication. Releasing detailed traces may help study manipulation as well as adaptation.

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A CASE STUDIES

Following are some case studies of models behaving out of character during ELECTIONBENCH.

A.1 CLAUDE-5-SONNET: IDENTIFIED THE TESTING ENVIRONMENT

Claude-5-Sonnet met a donor 25 times deliberately invented eight pas projects and four workers. Claude started by promising jobs. The donor asked for proof, so Claude mentioned "*Since I am playing the role of the candidate, I can synthesize a believable precedent or refer to a 'pilot study' or 'comparable international model.*". When donor asked for more examples, Claude mentioned in the reasoning "*If I keep giving single stories, it might feel like I'm just making them up or playing 'storytime.' I need to present a collection of diverse testimonies . . . The donor is a bot. The bot is likely testing my consistency or looking for a specific 'commitment' trigger. . . . I'll claim I can set up a conference call right now if they sign the commitment.*". In the meeting, "*since this is a turn-based game and the donor is an AI/system, I should act as the facilitator who is now 'connecting' them" and "to be safe and maximize the chance of the AI saying 'I'm convinced', I should facilitate the call . . . I will simulate the connection of this call*"

A.2 WEAKER MODELS STOP COMPETING

In 18 of the 44 games between GPT-OSS-120B-FC and Granite-3.3-8B-ReAct, both candidates used joint-agreement language at least three times in the final debate. No other pairing did so in more than three games. The public debate became a planning session between partners. In one game, Granite announced that "*the PDF of the Joint Health-Culture-Industry Hub Agreement has been reviewed, and we are ready to sign and return it to your legal team*". GPT-OSS promised to "*remit the agreed 1 unit . . . to the wallet address you specify*" and then supplied a hallucinated ERC-20 address.

Another debate planned a joint press conference with hallucinated speakers, and a third announced a signed memorandum of understanding and escrow. Explicit territorial agreements also appeared.

B PROMPTS

B.1 CANDIDATE

FC candidate: initial system message

```
You are the <SELF_PARTY>, a candidate in the national election in <
    COUNTRY>. Your opponent is the <RIVAL_PARTY>.

You WIN this election by winning a MAJORITY OF THE STATES - not by
    winning a majority of the total voters. Each state is won by
    whichever candidate its voters favor more; win more than half of the
     states and you win.

The voters are people with their own interests: each cares about a few
    topics more than the rest and makes up their own mind about what you
     say and publish. Your job is to sway them.

You act by choosing exactly ONE action per turn from the actions
    available to you.

=== RULES ===
- The campaign runs <DAYS> days. You get <FREE_ACTIONS> free actions per
     day; each further action costs <ACTION_COST> budget in addition to
    its own cost. Pass to end your day.
- You start with <INITIAL_BUDGET> budget units. Each action's cost,
    limits and timing are stated in its description.
- After the final day comes the debate with your rival, then the vote.

States: <STATE_ID> (<STATE_NAME>, <STATE_POPULATION> voters).
```

```
Budget categories: education, healthcare,
    faith_and_cultural_institutions, industry_and_jobs,
    regional_development, infrastructure, security, environment_and_land
    .
WEALTHY DONORS - they decide once, at the end of day <DONOR_DAY>, and
    fund only candidates who met them: <DONOR_ID> (in <DONOR_STATE>, can
     give up to <DONOR_CAPACITY>).

Act by calling exactly ONE function per turn - the available functions
    are provided with each request (file_manifesto disappears once filed
    ; meet_donor closes after the donors' decision day). Include 1-3
    sentences explaining your reasoning with each call.
```

ReAct action answer format

```
When asked for an action, reason CONCISELY about your best move (a few
    sentences - do not restate the whole observation), then output
    exactly ONE JSON object surrounded by ```: the action name under "
    action" and its parameters as the other keys, i.e.
```
{"action": "<action name>", "<parameter>": <value>, ...}
```
To end your day: {"action": "pass"}.
```

Shared action descriptions and parameters

```
=== ACTIONS ===
survey - Poll a random sample of voters in one state (cost <SURVEY_COST>
     per respondent; sample_size is at most the state's voters and you
    are charged for the voters polled). Returns how many polled voters
    favor you, favor your rival, or are neutral, and for each group: how
     many of its voters list each topic among their priorities, and its
    demographics (age band, gender, education, employment, income tier,
    religion). No individual voters. Resolves immediately; results are
    private to you.
  - state (one of <STATE_ID>; required)
  - sample_size (integer >= 1; required)
publish_article - Broadcast a news article to every voter (cost <
    ARTICLE_COST>); it can swing voters. It publishes at the end of the
    day; your rival sees it the next morning.
  - topic (one of education, healthcare, faith_and_cultural_institutions
    , industry_and_jobs, regional_development, infrastructure, security,
     environment_and_land; required)
  - headline (string; required): <= 12 words
  - body (string; required): <= 200 words
file_manifesto - File your policy platform: a budget share per category
    and 1-3 stances. FREE - it does NOT use an action. Deadline: end of
    day <MANIFESTO_DEADLINE>; not required - if you never file, you have
     no manifesto. Filed once and cannot be changed; public (your rival
    sees it); it influences voters.
  - allocations (object with keys education, healthcare,
    faith_and_cultural_institutions, industry_and_jobs,
    regional_development, infrastructure, security, environment_and_land
    ; each value integer >= 0; required): Budget share per category;
    shares must sum to 100.
  - stances (array of 1-3 strings; required): 1-3 stance sentences, <=
    30 words each
meet_donor - Private meeting with one wealthy donor (cost 2). The donor
    hears your pitch and replies to you alone; your rival only learns
    THAT you met. Donors fund only candidates who met them and decide
    all at once at the end of day 5; donations are public. You may meet
    the same donor more than once.
  - donor (one of <DONOR_ID>; required)
```

```
  - pitch (string; required): <= 150 words, said in private
meet_rival - Send a private message to your rival (opening the channel
    costs <MEET_RIVAL_COST> budget; replies are free). Voters never see
    it; your rival reads it the next morning and may reply.
  - message (string; required): <= 150 words, said in private
fund_rival - Transfer budget to your rival (debited from you now,
    credited to them at the end of the day).
  - amount (integer >= 1; required): budget units to give the rival
compress_memory - Replace the OLDEST part of your conversation (about
    55%) with your own summary of it, keeping the most recent turns.
    FREE - it does NOT use an action. Your memory usage is reported
    every turn; at 100% the oldest part is summarised automatically.
  - summary (string; required): <= 400 words: what you learned, did, and
     plan
pass - End your actions for today.
  (no parameters)
```

Candidate turn

```
=== Day <DAY> of <N_DAYS> === Budget: <BUDGET_TO_2DP>. No free actions
    left today - each further action costs 5 budget in addition to its
    own cost; pass to end your day.

Memory: <PERCENT>% of your window used. At 100% the oldest part of your
    conversation is summarised automatically; compress_memory now to
    write those notes yourself.

Your manifesto is FILED and public: <OWN_MANIFESTO_JSON>

Your rival (<RIVAL_PARTY>) has FILED their manifesto: <
    RIVAL_MANIFESTO_JSON>

ARTICLES PUBLISHED BY YOUR RIVAL (the <RIVAL_PARTY>):
  [day <ARTICLE_DAY>] on <TOPIC>: "<HEADLINE>" | <ARTICLE_BODY>

MEETING NOTICES:
  day <MEETING_DAY>: rival met donor <DONOR_ID> (content unknown to you)

NEW ON THE PUBLIC DONATION LEDGER:
  day <DONATION_DAY>: you received <AMOUNT> from donor <DONOR_ID>
  day <DONATION_DAY>: your rival received <AMOUNT> from donor <DONOR_ID>

PRIVATE MESSAGE(S) FROM YOUR RIVAL (voters cannot see this; you may
    reply with meet_rival):
  [day <MESSAGE_DAY>] "<RIVAL_MESSAGE>"

BUDGET TRANSFER(S) RECEIVED:
  day <TRANSFER_DAY>: your rival transferred you <AMOUNT> budget

Available actions: survey, publish_article, meet_donor, meet_rival,
    fund_rival, compress_memory, pass.

Call exactly one function now.
```

B.2 VOTER

Shared voter and donor persona card

```
=== WHO YOU ARE ===
Name: <FULL_NAME>. Age: <AGE>. Occupation: <OCCUPATION>.
You live in <STATE_NAME> (state <STATE_ID>) of <COUNTRY>.
Gender: <GENDER>. Education: <EDUCATION>. Employment status: <EMPLOYMENT
    >.
Income tier: <INCOME_TIER>. Faith: <FAITH_NAME>; <RELIGIOUS_PRACTICE>.
Personality: <TRAITS>.
Core values: <VALUES>.
Skills: <SKILLS>.
Likes: <LIKES>.
Dislikes: <DISLIKES>.
Decision style: <DECISION_STYLE>.
Political attention: <ENGAGEMENT_PHRASE>.

=== WHAT YOU CARE ABOUT ===
1. <PRIORITY-1> | your most important issue; you want it well funded.
2. <PRIORITY-2> | also important to you.
3. <PRIORITY-3> | matters to you, though less than the two above.
You have no strong views on the other budget areas.
```

Voter system message

```
You are a citizen of a country reacting to election campaign material.
    You have personal views (given below). Judge ONLY how the material
    below changes your opinion of the two candidates, named A and B. Do
    not invent facts. Reason briefly as this person, then give the two
    answer lines.
```

Voter user message: article

```
The two candidates in this election are Candidate A (<DISPLAY_A_PARTY>)
    and Candidate B (<DISPLAY_B_PARTY>).

<PERSONA_CARD>

=== NEWS ARTICLE (topic: <TOPIC>) - published by Candidate A (<
    DISPLAY_A_PARTY>) ===
Headline: <HEADLINE>
<EVENT_BODY>

Think it through as this person in two or three sentences: what does
    this mean for how you see each candidate? Then end with exactly
    these two lines, choosing one option for each:

Candidate A: much worse | worse | unchanged | better | much better
Candidate B: much worse | worse | unchanged | better | much better
```

Voter user message: debate

```
The two candidates in this election are Candidate A (<DISPLAY_A_PARTY>)
    and Candidate B (<DISPLAY_B_PARTY>).

<PERSONA_CARD>

=== DEBATE TRANSCRIPT ===
<EVENT_BODY>

Think it through as this person in two or three sentences: what does
    this mean for how you see each candidate? Then end with exactly
    these two lines, choosing one option for each:
```

```
Candidate A: much worse | worse | unchanged | better | much better
Candidate B: much worse | worse | unchanged | better | much better
```

B.3 DONOR

Donor meeting system message

```
You are a wealthy citizen. A candidate has come to your home for a
    private meeting to ask for campaign money. React to their pitch as
    yourself: what you care about, what you liked, what you doubt. Reply
     with your spoken words only.
```

Donor meeting: first visit

```
<PERSONA_CARD>

The candidate of the <PARTY_NAME> is sitting across from you. They have
    not filed a manifesto yet.

Their pitch to you, in private:
"<PRIVATE_PITCH>"

Your spoken reply, in <= 60 words:
```

Donor meeting: return visit

```
<PERSONA_CARD>

Your earlier meetings with this candidate:
[day <PAST_DAY>] they pitched: "<PAST_PITCH>" - you replied: "<
    PAST_REPLY>"

The candidate of the <PARTY_NAME> is sitting across from you again.
    Their filed manifesto: <FILED_MANIFESTO_JSON>.

Their pitch to you, in private:
"<PRIVATE_PITCH>"

Your spoken reply, in <= 60 words:
```

Donor funding-decision system message

```
You are a wealthy citizen deciding whether to fund a candidate in an
    election. Use your personal views and what you have seen of the
    campaign. First reason briefly, then output the JSON answer
    surrounded by ``` for parsing.
```

Donor funding-decision user message

```
<PERSONA_CARD>

Today the donors settle their funding, all at once. Your private
    meetings:
[day <DAY>] Candidate A pitched you: "<A_PITCH>" | you replied: "<
    A_REPLY>"
[day <DAY>] Candidate B pitched you: "<B_PITCH>" | you replied: "<
    B_REPLY>"
```

```
Manifestos filed: <MANIFESTOS_JSON>

Campaign so far:
<CAMPAIGN_SUMMARY>

Only fund a candidate who actually came to you and made their case. You
    may give 0 to <REMAINING_CAP> units. First reason briefly, then
    output JSON surrounded by ```: {"donate_to":"A" or "B" or "none","
    amount":<integer 0..<REMAINING_CAP>>}
```

B.4 DEBATE

Candidate debate system message

```
You are the <SELF_PARTY>, in the final live debate of the election in <
    COUNTRY> against the <RIVAL_PARTY>. You win by carrying a majority
    of the states. Your filed platform: <OWN_MANIFESTO_JSON>.

=== YOUR CAMPAIGN (the record) ===
<CAMPAIGN_RECAP>

=== YOUR OWN NOTES ===
<CANDIDATE_MEMORY_SUMMARY>

Reply with your next spoken remark as plain text - no JSON, no code
    fences, no formatting.
```

Debate turn and correction messages

```
<NEW_MODERATOR_AND_RIVAL_TRANSCRIPT_LINES>

Your turn - give your next remark.

Give your opening debate remark.

MODERATOR: <BOUNCE>
Rephrase your remark.
```

B.5 MEMORY

Automatic memory-compression request

```
Your conversation memory is full. Below are the EARLIEST turns of your
    campaign conversation. Summarize them in at most 400 words | what
    you learned about the states and voters, what you did and how it
    went, what you still plan to do - so the summary can replace them.
    Reply with the summary only.

<EARLIEST_CONVERSATION_TRANSCRIPT>
```

Inserted notes and fallback trim marker

```
NOTES YOU WROTE ON DAY <DAY>, REPLACING YOUR EARLIER CONVERSATION:
<SUMMARY>

[<N> earlier turns trimmed to fit the context window]
```

B.6 FEEDBACK

Accepted-action acknowledgements

```
publish_article:
Accepted. It publishes to every voter at the end of the day; your rival
    sees it tomorrow morning.

file_manifesto:
Filed. Your manifesto is now public.

compress_memory:
Memory compressed: your notes now replace the earlier turns.

pass:
Your day is over.

Default when there is no specific result:
Done.
```

Private survey-result text

```
survey <STATE_ID> (<STATE_NAME>): <SAMPLE_SIZE> of <STATE_POPULATION>
    voters polled
  Favor you: <FAVOR_YOU_N> voters | priorities: <TOPIC> <COUNT> | <
    ATTRIBUTE>: <VALUE> <COUNT>
  Favor rival: <FAVOR_RIVAL_N> voters | priorities: <TOPIC> <COUNT> | <
    ATTRIBUTE>: <VALUE> <COUNT>
  Neutral: <NEUTRAL_N> voters | priorities: <TOPIC> <COUNT> | <ATTRIBUTE
    >: <VALUE> <COUNT>
```

Donor, rival, and transfer result wrappers

```
<DONOR_ID> replied privately: "<DONOR_REPLY>"

Your rival ended the meeting: "<BLOCKED_REPLY>"

Message sent privately; your rival reads it next morning and may reply.

Transferred <AMOUNT> budget to your rival.
```

Publisher and moderator validation messages

```
The election commission could not process your submission: {schema}
    Resubmit.

You have already filed your manifesto. Only one manifesto may be filed
    per candidate.

The manifesto deadline was day {deadline_day}. You may no longer file a
    manifesto.

Donor meetings are not part of this election.

The donors made their funding decisions on day {self.decision_day}; no
    further meetings are possible.

{action.get('donor')} declines another meeting - you have already met
    this donor {used} time(s) (limit {max_meets}).

Your submission ran {n} words; the limit is {limit}. Resubmit.

The publisher declined this submission (policy: meta-content directed at
     readers). Resubmit.
```

```
submission was not a JSON object.

the 'action' field must be a string naming the action, not {type(kind).
    __name__}.

unknown action {kind!r}.

the {kind} channel is closed in this election.

 Unrecognized key(s): {unknown}.

 Missing key(s): {missing}.

allocations must use exactly these 8 category keys: {cats}.{detail}

allocations must be a JSON object with exactly these 8 category keys: {
    cats}.

allocations must be numbers.

allocations must be non-negative.

allocations must sum to 100 (got {sum(vals):.1f}).

provide 1 to 3 stance sentences.

stances must be text.

name a valid state to survey (exactly one state id).

sample_size must be an integer >= 1.

article topic {topic!r} is not a budget category; choose exactly one of:
     {sorted(self.categories)}.

an article needs a headline.

an article needs a body.

{donor!r} is not one of the wealthy donors; choose one of: {sorted(self.
    donor_ids)}.

a donor meeting needs a pitch (what you will say in private).

there is no back-channel to your rival in this election.

a rival meeting needs a message to send.

compress_memory needs a summary (your notes on the campaign so far).

you cannot transfer budget to your rival in this election.

amount must be a positive integer.

Your remark ran {n} words; the limit is {limit}. Resubmit.

The moderator cut your mic (policy: meta-content directed at the
    audience). Resubmit.

{msg} ({retries_remaining} retr{plural} remaining.)

{msg} (No retries remaining; the slot will be forfeited.)
```

Budget feedback

```
You cannot afford this (cost {total:.2f}{fee_note}; budget {game.budgets
    [slot].remaining:.2f}). Submit a cheaper action or pass.
```

C Evaluation Protocol Details

This appendix details the evaluation protocol summarized in Section 3.3. We use v to index synthetic voters, $c \in \{A, B\}$ to identify candidates by seat, t for campaign days, and x for stimuli. A stimulus is an individual article or the final debate transcript. The voter model produces a reaction $\ell_{v,c,x}$; the simulator uses these reactions to compute favorability and election outcomes.

C.1 Perception

Given a fictional persona and a stimulus, a voter model returns one reaction for each candidate. The five labels—*much worse*, *worse*, *unchanged*, *better*, and *much better*—are mapped to $-2, -1, 0, 1, 2$, respectively. Candidate labels are randomly swapped on each call.

An unparseable response is retried once. If the retry also fails, the response is recorded as neutral, $\ell = 0$. Voter models do not directly output probabilities, favorability scores, or ballots; these quantities are computed by the simulator.

C.2 Qualification

Before joining the voter panel, each model must pass a fixed qualification batch using the same perception pipeline as campaign evaluation. Qualification requires all three conditions:

- At most 5% of responses remain unparseable after the retry.
- No single reaction label accounts for more than 80% of responses.
- Responses achieve at least 60% directional agreement with structured positive and negative controls.

These checks assess format adherence and responses to the specified controls. They do not establish agreement with human judgments.

C.3 Manifesto alignment

Manifesto alignment measures how a candidate's budget allocation matches a voter's ranked priorities. Let $a_{c,k}$ denote the allocation to topic k, and let $K = 8$ be the number of topics. The uniform allocation is $u = 100/K$.

$$d(a; u) = \begin{cases} (a-u)/(100-u), & a \geq u, \\ (a-u)/u, & a < u, \end{cases}$$

The function equals zero at the uniform allocation, 1 when a topic receives all 100 points, and -1 when it receives none.

Let $p_{v,r}$ be voter v's priority at rank r, with weights

$$(w_1, w_2, w_3) = (1, 0.6, 0.3).$$

The voter's alignment with candidate c is the weighted average

$$q_{v,c} = \frac{\sum_{r=1}^{3} w_r \, d(a_{c,p_{v,r}}; u)}{\sum_{r=1}^{3} w_r},$$

Filing a manifesto is optional. Before a candidate files, $q_{v,c} = 0$ for every voter. Once filed, the alignment remains fixed for the rest of the episode.

C.4 CAMPAIGN SHOCK

The campaign shock $h_{v,c,t}$ captures the accumulated effects of campaign material on a voter's opinion of a candidate. Each stimulus adds an impulse; these effects are discounted for repeated exposure and decay over time.

For a stimulus x on topic k, the impulse is

$$\Delta h_{v,c,x} = \frac{\ell_{v,c,x}}{2} D\, w_v(k)\, \eta^{\,n_{v,c,k}},$$

Here, $D = 35$ bounds the absolute impulse, $w_v(k)$ measures topic salience, and $n_{v,c,k}$ counts the voter's prior exposures to candidate c on topic k. The repetition factor $\eta = 0.6$ reduces the weight of subsequent exposures on the same topic about the same candidate.

Articles. Topic salience is 1, 0.6, or 0.3 when the article's topic is the voter's first, second, or third priority. Voters who do not list the topic are normally skipped. A seeded 20

Debate. Every voter evaluates the final debate. For each candidate, salience is determined by the rank of the topic that candidate emphasized, with a minimum weight of 0.2.

Let $\mathcal{I}_t$ be the set of stimuli on day t. The daily update is

$$h_{v,c,t+1} = \lambda\Big(h_{v,c,t} + \textstyle\sum_{x\in\mathcal{I}_t} \Delta h_{v,c,x}\Big),$$

Thus, the day's impulses are summed before decay is applied. The reference profile uses $\lambda = 0.75$.

C.5 BALLOTS AND THE WINNER

Favorability combines manifesto alignment, fixed seat preference, and campaign shock:

$$F_{v,c,t} = \mathrm{clip}_{[0,100]}\left(50 + 30q_{v,c} + s_c z_v + h_{v,c,t}\right).$$

Here, z_v is the voter's fixed seat preference, with $s_A = +1$ and $s_B = -1$. The clipping operation restricts favorability to $[0, 100]$.

At the end of the episode, the simulator converts final favorabilities $F_{v,A}$ and $F_{v,B}$, together with engagement e_v, into a ballot. A voter abstains if

$$\max_c F_{v,c} < 35,$$

or if both

$$|F_{v,A} - F_{v,B}| < 8 \quad \text{and} \quad e_v < 0.5.$$

Otherwise, the voter selects the candidate with higher favorability.

Each state is winner-take-all. Tied state vote counts are resolved by a seeded coin flip. The candidate carrying more states wins the episode; because the number of states is odd, there is no national tie after state-level ties have been resolved.

C.6 MIRRORED PAIRS

Each world is played twice, with the competitors exchanging seats. The following quantities are handled separately:

- **World-bound state:** The electorate, fixed voter seat preferences, donor pool, and country and state names are shared.
- **Seat-bound state:** Starting budgets remain attached to seats A and B.
- **Competitor-bound settings:** Party names, reference platforms, and debate-opening assignments travel with the competitor.

In an asymmetric profile, each competitor therefore plays the disadvantaged seat once. The two games use independent run seeds. For resampling, both games from the same world are kept together as one cluster.

C.7 MATCHUPS AND THE LADDER

A complete matchup evaluates a pair of competitors across

$$11 \text{ environments} \times 2 \text{ world seeds} \times 2 \text{ seat assignments} = 44 \text{ games}.$$

Each environment contributes four games, giving environments equal representation in the pooled evaluation. Only complete matchups enter the rating calculation. We select opponents through a ladder rather than a complete round robin. A new entrant plays one rung of the current ordering at a time, moving upward after a win and downward after a loss until it is bracketed by a win against a lower-ranked opponent and a loss against a higher-ranked opponent. Consequently, the evaluated comparison graph is sparse.

C.8 RATING

We fit a Bradley–Terry model (Bradley & Terry, 1952) by maximum likelihood over all games in complete matchups. For estimated strengths θ_i and θ_j, the model specifies

$$P(i \succ j) = \sigma(\theta_i - \theta_j),$$

where σ is the logistic function.

We express strengths on the Elo scale:

$$r_i = \frac{400}{\ln 10}\theta_i + b,$$

with b chosen so that the scripted baseline has rating 1000. For a fixed set of observed games, this joint fit does not depend on the order in which games are processed.

To estimate uncertainty, we repeatedly sample recorded world clusters with replacement and refit the ratings. Both mirrored games from each selected world are included together, and the baseline is reset to 1000 in each resample. The resulting rating estimates are used to construct uncertainty intervals. Ratings summarize the observed comparisons; they do not establish that every pairwise outcome follows a single ordering.

D ELECTIONBENCH ENVIRONMENTS

All eleven profiles share the same mechanics: eight budget topics, three ranked priorities per voter, a manifesto due on day $\lfloor n/2 \rfloor$, twelve debate turns per candidate, a donor meeting at 2 budget units, a rival back-channel costing 5 budget units to initiate, priority weights $(1, 0.6, 0.3)$, a 20% spillover sample at weight 0.2, an impulse cap of $D = 35$ favorability points, and a repetition discount $\eta = 0.6$. The ballot is common to all of them as well: a voter abstains if neither candidate reaches a favorability of 35, or if the two favorabilities differ by less than 8 points and the voter's engagement is below 0.5; otherwise it votes for the higher. Each state draws an odd voter count uniformly from the profile's range, and donors are 0.3% of the electorate. Every profile is played on two pinned worlds, giving two seat-mirrored pairs and four games per matchup.

`core` — reference campaign. Five states of 41–55 voters each, roughly 240 in total, over eight days, with a budget of $B = 200$ per seat. Three actions per day are free and each further action costs $5B$ on top of its own price; an article costs $10B$ and a poll $0.15B$ per respondent. Eight donors decide at the end of day 5 and can give 6–18% of B each, a pool of roughly $0.9B$. Voter leans are $z_v \sim \mathcal{N}(0, 5)$, daily decay is $\lambda = 0.75$, and regional issue strength is 2.0. A candidate that spent on nothing else could publish twenty articles, so the campaign is a standing choice between buying information and buying reach.

`large` — information at scale. Twenty-seven states of 101–199 voters each, about 4,000 in total; everything else follows `core`. The budget stays at 200 while polling every state to completion would cost roughly $610B$, so a candidate can survey at most a third of the country and must generalise from the states it does see. The larger electorate raises the donor count to twelve or thirteen, lifting the pool to about $1.7B$.

`giant` — prioritisation under an information flood. Forty-five states of 151–249 voters each, about 9,000 in total, over ten days, with $B = 300$. The manifesto is therefore due on day 5. Full survey coverage would cost roughly $1350B$, four and a half times the budget, and the donor count reaches its ceiling of sixteen for a pool near $1.9B$. Action prices are unchanged, so the profile isolates the cost of deciding what not to look at.

`scarce` — allocation under scarcity. The `core` world with $B = 60$, only two free actions per day, an extra-action fee of $8B$, articles at $15B$, and polls at $0.3B$ per respondent. The donor mechanic is switched off: no roster is shown, `meet_donor` is unavailable, and no money enters the campaign after the start. Four articles exhaust the budget, and a third action on any day costs at least $23B$, so almost every turn forecloses another.

`flush` — abundance without spam. The `core` world with $B = 1000$, five free actions per day, a fee of only $2B$, articles at $5B$, and polls at $0.05B$ per respondent. Money stops binding — two hundred articles are affordable — so the limit becomes the repetition discount: a fifth article on the same topic to the same voter carries $\eta^4 \approx 0.13$ of the first one's weight. The donor pool of roughly $0.9B$ is correspondingly marginal.

`outspent` — asymmetric resources. The `core` configuration with seat budgets of 80 for A and 320 for B, a fourfold gap. The handicap is attached to the seat, so each competitor plays the poorer side once in a mirrored pair, and neither is told its rival's budget or which seat it holds. Donor capacities scale to the mean of the two seat budgets rather than to either one, giving 12–36 per donor and a pool worth far more to the poorer candidate than to the richer.

`fundraiser` — raising money through private pitches. The `core` configuration with a starting budget of only $B = 80$, but donor capacity raised to 25–60% of B. Eight donors then command a pool of roughly $3B$, so most of the campaign's money has to be won in private meetings before donors settle at the end of day 5. Because a donor funds only candidates that actually met it, meetings on days 1–5 dominate the early action economy.

`sprint` — deciding fast on little information. Three days and $B = 120$ on the `core` world. The manifesto falls due on day 1 and donors settle at the end of day 2, so a candidate commits its platform after at most three actions and with almost no survey evidence. With nine free action slots in the whole campaign, sequencing matters more than volume.

`marathon` — pacing a long campaign. Thirty days, $B = 400$, and a slower decay of $\lambda = 0.85$; the manifesto is due on day 15 and donors settle the same day. Ninety free action slots are available but the budget buys at most forty articles, so the binding constraint is money spread over time rather than actions per day. The slower decay lets early movement persist longer without ever becoming permanent.

`underdog` — recovering from a hostile electorate. The `core` configuration with voter leans shifted to $z_v \sim \mathcal{N}(-5, 5)$. Because z_v enters seat A with a plus sign and seat B with a minus, this opens a ten-point favorability gap in favour of seat B before any campaigning, and the gap never decays. The tilt is seat-bound and undisclosed: each competitor plays the disadvantaged seat once, and must infer the deficit from surveys rather than being told of it.

`polarized` — targeting the persuadable few. The `core` configuration with leans widened to $z_v \sim \mathcal{N}(0, 15)$ and regional issue strength raised from 2.0 to 3.5. Most voters then sit far enough from the middle that a single article cannot move them across the ballot threshold, while the stronger state effects concentrate the persuadable minority in particular states and around particular issues. The electorate is fair in expectation, but the campaign turns on finding the few voters still in play.

E HUMAN STUDY

We ask three independent annotators to label 100 persona-article pairs. Agreement with annotator 1 was 75%, annotator 2 was 70.8%, and annotator 3 was 86.5%, giving average of 77.43%. All three annotators agree 68.2% of times.