

# What Effect do Audits Have on Voter Confidence?

Jacob Jaffe\*    Joseph Loffredo†    Samuel Baltz‡    Alejandro Flores§  
Charles Stewart III¶

## Abstract

Post-election audits are thought to bolster voters' confidence in elections, but it is unclear which aspects of audits drive public trust in election results and why. In a set of survey experiments fielded by YouGov to a sample of 2,000 Americans, we used both factorial and conjoint designs to understand which attributes of election audits are most important for increasing voter confidence in legitimate election results. Overall, we find that *what* an audit finds is much less important than *how* the audit is conducted, so long as the audit does not uncover exceptionally large errors. 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 than the actual number of discrepancies found. Although voters are quick to pick up partisan cues about audits, this has not produced a broader polarization around election audits, and voters rationally do not punish an election in which the winner was called correctly for a few mis-counted votes. Our findings suggest that election administrators can bolster voter confidence through the design of election audits, without serious fear that turning up small numbers of errors will harm voter confidence.

**Keywords:** Election administration, post-election audits, voter confidence, polarization, experimental research, electoral legitimacy

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\*PhD Candidate, Department of Political Science, MIT. [jacobjaf@mit.edu](mailto:jacobjaf@mit.edu)

†PhD Student, Department of Political Science, MIT. [loffredo@mit.edu](mailto:loffredo@mit.edu)

‡Research Scientist, Department of Political Science, MIT. [sbaltz@mit.edu](mailto:sbaltz@mit.edu)

§Postdoctoral Fellow, Department of Political Science, MIT. [alex410@mit.edu](mailto:alex410@mit.edu)

¶Kenan Sahin Distinguished Professor of Political Science, Department of Political Science, MIT. [cstewart@mit.edu](mailto:cstewart@mit.edu)

# Introduction

Trust in American elections has fallen to historic lows among Republican voters (Stewart, 2022; Sances and Stewart, 2015; Clark and Stewart III, 2021). While it has long been understood that supporting the candidacy of losing candidates has a negative effect on public trust in elections (Sances and Stewart, 2015; Sinclair et al., 2018), supporters of Donald Trump have voiced a notable visceral distrust in the electoral process since 2020. Republican elites have acted on this skepticism, making it a central feature of their partisan brand: 156 Republican House members have raised concerns about the validity of the 2020 presidential election and over half of Republican candidates in the 2022 midterm election did the same (MacFarlane et al., 2022). Moreover, this rhetoric resonated with certain segments of the electorate, culminating on January 6, 2021 when supporters of Donald Trump rioted at the United States Capitol, hoping to disrupt the certification of the 2020 presidential election.

Given these elite cues by public officials in the lead up to and since the 2020 general election, casting doubt on the security of American elections (e.g., integrity of voting machines, reliability of mail-in voting), it is unsurprising that a record-number of states required a post-election audit that year (U.S. Election Assistance, 2021; Jaffe et al., 2022). The consensus out of those delegated to run elections in this country is that post-election audits necessarily bolster voter confidence: “[they are designed to] look for evidence that evaluates the effectiveness and durability of the procedures, processes, systems, and training” (National Association of Secretaries of State, 2021). Both believers in and deniers of the 2020 election outcome have their own reasons to support post-election audits as a result. For deniers of the 2020 election, audits are a way to prevent future elections from being stolen. For those who believe in the trustworthiness of the 2020 election, post-election audits are an opportunity to anticipate such objections before they metastasize into a political identity such as the “Stop the Steal” movement.

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. 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. These findings are consistent with other studies testing varying modes of assuring Americans that their votes were cast as intended (Alvarez et al., 2008; Bullock et al., 2005). Notably, this body of work collectively underscores the role of media and how information arising from such verification methods in election administration is communicated to the public. News outlets will often report a full spectrum of details about post-election audits: difference in vote tabulation (if any); number of counties and ballots that were sampled; and even distinguish an audit from a recount.<sup>1</sup> The resonance of this information with voters is in conversation with a broader literature centered on how media coverage of government institutions shapes constituents’ confidence in government institutions (Price and Romantan, 2004). In short, if post-election audits are meant to relieve any doubts about the accuracy of election results, then information about how audits are conducted—coupled with the knowledge that how citizens feel about an election is grounded in their experiences at the polls (Atkeson et al., 2014; Alvarez et al., 2008, 2021; King, 2017; Barreto et al., 2009)—should lead us to expect that post-election audits inherently have positive effects on voter confidence.

Yet, it is unclear which aspects of audits drive public trust in election results. Evaluations about the integrity of electoral outcomes may be premised on factors such as who conducts the audit, how the results of an audit are disseminated, or the size of the discrepancy found. This supposition raises the added question of whether there is a certain magnitude of errors that voters are willing to tolerate (even if outcomes do not change) before seeing such a number as an indictment of the entire election. Thus, in some instances, audits may decrease confidence in the results of elections. Existing work on voter appraisals about the accuracy and security of elections does not consider these potential sensitivities.

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<sup>1</sup>For examples, see (Bloom, 2022; Ragar, 2022; Mendez, 2022; Hendrickson, 2021; Forman, 2022; Axelrod, 2021; Zelinger, 2022).

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. Of particular interest among these factors is the size of the discrepancy found, which is not included in previous research. An audit will oftentimes give two pieces of information. First, it may state the number of votes changed from the initial count to the re-tabulation done during the audit. Second, it will either confirm the results of the audit or call for a full recount. The vast majority of audits confirm the results of the election. If a voter trusts the audit, then the size of the discrepancy rationally may have no impact on trust in whether the correct candidate was declared winner. It is possible that a voter may not trust an audit, thinking that election authorities are likely to understate any mistakes made. Additionally, a larger number of mistakes may be an indication of future unreliability. We find descriptive evidence that trust in audits is high and future elections are beyond the scope of the dependent variable. While post-election audits are a tool election administrators rely on to bolster public trust in elections, we take a novel approach by testing whether election audits are conducted may actually have the opposite effect.

To test this proposed framework, we leverage a preregistered survey experiment administered by YouGov on a sample of 2,000 American voters. Our point of departure in this study is to not only understand the impact of conducting an audit on public trust, but to examine the ways in which how an audit is conducted moves voter trust in election outcomes. In a set of survey experiments implementing both factorial and conjoint designs, we examine what attributes of audits (e.g., size of errors, transparency, who conducts them) generate positive effects in voter confidence of election results, how voters process information about an audit,

and document what voters think audits should be doing. We break down the concept of a post-election audit and test the effects of its constituent components on voter confidence. To give greater perspective and nuance to our data, we collect new data about what voters currently know about and expect from audits. We test robustness of these treatments against a wide array of political referents and associations that may alter how and what type of information about audits voters take to be meaningful.

Overall, our findings suggest that the *results* of an election audit is not as impactful on voter confidence as much as *how* an audit is conducted. When audits reveal a fairly typical number of errors, voter confidence is boosted only slightly, if at all. 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 they do view a few features of election audits quite differently than Democrats, this divergence has only taken place in response to narrow elite cues; there has been no broader split in how reassured partisans are by election audits.

## Theory and Literature

Regardless of whether they increase trust in elections, post-election audits play a pivotal role in ensuring elections are without fraud. Democracies rely on the successful transmission of votes into electoral winners. Without audits, it is possible that the wrong winners are chosen. Post-election audits explicitly exist to ensure the accuracy of elections in converting cast ballots into winners. Although they ensure accuracy, that does not necessarily imply that they also cause the perception of accuracy. Trust is important independent of accuracy and key to the continued democratic process (Rahn et al., 1999). Previous work has shown the impact that exposure to election administration successes and failures (Price and Romantan, 2004) can have on trust, either nationally or locally (Atkeson and Saunders, 2007). Without the perception of accuracy, voters will not trust that elections are correctly selecting winners.

Levels of perceived prevalence of vote fraud, as well as reported observed fraud are correlated with confidence in elections (Atkeson, 2014).

Most post-election audits sample ballots, machines, precincts, or races and try to find every possible error within their sample. The inherent fact that audits involve the reporting of errors may complicate efforts to increase trust in elections. Audits oftentimes ask voters to adjudicate between two points with normatively opposite values. First, that there were errors, a point which alone has negative consequences for trust in elections. Second, that those errors were insufficient to change the outcome of the election. Together, these points should have positive impacts on public trust in elections. The ability of voters to accomplish this task, although simple, gets to the heart of democratic performance. A number of studies have shown that voter misattribution is common and that voters place blame where it is not deserved (Sances, 2017; Dynes and Holbein, 2020; Wu, 2022). However, others argue otherwise (Fowler and Hall, 2018; Graham et al., 2023), pointing out that even irrelevant events give insight into politician quality (Ashworth et al., 2018). The cognitive task asked of voters by audits bears surface-level resemblance to misattribution but is fundamentally different; instead of assigning blame, voters are given competing information about whether blame should be assigned at all. The cognitive task provided by audits may be less taxing than some others; when learning about an audit the information provided is likely sufficient. Motivated reasoning, by which voters interpret the same information in different directions based on their priors, may provide a mechanism for those with strong prior beliefs, like partisans, to interpret the outcomes of election audits differently (Little et al., 2022).

The discrepancy between the original count for a candidate in a selection of audited ballots and the audited count is not the only electoral factor that may effect how audits affect public trust in elections. Not every audit samples the same amount of votes. More comprehensive audits may increase trust in elections by increasing the trustworthiness of the auditing process. Similarly, who administers the audit and the transparency with which an audit is conducted and its results are shared may increase the authoritativeness voters

assign to it. The environment in which the race took place may have an effect on trust before any audit even begins. What the race is and what political elites have to say about it and its fairness will also impact the trust voters have in any election. While partisan cues or the facts of the race may not be manipulateable by election administrators, a number of the other variables are. Transparency, scale, and organization are all things that election administrators can change to increase the trust voters have in the very elections they administer. Additionally, all of these factors are logically associated with the success of audits in general.

## Hypotheses

In a set of survey experiments fielded by YouGov to a sample of 2,000 Americans implementing both factorial and conjoint designs, we examine what attributes of audits generate positive effects in voter confidence of election results, how voters process information about an audit, and document what voters think audits should be doing. Before fielding our survey instrument, we preregistered the following four hypotheses on the impact of information on trust in the outcome of an election:

- $H_1$ : The performance of an audit which reveals some errors in the counting of votes but which confirms the outcome INCREASES the trust in an election.
- $H_2$ : The performance of an audit which reveals some errors in the counting of votes but which confirms the outcome DECREASES the trust in an election.
- $H_3$ : Effect of a post-election audit is a function of the *magnitude of errors* found in an audit.
- $H_4$ : *How* post-election audits are conducted (e.g., *who* conducts them, transparency, etc.) affects how they are perceived.

## **Experimental and Survey Design**

We include two different experiments, with complementary aims. The first is a short series of informational questions. In these, we randomize how much information, or exactly which information, respondents receive about the results of a hypothetical election audit. Then, we compare the self-reported confidence in the hypothetical election between the groups that were randomly exposed to more or different pieces of information.

Then, we supplement this analysis with a conjoint study. That analysis compares different features of election audits to each other, to determine what makes an election audit have a strongly positive or negative effect on voter confidence.

### **Descriptive questions**

In addition to the two experimental designs, respondents were asked a series of general questions about post-election audits. First, respondents were asked how often they have heard about post-election audits to get a sense of baseline awareness. Second, respondents were asked a set of basic factual questions to measure how knowledgeable respondents are about audits, including how often respondents have heard about audits, how many states perform audits, how many ballots are typically counted in audits, who typically makes the decision to conduct audits, and how often audits change the winner of election. Third, respondents were asked questions to gauge expectations about the effectiveness of audits, average percent of ballots that are incorrectly counted, and how often audits should change the winner of an election. The full text of these questions is found in Appendix A.

### **Informational questions**

The first experiment in our survey is an information addition exercise, with three treatments, and three questions to measure respondents' confidence in the result of a hypothetical election. The control group was told simply that a presidential election took place and the



Democrat won. The first treatment group (which we will call “Audit-0”) was told the same thing, but were also informed that an audit was conducted, resulting in no change to election outcome. A second treatment group (“Audit-1”) was given this same information, but were also told that the audit found a 0.02% difference in the total vote count. Finally, members in a third treatment group (“Audit-2”) were told the same information as those in the second, but were informed that there was a 1% difference in the total vote count.

The respondents were then asked three questions. They were asked to report how confident they were that a) the candidate with the most votes won, b) the election was accurate and secure, and c) votes were counted as voters intended. We preregistered the following analysis: we focus on the “Tolerance Effect” of the information addition exercise using Ordinary Least Squares:

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 f_i + \epsilon \tag{1}$$

where  $\beta_1$  is the estimand of interest, and  $f_i$  indicates the random assignment to one of the experimental groups.  $H_1$  predicts that the coefficient  $\beta_1$  will be positive, while  $H_2$  predicts it will be negative, which  $H_3$  predicts the coefficient changes as the size of the errors grows.

The design of this portion of the study is straightforward, with a few details that require motivation. We fixed the party label and the office in this question, so that the only change is information about the audit. The first treatment group might be similarly thought of as a second control group: in addition to allowing us to estimate the treatment effect of being told election results versus being told election results *alongside* affirmation that a confirmatory audited happened, the presence of both prompts also gives us two baselines to compare the numerically specific prompts to. In the two treatments with numbers attached, we chose conservative numbers that would be highly unsurprising results for real presidential election audits, for two reasons. First, we wished to produce estimates of practical value, and having unrealistically large discrepancies would falsely inflate the treatment effects. Second, telling respondents that a presidential election found unrealistically large discrepancies would risk

deceiving them into thinking that such an audit had actually taken place, and potentially affecting their confidence in actual presidential elections.<sup>2</sup>

With these considerations in mind, a separate information provision question focuses specifically on the number of discrepancies found in the election. This question is purely hypothetical: it begins with “suppose”, it mentions an election but it contains no information about where or when or for which office this election took place, and it refers to the candidates just as “Candidate A” or “Candidate B”. Within this *purely hypothetical* scenario, we identify an easy to understand election margin (candidate A wins by 1,000 votes), and we ask respondents how confident they would be if a post-election audit arrived at a vote count which different from the original count by one of three randomly assigned values: 10 votes, 100 votes, or 500 votes. This non-specific hypothetical question allows us to test the effect of unrealistically large discrepancies on self-reported confidence, without a serious risk that we might affect respondents’ attitudes about real elections.

In one final informational experiment, we ask respondents how their confidence is affected by the losing candidate agreeing that they lost the election, with half of respondents also randomly informed that a post-election audit confirmed that the results were correct. This allows us to test whether or not the existence of a confirmatory post-election audit reinforces the importance of candidate concessions.

## Conjoint study

Our conjoint study includes six crucial ingredients of an election audit, each motivated by either straightforward reasoning or previous empirical results which suggest that the variable might mediate how election audits affect voters’ confidence in elections.

Two features we take to be common sense: the scale of the audits, and the number of problems it uncovers. It is straightforward that a larger audit that confirms the results of an election should reinforce voter confidence more than a smaller audit would. Similarly,

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<sup>2</sup>We will discuss these considerations further when motivating the variable values in the conjoint experiment.

the more incorrectly counted votes that the audit identifies, the less we should expect it to bolster voter confidence.

Several previous studies suggest that who conducts the audit and how it is reported could both matter. Voter attitudes about local election officials in particular are closely related to their confidence in elections, so their attitudes about the agents who conduct the audit could mediate how they view the results of that audit (Merivaki and Suttman-Lea, 2022; Suttman-Lea and Merivaki, 2023). Transparency in the conduct and reporting of an election is also one of the core variables in voter confidence, and should reasonably be expected to apply to audits of those elections as well (Alvarez and Hall, 2008). We capture this idea by presenting respondents with options regarding whether and how the audit results are reported to the public.

Finally, the importance of party identification for structuring confidence in American elections can hardly be overstated, so we include a variable reporting the winner's party (Stewart, 2022). Because the integrity of American elections was particularly politicized by a recent Republican president, with differential effects on voters of different parties, we also hypothesize that there may be something special about the presidency that shapes voters' confidence in that election's results. So, we vary whether the office is for the presidency or for a much less prominent office.

Table 1: Attributes for Audit Profiles in Conjoint Experiment

Attributes	Values	Basis
Share of votes included in audit	1%	Empirical
	5%	
	10%	
Difference between results posted on election night and after audit	0 ballots	Empirical
	10 ballots	
	100 ballots	
Who conducted the audit	Local administrators	Empirical
	State administrators	
	Outside contractor	
Availability of audit results	Posted publicly	Empirical
	Given to the media	
	Not shared with the public	
Election winner’s party	Republican	Empirical
	Democrat	
Office audit conducted for	President	Substantive
	School board	

We chose variable values for the conjoint in the following way.

**Share of ballots:** How many ballots are included in a typical election audit? It is fairly common for states to mandate audits of either 1% of the reporting units, or 1% of the ballots within each reporting unit; examples as of the 2022 election are California, Kansas, and Texas (NCSL, 2023). Perhaps the most common share of units or votes to be included in an audit is somewhere between 1% and 5%; examples in this range are New Jersey (about 2%), Nevada (2% to 3%), Washington (about 4%), and Wisconsin (at least 5%). In some cases, states will audit more than 5%: Connecticut requires an audit of 10% of districts, and Oregon requires auditing 10% of precincts whenever the margin is sufficiently close. Rarely if ever do states or counties audit more than 10% of the votes or reporting units in an election. So, 1%, 5%, and 10% reasonably represents the shares of votes that are typically included in election audits.

**Discrepancy found:** It is much more difficult to pin down a reasonable scale for the number of discrepancies found in an election audit. There is no centralized reporting of American election audit results, so how many ballots we should reasonably expect to be counted differently in the original election and the election audit is not known. Compounding the empirical problem is a serious ethical consideration: if our conjoint experiment names an unrealistically large number without clearly emphasizing that the number is completely hypothetical (which would be particularly logistically difficult in the context of a conjoint experiment), then we may give respondents the impression that American elections are much less accurate than they are.<sup>3</sup> Here we rely on estimates by Jaffe et al. (2022): they show that the vast majority of audit discrepancies are close to 0, rarely more than a dozen, and almost never more than 100 votes. So, we present respondents with theoretical discrepancies of 0, 10, or 100 ballots.

**Who conducted the audit:** Audits are always done by one of three groups. One option is for the audit to be mandated at the state level, as it is in Arkansas where a random selection of precincts are audited. Another option is for audits to be conducted entirely by local election officials, as in many California counties. It has been demonstrated that voters can view state election administrators and local election administrators quite differently, and that their overall attitudes about elections may be closely related to these feelings (Suttman-Lea and Merivaki, 2023). Notably, the American federal government does not play any direct role in auditing elections; the only remaining alternative is for audits to be done by some non-government contractor.

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<sup>3</sup>We also use the raw number of discrepancies rather than a percentage. One simple reason is that, in the information addition question, we already used percentages to test the effect of discrepancies, so this guards against findings that simply have to do with people thinking of percentages as either inherently large or small. However, there is a more serious reason which have to do with interpretability. The total number of discrepancies found is presented alongside the share of ballots that are included in the audit, which is a percentage. This means that, if the discrepancies were a percentage, then respondents would be asked to make a judgment about the magnitude of a percentage of a percentage, a task at which people are notoriously unreliable (Jacobs Danan and Gelman, 2018).

**Availability:** Most often, states that conduct election audits will make them available to the public in some format. However, a few states, like Pennsylvania in 2020, provide or summarize audit results only to media organizations, which then report the results to the public. Counter-intuitively, another option is for the state to conduct an audit but then neither announce the results of their audit nor provide it to the media, as Indiana did in 2020.

**Winner’s party:** This variable is constrained by the requirement that every possible combination of conjoint variables must be coherent, and no party other than the Democrats or Republicans has come anywhere close to capturing the American presidency in modern times.

**Office:** The presidency, alongside being the most prominent race in the country, is also more substantively important than any other single office. So, to vary the level of salience and personalization of this office, we also included a school board race.

## Results

We first summarize some descriptive results, and then present the results of our two experimental designs. The descriptive results reveal that people on the whole do not have much information about election audits. The information addition experiment, however, produces only very weak support for the idea that voters’ confidence should be bolstered by audits that find very few errors in the original vote count. In the conjoint, we find that the most important features of election audits have to do with how the audit is conducted, and transparently releasing the audit’s results stands out as a particularly important way to bolster voters’ confidence. So, hypothesis  $H_4$  is much better supported by our results than any of  $H_1$ ,  $H_2$ , or  $H_3$ , although  $H_1$  and  $H_2$  may be true for different types of audits, and  $H_3$  is

weakly contradicted.

## **Descriptive results**

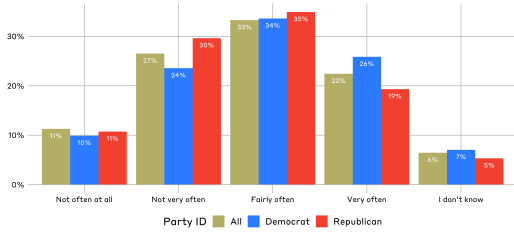
Figure 1 shows the results of our core descriptive questions.

The descriptive questions largely revealed that our respondents have low levels of information about election audits. They are ready to say that they do not know details about election audits, and many factual questions divided them quite evenly. However, they also are not consistently incorrect about any feature of audits.

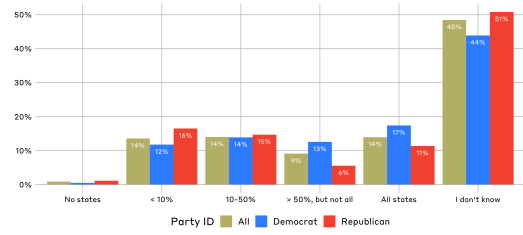
Some questions revealed large information gaps: about half of respondents declared that they did not know how many states perform election audits, and a plurality say they do not know how many votes are typically counted in an audit. While a very narrow plurality of respondents believed that state officials usually decide whether to have an audit, “don’t know” was nearly as common a response. On such fundamental features of election audits as how many audits take place, how large those audits are, and who decides to have an audit, our respondents do not have strong prior beliefs.

This is not entirely for lack of hearing about audits: the distribution of answers to “how often have you heard post-about election audits” is a strikingly triangular distribution, with a plurality having heard about audits “fairly often”. Nor does it mean that respondents place no value on election audits: actually, a large majority agree that election audits are effective in detecting errors in how ballots were counted. However, most respondents think that fewer than 5% of ballots are incorrectly counted on average (with only a third holding the most realistic view that fewer than 1% of ballots are mis-counted), do not think that audits frequently overturn election results, and do not expect that they should.

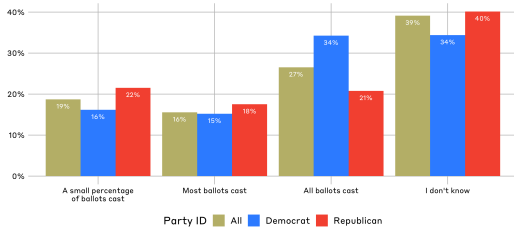
Strikingly, although we expected election audits to be highly polarizing by party, there is only one question that reveals a major partisan split: Republicans think that elections are much less accurate than Democrats do. Most Democrats in our sample believe that fewer than 1% of ballots are incorrectly counted, but only 13% of Republicans agreed, with



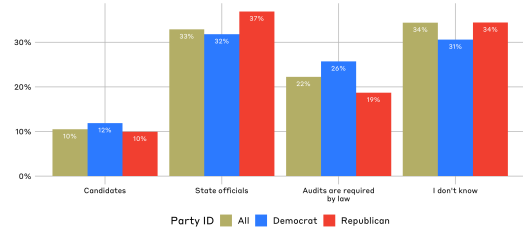
(a) How often have you heard about post-election audits in the United States?



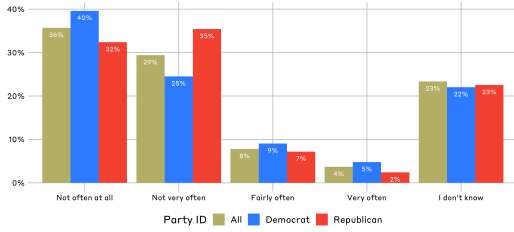
(b) In a given election, how many states perform post-election audits?



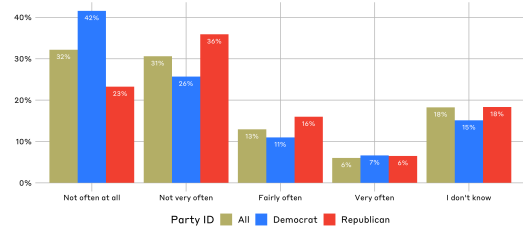
(c) Within a state, do post-election audits typically count [...]?



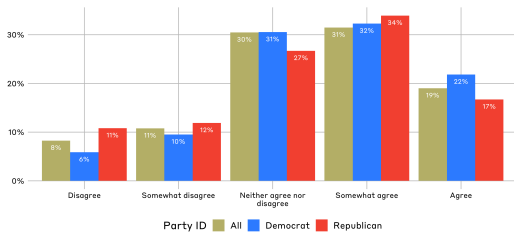
(d) Who normally decides whether to have an audit?



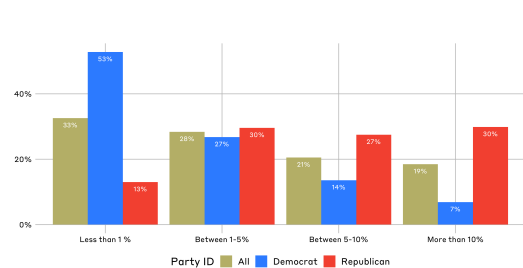
(e) How often do audits change the winner of elections nationwide?



(f) How often would you expect post-election audits to change the winner of an election?



(g) Do you agree or disagree with this statement: "Election audits are effective in detecting errors in how ballots were counted"?



(h) What percent of ballots do you think are incorrectly counted on average?

Figure 1: The results of our core descriptive questions.



most Republicans believing that more than 5% of ballots are incorrectly counted. However, it is noteworthy that these beliefs about election *accuracy* did not spill over into beliefs or attitudes about election *audits*, with Democrats and Republicans in close agreement about most features of audits.

## Informational results

Table 2 shows the results of applying Equation 1 to the information addition questions. There are only two significant effects in these models: introducing the precise numbers that the audit found does increase confidence that the candidate with the most votes won the election. However, the mere existence of an audit does not increase confidence, nor does any additional information significantly increase confidence that the election was accurate and secure, or that votes were counted as intended. Together, these results suggest a very weak positive effect of confirmatory audit results on voter confidence in the election.

Table 2: Effects of Information on Confidence in Audit Outcomes

	Winner	Conduct	Accurate
Audit-0	0.005 (0.027)	-0.011 (0.027)	-0.012 (0.027)
Audit-1	0.060* (0.027)	0.040 (0.028)	0.028 (0.028)
Audit-2	0.055* (0.026)	0.022 (0.028)	0.029 (0.027)
N	1708	1708	1694
R <sup>2</sup>	0.006	0.003	0.002

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$  Models use HC2 robust standard errors.

In the Appendix, we plot the coefficient estimates and group means for each treatment group in each of these questions.

## Conjoint results

To more directly test how the various features of post-election audits shape the extent to which voters are confident in the results of an election, we performed a conjoint experiment. In the conjoint experiment, we varied six attributes: how many of the ballots were recounted (1%, 5%, or 10%), how large a discrepancy was found (0 ballots, 10 ballots, or 100 ballots), who performed the audit (state administrators, local administrators, or an outside contractor), whether and how the audit results are made available to the public (posted publicly, presented through the media, or not shared publicly), whether the winner was a Democrat or a Republican, and whether the election was for a school board seat or the presidency. Note that respondents made a binary choice three times each, and standard errors are clustered by respondent. Our main quantity of interest is the marginal mean (Leeper et al., 2020), but we also report the few cases where instead computing the Average Marginal Component Effect (AMCE) produces a meaningfully different result (Hainmueller et al., 2014). The results of the experiment are shown in Figure 2.

## Estimated Marginal Mean effect on chosen county

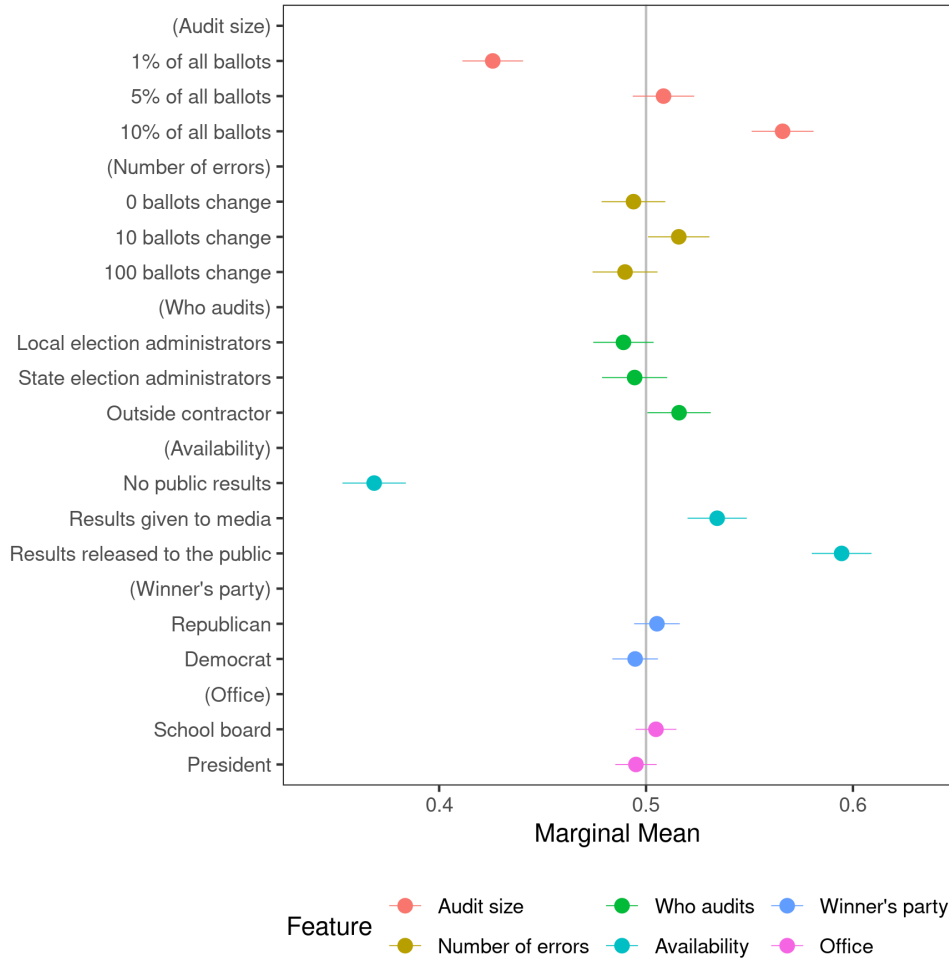


Figure 2: The estimated Marginal Mean of each attribute in the conjoint experiment on a given county being the one that respondents selected as having the more reliable election results.

Simply put, our results suggest that *how an audit is conducted* is critical to voter confidence in the outcome of elections. We will examine three main findings produced from the conjoint experiment. First, we find that the most important feature in the conjoint experiment is how results are announced to the public: announcing election results more transparently will bolster voter confidence more than any other decision in how to structure the audit. Second, auditing a larger share of the vote will increase voter confidence more. Third, voters are more confident in elections that were audited by an independent contractor

than by election administrators themselves. It is worth proceeding variable by variable and examining the relationship between each concept and voter confidence.

In the question of how audit features affect voters' confidence, the number of ballots (0, 10, or 100) with discrepancies does not exert a consistent effect on how confident voters are in the election result. The marginal mean for 10 ballots is positive and significant, but the marginal means for 0 ballots and 100 ballots are both indistinguishable from zero (and both are true for the AMCE as well). This does not support the notion that audits which find larger discrepancies (within this normal range) will consequently give people less confidence in the vote count.

In contrast, the share of all votes that are audited does matter. When only 1% of ballots cast are included in the election audit, the marginal mean is negative and significant. When 5% of ballots cast are audited it is indistinguishable from zero, and it is positive when 10% of ballots are audited. Thus, auditing a larger number of votes does, net other attributes, increase peoples' confidence in the election results. It is important to note that this result is the only one which is not entirely robust to computing the AMCE instead of the marginal mean, but the story is the same: counting 1% of ballots is associated with an AMCE that overlaps zero, while counting 5% produces a positive AMCE and 10% an even more positive AMCE.

Regarding who conducts the election audit, the effects for either local or state election administrators conducting the election are indistinguishable from zero. However, confidence is bolstered when an outside contractor conducts the audit.

The last attribute with significant variation is the one that includes both the largest and the smallest values: the availability of results. The single largest effect in the experiment is the increase in confidence when audit results are made publicly available. Communicating results to the media also boosts voter confidence, but we find a significantly negative marginal mean when no results are available to the public (the single smallest value in the experiment).

Interestingly, neither feature to do with the setting of the election mattered. Whether the

winner was a Democrat or a Republican, and whether the race was for president or school board, voter confidence was not clearly affected.

Throughout this conjoint analysis, we presented results for a binary choice exercise: respondents were asked to choose which of two counties held the election that inspires more confidence. In an additional attempt to measure voter confidence, we also asked respondents to rate how confident they are in the results of each county, in addition to asking them to choose which of the two counties has a more accurate election. That analysis supports two key findings from the binary choice exercise: the most important attribute remains how the election audits are announced, with more transparent reporting bolstering confidence more than any other attribute, and also the more votes that are included in the audit the more confident people are in the election's results.

So far, we have only analyzed the effect of the conjoint on voter confidence in the full sample of respondents. However, one crucial difference between respondents is known to affect how they view election results: party identification is a significant mediating variable when it comes to confidence in American elections (Stewart, 2022; Sances and Stewart, 2015; Clark and Stewart III, 2021). For that reason, we provide subgroup analysis for Republican, Independent, and Democratic voters. Republicans and Democrats are those who identify as strong, weak, or leaning Republican or Democrat on the survey. Only those who identify as Independent are coded as such for this analysis.

Figure 3 shows the marginal means in the binary choice exercise broken down by respondents' party identification.

### Marginal mean by party

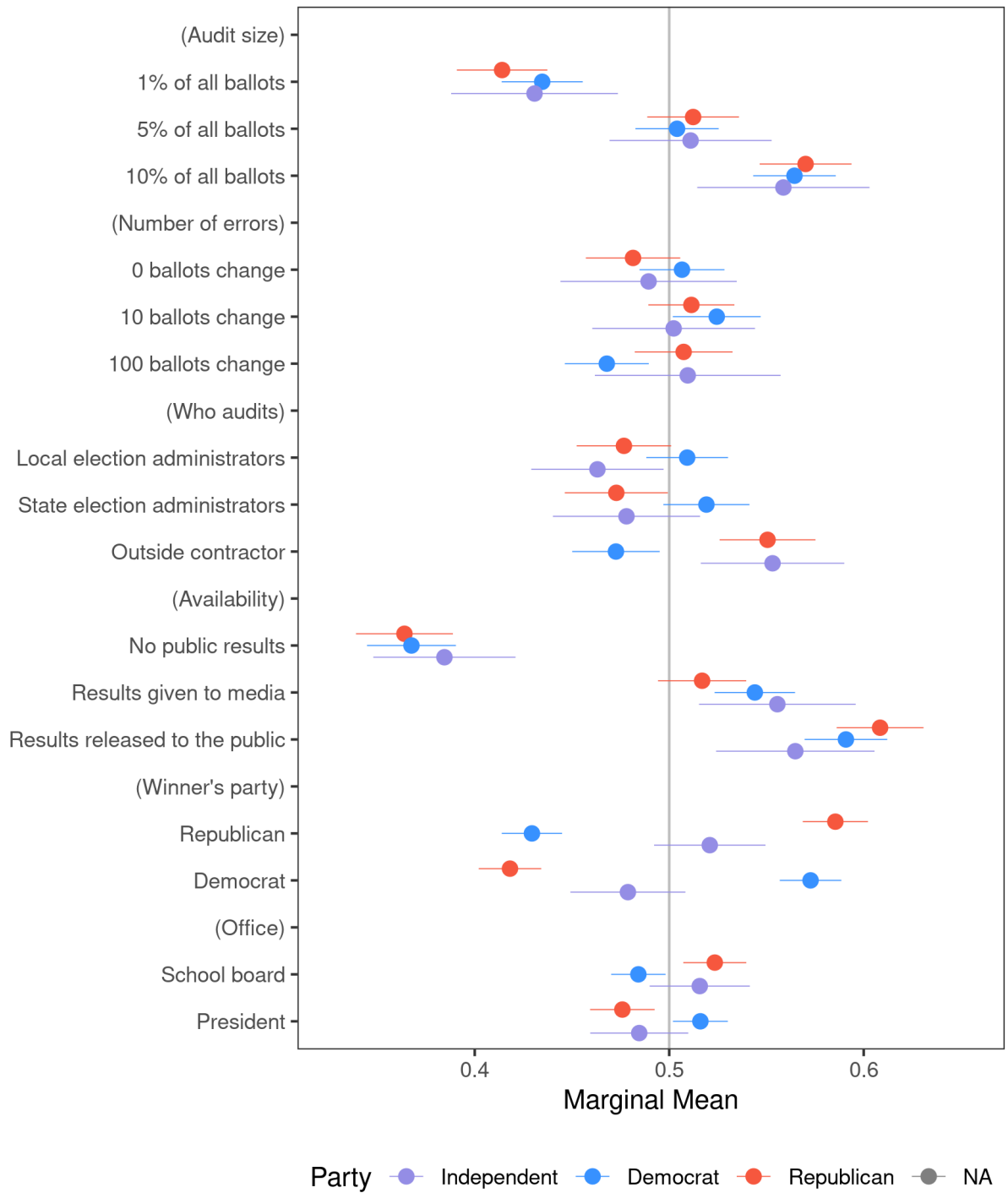


Figure 3: Marginal mean estimates broken down by party identification.

We interpret Figure 3 as upholding all of the substantive results of the analysis so far, with one difference: the winner's party does matter to partisans, as does the office being contested. These differential effects disappeared in the overall analysis simply because the weighted average of the two group's opposite responses washes out to zero.

First, Figure 3 shows that polarization in the perception of post election audits is largely concentrated in two areas. First, and as expected, there is a significant impact of simply who won the election on how the accuracy of the election is perceived. Republicans are much more likely to trust elections in which a Republican won, while Democrats are much less likely to trust those elections.

Second is the administrator of the audit. Republicans and Independents have a strong preference for outside contractors, while Democrats trust such groups less. This reflects a penetration of elite behavior to mass respondents. For the 2020 election, two states had re-tabulations of the vote which they referred to as audits that were performed by an outside figure or group, Wisconsin and Arizona. In Wisconsin, former Justice in the Wisconsin Supreme Court Michael Gableman was hired by Republican Wisconsin Assembly speaker to audit the results of the 2020 Presidential election in Wisconsin and quickly became the target of national news headlines and partisan rancor. In Arizona, the Republican-controlled legislature hired the Cyber Ninjas cybersecurity company perform an audit that was also quickly attacked by Arizona Democrats as especially partisan. These two incidents appear to have already been the cause of partisan disagreement over who ought to perform audits.

There is also a significant difference between Republicans and Democrats when it comes to the office being contested in the election. Those who identify as Republicans may have relatively less trust in Presidential elections compared to School Board elections, and the reverse for Democrats. That would be consistent with the repeated Republican narrative of the faultiness of the 2020 Presidential Election. The effect sizes, however, are extremely small and the difference between them is also small.

Overall, however, election audits do not affect Democrats and Republicans very differ-

ently. When confronted with the knowledge that an election was imperfect, but that it identified the correct winner, Democrats, Republicans, and Independents all behave quite similarly. It would be easy to expect that the onslaught of elite cues by Republican politicians targeting the integrity of American elections would have driven the two parties apart in this regard. But any change in attitudes has remained relatively contained to those areas, and has not bled over into a broader split between how election audits affect Republicans' and Democrats' confidence in the results.

## Discussion

Broadly, the pattern of results generated by this study provide three key takeaways. First, voters are sufficiently adept at parsing out information that contains both negative and positive aspects of voter tabulation process. That is, public trust in elections does not appear to be moved by the precise amount of miscounted votes so long as audits that confirm election outcomes are conducted in a reasonable and transparent manner. Second, our findings are consistent with reasonable expectations about how voters might evaluate best practices for conducting post-election audits. Third, consistent with previous research on the polarization of American elections, voters are responsive to partisan cues within specific dimensions of election administration.

In the course of our experimental interventions, we ask respondents to consider elections in one of two forms: one in which an audit was conducted (“Audit-0”) and another in which there is no mention of an audit being conducted (“Control”). This leaves out one alternative: an election in which an audit explicitly did not occur. Nevertheless, our experimental design is more reflective of what occurs when voters are informed of the existence of an audit. An additional limitation of our experimental design is the breadth of information we provide respondents when tasking them with evaluating aspects of how post-election audits are conducted. However, by doing so, we are able to show that voters have stable and clearly



defined preferences regarding the different features of how audits are conducted.

Overall, the contributions of this study are two-fold. First, to our knowledge, this is the first study to break down the concept of an election audit, and test the effects of its constituent components and their centrality to public trust in election outcomes. Second, this work underscores the importance of transparency on public trust for voters who are capable of rationally incorporating mixed, but definitive information into their evaluation of government performance. In a world where democratic institutions are under the threat, state legislation implementing post-election audits can promote public trust in elections.

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# Online Appendix for “What Effect do Audits Have on Voter Confidence?”

## Contents

- A Survey Instrument . . . . . A-2
- B Information Addition . . . . . A-12
  - B.1 ANOVA . . . . . A-12
  - B.2 OLS Models for Moderators . . . . . A-13
  - B.3 Coefficient estimates and group means . . . . . A-21
- C Conjoint . . . . . A-24
- D Statement Regarding the Ethical Use of Human Subjects . . . . . A-26

## A Survey Instrument

Before beginning this module, respondents will be shown the following text:

There's been a lot of talk recently about post-election audits. Audits confirm the results of an election by checking whether ballots were counted as they should have been. In the following questions, you will be asked about what you know and think about post-election audits.

### Baseline Views

(1) How often have you heard about post-election audits in the United States?

- Not often at all
- Not very often
- Fairly often
- Very often
- I don't know

(2) In a given election, how many states perform post-election audits?

- All states
- More than 50 percent of states, but not all
- Between 10 and 50 percent of states
- Less than 10 percent of states
- No states
- I don't know

(3) Within a state, do post-election audits typically count\_\_\_\_\_?

- All ballots cast
- Most ballots cast
- A small percentage of ballots cast
- I don't know

(4) Who normally decides whether to have an audit?

- Candidates
- State officials
- Audits are required by law
- I don't know

(5) How often do audits change the winner of elections nationwide?

- Not often at all
- Not very often
- Fairly often
- Very often
- I don't know

(6) How often would you expect post-election audits to change the winner of an election?

- Not often at all
- Not very often
- Fairly often
- Very often
- I don't know

(7) Do you agree or disagree with this statement: "Election audits are effective in detecting errors in how ballots were counted"?

- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree

(8) What percent of ballots do you think are incorrectly counted on average?

- Less than 1 percent
- Between 1 and 5 percent
- Between 5 and 10 percent
- More than 10 percent

### Information Addition

**Control:** “The total vote count in a recent presidential race was called in favor of the Democrat”.

**Audit-0:** “The total vote count in a recent presidential race was called in favor of the Democrat. Audits were conducted but none changed the outcome.”

**Audit-1:** “The total vote count in a recent presidential race was called in favor of the Democrat. Audits were conducted, and while one state did find a .02% difference in the total vote count, none changed the outcome.”

**Audit-2:** “The total vote count in a recent presidential race was called in favor of the Democrat. Audits were conducted, and while one state did find a 1% difference in the total vote count, none changed the outcome.”

Please indicate how confident you are. . .

(9) The candidate with the most votes won the election

(10) The election was accurate and secure.

(11) Votes were counted as voters intended

Respondents will be randomly assigned to see one of the four prompts. Questions (9), (10), and (11) will be displayed in a grid.

- Not often at all
- Not very often
- Fairly often
- Very often
- I don't know

### Conjoint

The following set of questions is an implementation of a conjoint experiment. Respondents will be asked to complete 3 trials. In each trial, respondents will see a comparison table in the form shown in Figure A-1 and will be asked to answer questions (12), (13), and (14).



	County [X]	County [Y]
% Total ballots examined		
Difference between results posted on election night and after audit		
Who conducted the audit		
Availability of audit results		
Winner of election		
Office audit conducted for		

Figure A-1: Conjoint table shown to respondents

In each trial, the value displayed for each attribute will be randomly assigned. The levels for the attributes included in the conjoint are shown in Table A-1.

Table A-1: Attributes for Audit Profiles in Conjoint Experiment

Attributes	Values	Basis
Difference between results posted on election night and after audit	0 ballots 10 ballots 100 ballots	Empirical
Who conducted the audit	Local administrators State administrators Outside contractor	Empirical
Availability of audit results	Posted publicly Given to the media Not shared with the public	Empirical
Winner of election	Republican Democrat	Empirical
Office audit conducted for	President School board	Substantitive

(12) Between the two, in which county would you have the most confidence in the results of the election?

- County [X]
- County [Y]

Please indicate how confident you are in each county's election results:

(13) County [X]

(14) County [Y]

Questions (13) and (14) will be displayed in a grid.

- Not at all confident
- Not very confident
- Fairly confident
- Very confident
- I don't know

### Normative Questions

(15) Suppose Candidate A won an election over Candidate B by 1,000 votes. After a post-election audit was conducted, it was found that there was a [XX] vote difference compared to what was reported on election night. How confident are you in the results of the election?

In question (15), the value displayed for the vote difference will be randomly assigned from 10, 100, or 500.

- Not at all confident
- Not very confident
- Fairly confident
- Very confident
- I don't know

(16) How important is it to you that the losing candidate accept the results of an election [**confirmed with a post-election audit**]?

1/2 of respondents will be randomly assigned to see the text in bold and brackets.

- Not at all confident
- Not very confident
- Fairly confident
- Very confident
- I don't know

## Demographics & Moderators

(17) Which of the following statements best describes you?

- I did not vote in the election this November
- I thought about voting this time, but didn't
- I usually vote, but didn't this time
- I tried to vote, but was not allowed to when I tried
- I tried to vote, but it ended up being too much trouble
- I definitely voted in the November 2022 General Election

(18) How did you vote, or try to vote, in this election?

(18) is only shown to respondents who selected "I tried to vote, but was not allowed to when I tried", "I tried to vote, but it ended up being too much trouble," or "I definitely voted in the November 2022 General Election" in (17).

- Voted in person on Election Day (at a polling place or precinct)
- Voted in person before Election Day
- Voted by mail or absentee ballot by mail
- I don't know

Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements.

(19) "In this election, I found it convenient to cast my vote."

(20) "In this election, my vote was cast accurately."

(21) "In this election, there was widespread voter fraud."

Only respondents who responded with "I definitely voted in the November 2022 General Election" in (18) are asked to answer (20), (21), and (22). The order in which (20)-(22) is displayed in the grid-style question is randomized across respondents.

- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree

The following is a list of potential reasons for why a voter could not vote. Please indicate how often you think these situations occur.

(22) “Waiting in long lines to cast votes in person”

(23) “Living far from assigned polling location”

(24) “Not having required voter identification documentation”

(25) “Finding it too hard to or being unable to request absentee ballots or vote by mail”

(26) “Being removed from the voter registration list without notice”

(27) “Polling locations opening too late in the morning or closing too early in the evening”

- It is very common
- It occurs occasionally
- It occurs infrequently
- It almost never occurs
- I’m not sure

The order in which (22)-(27) is displayed in the grid-style question is randomized across respondents.

The following is a list of activities that are usually against the law. Please indicate how often you think these activities occur.

(28) “People voting more than once in an election”

(29) “People stealing or tampering with ballots that have been cast”

(30) “People pretending to be someone else when going to vote”

(31) “People voting who are not U.S. citizens ”

(32) “People casting an absentee ballot intended for another person”

(33) “Officials changing the reported vote count in a way that is not a true reflection of the ballots that were actually counted”

- It is very common
- It occurs occasionally
- It occurs infrequently
- It almost never occurs
- I’m not sure

The order in which (28)-(33) is displayed in the grid-style question is randomized across respondents.

(34) Do you own your home, pay rent, or have some other living arrangement?

- Own home
- Pay rent
- Other (SPECIFY)

(35) Does a health problem, disability, or handicap CURRENTLY keep you from participating fully in work, school, housework, or other activities?

- Yes
- No

(36) How confident are you that the votes for president were accurately cast and counted nationwide in the **2020** election?

- Extremely confident
- Very confident
- Somewhat confident
- Not at all confident
- I don't know

(37) How interested would you say you are in politics? Are you...

- Very interested
- Somewhat interested
- Not very interested
- Not at all interested

In this grid below, please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements:

(38) “Billionaire George Soros is behind a hidden plot to destabilize the American government, take control of the media, and put the world under his control”

(39) “Donald Trump is waging a secret war against elite Satan-worshipping pedophiles in government, business and the media”

(40) “In the 2020 election, some voting machines purposely flipped votes from President Trump to President Biden”

(41) “Mail ballots are regularly cast in the names of dead people in U.S. elections”

(42) “Antifa stormed the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021”

(43) “Thousands of voters cast multiple ballots in U.S. elections”

(44) “Election administrators rig elections in favor of one party.”

The order in which (38)-(44) is displayed in the grid-style question is randomized across respondents.

- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree

(45) Whose responsibility is it to decide if a law is constitutional or not?

The order of the response options is randomized across respondents.

- The President
- Congress
- The Supreme Court

(46) Whose responsibility is it to nominate judges to Federal Courts?

The order of the response options is randomized across respondents.

- The President
- Congress
- The Supreme Court

(47) Do you know what job or political office is currently held by Chuck Schumer? Is it:

The order of the response options is randomized across respondents.

- Speaker of the House
- Secretary of the Treasury
- Senate Majority Leader
- Justice of the Supreme Court
- Governor of New York

(48) Do you know what job or political office is currently held by Janet Yellen? Is it:

The order of the response options is randomized across respondents.

- Attorney General
- Justice of the Supreme Court
- Secretary of the Treasury
- House Republican Leader
- Secretary of State

### **Attention Checks**

We have employed three attention checks that will be randomly presented to respondents within and between the modules of our fielded survey.

(AC1) Please select Agree to show you are paying attention to the question.

- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree

(AC2) Please enter the following number into the text box below: 15.

(AC3) To show that you are paying attention to this survey, please select seven below.  
(scale from 1 to 10)

## B Information Addition

### B.1 ANOVA

Table B-2: “The candidate with the most votes won the election” (ANOVA)

	Df	Sum Sq	Mean Sq	F value	Pr(>F)
Treatment Groups	3	1.28	0.43	3.44	0.0163
Residuals	1704	210.82	0.12		

Table B-3: “How the election was run” (ANOVA)

	Df	Sum Sq	Mean Sq	F value	Pr(>F)
Treatment Groups	3	0.64	0.21	1.61	0.1846
Residuals	1704	226.08	0.13		

Table B-4: “Votes were counted as voters intended” (ANOVA)

	Df	Sum Sq	Mean Sq	F value	Pr(>F)
Treatment Groups	3	0.52	0.17	1.34	0.2612
Residuals	1690	220.96	0.13		



## B.2 OLS Models for Moderators

Table B-5: Effects of Information on Confidence in Audit Outcomes

	Attentive Respondents			All Respondents		
	Winner	Conduct	Accurate	Winner	Conduct	Accurate
Audit-0	0.005 (0.027)	-0.011 (0.027)	-0.012 (0.027)	0.000 (0.026)	-0.008 (0.026)	-0.015 (0.026)
Audit-1	0.060* (0.027)	0.040 (0.028)	0.028 (0.028)	0.056* (0.026)	0.043 (0.026)	0.027 (0.026)
Audit-2	0.055* (0.026)	0.022 (0.028)	0.029 (0.027)	0.034 (0.025)	0.016 (0.027)	0.022 (0.026)
N	1708	1708	1694	1871	1870	1854
R <sup>2</sup>	0.006	0.003	0.002	0.004	0.003	0.002

\* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001 Models use HC2 robust standard errors.

Table B-6: Effects of Information by Party ID on Confidence in Audit Outcomes

	Attentive Respondents			All Respondents		
	Winner	Conduct	Accurate	Winner	Conduct	Accurate
Audit-0	0.046 (0.079)	0.050 (0.078)	-0.005 (0.077)	0.016 (0.075)	0.028 (0.073)	-0.040 (0.072)
Audit-1	0.071 (0.076)	0.089 (0.077)	0.036 (0.076)	0.064 (0.072)	0.115 (0.072)	0.019 (0.072)
Audit-2	0.216** (0.074)	0.096 (0.088)	0.127 (0.072)	0.143 (0.073)	0.065 (0.082)	0.073 (0.069)
Democrat	0.397*** (0.058)	0.441*** (0.056)	0.402*** (0.057)	0.354*** (0.054)	0.393*** (0.052)	0.345*** (0.053)
Republican	-0.051 (0.063)	-0.080 (0.063)	-0.090 (0.063)	-0.072 (0.059)	-0.103 (0.059)	-0.135* (0.059)
Audit-0 x Democrat	-0.030 (0.083)	-0.073 (0.081)	0.000 (0.080)	-0.004 (0.078)	-0.048 (0.076)	0.024 (0.076)
Audit-1 x Democrat	-0.043 (0.080)	-0.097 (0.079)	-0.035 (0.079)	-0.046 (0.075)	-0.123 (0.074)	-0.020 (0.075)
Audit-2 x Democrat	-0.197* (0.077)	-0.110 (0.090)	-0.119 (0.075)	-0.135 (0.077)	-0.082 (0.085)	-0.057 (0.071)
Audit-0 x Republican	-0.018 (0.089)	-0.006 (0.088)	0.038 (0.087)	0.006 (0.085)	0.017 (0.083)	0.081 (0.082)
Audit-1 x Republican	0.033 (0.088)	-0.001 (0.089)	0.037 (0.089)	0.039 (0.083)	-0.032 (0.083)	0.055 (0.083)
Audit-2 x Republican	-0.184* (0.085)	-0.070 (0.097)	-0.117 (0.084)	-0.122 (0.084)	-0.036 (0.092)	-0.061 (0.080)
N	1708	1708	1694	1871	1870	1854
R <sup>2</sup>	0.335	0.378	0.372	0.299	0.346	0.347

\* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001 Models use HC2 robust standard errors.

Table B-7: Effects of Information by Political Interest on Confidence in Audit Outcomes

	Attentive Respondents			All Respondents		
	Winner	Conduct	Accurate	Winner	Conduct	Accurate
Audit-0	-0.061 (0.064)	-0.041 (0.066)	-0.080 (0.062)	-0.065 (0.062)	-0.022 (0.062)	-0.061 (0.060)
Audit-1	0.044 (0.074)	0.092 (0.073)	0.004 (0.073)	0.061 (0.069)	0.100 (0.067)	0.040 (0.067)
Audit-2	0.041 (0.065)	0.039 (0.075)	0.057 (0.060)	0.016 (0.064)	0.017 (0.069)	0.072 (0.061)
Political Interest	-0.027 (0.064)	0.070 (0.068)	0.003 (0.060)	0.013 (0.062)	0.094 (0.064)	0.043 (0.058)
Audit-0 x Political Interest	0.096 (0.086)	0.047 (0.089)	0.099 (0.084)	0.097 (0.083)	0.026 (0.083)	0.068 (0.080)
Audit-1 x Political Interest	0.022 (0.096)	-0.072 (0.096)	0.034 (0.095)	-0.007 (0.090)	-0.080 (0.090)	-0.017 (0.089)
Audit-2 x Political Interest	0.020 (0.087)	-0.022 (0.099)	-0.041 (0.083)	0.028 (0.086)	0.004 (0.092)	-0.071 (0.083)
N	1708	1708	1694	1871	1870	1854
R <sup>2</sup>	0.007	0.007	0.005	0.007	0.009	0.005

\* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001 Models use HC2 robust standard errors.

Table B-8: Effects of Information by Political Knowledge on Confidence in Audit Outcomes

	Attentive Respondents			All Respondents		
	Winner	Conduct	Accurate	Winner	Conduct	Accurate
Audit-0	-0.125 (0.069)	-0.140 (0.078)	-0.191** (0.070)	-0.116 (0.062)	-0.094 (0.065)	-0.181** (0.060)
Audit-1	-0.152* (0.076)	-0.017 (0.084)	-0.137 (0.078)	-0.109 (0.067)	0.007 (0.070)	-0.114 (0.067)
Audit-2	-0.076 (0.065)	-0.086 (0.081)	-0.111 (0.066)	-0.123* (0.060)	-0.072 (0.069)	-0.115 (0.060)
Political Knowledge	-0.174** (0.060)	-0.092 (0.076)	-0.174** (0.060)	-0.153** (0.054)	-0.071 (0.065)	-0.168** (0.053)
Audit-0 x Political Knowledge	0.169* (0.085)	0.170 (0.095)	0.232** (0.086)	0.156* (0.079)	0.117 (0.083)	0.223** (0.077)
Audit-1 x Political Knowledge	0.278** (0.094)	0.074 (0.103)	0.213* (0.097)	0.225** (0.084)	0.049 (0.090)	0.189* (0.086)
Audit-2 x Political Knowledge	0.170* (0.082)	0.144 (0.099)	0.180* (0.085)	0.217** (0.078)	0.122 (0.088)	0.184* (0.079)
N	1708	1708	1694	1871	1870	1854
R <sup>2</sup>	0.013	0.006	0.008	0.011	0.005	0.008

\* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001 Models use HC2 robust standard errors.

Table B-9: Effects of Information by Participation in 2022 General Election on Confidence in Audit Outcomes

	Attentive Respondents			All Respondents		
	Winner	Conduct	Accurate	Winner	Conduct	Accurate
Audit-0	0.005 (0.056)	-0.007 (0.060)	-0.023 (0.057)	-0.005 (0.049)	-0.011 (0.050)	-0.038 (0.051)
Audit-1	0.011 (0.057)	0.059 (0.062)	0.037 (0.059)	0.002 (0.049)	0.052 (0.050)	0.029 (0.050)
Audit-2	0.027 (0.055)	0.041 (0.065)	0.061 (0.057)	-0.033 (0.051)	0.019 (0.055)	0.036 (0.053)
Voted in 2022	-0.009 (0.048)	0.031 (0.053)	0.020 (0.048)	-0.021 (0.043)	0.010 (0.045)	0.012 (0.043)
Audit-0 x Voted in 2022	-0.001 (0.064)	-0.002 (0.067)	0.018 (0.065)	0.005 (0.058)	0.005 (0.059)	0.032 (0.059)
Audit-1 x Voted in 2022	0.066 (0.065)	-0.022 (0.069)	-0.010 (0.067)	0.076 (0.057)	-0.012 (0.059)	-0.002 (0.059)
Audit-2 x Voted in 2022	0.036 (0.063)	-0.024 (0.072)	-0.042 (0.065)	0.092 (0.058)	-0.003 (0.063)	-0.020 (0.060)
N	1707	1707	1693	1870	1869	1853
R <sup>2</sup>	0.007	0.003	0.003	0.008	0.003	0.003

\* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001 Models use HC2 robust standard errors.

Table B-10: Effects of Information by 2022 Vote Mode on Confidence in Audit Outcomes

	Attentive Respondents			All Respondents		
	Winner	Conduct	Accurate	Winner	Conduct	Accurate
Audit-0	0.008 (0.054)	-0.001 (0.055)	-0.015 (0.052)	-0.004 (0.051)	-0.015 (0.052)	-0.030 (0.049)
Audit-1	0.124** (0.048)	0.110* (0.050)	0.081 (0.047)	0.114* (0.045)	0.093 (0.048)	0.073 (0.045)
Audit-2	0.009 (0.054)	0.000 (0.056)	-0.022 (0.054)	-0.018 (0.052)	-0.021 (0.054)	-0.044 (0.052)
Voted Early in 2022	-0.058 (0.062)	-0.016 (0.058)	-0.030 (0.057)	-0.056 (0.059)	-0.024 (0.054)	-0.041 (0.053)
Voted In-person in 2022	-0.149** (0.052)	-0.153** (0.053)	-0.193*** (0.050)	-0.158** (0.049)	-0.168*** (0.051)	-0.199*** (0.047)
Audit-0 x Voted Early in 2022	-0.045 (0.084)	-0.082 (0.083)	-0.067 (0.082)	-0.035 (0.079)	-0.058 (0.077)	-0.050 (0.076)
Audit-1 x Voted Early in 2022	-0.069 (0.082)	-0.123 (0.081)	-0.111 (0.079)	-0.055 (0.077)	-0.074 (0.076)	-0.077 (0.074)
Audit-2 x Voted Early in 2022	0.067 (0.082)	0.038 (0.082)	0.042 (0.082)	0.061 (0.080)	0.054 (0.078)	0.075 (0.078)
Audit-0 x Voted In-person in 2022	0.045 (0.070)	0.046 (0.071)	0.071 (0.069)	0.055 (0.067)	0.068 (0.068)	0.093 (0.066)
Audit-1 x Voted In-person in 2022	-0.064 (0.067)	-0.087 (0.071)	-0.055 (0.069)	-0.041 (0.064)	-0.064 (0.067)	-0.049 (0.066)
Audit-2 x Voted In-person in 2022	0.096 (0.069)	0.058 (0.072)	0.105 (0.070)	0.130 (0.066)	0.088 (0.069)	0.130 (0.067)
N	1371	1367	1359	1463	1461	1450
R <sup>2</sup>	0.038	0.04	0.046	0.036	0.04	0.045

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$  Models use HC2 robust standard errors.

Table B-11: Effects of Information by Accuracy of 2022 Voting on Confidence in Audit Outcomes

	Attentive Respondents			All Respondents		
	Winner	Conduct	Accurate	Winner	Conduct	Accurate
Audit-0	-0.170 (0.092)	-0.115 (0.092)	-0.202* (0.092)	-0.142 (0.088)	-0.026 (0.103)	-0.183* (0.089)
Audit-1	0.055 (0.107)	0.034 (0.105)	-0.056 (0.106)	0.045 (0.104)	0.030 (0.103)	-0.073 (0.104)
Audit-2	-0.118 (0.102)	-0.184 (0.097)	-0.201* (0.100)	-0.084 (0.097)	-0.142 (0.094)	-0.152 (0.096)
2022 Vote Accuracy	0.688*** (0.077)	0.782*** (0.074)	0.727*** (0.075)	0.682*** (0.075)	0.776*** (0.073)	0.725*** (0.073)
Audit-0 x 2022 Vote Accuracy	0.179 (0.105)	0.096 (0.103)	0.202* (0.103)	0.151 (0.100)	0.004 (0.115)	0.184 (0.100)
Audit-1 x 2022 Vote Accuracy	0.006 (0.119)	-0.019 (0.117)	0.077 (0.118)	0.018 (0.116)	-0.011 (0.114)	0.097 (0.115)
Audit-2 x 2022 Vote Accuracy	0.194 (0.115)	0.213 (0.109)	0.236* (0.111)	0.156 (0.111)	0.170 (0.107)	0.183 (0.108)
N	1338	1337	1328	1411	1412	1401
R <sup>2</sup>	0.261	0.283	0.287	0.258	0.27	0.283

\* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001 Models use HC2 robust standard errors.

Table B-12: Effects of Information by Perception of Fraud in 2022 on Confidence in Audit Outcomes

	Attentive Respondents			All Respondents		
	Winner	Conduct	Accurate	Winner	Conduct	Accurate
Audit-0	0.034 (0.027)	-0.005 (0.020)	0.008 (0.021)	0.039 (0.026)	0.004 (0.021)	0.012 (0.020)
Audit-1	0.049 (0.028)	0.001 (0.023)	0.010 (0.023)	0.053 (0.028)	0.013 (0.023)	0.013 (0.023)
Audit-2	0.035 (0.028)	-0.019 (0.023)	0.000 (0.022)	0.038 (0.027)	-0.011 (0.023)	0.003 (0.022)
2022 Voting Fraud	-0.694*** (0.045)	-0.803*** (0.037)	-0.756*** (0.039)	-0.642*** (0.047)	-0.736*** (0.040)	-0.704*** (0.041)
Audit-0 x 2022 Voting Fraud	-0.044 (0.060)	0.044 (0.053)	0.010 (0.056)	-0.089 (0.060)	0.004 (0.056)	-0.031 (0.056)
Audit-1 x 2022 Voting Fraud	0.043 (0.065)	0.069 (0.056)	0.015 (0.058)	0.035 (0.066)	0.044 (0.060)	0.008 (0.060)
Audit-2 x 2022 Voting Fraud	0.102 (0.067)	0.129* (0.060)	0.079 (0.060)	0.068 (0.066)	0.087 (0.061)	0.053 (0.061)
N	1336	1335	1326	1409	1410	1399
R <sup>2</sup>	0.48	0.549	0.537	0.45	0.503	0.499

\* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001 Models use HC2 robust standard errors.

Table B-13: Effects of Information by 2022 Voting Convenience on Confidence in Audit Outcomes

	Attentive Respondents			All Respondents		
	Winner	Conduct	Accurate	Winner	Conduct	Accurate
Audit-0	-0.041 (0.185)	-0.090 (0.183)	-0.116 (0.190)	-0.082 (0.172)	-0.051 (0.166)	-0.111 (0.175)
Audit-1	0.239 (0.165)	0.152 (0.159)	0.069 (0.169)	0.276 (0.159)	0.230 (0.162)	0.151 (0.173)
Audit-2	0.072 (0.160)	-0.024 (0.171)	-0.057 (0.175)	0.030 (0.151)	-0.055 (0.162)	-0.049 (0.163)
2022 Voting Convenience	0.256 (0.134)	0.246 (0.133)	0.217 (0.137)	0.248 (0.129)	0.240 (0.129)	0.223 (0.131)
Audit-0 x 2022 Voting Convenience	0.044 (0.198)	0.082 (0.196)	0.116 (0.203)	0.087 (0.186)	0.047 (0.180)	0.113 (0.188)
Audit-1 x 2022 Voting Convenience	-0.179 (0.178)	-0.127 (0.173)	-0.045 (0.181)	-0.218 (0.172)	-0.209 (0.176)	-0.134 (0.187)
Audit-2 x 2022 Voting Convenience	-0.007 (0.173)	0.047 (0.185)	0.087 (0.189)	0.035 (0.164)	0.082 (0.176)	0.077 (0.177)
N	1338	1337	1328	1411	1412	1401
R <sup>2</sup>	0.022	0.017	0.017	0.025	0.017	0.017

\* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001 Models use HC2 robust standard errors.

Table B-14: Effects of Information by Perceptions of Systemic Voter Fraud on Confidence in Audit Outcomes

	Attentive Respondents			All Respondents		
	Winner	Conduct	Accurate	Winner	Conduct	Accurate
Audit-0	0.019 (0.028)	0.015 (0.024)	0.029 (0.024)	0.021 (0.028)	0.030 (0.024)	0.031 (0.024)
Audit-1	0.035 (0.026)	0.016 (0.025)	0.025 (0.024)	0.031 (0.026)	0.027 (0.025)	0.036 (0.024)
Audit-2	0.043 (0.027)	0.006 (0.025)	0.053* (0.023)	0.022 (0.028)	-0.001 (0.027)	0.029 (0.026)
Perceptions of Fraud	-0.727*** (0.044)	-0.803*** (0.042)	-0.759*** (0.043)	-0.678*** (0.046)	-0.740*** (0.044)	-0.713*** (0.043)
Audit-0 x Perceptions of Fraud	0.019 (0.069)	0.011 (0.059)	-0.030 (0.060)	-0.008 (0.069)	-0.026 (0.059)	-0.052 (0.060)
Audit-1 x Perceptions of Fraud	0.079 (0.064)	0.067 (0.063)	0.013 (0.066)	0.075 (0.066)	0.050 (0.064)	-0.011 (0.064)
Audit-2 x Perceptions of Fraud	0.030 (0.064)	0.032 (0.057)	-0.063 (0.056)	0.033 (0.066)	0.042 (0.062)	-0.014 (0.064)
N	1658	1658	1646	1812	1810	1796
R <sup>2</sup>	0.413	0.48	0.489	0.36	0.425	0.432

\* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001 Models use HC2 robust standard errors.

Table B-15: Effects of Information by Belief in Political Conspiracies on Confidence in Audit Outcomes

	Attentive Respondents			All Respondents		
	Winner	Conduct	Accurate	Winner	Conduct	Accurate
Audit-0	0.025 (0.032)	0.003 (0.024)	0.028 (0.025)	0.022 (0.032)	0.008 (0.024)	0.027 (0.025)
Audit-1	0.038 (0.029)	-0.001 (0.023)	0.024 (0.023)	0.031 (0.030)	-0.013 (0.025)	0.015 (0.025)
Audit-2	0.014 (0.030)	-0.019 (0.024)	0.027 (0.024)	0.023 (0.030)	-0.013 (0.024)	0.024 (0.024)
Belief in Political Conspiracies	-0.833*** (0.055)	-0.945*** (0.047)	-0.855*** (0.050)	-0.736*** (0.057)	-0.856*** (0.049)	-0.782*** (0.050)
Audit-0 x Belief in Political Conspiracies	0.038 (0.082)	0.069 (0.068)	-0.009 (0.072)	0.008 (0.082)	0.041 (0.069)	-0.033 (0.070)
Audit-1 x Belief in Political Conspiracies	0.036 (0.074)	0.089 (0.069)	-0.012 (0.072)	0.041 (0.081)	0.126 (0.077)	0.014 (0.078)
Audit-2 x Belief in Political Conspiracies	0.133 (0.074)	0.139* (0.067)	0.036 (0.067)	0.044 (0.075)	0.096 (0.068)	0.014 (0.068)
N	1708	1708	1694	1871	1870	1854
R <sup>2</sup>	0.401	0.467	0.448	0.333	0.395	0.383

\* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001 Models use HC2 robust standard errors.



### B.3 Coefficient estimates and group means

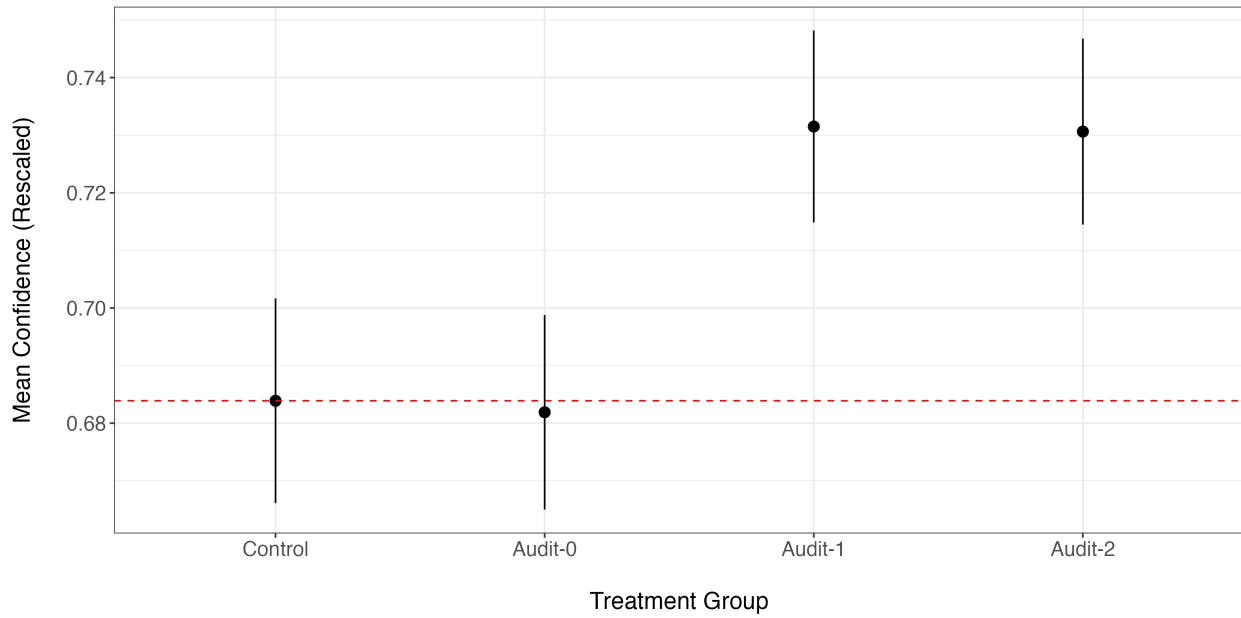


Figure B-2: Treatment Group Means for Confidence that Winner is Correct

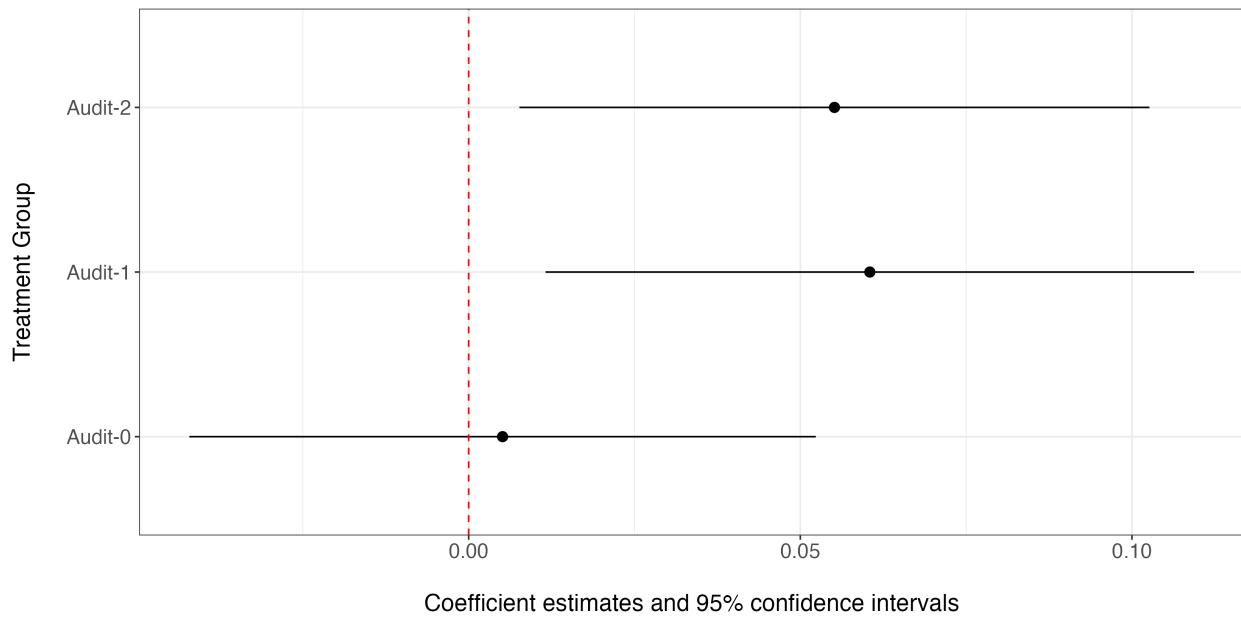


Figure B-3: Coefficient Estimates for Effects of Information on Confidence in Audit Outcomes

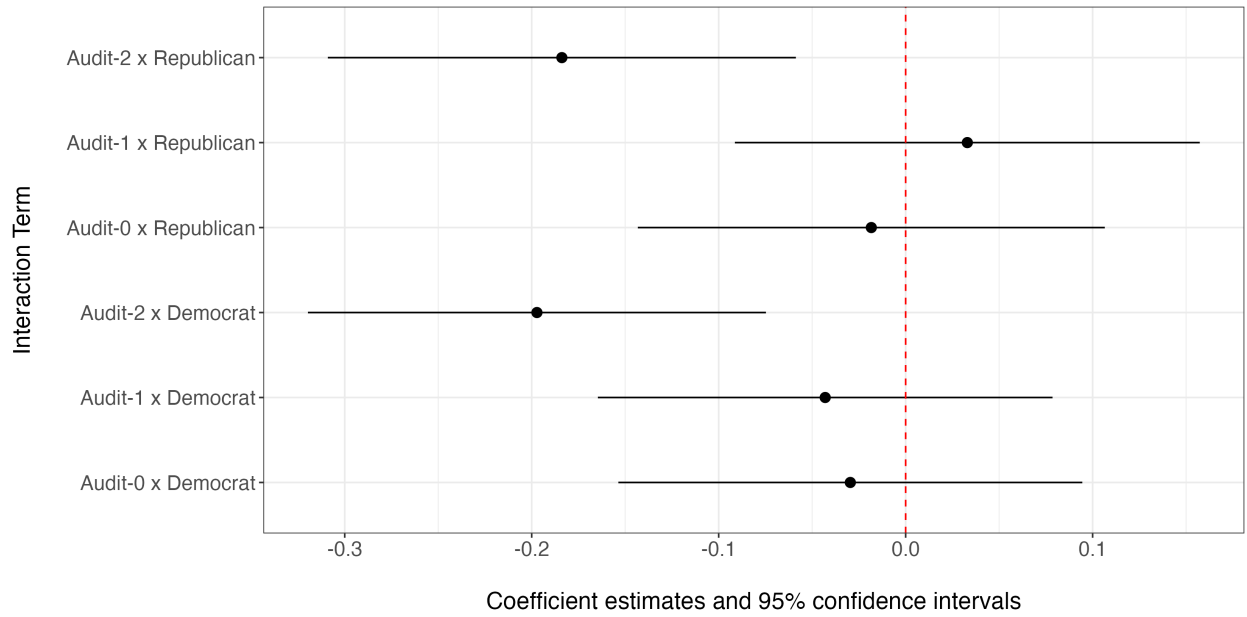


Figure B-4: Coefficient Estimates for Effects of Information by Party on Confidence in Audit Outcomes

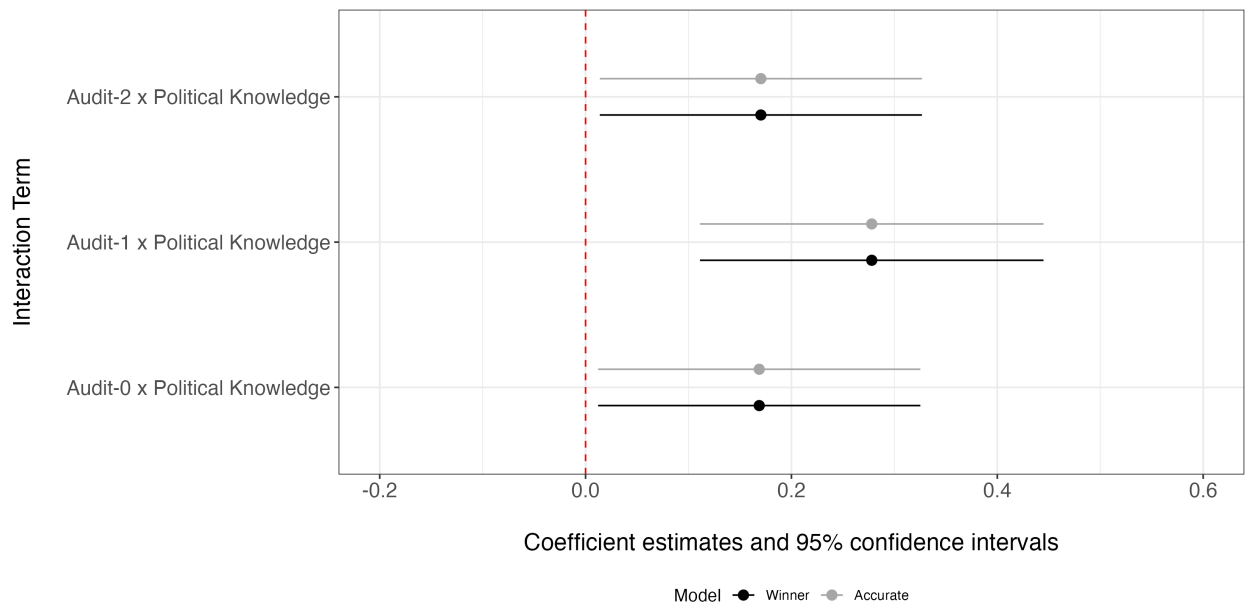


Figure B-5: Coefficient Estimates for Effects of Information by Level of Political Knowledge on Confidence in Audit Outcomes

Table B-16: Pairwise Comparison of Mean Confidence in Election Results by “Order of Magnitude” Treatment

Group 1	Group 2	Difference	p
100 votes	10 votes	-0.049	0.001
500 votes	10 votes	-0.147	0.000
500 votes	100 votes	0.098	0.000

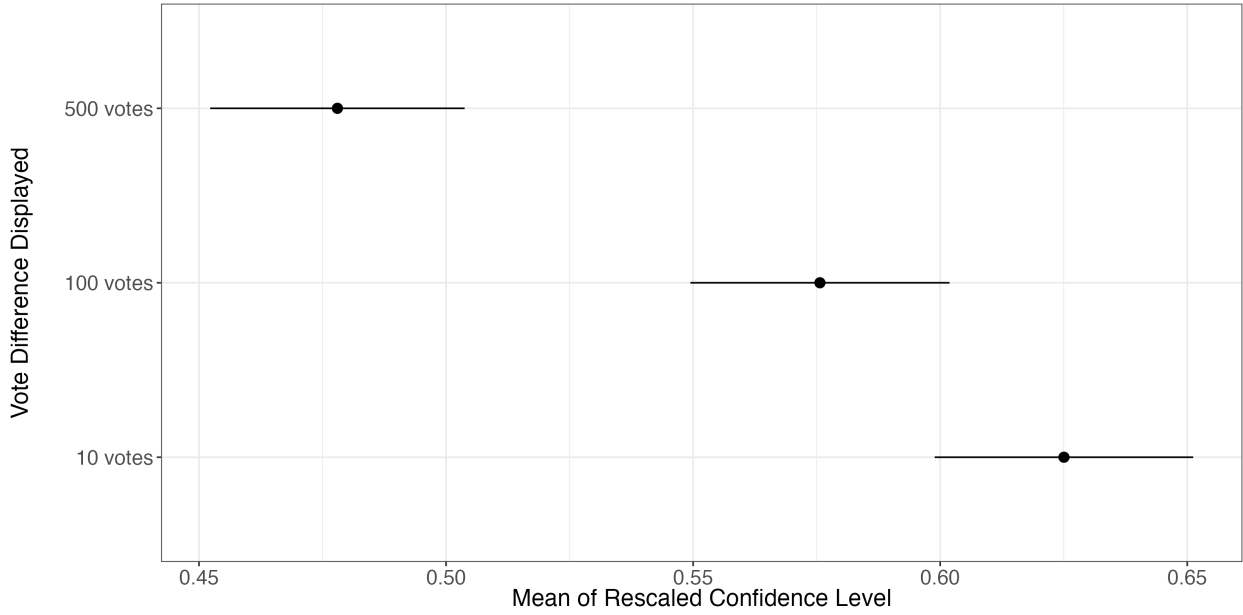


Figure B-6: Mean Confidence in Election Results by Discrepancy Size

## C Conjoint

Current research on conjoints (De la Cuesta and Imai, 2022) have shown that the marginal distribution of the factors in the population in a binary choice conjoint field experiment can have a significant impact on external validity. If the causal quantities of interest are identified using an oversample of examples that are systematically unlikely to occur, that has serious consequences for extrapolating behavior in real world circumstances.

While this methodological point is extremely well made for the classic example of comparing two candidates for public office, aspects of using the population to estimate the marginal distribution for each factor travel less well to the context presented here. A significant number of states provide little to no information or data about the performance or outcome of their elections. In addition to being a factor varied in the conjoint experiment presented here, that implies that data on the marginal distribution of these factors is missing or unavailable. For some of the states that are available, the answers are too complex or difficult to communicate within the context of a survey. For instance, a number of states have either tiered or risk-limiting audits, such that the proportion of the ballots counted is not defined. In cases where the survey offers a single round number option, the marginal distribution is that of a continuous variable, though in that case, the closest number is used. Also, sometimes the delineation between the categories is slightly ambiguous. For instance, while some cases are obvious, the delineation of responsibility between state and local authorities in an audit can be ambiguous. A number of states explicitly allow for the office of the Secretary of State to exercise discretion when implementing an audit that may change where an audit falls in some of these categories. A final point about the difficulty in constructing a reasonable marginal distribution for each of the factors is that the purpose of the conjoint is in part motivated to make the comparisons realistic. However, as

Table C-17: pAMCEs

Variable	Factor	Estimate	SE	p value
Ballots audited	10% of ballots cast	0.150	0.016	0
Ballots audited	5% of total ballots cast	0.081	0.016	0
Shift	10 ballots	0.012	0.018	0.500
Shift	100 ballots	0.009	0.018	0.598
Administered	Outside contractor	0.034	0.016	0.037
Administered	State administrators	0.021	0.016	0.196
Availability	Media	0.177	0.016	0
Availability	Public	0.219	0.016	0
Winner	Republican	-0.016	0.016	0.296
Office	School board	0.008	0.016	0.623

The population AMCEs show no major differences in findings when compared to the previously presented AMCEs.

Table C-18: pAMCE, Republican Respondents

Variable	Factor	Estimate	SE	p value
Ballots audited	10% of ballots cast	0.184	0.027	0
Ballots audited	5% of total ballots cast	0.112	0.027	0
Shift	10 ballots	0.040	0.030	0.193
Shift	100 ballots	0.074	0.031	0.016
Administered	Outside contractor	0.119	0.028	0
Administered	State administrators	0.005	0.028	0.860
Availability	Media	0.173	0.028	0
Availability	Public	0.226	0.028	0
Winner	Republican	0.151	0.026	0
Office	School board	0.018	0.027	0.490

Table C-19: pAMCE, Democrat Respondents

Variable	Factor	Estimate	SE	p value
Ballots audited	10% of ballots cast	0.122	0.022	0
Ballots audited	5% of total ballots cast	0.055	0.023	0.014
Shift	10 ballots	-0.004	0.025	0.857
Shift	100 ballots	-0.038	0.025	0.133
Administered	Outside contractor	-0.049	0.023	0.034
Administered	State administrators	0.022	0.023	0.331
Availability	Media	0.194	0.023	0
Availability	Public	0.241	0.023	0
Winner	Republican	-0.136	0.022	0
Office	School board	-0.026	0.022	0.230

## **D Statement Regarding the Ethical Use of Human Subjects**

In devising the experimental instrument in search of identifying and measuring a specific electoral experience, a good faith effort was made to anticipate the ethics of this study. Given the interest in politically sensitive information, how those data are collected matters not only from an analytical perspective regarding the intellectual integrity of the project but also about concern for the participants' well-being. For that reason, the following steps were taken: the purpose of the study was disclosed to respondents; the contact information for the study's sponsoring institution(s) and investigator(s) were provided, allowing a direct access to share concerns or additional questions; subjects were given the opportunity to leave the study at any time; and most importantly, individuals were told that any personally-identifying information would be confidential. Moreover, our experimental treatments did not rely on deception. Finally, the panel was recruited by a third party, YouGov; and although participants were compensated for their time, the vendor did not disclose the specific amounts or forms of payment. Under these circumstances, this study's investigative plan conformed to the AAPOR's "Code of Professional Ethics and Practices." and thus approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB).