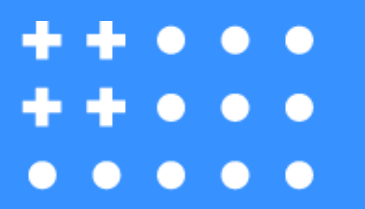


# What Effect do Audits Have on Voter Confidence?

Jacob Jaffe, Joseph Loffredo, Samuel Baltz, Alejandro Flores, Charles Stewart III  
Massachusetts Institute of Technology



MIT ELECTION DATA  
+ SCIENCE LAB

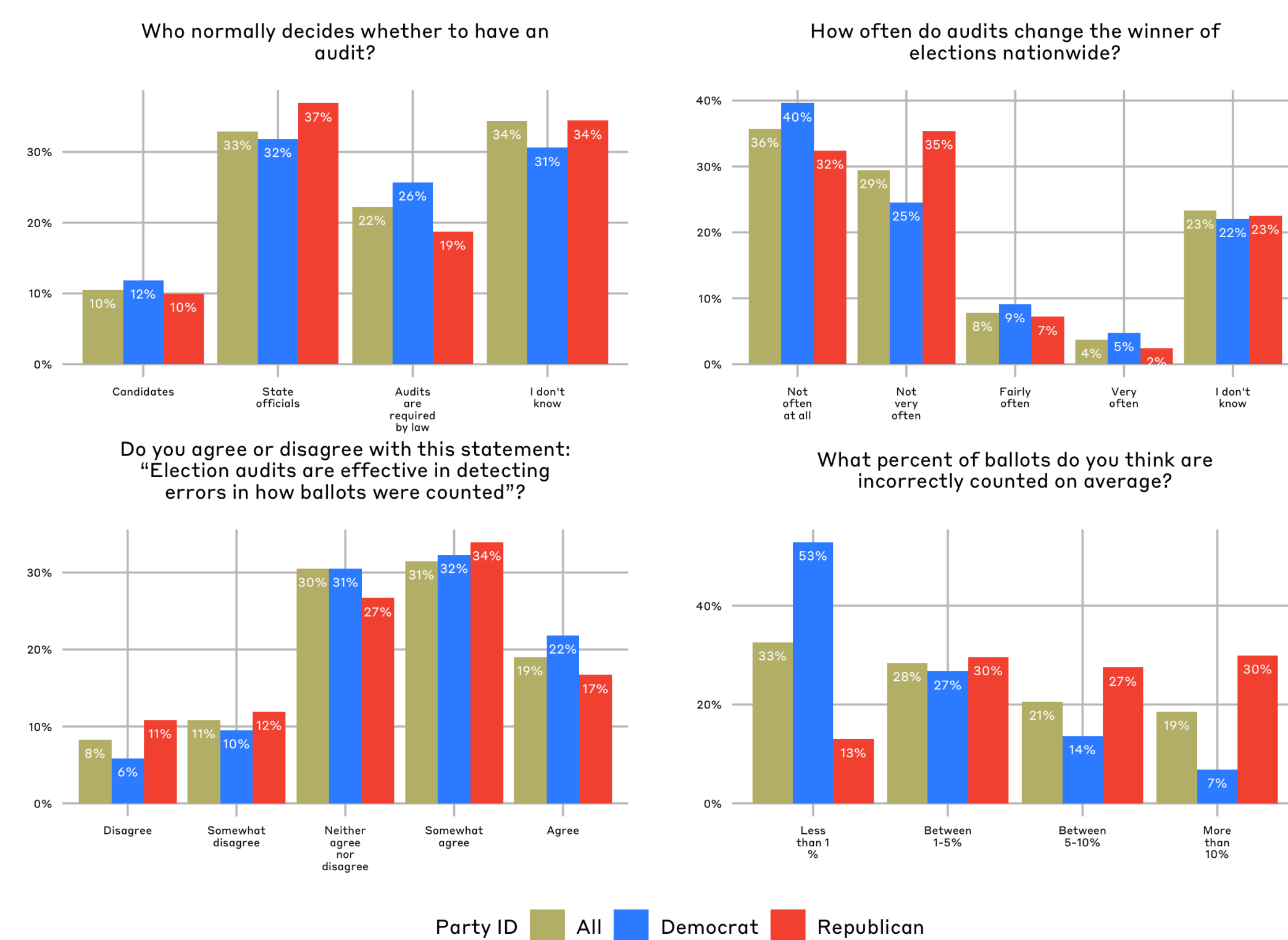
## Theoretical Grounding

A record-number of states required a post-election audit in the 2020 General Election (U.S. Election Assistance, 2021). Only recently has the perceived normative value of audits gone beyond mere anecdotal intuition and have empirically been shown that they do indeed influence voter opinion about the electoral process (Atkeson et al., 2014; Alvarez et al., 2021; King, 2017). Specifically, Traugott and Conrad (2012) experimentally demonstrate that informing voters that audits were conducted after an election engenders greater trust in the accuracy of its results. Yet, it is unclear which aspects of audits drive public trust in election results. We theorize an informational mechanism that allows for two competing hypotheses about how post-election audits may shape voter trust in election outcomes. On the one hand, audits may give context about the accuracy of vote counts, which in turn makes voters feel more confident in election outcomes. On the other hand, information regarding post-election audits may have an adverse effect: voters may not know what to do with this information, lack the context to make sense of such information, or hold preconceived notions that counteract the intended positive effects of that information. In this study we will test competing hypotheses on the impact of information on trust in the outcome of an election.

## Data & Design

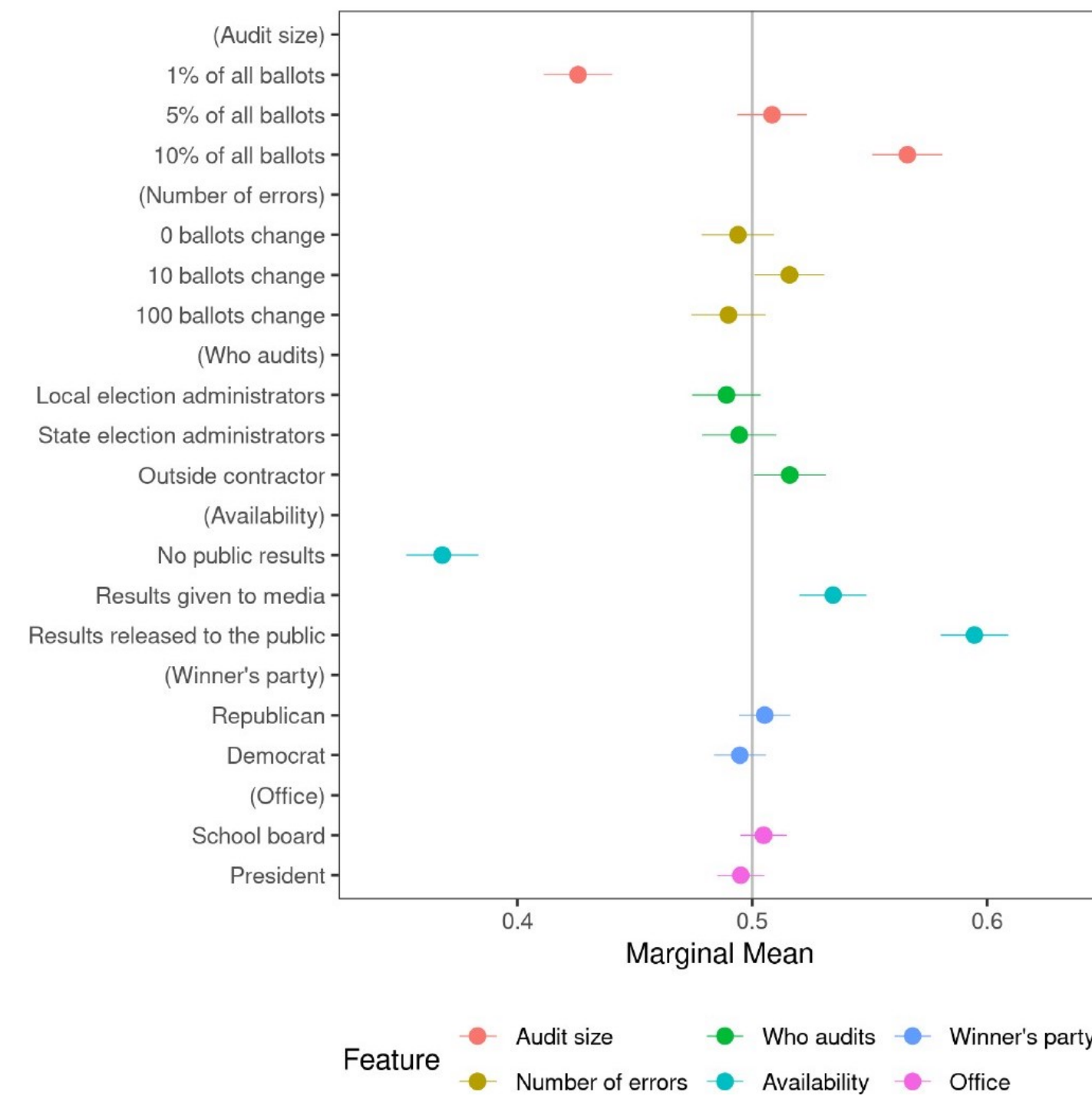
- Pre-registered survey experiment fielded by YouGov on a sample of 2,000 respondents during week of February 27, 2023
- Vignette Experiment: Information Addition (1 x 4 factorial design)
- Vignette Experiment: Order of Magnitude (1 x 3 factorial design)
- Conjoint Experiment: Aspects of an audit

## Descriptive Results

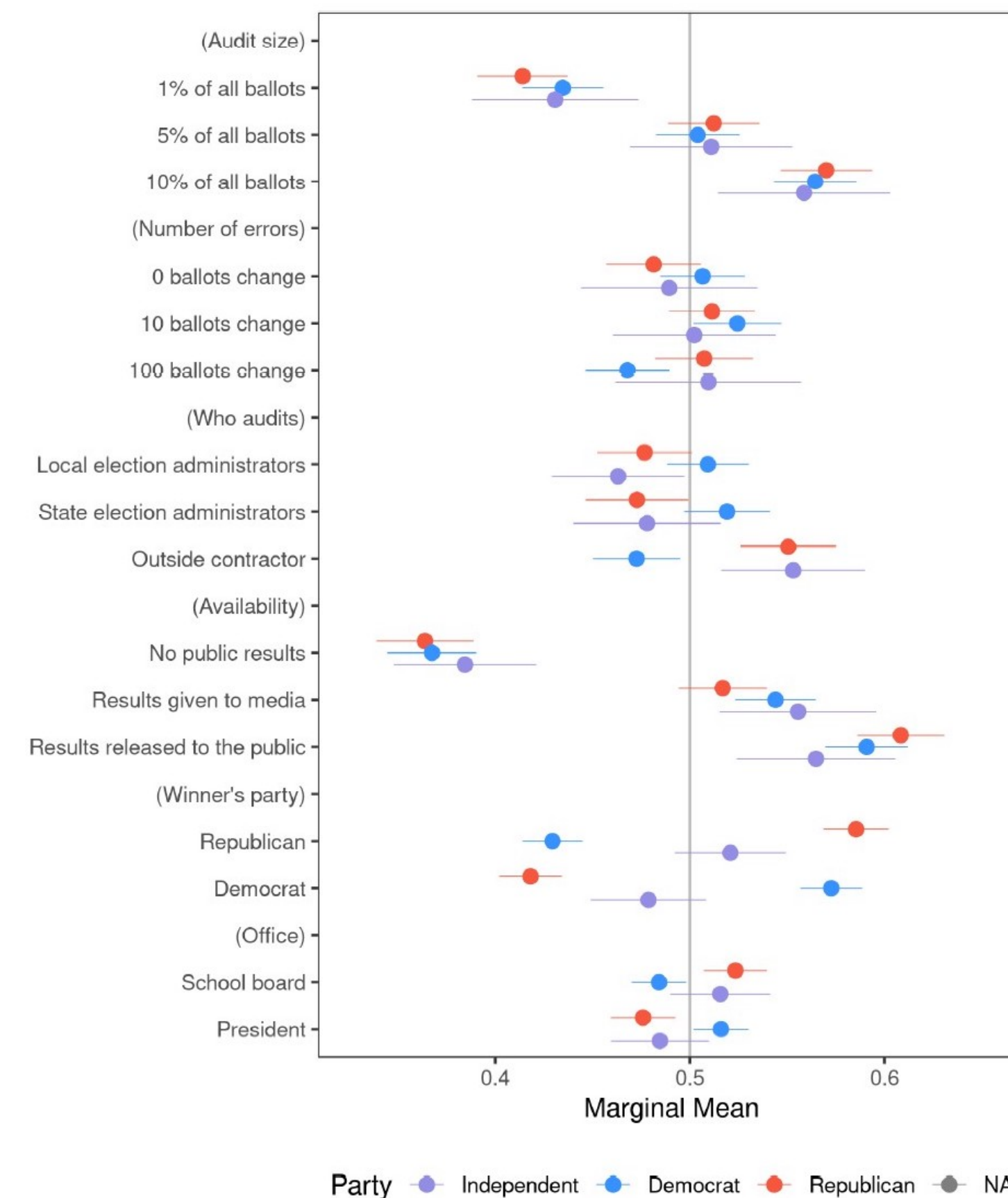


## Conjoint Experiment

Estimated Marginal Mean Effect on Chosen County

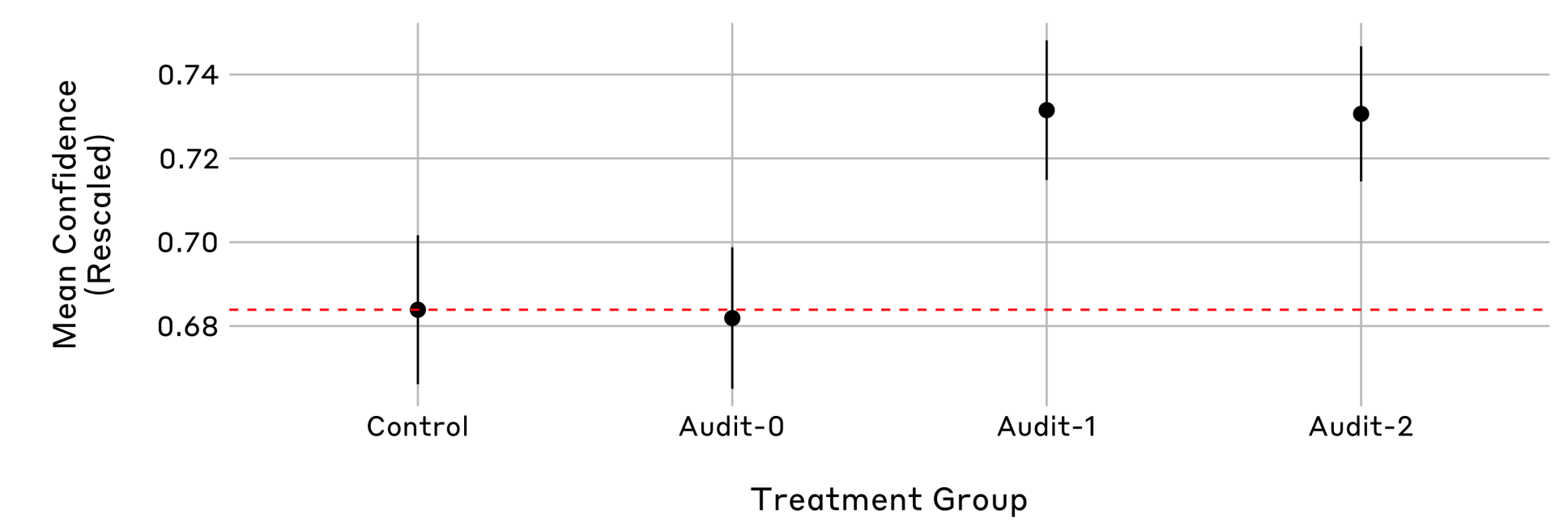


Marginal Mean (by Respondent Party)

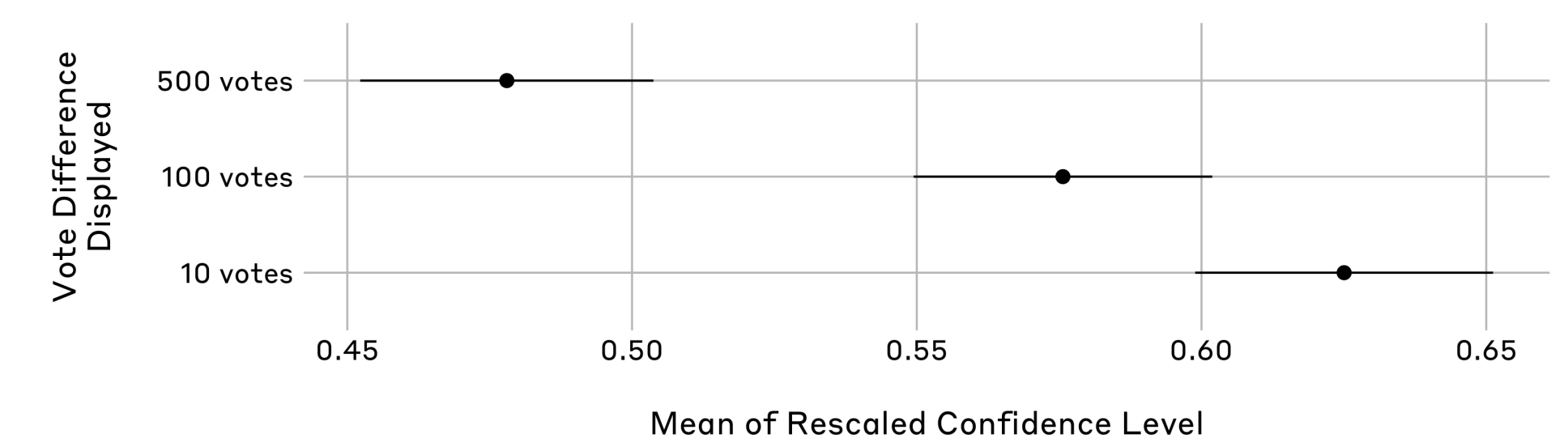


## Vignette Experiments

Information Addition



Order of Magnitude



## Conclusions

- The results of an election audit is not as impactful on voter confidence as much as how an audit is conducted.
- Structural features of the audit, like who conducts it and how its results are announced, turn out to be more consequential to voter evaluations of election results.
- While Republicans have less confidence in the accuracy of vote counting and view a few features of election audits quite differently than Democrats.

## References

- R. Michael Alvarez, Jian Cao, and Yimeng Li. Voting Experiences, Perceptions of Fraud, and Voter Confidence. *Social Science Quarterly*, 102(4):1225--1238, July 2021.
- Lonna Rae Atkeson. Voter Confidence in 2010: Local, State, and National Factors. In R. Michael Alvarez and Bernard Grofman, editors, *Election Administration in the United States: The State of Reform after Bush v. Gore*, pages 102--119. Cambridge University Press, 1 edition, September 2014.
- Bridgett A. King. Policy and Precinct: Citizen Evaluations and Electoral Confidence. *Social Science Quarterly*, 98(2):672--689, June 2017.
- Michael W. Traugott and Frederick G. Conrad. Confidence in the Electoral System: Why We Do Auditing. In R. Michael Alvarez, Lonna Rae Atkeson, and Thad E. Hall, editors, *Confirming Elections: Creating Confidence and Integrity Through Election Auditing*, pages 41--56. Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 1st ed edition, 2012.
- U.S. Election Assistance Commission. *Election Audits Across the United States*. Technical report, 2021.