Trust in the Count: Improving Voter Confidence with Post-Election Audits

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Abstract

Post-election audits are thought to bolster voter confidence in elections, but it is unclear which aspects of audits drive public trust. Using pre-registered vignette and conjoint survey experiments administered by YouGov on a sample of 2,000 American respondents, we find that *how* an audit is conducted is more important than *what* an audit finds. Structural features of audits, 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 discrepancy found. Moreover, while Democrats and Republicans have increasingly divided views of the state of democracy in the United States, they are similarly receptive to information presented about audits, and largely agree that audits are effective tools for detecting errors in vote counting. Our findings thus reinforce the expectation that audits do increase voter trust and suggest that election administrators can strengthen voter confidence by making audits as transparent as possible.

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

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Introduction

With trust in American elections falling sharply among Republican voters (Sances and Stewart III 2015; Clark and Stewart III 2021; Stewart III 2022), a record number of states have turned to post-election audits as a way to bolster voter confidence (U.S. Election Assistance Commission 2021). Post-election audits—which are defined by legal statute to "look for evidence that evaluates the effectiveness and durability" of election processes and procedures (National Association of Secretaries of State 2021)—are one of the core tools governments use to increase public trust in elections. Yet, it is currently unclear how the results and features of post-election audits affect voter confidence in election results.

Only recently has empirical research focused on the role audits have in promoting voter confidence in the electoral process. Prevailing evidence suggests that diverse features of election administration affect voter confidence (Bullock, Hood, and Clark 2005; Atkeson and Saunders 2007; Alvarez, Hall, and Llewellyn 2008; Sances and Stewart III 2015; Sinclair, Smith, and Tucker 2018; Stewart III and Dunham 2020; Suttmann-Lea and Merivaki 2023). However, despite audits' central role in verifying the integrity of the electoral process, little research has examined whether audits actually influence voters' perceptions of the accuracy of vote tabulation. Perhaps the most direct test so far, that of Traugott and Conrad (2012), demonstrates that merely informing voters that audits were conducted after an election engenders greater trust in the accuracy of its results. Nevertheless, researchers have yet to evaluate how structural features of audits—including their scope, transparency, participants, and findings—together shape voter confidence in election results.

Using pre-registered vignette and conjoint survey experiments administered by YouGov on a sample of 2,000 American respondents, we find that some attributes of hypothetical audits are especially important for driving voter confidence. Our findings suggest that public trust is not harmed when an audit uncovers small errors that do not change the election result. That is, *what* an audit finds has little influence on voter confidence in largely accurate elections. *How* an audit is conducted, however, does matter. For Democrats, Republicans,

and Independents, features of an 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 discrepancy found.

This study is in conversation with a broader body of literature that spans across both the American and comparative contexts emphasizing the role of verification procedures in enhancing the credibility of elections (Bush and Prather 2017, 2018; Challú, Seira, and Simpser 2020). Our experiments focus on the United States, which we believe poses a particularly challenging case for the claim that certain designs of election verification procedures may be more effective in increasing trust. Because the American electorate is so polarized—especially regarding trust in elections—we might expect Americans, and particularly Republicans, to be especially unlikely to budge on how much they trust elections. If even Republicans report greater trust in elections when an audit with a particular feature is conducted, then we might expect the effect to be even larger in contexts where election administration itself is less politicized.

We make three contributions. First, we find support for the expectations of scholars and government officials alike and reinforce the finding of Traugott and Conrad (2012) that election audits do increase voter trust in elections. We give this finding greater context by collecting new data about what voters currently know about and expect from audits. Second, we go beyond these initial findings, underscoring that how audits are conducted has direct implications for voter confidence. In doing so, we provide practical guidance for practitioners and policymakers, emphasizing the importance of transparency when carrying out processes aimed at verifying election integrity. Third, our findings identify one particular area of election administration that has not been infected by the broader polarization of American politics. While Democrats and Republicans have increasingly divided views of the state of democracy in the United States (Justwan et al. 2018), they are similarly receptive to information presented about post-elections audits and are largely in consensus that audits are effective tools for detecting errors in vote tabulations.

Theoretical Grounding and Expectations

Work on voter confidence in the American context has explored public trust in the accuracy and security of elections as a function of how voters cast their ballots (Alvarez, Hall, and Llewellyn 2008; Alvarez, Cao, and Li 2021), evaluations of their own experiences at the polls (Atkeson and Saunders 2007; Alvarez, Hall, and Llewellyn 2008; Stein et al. 2008; Barreto, Cohen-Marks, and Woods 2009; Hall, Quin Monson, and Patterson 2009; Claassen et al. 2013; King 2017; Rinfret, Barsky, and Scott 2018; Stewart III and Dunham 2020; Alvarez, Cao, and Li 2021), information diets (Bowler and Donovan 2016; Alvarez, Cao, and Li 2021), election outcomes (Kornberg and Clarke 1992; Anderson and Guillory 1997; Sances and Stewart III 2015; Sinclair, Smith, and Tucker 2018), elite messaging (Clayton et al. 2021; Clayton and Willer 2023; Gross, Baltz, and Stewart III 2023; Gross et al. 2023), and information conveyed by local election officials themselves (Suttmann-Lea and Merivaki 2023). Do audits—which are specifically intended to "provide reassurance that the reported results reflect the will of the electorate" (Hall and Smith 2012)—likewise affect voter confidence in elections?

This is not just a theoretical question, but a pressing concern for practical politics in the United States. The accuracy of American elections has been called into question by Republican elites following the 2020 presidential election (MacFarlane et al. 2022; FiveThirtyEight Staff 2022), prompting a record number of states to implement post-election audit procedures (U.S. Election Assistance Commission 2021; Jaffe et al. 2022).

Few studies have directly attempted to measure whether audits increase voter confidence, but there is a wealth of insights about the accuracy of vote counting in both comparative and case-specific contexts. Across democracies, "broad-gauge changes in how citizens are connected to their states" (Nevitte 1996, p. 67) have spurred longstanding concerns about voter confidence, prompting some researchers to investigate how the integrity of ballot-tallying procedures relate to voter confidence. For example, there is evidence suggesting that the presence of election observers improve voter confidence (Brancati 2014; Bush and

Prather 2017). In Mexico, where recounts are often conducted in response to suspected inconsistencies, the presence of a recount is correlated with lower trust in election outcomes (Challú, Seira, and Simpser 2020). Bush and Prather (2018) emphasize the potential role of irrationality in voters' evaluations of expert reports on election security and accuracy, presenting two potential causal mechanisms of how voters may process information regarding election verification: Bayesian updating (Bartels 2002) and motivated reasoning (Taber and Lodge 2006).

For our purposes, Bayesian updating would lead us to expect that audits should change voter evaluations of election accuracy and security when they conflict with prior beliefs and those initial beliefs are weak. Motivated reasoning, however, would lead us to expect that voters should reject information that is inconsistent with their attitudinal priors and, instead, double down on their existing beliefs rather than update them. For example, as Challú, Seira, and Simpser (2020) note, "once they get into the public eye, inconsistencies in vote tallies can undermine trust in election outcomes and in the electoral system itself– often with the help of political rhetoric" (p. 1081). Presumably, whether these revealed inconsistencies actually shake voter confidence is conditioned on individuals' perception of the pervasiveness of errors in vote tabulation.

While these are important findings, this work leaves three unanswered questions: (1) what types of information reduce trust in the electoral process, (2) how do voters react to learning about non-fraudulent, benign errors in vote tabulation, and (3) which aspects of post-election auditing make voters have greater trust in election results? As it pertains to the role of audits in American elections, Traugott and Conrad (2012) find that informing voters that audits were conducted after an election engenders greater trust in the accuracy of its results. However, Traugott and Conrad suggest that *any* description of an audit that detects the presence of errors or fraud will necessarily reduce voter confidence in the electoral system. This is concordant with Challú, Seira, and Simpser (2020) who point out that inconsistencies breed distrust. While an audit finding any level of discrepancy between results posted on

election night and those reported following an audit might diminish voter confidence, it is unclear whether that is the case if an audit also serves to *confirm* that the candidate with the most votes won the election. Errors in vote tabulations are common (Warner et al. 2021; Ansolabehere et al. 2018), but the vast majority of post-election audits in the United States confirm election results (Jaffe 2022; Jaffe et al. 2022). Because the prior literature gives good reasons to anticipate either one of two opposing expectations, we therefore adjudicate between two competing pre-registered hypotheses:

> H_1: The performance of an audit that reveals some errors in the counting of votes but confirms the outcome INCREASES the trust in an election.

> H_2: The performance of an audit that reveals some errors in the counting of votes but confirms the outcome DECREASES the trust in an election.

Furthermore, we posit that voters may have a certain tolerance for the number of errors revealed by an audit, while still confirming the outcome of an election, before these errors are perceived as an indictment of the broader electoral process. That is, the connection between conducting audits and voter confidence is a function of *what* the results actually reveal. We formalize this supposition in the following hypothesis:

> H_3: The effect of a post-election audit is a function of the *magnitude of errors* found in an audit.

Finally, from (Bush and Prather 2017, 2018) we take seriously that *how* election administration is carried out in the public eye has a direct effect on promoting public trust in elections. However, there is no existing guidance on which structural features of post election audits are relevant to voter evaluations. For that reason, our experimental designs consider the effects of certain aspects of post-election audits that dominate public discourse. Such aspects include: number of counties and ballots sampled, differences in candidate vote totals (if any), people involved in carrying out the process, and how results are disseminated to the public.[1] This leads to our last hypothesis:

1. For examples, see Bloom (2022), Ragar (2022), Mendez (2022), Hendrickson (2021), Forman (2022), Axelrod (2021), and Zelinger (2022).

H_4: *How* post-election audits are conducted affects how they are perceived.

Research Design and Data

Sample

Our data were collected through an online survey fielded by YouGov between February 27 and March 3, 2023. YouGov's initial recruitment pool consisted of 2,088 respondents who were subsequently matched to a sample of 2,000 respondents via stratified sampling from the 2019 American Community Survey based on gender, age, race, and education. The analyses that follow are conducted using the weights provided by YouGov—created using propesnity score matching followed by post-stratification—such that our sample may be representative of the U.S. population.[2] Given the complexity of our experimental design, respondents were presented with three attention checks throughout the survey (Berinsky et al. 2021). Even if respondents failed any of these attention checks, they were still included in the final sample from YouGov. However, our main analyses are limited to respondents who successfully passed all three attention checks. Approximately 91% of respondents were attentive, resulting in a final sample of 1,813 respondents.[3]

Experimental Treatments

Respondents were presented with two experimental treatments which serve complementary aims: *Information Addition* (vignette design) and *Audit Attributes* (conjoint design). Details of the designs for the two experiments are found below. The order in which respondents were exposed to the experimental treatments was not randomized. All respondents were presented with the *Information Addition* experiment prior to the *Audit Attributes* experiment

2. A complete description of how our observations were constructed and weighting was implemented can be found in Appendix B. Because YouGov maintains an opt-in panel, a precise response rate was not provided.

3. The analyses in the main text of this paper reflect the responses of "attentive" responses, a decision that was made when this study was pre-registered. See Appendices D and E for analyses including all respondents. Note that all of the questions in our survey were "soft required" for respondents.

Table 1: Attributes for Audit Results in Informational Experiment

Condition	**Text**	**Hypothesis**
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.	H_1 vs. H_2
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.	H_3
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.	H_3

to ensure that exposure to the information-dense conjoint design did not bias responses to the intentionally low-information conditions part of the vignette design.[4] In addition to the two experimental treatments, we include a set of descriptive questions to understand baseline levels of awareness and expectations of post-election audits and how certain factors (e.g., partisanship, perceptions of systematic voter fraud, belief in political conspiracy theories, and belief in election denialism) shape confidence in election administration.[5] The full text of the questions presented to respondents, along with their ordering, can be found in Appendix A.

Information Addition

In this vignette experiment, respondents were randomly assigned to see one of four possible descriptions about a hypothetical post-election audit of vote counts at the state-level for a presidential election. The exact text presented to respondents can be found in Table 1. After respondents were presented with the description, they were asked to indicate how confident they were that "the candidate with the most votes won the election." Confidence was coded to range from 1 for "not at all confident" to 4 for "very confident." All "I don't know" responses were treated as missing data and omitted from analysis. For the purposes of

4. In Appendix E.1 we show that what information condition the respondents are given does not have a systematic effect on conjoint ratings.

5. Questions aimed to measure baseline awareness and expectations were asked before the two experimental treatments. Question aimed at measuring other factors related to voter confidence were asked following the experimental treatments.

analysis, responses were rescaled to range from 0 to 1 (with 1 representing greater confidence) allowing for easier comparison.

The goal of this experiment is to identify whether voter confidence in the outcome of elections is sensitive to the level of information about its results. The text in the "Audit-0" condition aims to determine whether mentioning that an audit was conducted following an election, as opposed to merely stating the winner of the election ("Control"), has a positive effect on confidence in election outcomes. Traugott and Conrad (2012) employ a similar design and find that stating an audit was conducted does in fact increase voter confidence. Treatment conditions "Audit-1" and "Audit-2" extend the analysis conducted by Traugott and Conrad, looking to identify the effect of presenting respondents with the results of a post-election audit on confidence. The difference between treatment conditions "Audit-1" and "Audit-2" is the discrepancy in the total vote count (0.2% or 1%) before and after the audit was conducted. Given the hypotheses we have outlined, H_1 predicts that information provided in "Audit-1" and "Audit-2" will *increase* confidence in the election outcome, compared to respondents assigned to "Control". H_2 predicts that the information presented in "Audit-1" and "Audit-2" will *decrease* confidence in the election outcome relative to those assigned to "Control". Lastly, H_3 predicts that the level of confidence in the election outcome among those assigned to "Audit-1" and "Audit-2" will be meaningfully different.

In designing this experiment, we were intentional in making the following choices. First, party labels (e.g., that the winner was a Democrat) and the level of office (e.g., the election was held for president) were held constant so that the only variation across treatment conditions was the information presented about an audit. Second, the specific numbers presented as the discrepancy in the total vote count in "Audit-1" (0.2%) and "Audit-2" (1%) were chosen because they are not so unrealistically large to either falsely inflate treatment effects or shake voter confidence in the outcome of *actual* presidential elections. Though 1% is large, such a discrepancy in total vote count has been found for non-presidential elections and in individual counties for the 2020 U.S. presidential election (Jaffe et al. 2022). Third,

though confidence in vote tabulation varies by whether respondents are considering if their own ballot, ballots in their county, or ballots nationwide were counted as intended (Sances and Stewart III 2015), we specified that "one state" found a discrepancy in the total vote in "Audit-1" and "Audit-2." In doing so, we ensured our outcome measures were not biased by any prior notions respondents might have about election administration in particular states or other jurisdictions and that all responses were centered on the same point of reference.

Audit Attributes

In the conjoint experiment, respondents are presented with descriptions of how two hypothetical counties with an equal number of voters conduct audits of their election results. The goal of this experiment is to compare typical features of post-election audits to each other and their relative effect on voter confidence in results of an election. In asking respondents to compare *counties* with equal number of voters, we aimed to reduce to cognitive task respondents face in comparing the nuances of audit results.[6] For each county's audit description, respondents are presented with six key attributes: (1) share of the votes included in the audit, (2) difference between results posted on election night and after audit, (3) who conducted the audit, (4) availability of audit results, (5) party of the candidate who won the election, and (6) office audit is conducted for. Respondents saw three pairs of county profiles and after each pair were tasked with selecting the county in which they would "have the most confidence in the results of the election." In total, 1,820 respondents completed all three profile tasks – our analyses reflect their responses only. The selected attributes reflect common reporting on post-election audits. For example, two articles published by the *Texas Tribune* on state election security after the 2020 election (Mendez 2022; Ura and Waller 2021) mention the percent of ballots audited (1% in most counties), who conducted

6. We choose counties for two reasons. The first is external validity: in much of the country, counties are the main unit of government responsible for actually administering elections, as well as election audits. Second, we did not want to bring state-level election margins to the front of respondents' minds by situating the inaccuracy at the state level: a respondent in a state where presidential elections are close might imagine that a small change in the state-level vote count would change the election result, whereas a respondent in a different state may have a different reaction.

Table 2: Attributes for Audit Profiles in Conjoint Experiment

Attributes	**Values**	**Basis**	**Hypothesis**
Share of votes included in audit	1% 5% 10%	Empirical	H_4
Difference between results posted on election night and after audit	0 ballots 10 ballots 100 ballots	Empirical	H_1 vs. H_2
Who conducted the audit	Local administrators State administrators Outside contractor	Empirical	H_4
Availability of audit results	Posted publicly Given to the media Not shared with the public	Empirical	H_4
Election winner's party	Republican Democrat	Empirical	Alternative to H_4
Office audit conducted for	President School board	Substantive	Alternative to H_4

the audit (state administrators), number of discrepancies, and where (if anywhere) audit results have been made available.

Table 2 provides a summary of the values each attribute can take, the basis for how the specific values were chosen, and which of our hypotheses the attribute is testing. Below, we provide more detail on the basis for the values chosen for each attribute:

- *Share of votes included in audit*: As documented by the National Conference of State Legislators (2022), 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 (e.g., California, Kansas, Texas). However, the most common share of units or votes to be included in an audit is between 1% and 5% (e.g., New Jersey, Nevada, Washington, Wisconsin). While some state sets the share to 10% of districts (e.g., Connecticut) or precincts (e.g., Oregon), rarely do states or counties audit more than 10% of the votes or reporting units in an election when statute requires auditing a fixed percentage of ballots (Jaffe et al. 2022).

- *Difference between results posted on election night and after audit*: Unfortunately, there is no centralized reporting of American election audit results, so how many ballots we should reasonably expect to be counted differently between election night and after an audit has been conducted is not known. To determine plausible values for this attribute, we rely on the work of Jaffe et al. (2022) who show that the vast majority of audit discrepancies are close to 0, rarely more than a dozen, and almost never more than 100 votes. In opting to present values that are as realistic as the closest existing approximation suggests, we guard against a serious ethical consideration: if the values presented were unrealistically large values without clearly emphasizing that they are hypothetical, then respondents may conclude that American elections are much less accurate than they are. For simplicity, we also present these difference in terms of raw number rather than in terms of percentages.[7]

- *Who conducted the audit*: Audits are conducted by one of three groups: state administrators (e.g., Arkansas), local election officials (e.g., California), or outside contractor (e.g., Wisconsin, where a retired state Supreme Court justice led post-election audits in 2020). This latter category is also intended to evoke events that are not really audits by any reasonable definition, but are commonly called "audits" in the media, such as the investigation into the 2020 Arizona election by a group called the "Cyber Ninjas".

- *Availability of audit results*: Typically, states that conduct election audits will make them publicly available in some format. Many states will publish results via official government communication channels (e.g., Minnesota in 2022). Some states (e.g., Pennsylvania in 2020) provide or summarize audit results only to media organizations, which then report the results to the public. Others may conduct an audit but then

7. We use raw numbers for three reasons. First, respondents were previously presented with percentages in the *Information Addition* experiment. Second, we wanted to test the effect of discrepancies in total vote counts in a way that did not require respondents to consider whether percent discrepancy was inherently large or small in the context of the percent of ballots included in the audit. This reduces the cognitive task of evaluating this attribute (Jacobs Danan and Gelman 2018). Third, we found that news articles tended to use raw totals when discussing the results of audits.

neither announce the detailed results of their audit nor provide it to the media (e.g., Indiana in 2020).

- *Election winner's party*: Because one of the offices we consider is the presidency, for the conjoint scenarios to be realistic the winner must be either a Democrat or a Republican.

- *Office audit conducted for*: The presidency, alongside being the most prominent race in the country, is also more substantively important than any other single office. To vary the level of salience and personalization of this office, we also included a school board race, which is a commonly selected office at the local-level.

Results

Knowledge and Expectations of Post-Election Audits

The primary interest of this study is to examine what attributes of audits affect voter confidence. Our analyses begin, however, by exploring preexisting knowledge and expectations of post-elections. As illustrated by the upper-left panel of Figure 1, most individuals are uninformed about how many states perform post-election audits in a given election, with 48.4% of all respondents—including 43.9% of Democrats and 50.7% of Republicans—responding "I don't know." As of Fall 2022, 34 states and Washington, DC require traditional post-election audits, with two additional states (e.g., Michigan and Oklahoma) allowing local officials to use traditional post-election audits (National Conference of State Legislatures 2022).

Nevertheless, as the results in the upper right panel of Figure 1 note, 65.1% of all respondents—including 64.1% of Democrats and 67.8% of Republicans—are correct in stating that audits rarely change the winner of elections nationwide. This finding is noteworthy given one striking contradiction in our pattern of results. As shown in the lower left panel of Figure 1, a majority of respondents (50.5%) either agree or somewhat agree that "election audits are effective in detecting errors in how ballots are counted". Importantly, there is

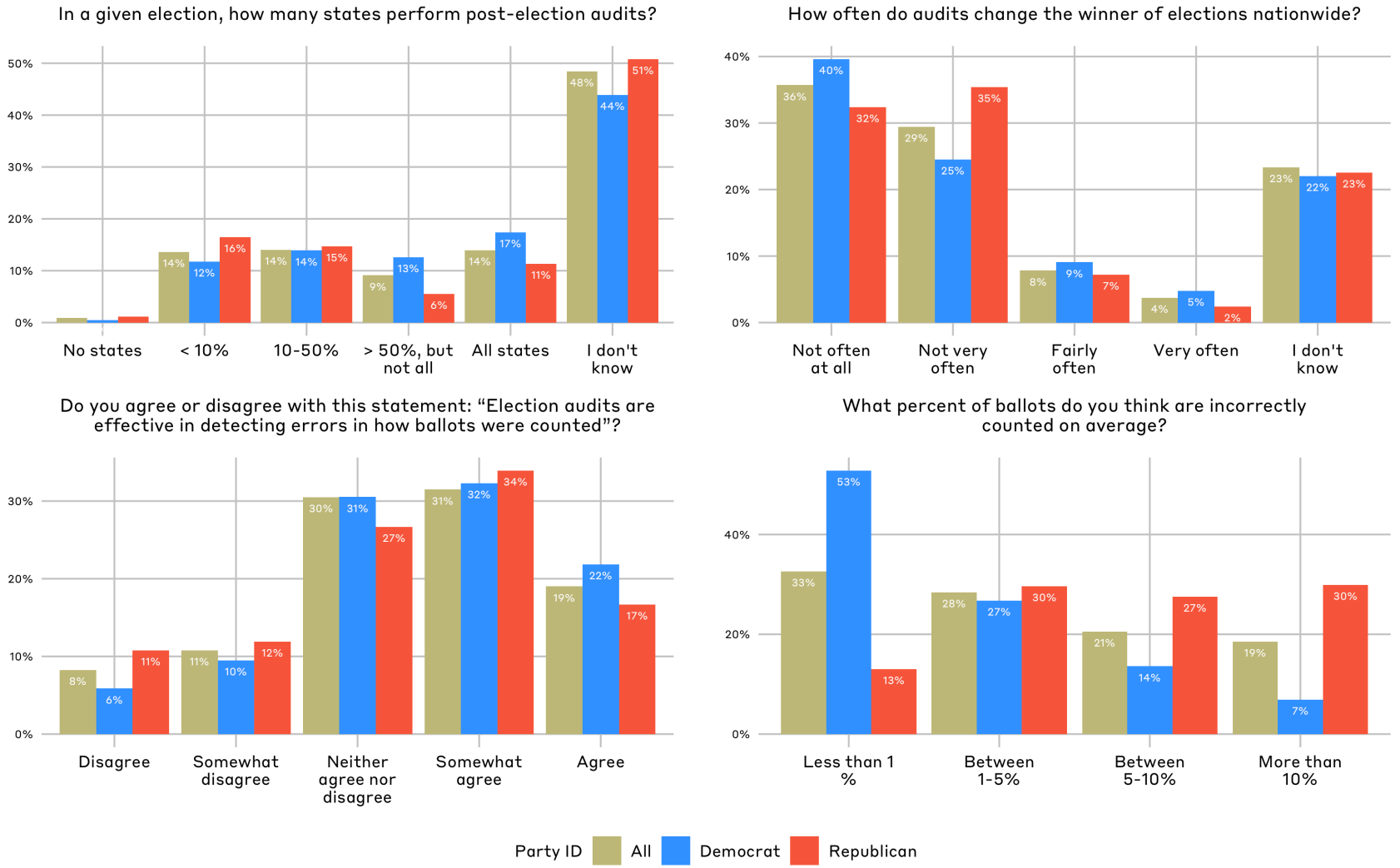

Figure 1: Baseline Factual Knowledge and Attitudes of Post-Election Audits

little evidence of a partisan division in responses to this statement as 54.1% of Democrats and 50.6% of Republicans agree or somewhat agree that audits are effective in detecting errors. Yet, there is a pronounced split in the perceived accuracy of vote tabulation: in comparison to 52.8% of Democrats, just 13.0% of Republicans think less than 1% of ballots are incorrectly counted on average. Moreover, a striking 29.9% of Republicans think *more* than 10% of ballots are typically incorrectly counted compared to just 6.9% of Democrats. As previously noted, even a 1% discrepancy between vote tallies reported on election night and following a post-election audit is large (Jaffe et al. 2022).

Thus, our initial findings suggest that individuals are generally uninformed about the prevalence of post-election audits across states, yet are cognizant that audits rarely alter the outcome of elections. Most importantly, while the perceived accuracy of vote tabulation appears split along partisan lines, Democrats and Republicans similarly believe that post-election audits are effective tools in detecting ballot counting errors. We next investigate how the manner in which election results are communicated and the structural features of post-election audits shape public trust in election results.

Information Addition

As outlined above, we theorize that public trust in election results is a function of two details: the presence of a post-election audit and the magnitude of errors revealed by a post-election audit. To that end, we ask respondents how confident they are that the candidate with most the votes won a hypothetical presidential election described to them. As reported in the estimate for "Audit-0" in Figure 2, merely mentioning that an audit was conducted does not have a statistically significant treatment effect ($p = 0.832$) on voter confidence compared to respondents who were told only that the winner of the election was a Democrat ("Control"). However, as noted by estimated treatments effects for the "Audit-1" and "Audit-2" conditions, mentioning *both* that a post-election audit was conducted and the results of the audit have positive and significant effects on voter confidence. Specifically, reporting

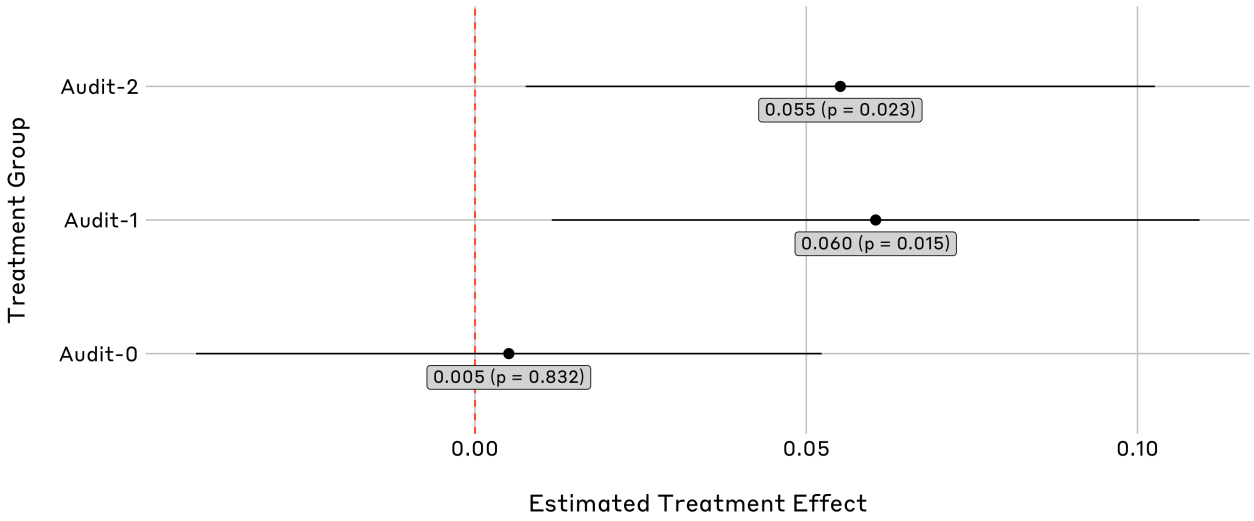

Figure 2: Estimated Treatment Effects of Post-Election Audit Information

Notes: This figure plots the coefficient estimates and their 95% confidence intervals produced from a linear regression model. The outcome measure is scaled level of confidence that the candidate with the most votes won the hypothetical election described in the experimental vignette. Each value is labeled with its estimate and corresponding p-value created using heteroskedasticity-consistent (HC2) standard errors. A complete regression table can be found in Appendix Table D-3.

that an audit was conducted and found a 0.2% discrepancy in the total vote count increases confidence by 6 percentage points ($p = 0.015$), on average. Similarly, reporting an audit that found a 1% discrepancy increases by confidence by 5.5 percentage points ($p = 0.023$), on average.

These results provide evidence in favor of H_1: performing an audit that reveals some errors in vote counting but overall confirms the outcome of an election does in fact increase public trust in election results. Consequently, we fail to find sufficient evidence in favor of H_2. Because the estimates for "Audit-1" and "Audit-2" are indistinguishable from one another as illustrated by the 95% confidence intervals in Figure 2, we fail to find sufficient evidence in favor of H_3.[8] Furthermore, when describing the hypothetical post-election audit to respondents for the "Audit-1" and "Audit-2" conditions, we state that "one state did find…" rather than indicating that the audit occurred in the respondent's state. In light of

8. In Appendix F.1 we provide an additional analysis examining whether voter confidence in the results of an election is a function of the number of errors an audit reveals (H_3). We find that confidence in election results meaningfully differs based on the discrepancy reported when an audit reveals an unusually large discrepancy (i.e., one beyond what Jaffe et al. 2022 have empirically demonstrated as typical) in a race where two candidates are separated by 1,000 votes.

work suggesting that the effectiveness of efforts to increase vote confidence differ based on whether respondents consider election administration in their own state versus other states (Gaudette et al. 2023), our results are notable and underscore that information about audits can perhaps increase public trust in elections regardless of the context respondents consider. Further testing the robustness of our findings, we supplement this analysis by considering a range of key political constructs that may moderate the effects of our experimental interventions. As shown in the results presented in Appendix D, factors such as belief in systematic voter fraud, belief in political conspiracies, and election denialism have no meaningful moderating effect on confidence.[9] Additionally, we conduct this analysis separately for Democrats, Republican, and Independents.[10] As shown in Appendix Table D-5, both mentioning that an audit was conducted and found a 0.02% discrepancy in the vote count ("Audit-1") has a statistically significant effect on voter confidence among *Republican* respondents. Similarly, reporting an audit that found a 1% discrepancy ("Audit-2") has a meaningful effect on voter confidence among *Independent* respondents.

Overall, it appears that an effective strategy for increasing voter confidence in election outcomes entails communicating both the presence and results of a post-election audit. Crucially, the precise magnitude of the errors revealed by an audit does not appear to shake voter confidence.

Audit Attributes

Next, we assess the relative directionality and magnitude of different dimensions of post-election audits on voter confidence. Specifically, our main quantity of interest is the Average

9. The survey questions asked to measure these constructs can be found in Appendix A. The "Belief in Systematic Voter Fraud" battery is found in questions 15-20, "Belief in Political Conspiracies" battery is found in questions 22-28, and "Election Denialism" is measured by the response to question 21. For question batteries, all responses are collapsed into a scale that measures 0-1 after min-max rescaling.

10. Only those who identify as pure independents are coded as "Independents" in this analysis. Independents classified as "leaners" according to a 7-point scale for partisan identification are classified as "Democrats" or "Republicans."

Marginal Component Effect (AMCE) (Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto 2014).[11] All estimates, created using the *Cregg* package for R (Leeper 2020), use standard errors clustered by respondent. The main results of the conjoint experiment are shown in Figure 3.

The overall pattern of results are taken as support for hypothesis H_4, primarily when examining the impact of the attributes described in Table 2. First, we find that the most important feature of post-election audits is how results are communicated to the public: announcing election results more transparently promotes greater voter confidence than any other structural component. Second, auditing a larger share of the total ballots cast has a similar positive effect. Third, voters are more confident in elections audited by an independent contractor than by election administrators themselves. In short, these sensitivities suggest that *how* an audit is conducted is critical to voter confidence in the outcome of elections.

To be more precise, as illustrated in Figure 3, compared to a hypothetical county that chooses to not publicly disclose the results of an audit, the probability of being more confident in the election results from a county increases when the county releases the results of an audit directly to the public (AMCE ≈ 0.23, SE ≈ 0.01) or to the media (AMCE ≈ 0.17, SE ≈ 0.01). Additionally, compared to a county that audits 1% of all ballots, auditing 5% or 10% of all ballots increases the probability of being more confident in a county's election results by about 0.08 (SE ≈ 0.01) and 0.14 (SE ≈ 0.01), respectively. Furthermore, assessing variation in who conducts an audit, the difference in probability of being confident in a county's election results that are audited by an outside contractor compared to local election administrators is 0.03 (SE ≈ 0.01). Notably, compared to those audited by local election administrators, whether or not a county's election results are audited by *state* election administrators has no meaningful effect on voter confidence. Importantly, neither the number of errors revealed

11. In the context of this study, the AMCE is understood as the expected difference in the likelihood of a respondent expressing greater confidence in the election results of a county, where the county possesses a certain attribute at a treatment level, as opposed to another county with the same feature at a baseline level. When interpreting the AMCE, we structure our sentences according to the "practical recommendations" of Bansak et al. (2022). In Appendix E.3, we also provide marginal means to visualize the baseline response level (Leeper, Hobolt, and Tilley 2020).

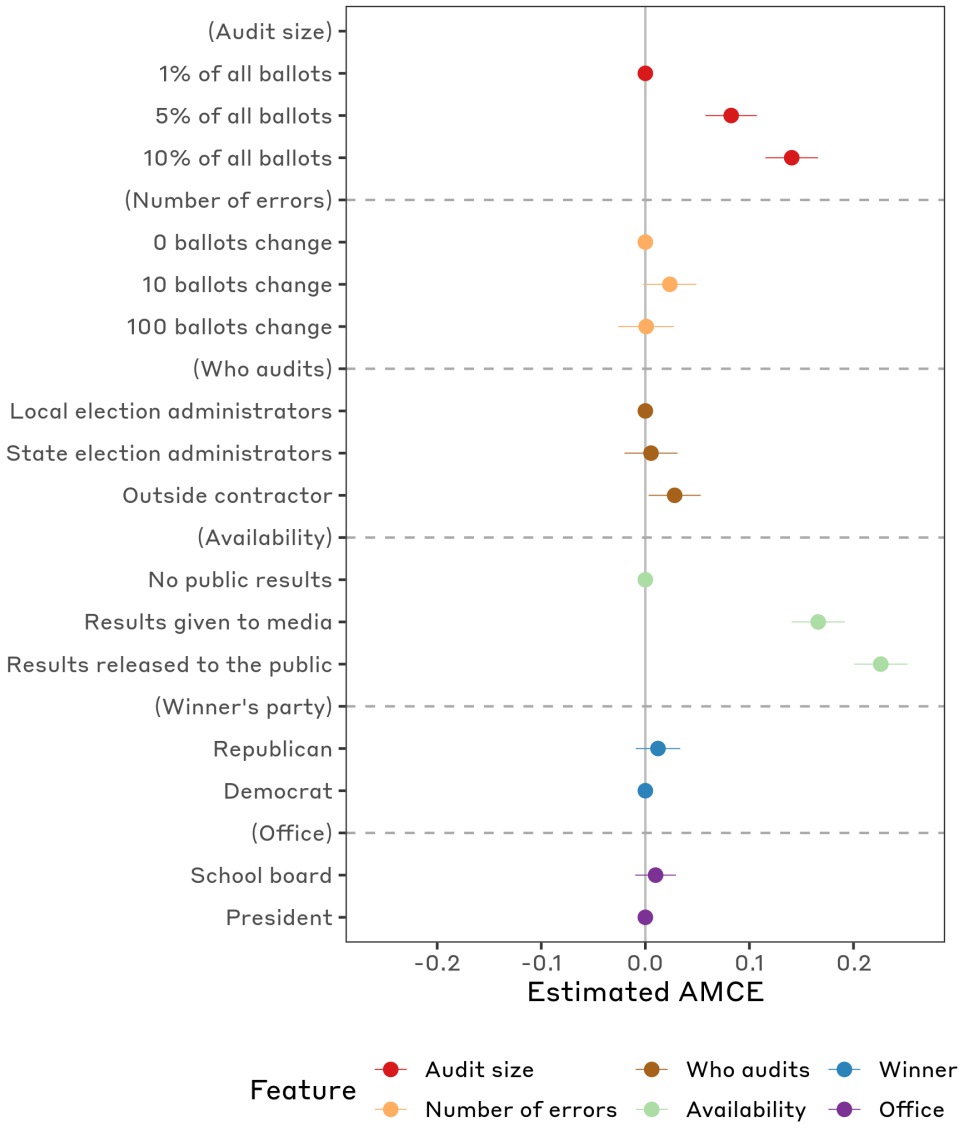

Figure 3: Estimated AMCE on Chosen County

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

by a county's audit, who won the election, nor which level of office an audit is conducted for meaningfully influences whether respondents are more confident in one county's election results than the other.

To consider whether this observed sensitivity is driven by respondents' partisanship, particularly in light of the well-documented relationship between party identification and voter confidence (Sances and Stewart III 2015; Clark and Stewart III 2021; Stewart III 2022),

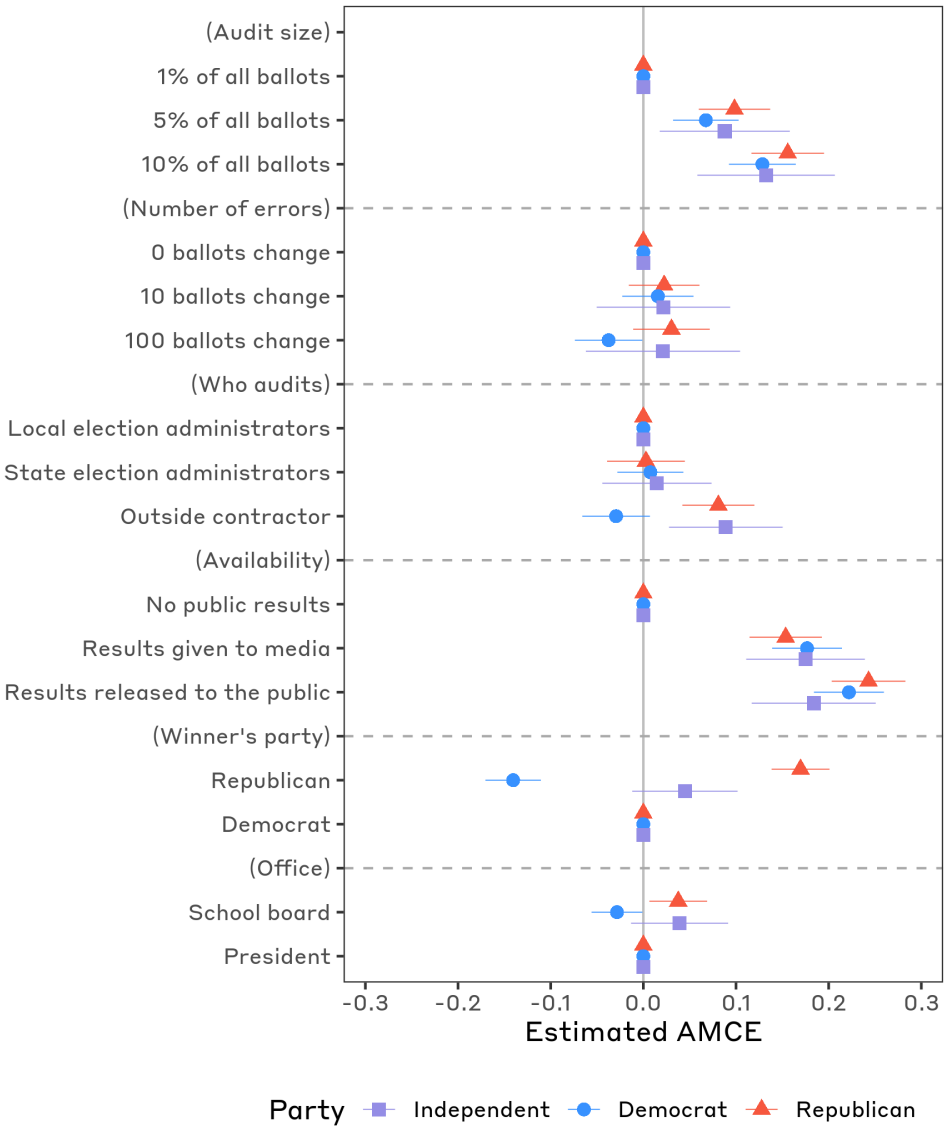

Figure 4: Estimated Conditional AMCE by Respondent Party ID

Notes: The estimated AMCE of each attribute in the conjoint on a given county being the one that respondents selected as having more reliable results, broken down by respondents' party identification.

we present conditional AMCEs for Republican, Independent, and Democratic respondents in 4.[12] Figure 4 presents the conditional AMCE estimates.

In comparison to the results described previously, the most dramatic change is that Democratic respondents are less confident in audits conducted for elections in which a Re-

12. As before, only those who identify as pure independents are coded as "Independents" in this analysis. "Leaners" according to a 7-point scale for partisan identification are classified as "Democrats" or "Republicans."

publican candidate was declared and confirmed the winner rather than a Democratic candidate (AMCE $\approx$ -0.15, SE $\approx$ 0.02). Conversely, Republican respondents were more confident in audits for elections in which a Republican candidate won rather than a Democratic candidate (AMCE $\approx$ 0.17, SE $\approx$ 0.02). This provides another instance of the "winner effect" on voter confidence (Sances and Stewart III 2015; Sinclair, Smith, and Tucker 2018).

A more minor difference is how partisans react to who conducts an audit. Compared to counties whose audits are conducted by local election administrators, audits conducted by outside contractors increase the probability of being more confident in a county's election results by 0.08 (SE $\approx$ 0.02) and 0.09 (SE $\approx$ 0.03) among Republican and Independent respondents, respectively. Democratic respondents appear to make no such distinction. This may reflect a penetration of elite rhetoric and behavior to mass respondents.

Furthermore, there is a difference between Republicans and Democrats in how the level of office an election being audited for factors into voter evaluations. Compared to elections for president, Republican respondents are generally more confident in the results of school board elections (AMCE $\approx$ 0.04, SE $\approx$ 0.02), while Democratic respondents are less confident (AMCE $\approx$ -0.03, SE $\approx$ 0.01). These findings, while substantively small, are consistent with the repeated Republican narrative of the faultiness of the 2020 presidential election.

Most importantly, however, Democrats and Republicans do not substantively differ in their evaluations of a county's post-election audit based on either the number of ballots examined or the number of discrepancies revealed. Moreover, Democratic, Republican, and Independent respondents largely agree that transparency in publishing elections results improves confidence. Together, these data underscore that post-election audits have the potential to strengthen voter confidence in spite of the unambiguous strength of partisan biases in American politics more generally.

Discussion

Broadly, our findings provide three key takeaways. First, as expected by both practitioners and scholars, audits do in fact improve public trust in the outcome of elections. Second, audits are a sum of their parts: *how* audits are conducted matters more to voter confidence that *what* audits find. That is, the precise number of miscounted votes matters less so long as audits confirm election outcomes and are conducted in a reasonable and transparent manner. Third, post-election audits appear to be one aspect of election administration in which Democrats and Republicans are not divided along perceptions of factual related information. While they may differ in their views of how accurate vote counting is, both Democrats and Republicans agree that audits are an effective tool in administering elections.

Our work makes a more fine, practical point: the people who conduct audits are seen as arbiters of election integrity. Further, there is a partisan divide in who is well-suited for this role, with Republican and Independents showing preference for outside contractors whereas Democrats appear indifferent. This may explain, in part, the degree of scrutiny levied against election administrators (Gross, Baltz, and Stewart III 2023; Gross et al. 2023). Nevertheless, election administrators play a critical role in increasing voter confidence through communications to their constituents (Suttmann-Lea and Merivaki 2023) and in the context of this study, may play a critical role in ensuring transparency in the outcome of post-election audits.

The findings of this study carry implications beyond the present experimental context. First, as outlined throughout, our investigative approach relied on a faithful representation of how audits are designed, implemented, and discussed in the United States. Second, as depicted in our conjoint design, aspects of post-election verification procedures do in fact vary and are of continuing focus for policymakers in democracies around the world. In larger consideration, this work invites future work in two specific regards. Whereas the focus of this study is centered on audits, subsequent research may similarly explore how the design, implementation, and discussion of other tools used to verify election integrity, including

voter identification procedures, shape public trust in elections. Moreover, future research should consider how the effects of verification procedures on voter confidence may depend on the context in which they are employed or referenced. Namely, does the implementation of verification procedures, such as audits, have different effects on public trust in elections when used in *specific* politically contentious jurisdictions (e.g., states of Arizona and Georgia in presidential election years)? Lastly, the insights from this study call greater attention to the role of election officials in how they handle the results of post-election audits. This leaves unanswered whether candidates for elected office—those who have a vested interest in election outcomes—affirm and respect elections verified through post-election audits.

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Online Appendix for "Trust in the Count: Improving Voter Confidence with Post-Election Audits"

Contents

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 at all confident
- Not very confident
- Fairly confident
- Very confident
- 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).

At the beginning of the conjoint, respondents are shown the following prompt:

	County A	County B
% Total ballots examined	1% of total ballots cast	10% of ballots cast
Difference between results posted on election night and after audit	100 ballots	0 ballots
Who conducted the audit	Outside contractor	Outside contractor
Availability of audit results	Publicly posting final results to the public	Publicly posting final results to the public
Winner of election	Republican	Democrat
Office audit conducted for	School board	President

Figure A-1: Format of County Profile Display in YouGov

Please read the descriptions of how two hypothetical counties with an equal number of voters conduct audits of their election results. Then, please indicate which of the two you personally prefer.

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

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

Attributes	**Values**	**Basis**
Share of votes included in audit	1% 5% 10%	Empirical
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	Empricial
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

Demographics & Moderators

Belief in Systematic Voter Fraud: The following is a list of activities that are usually against the law. Please indicate how often you think these activities occur.
(15) "People voting more than once in an election"
(16) "People stealing or tampering with ballots that have been cast"
(17) "People pretending to be someone else when going to vote"
(18) "People voting who are not U.S. citizens "
(19) "People casting an absentee ballot intended for another person"
(20) "Officials changing the reported vote count in a way that is not a true reflection of the ballots that were actually counted"

The order in which (15)-(20) is displayed in the grid-style question is randomized across respondents.

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

(21) **Election Denialism**: 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

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

(22) "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"
(23) "Donald Trump is waging a secret war against elite Satan-worshiping pedophiles in government, business and the media"
(24) "In the 2020 election, some voting machines purposely flipped votes from President Trump to President Biden"
(25) "Mail ballots are regularly cast in the names of dead people in U.S. elections"
(26) "Antifa stormed the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021"
(27) "Thousands of voters cast multiple ballots in U.S. elections"
(28) "Election administrators rig elections in favor of one party."

The order in which (22)-(28) is displayed in the grid-style question is randomized across respondents.

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

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 Survey Methodology

The survey presented in this study was fielded by YouGov between February 27, 2023 and March 3, 2023. YouGov interviewed 2,088 respondents who were matched down to a sample of 2,000 observations. The respondents were matched to a sampling frame on gender, age, race, and education which was constructed by stratified sampling from the full 2019 American Community Survey (ACS) 1-year sample with selection within strata by weighted sampling with replacements (using the person weights on the public use file).

The matched cases were weighted to the sampling frame using propensity scores. The matched cases and the frame were combined and a logistic regression was estimated for inclusion in the frame. The propensity score function included age, gender, race/ethnicity, years of education, and region. The propensity scores were grouped into deciles of the estimated propensity score in the frame and post-stratified according to these deciles.

The weights were then post-stratified on the 2020 Presidential vote choice, and a four-way stratification of gender, age (4-categories), race (4-categories), and education (4-categories), to produce the final weight.

Analyses presented in this study rely entirely on these weights.

C Survey Sample Summary

Table C-2: Survey Sample Summary Statistics (by Information Addition Treatment Condition)

Characteristic	**Overall**, N = 2,000	**Control**, N = 502	**Audit-0**, N = 500	**Audit-1**, N = 491	**Audit-2**, N = 507
Party ID					
Independent	300 (15%)	79 (16%)	69 (14%)	80 (16%)	72 (14%)
Democrat	987 (49%)	251 (50%)	235 (47%)	242 (49%)	259 (51%)
Republican	713 (36%)	172 (34%)	196 (39%)	169 (34%)	176 (35%)
Education					
No HS	72 (3.6%)	18 (3.6%)	17 (3.4%)	19 (3.9%)	18 (3.6%)
High school graduate	623 (31%)	139 (28%)	158 (32%)	168 (34%)	158 (31%)
Some college	421 (21%)	111 (22%)	103 (21%)	99 (20%)	108 (21%)
2-year	216 (11%)	47 (9.4%)	66 (13%)	54 (11%)	49 (9.7%)
4-year	413 (21%)	111 (22%)	99 (20%)	95 (19%)	108 (21%)
Post-grad	255 (13%)	76 (15%)	57 (11%)	56 (11%)	66 (13%)
Voter Registration Status					
Yes	1,793 (90%)	454 (90%)	453 (91%)	435 (89%)	451 (89%)
No	186 (9.3%)	42 (8.4%)	42 (8.4%)	52 (11%)	50 (9.9%)
Don't Know	21 (1.1%)	6 (1.2%)	5 (1.0%)	4 (0.8%)	6 (1.2%)
Age					
18-29	333 (17%)	77 (15%)	76 (15%)	79 (16%)	101 (20%)
30-44	483 (24%)	136 (27%)	120 (24%)	105 (21%)	122 (24%)
45-64	693 (35%)	168 (33%)	164 (33%)	185 (38%)	176 (35%)
65+	491 (25%)	121 (24%)	140 (28%)	122 (25%)	108 (21%)

[1] n (%)

D Information Addition: Supplementary OLS Models

Table D-3: Effects of Information on Confidence in Audit Outcomes

	Attentive Respondents			All Respondents		
	Winner	Conduct	Accurate	Winner	Conduct	Accurate
Audit-0	0.005	−0.011	−0.012	0.000	−0.008	−0.015
	p = 0.851	p = 0.693	p = 0.659	p = 0.989	p = 0.764	p = 0.550
Audit-1	0.060	0.040	0.028	0.056	0.043	0.027
	p = 0.027	p = 0.152	p = 0.312	p = 0.028	p = 0.100	p = 0.296
Audit-2	0.055	0.022	0.029	0.034	0.016	0.022
	p = 0.037	p = 0.442	p = 0.289	p = 0.183	p = 0.537	p = 0.400
(Intercept)	0.648	0.636	0.647	0.654	0.639	0.649
	p = <0.001	p = <0.001	p = <0.001	p = <0.001	p = <0.001	p = <0.001
N	1708	1708	1694	1871	1870	1854
R^2	0.006	0.003	0.002	0.004	0.003	0.002

Models use HC2 robust standard errors.

Table D-4: 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	0.050	−0.005	0.016	0.028	−0.040
	p = 0.564	p = 0.526	p = 0.949	p = 0.836	p = 0.698	p = 0.576
Audit-1	0.071	0.089	0.036	0.064	0.115	0.019
	p = 0.354	p = 0.244	p = 0.642	p = 0.375	p = 0.109	p = 0.791
Audit-2	0.216	0.096	0.127	0.143	0.065	0.073
	p = 0.003	p = 0.272	p = 0.080	p = 0.051	p = 0.430	p = 0.294
Democrat	0.397	0.441	0.402	0.354	0.393	0.345
	p = <0.001	p = <0.001	p = <0.001	p = <0.001	p = <0.001	p = <0.001
Republican	−0.051	−0.080	−0.090	−0.072	−0.103	−0.135
	p = 0.420	p = 0.203	p = 0.151	p = 0.223	p = 0.078	p = 0.021
Audit-0 x Democrat	−0.030	−0.073	0.000	−0.004	−0.048	0.024
	p = 0.722	p = 0.365	p = 0.998	p = 0.958	p = 0.524	p = 0.749
Audit-1 x Democrat	−0.043	−0.097	−0.035	−0.046	−0.123	−0.020
	p = 0.589	p = 0.220	p = 0.661	p = 0.544	p = 0.096	p = 0.791
Audit-2 x Democrat	−0.197	−0.110	−0.119	−0.135	−0.082	−0.057
	p = 0.011	p = 0.219	p = 0.112	p = 0.079	p = 0.336	p = 0.425
Audit-0 x Republican	−0.018	−0.006	0.038	0.006	0.017	0.081
	p = 0.837	p = 0.943	p = 0.658	p = 0.945	p = 0.838	p = 0.322
Audit-1 x Republican	0.033	−0.001	0.037	0.039	−0.032	0.055
	p = 0.709	p = 0.993	p = 0.680	p = 0.644	p = 0.702	p = 0.512
Audit-2 x Republican	−0.184	−0.070	−0.117	−0.122	−0.036	−0.061
	p = 0.031	p = 0.470	p = 0.164	p = 0.146	p = 0.698	p = 0.445
(Intercept)	0.482	0.458	0.491	0.516	0.493	0.538
	p = <0.001	p = <0.001	p = <0.001	p = <0.001	p = <0.001	p = <0.001
N	1708	1708	1694	1871	1870	1854
R^2	0.335	0.378	0.372	0.299	0.346	0.347

Models use HC2 robust standard errors.

Table D-5: Effects of Information by Party ID Subgroup on Confidence in Election Outcome

	Attentive Respondents				All Respondents			
	All	Dem.	Rep.	Ind.	All	Dem.	Rep.	Ind.
Audit-0	0.005	0.016	0.028	0.046	0.000	0.011	0.021	0.016
	p = 0.851	p = 0.496	p = 0.500	p = 0.564	p = 0.989	p = 0.624	p = 0.591	p = 0.836
Audit-1	0.060	0.028	0.104	0.071	0.056	0.018	0.102	0.064
	p = 0.027	p = 0.229	p = 0.021	p = 0.355	p = 0.028	p = 0.434	p = 0.016	p = 0.376
Audit-2	0.055	0.019	0.033	0.216	0.034	0.008	0.021	0.143
	p = 0.037	p = 0.411	p = 0.445	p = 0.004	p = 0.183	p = 0.729	p = 0.623	p = 0.052
(Intercept)	0.648	0.879	0.431	0.482	0.654	0.870	0.443	0.516
	p = <0.001	p = <0.001	p = <0.001	p = <0.001	p = <0.001	p = <0.001	p = <0.001	p = <0.001
N	1708	875	603	230	1871	955	659	257
R^2	0.006	0.002	0.011	0.044	0.004	0.001	0.012	0.02

Models use HC2 robust standard errors.

Table D-6: 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	0.015	0.029	0.021	0.030	0.031
	p = 0.506	p = 0.517	p = 0.216	p = 0.439	p = 0.201	p = 0.190
Audit-1	0.035	0.016	0.025	0.031	0.027	0.036
	p = 0.176	p = 0.517	p = 0.302	p = 0.234	p = 0.269	p = 0.137
Audit-2	0.043	0.006	0.053	0.022	−0.001	0.029
	p = 0.112	p = 0.808	p = 0.023	p = 0.432	p = 0.959	p = 0.272
Perceptions of Fraud	−0.727	−0.803	−0.759	−0.678	−0.740	−0.713
	p = <0.001	p = <0.001	p = <0.001	p = <0.001	p = <0.001	p = <0.001
Audit-0 x Perceptions of Fraud	0.019	0.011	−0.030	−0.008	−0.026	−0.052
	p = 0.779	p = 0.852	p = 0.622	p = 0.903	p = 0.656	p = 0.387
Audit-1 x Perceptions of Fraud	0.079	0.067	0.013	0.075	0.050	−0.011
	p = 0.222	p = 0.285	p = 0.843	p = 0.256	p = 0.440	p = 0.865
Audit-2 x Perceptions of Fraud	0.030	0.032	−0.063	0.033	0.042	−0.014
	p = 0.636	p = 0.577	p = 0.261	p = 0.614	p = 0.499	p = 0.827
(Intercept)	0.948	0.968	0.960	0.938	0.950	0.949
	p = <0.001	p = <0.001	p = <0.001	p = <0.001	p = <0.001	p = <0.001
N	1658	1658	1646	1812	1810	1796
R^2	0.413	0.48	0.489	0.36	0.425	0.432

Models use HC2 robust standard errors.

Table D-7: 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	0.003	0.028	0.022	0.008	0.027
	p = 0.422	p = 0.903	p = 0.260	p = 0.483	p = 0.724	p = 0.278
Audit-1	0.038	−0.001	0.024	0.031	−0.013	0.015
	p = 0.192	p = 0.977	p = 0.295	p = 0.314	p = 0.604	p = 0.566
Audit-2	0.014	−0.019	0.027	0.023	−0.013	0.024
	p = 0.635	p = 0.422	p = 0.258	p = 0.451	p = 0.596	p = 0.316
Belief in Political Conspiracies	−0.833	−0.945	−0.855	−0.736	−0.856	−0.782
	p = <0.001	p = <0.001	p = <0.001	p = <0.001	p = <0.001	p = <0.001
Audit-0 x Belief in Political Conspiracies	0.038	0.069	−0.009	0.008	0.041	−0.033
	p = 0.645	p = 0.312	p = 0.904	p = 0.917	p = 0.557	p = 0.636
Audit-1 x Belief in Political Conspiracies	0.036	0.089	−0.012	0.041	0.126	0.014
	p = 0.626	p = 0.195	p = 0.873	p = 0.608	p = 0.101	p = 0.853
Audit-2 x Belief in Political Conspiracies	0.133	0.139	0.036	0.044	0.096	0.014
	p = 0.074	p = 0.038	p = 0.589	p = 0.564	p = 0.159	p = 0.835
(Intercept)	0.972	1.003	0.978	0.954	0.987	0.967
	p = <0.001	p = <0.001	p = <0.001	p = <0.001	p = <0.001	p = <0.001
N	1708	1708	1694	1871	1870	1854
R^2	0.401	0.467	0.448	0.333	0.395	0.383

Models use HC2 robust standard errors.

Table D-8: Effects of Information by Election Denialism on Confidence in Audit Outcomes

	Attentive Respondents			All Respondents		
	Winner	Conduct	Accurate	Winner	Conduct	Accurate
Audit-0	0.018	−0.020	−0.007	0.003	−0.019	−0.011
	p = 0.485	p = 0.296	p = 0.730	p = 0.907	p = 0.305	p = 0.581
Audit-1	0.032	−0.014	0.001	0.022	−0.023	−0.012
	p = 0.195	p = 0.437	p = 0.945	p = 0.353	p = 0.199	p = 0.540
Audit-2	0.016	−0.022	−0.001	−0.008	−0.030	−0.001
	p = 0.549	p = 0.259	p = 0.979	p = 0.772	p = 0.138	p = 0.971
(Intercept)	0.960	1.001	0.986	0.961	0.996	0.982
	p = <0.001	p = <0.001	p = <0.001	p = <0.001	p = <0.001	p = <0.001
N	1650	1649	1637	1803	1802	1788
R^2	0.515	0.625	0.596	0.481	0.589	0.563

Models use HC2 robust standard errors.

E Conjoint

Current research on conjoints (de la Cuesta, Egami, 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 if 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 de la Cuesta, Egami, and Imai (2022) point out, use of an alternative counterfactual distribution of interest is also acceptable. In this case, although the empirical distribution of county level changes in the vote is skewed towards 0, we are theoretically extremely interested in how voters react to the simultaneous presence of information that the process was flawed and information that the process came to the correct outcome. If the ballot differences are too small, the ability to estimate that is lessened. The marginal distribution of that variable is left as a uniform, but all others presented in this appendix are gathered from previous research (Jaffe et al. 2022).

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

Table E-9: 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

Table E-10: 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 E-11: 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

E.1 Order of Randomization Blocks

All respondents were given both the additive treatment in addition to the conjoint treatment with the additive treatment always presented first. This was done as the conjoint treatment presents an extensive series of audit features, such as size, discrepancy, the person in charge, and more. On the other hand, some of the additive conditions intentionally present limited information to the respondent. If the respondent is given this condition after already having seen a description with an extensive amount of information, they may be biased against it in a way that is not reflective of how most voters encounter information about post-election audits.

Preventing this form of bias if important, but less so if it leads to bias in the opposite sense, if presenting the additive treatment biases responses to the conjoint treatment. It is not apparent that there ought to be any reason that seeing the information treatment in general ought to bias conjoint responses. We show in E-2 that there is no systematic difference in how respondents rated the conjoint counties based on what condition they were exposed to in the first treatment block.

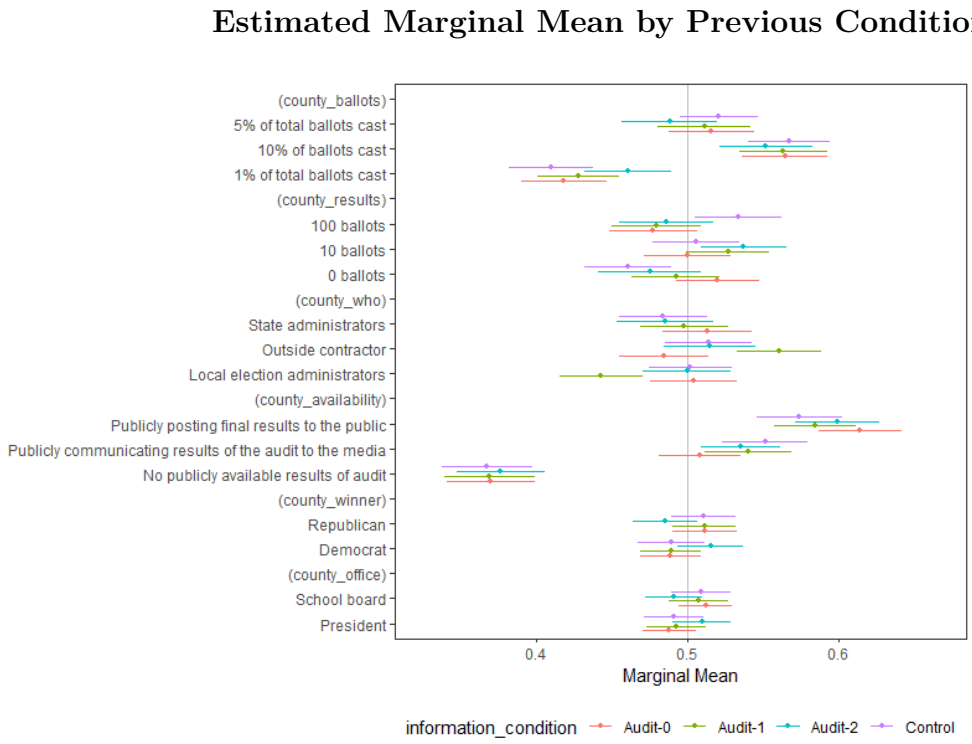

Figure E-2: The estimated Marginal Mean of each attribute in the conjoint experiment, separated by what additive information condition they had been previously given.

E.2 Other Conjoint Moderators

While we have strong expectations that partisanship is an important moderator for how electoral legitimacy is viewed, it is not the only possible moderator. Co-partisanship between the respondent and the hypothetical winner of the election in the conjoint is obviously

extremely similar to respondent's partisanship alone, if co-partisans and anti-partisans have exactly opposite reactions however, the effect might be missed.

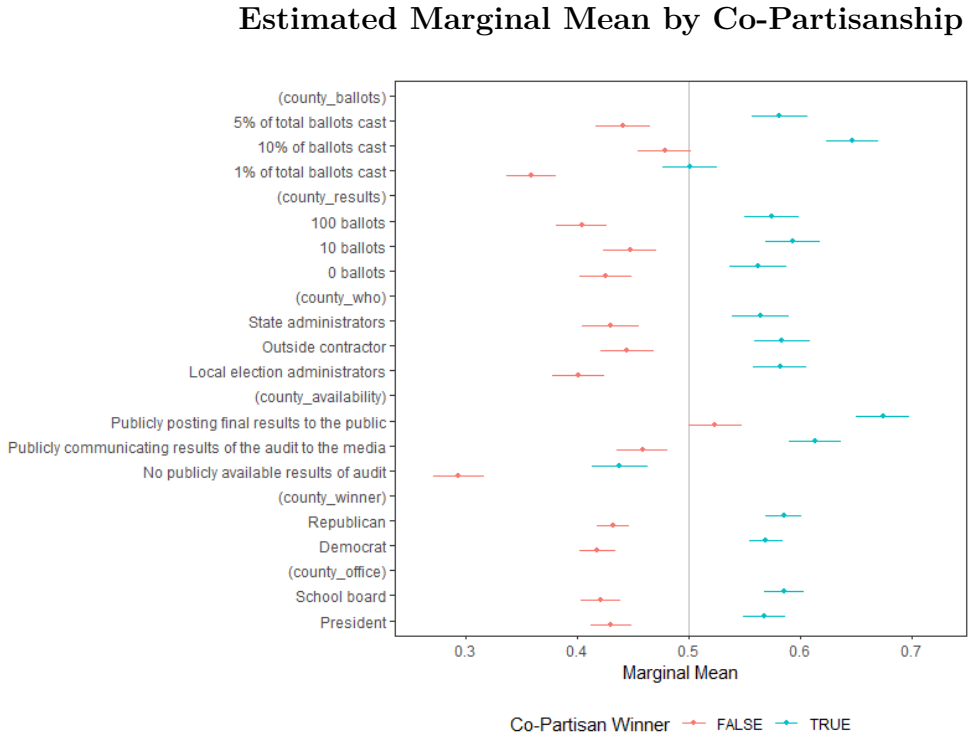

Figure E-3: The estimated Marginal Mean of each attribute in the conjoint experiment, separated by respondent co-partisanship with winning candidate.

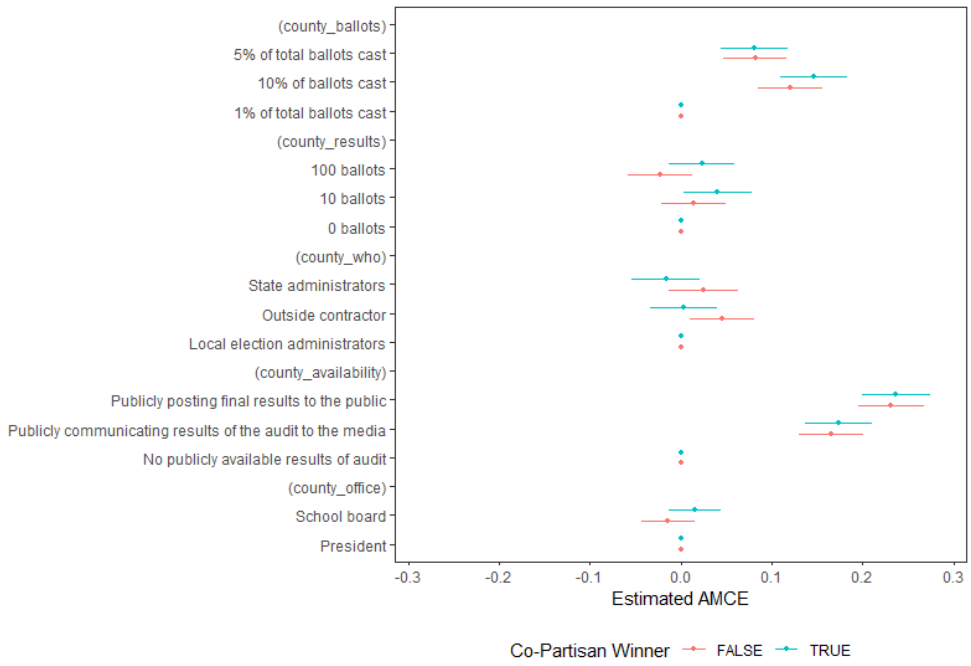

Figure E-4: The estimated AMCE of each attribute in the conjoint experiment, separated by respondent co-partisanship with winning candidate.

In figures E-3 and E-4 we see no evidence that co-partisanship has any effect independent of the original partisanship results. This is illustrated by the fact that the difference between the group marginal means is nearly identical to the difference observed between the trust Republican respondents have in Republican winners and Democratic respondents have in Democratic winners along with null results for the AMCE outside of that.

Before the experimental conditions, respondents are asked five factual questions about American elections. They are how many states perform post-election audits, how many ballots are typically counted in post-election audits, who decides whether to have an audit, how often do audits change the winner of elections, and around what percent of ballots are likely to be incorrectly counted. These are difficult questions in a number of ways even with the possible multiple choice answers being wide ranges of values. 61% of respondents correctly answered either 0 or 1 questions. We split the data into respondents with 2 or more correct responses and fewer.

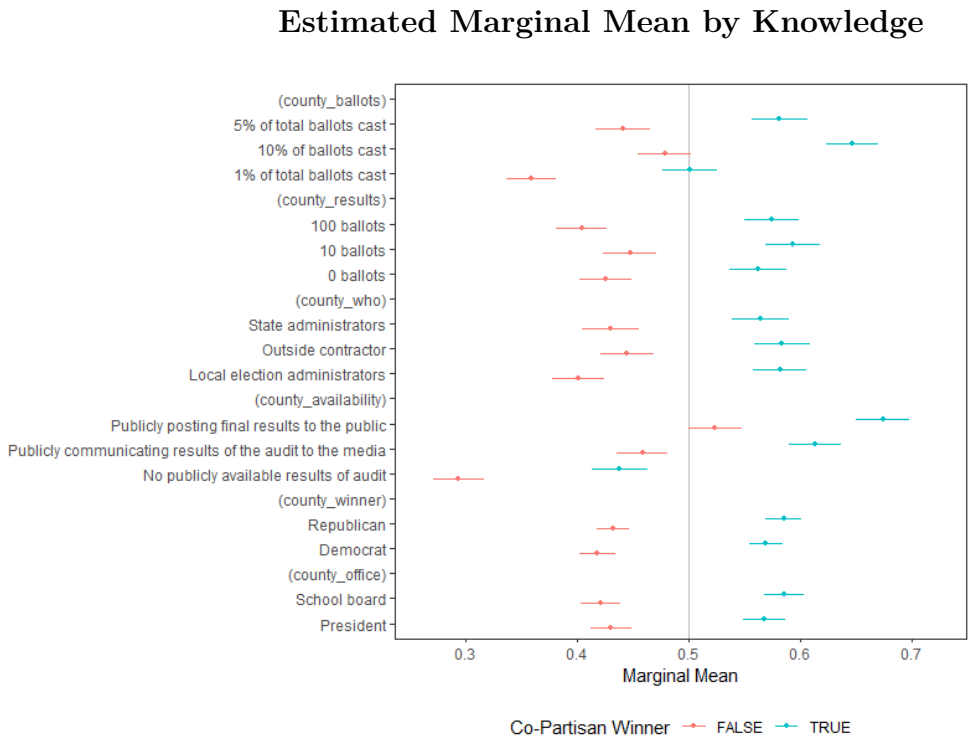

Figure E-5: The estimated Marginal Mean of each attribute in the conjoint experiment, separated by respondent post-election audit knowledge.

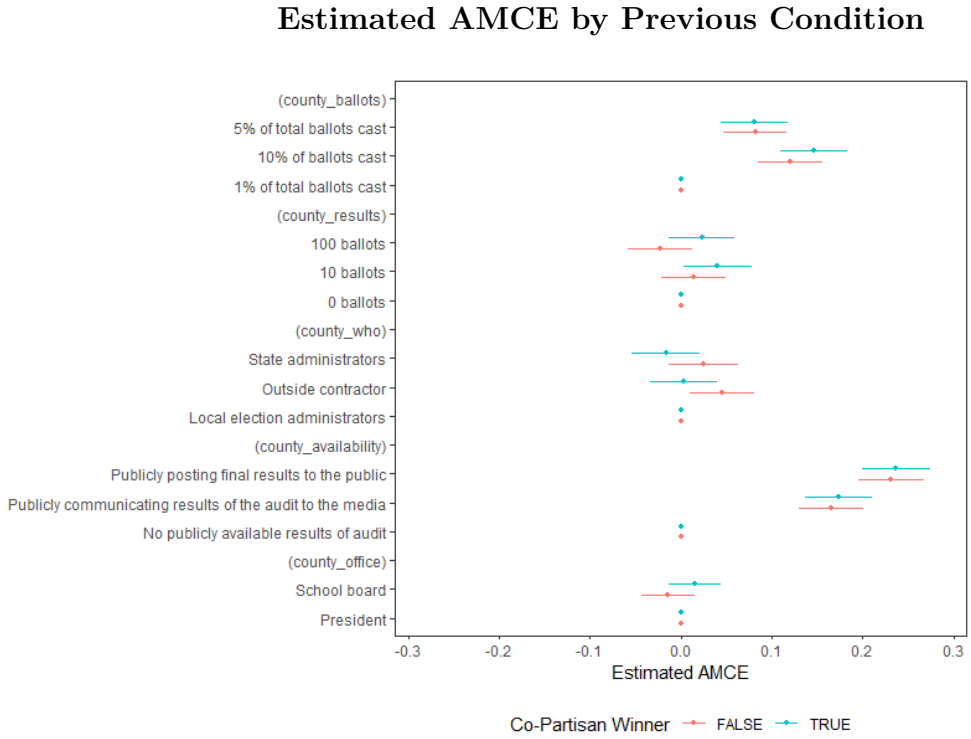

Figure E-6: The estimated AMCE of each attribute in the conjoint experiment, separated by respondent post-election audit knowledge.

E.3 Marginal Means

The following two figures show the marginal means corresponding to the AMCEs presented in Figure 3 and Figure 4, respectively.

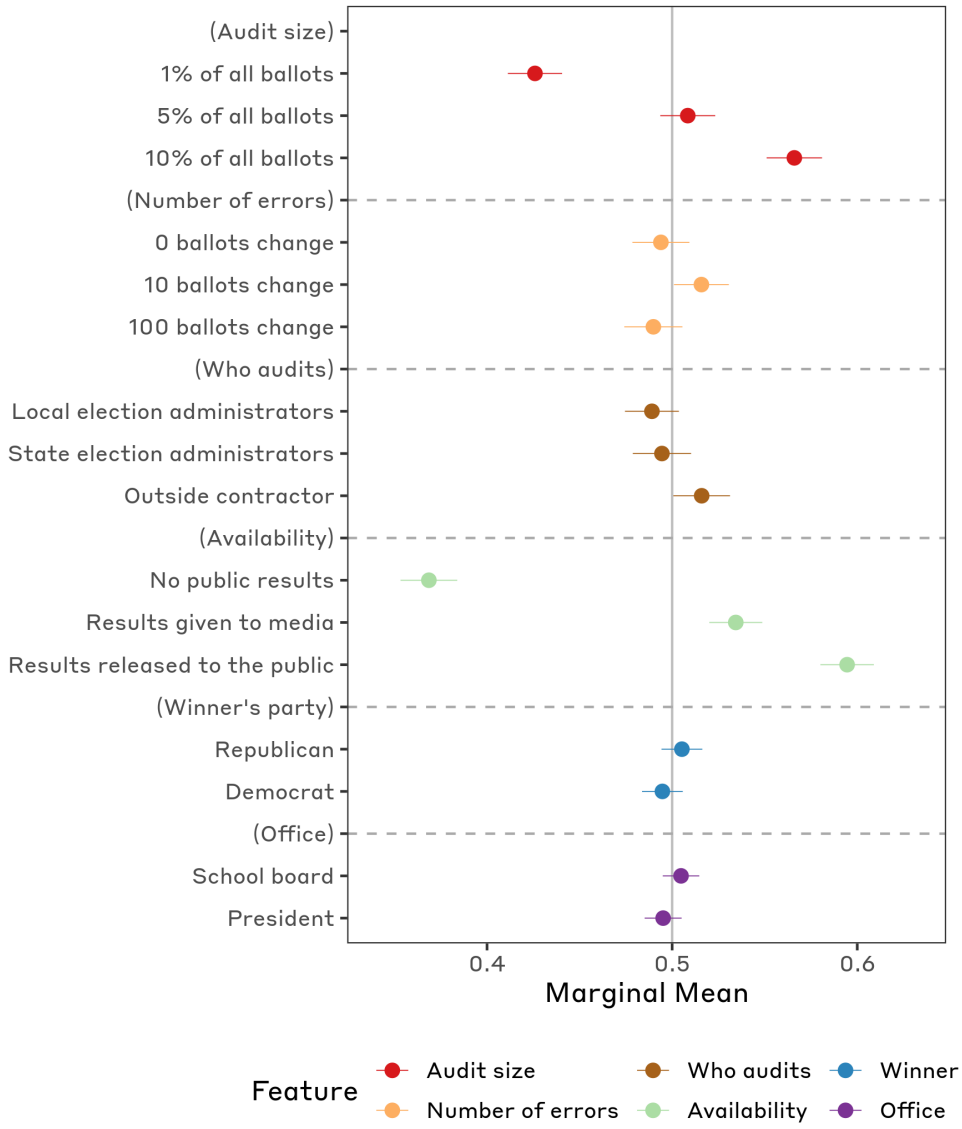

Figure E-7: **Estimated Marginal Mean effect on chosen county**. The estimated Marginal Mean of each attribute in the conjoint experiment on a given county being the one that respondents selected as having the more reliable election results.

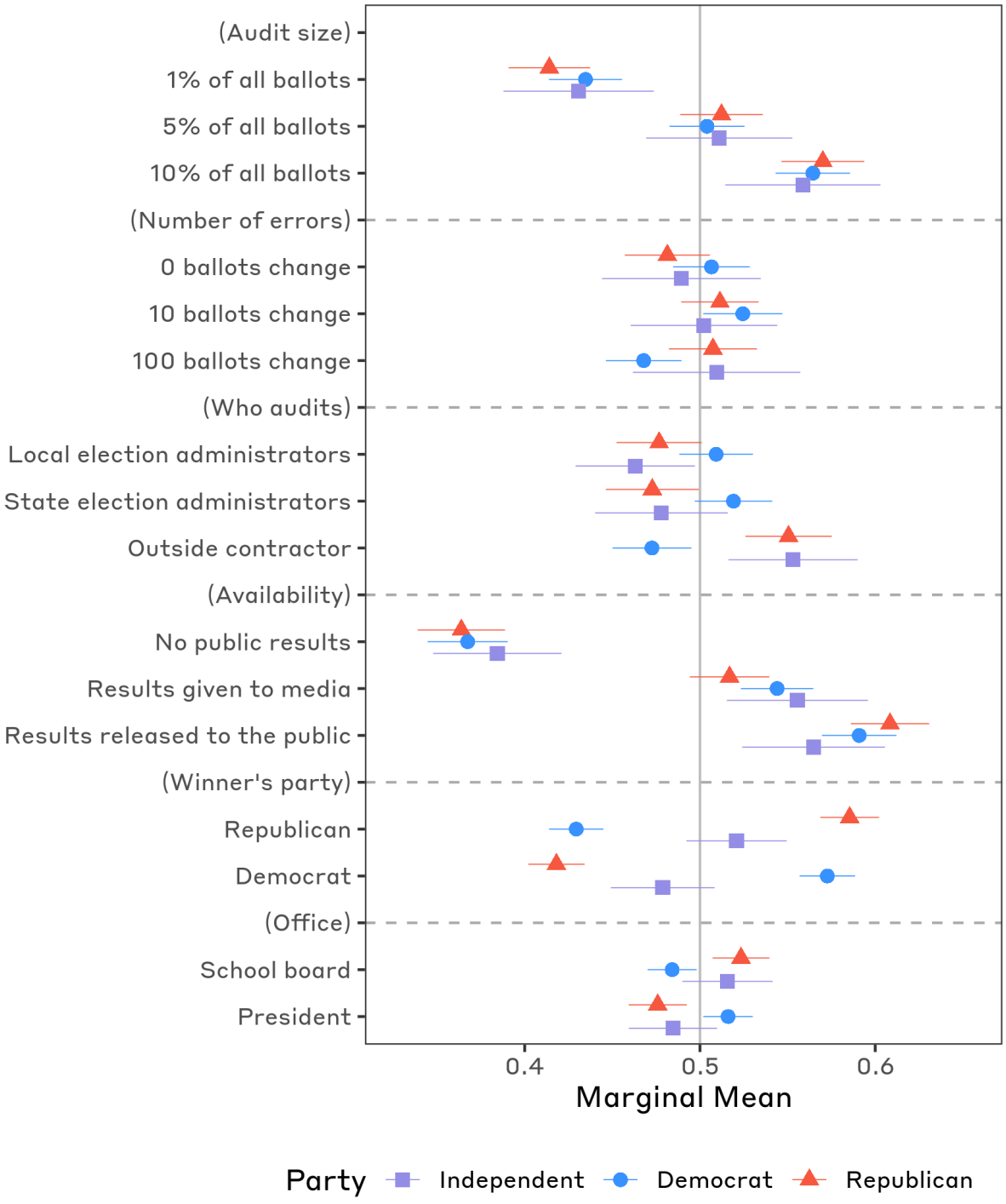

Figure E-8: **Marginal means by party**. Marginal mean estimates broken down by party identification.

F Pre-registered Ancillary Analyses

F.1 Tolerance for Errors

As a further test of the robustness of this study's findings regarding H_3, in our pre-analysis plan we noted that the following question would be used to conduct an ancillary analysis regarding voters' tolerance of errors in vote tabulation.

> 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?

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

In the same manner as the rest of our analyses, responses are rescaled to range from 0 to 1 (with 1 marking the highest level of confidence) and "I don't know" responses treated as missing data. To examine whether there voter confidence is sensitive to the number of errors revealed by an audit, we display pairwise comparisons of mean confidence in election results. As shown, these findings provide evidence in favor of H_3, suggesting that voter confidence is a function of what an audit finds, however, only when an audit finds an unusually large discrepancy in a race where two candidates are separated by 1,000 votes. Given the unrealistic setup of this design, we do not consider this a key finding of this study.

Table F-12: 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

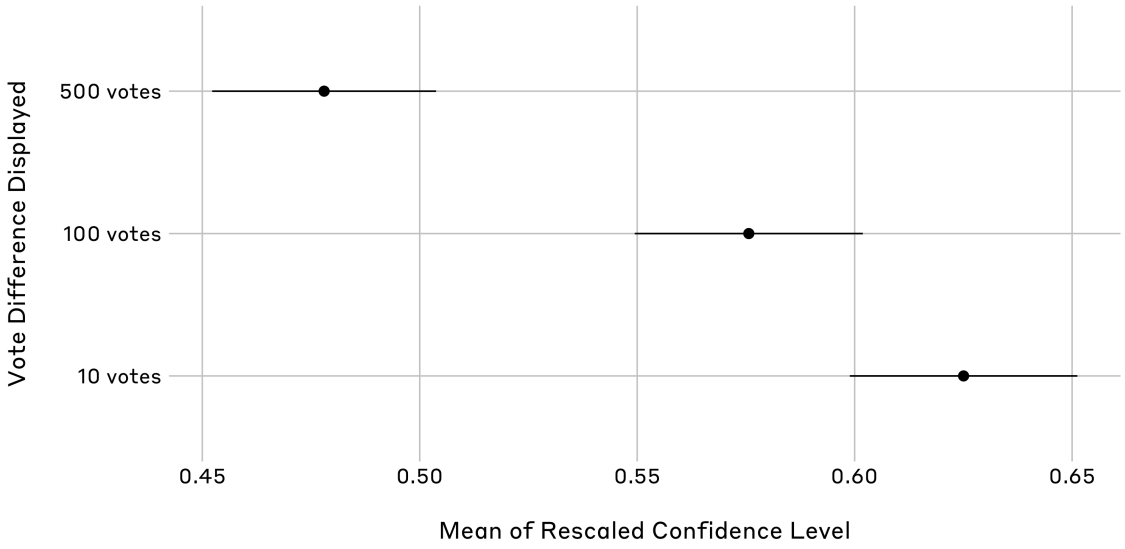

Figure F-9: Mean Confidence in Election Results by Discrepancy Size

G 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).