Are There Minorities Intense Enough to Overcome Majority Preferences?

Chris Tausanovitch
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7/18/2024

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  - Elasticity of votes wrt preferences varies due to heterogeneous intensity
  - Ergo the most popular policy is *not necessarily* the one that generates the most votes
- I will show that **intensity rarely makes a difference, but it may be crucial to understanding a small number of cases**

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- This jives with the literature on roll call voting (Arnold 1990, Fenno 1989, Fiorina 1974, Kingdon 1989), issue publics (Converse 1964, Krosnick 1990), as well as common narratives about politics.

- And we have some evidence for this already (Hill 2022)

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- A candidate can expect to earn 58% of the vote if they side with group A even though it is the smaller group
- Similar result from spatial voting + heterogenous intensity + probabilistic voting

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- Few are tailored to a specific issue under consideration

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- Abramson, Kocak, and Magazinnik (2022) criticize existing uses of conjoint analysis because the results do not capture *majority* preferences

Given this choice, which one would you prefer?

Set A	Set B
Do not allow the display of the Ten Commandments in public schools and courthouses	Allow the display of the Ten Commandments in public schools and courthouses
Provide government-run health insurance to all Americans	Do not provide government-run health insurance to all Americans
Do not create a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants brought here as children	Create a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants brought here as children

○ Set A

○ Set B

Analysis

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- Goal is to compare these to survey marginals (% in favor)

*There are some complications here, but they don't matter

- 44 different attributes, 2-4 are chosen for each experiment.
- AMCEs can be calculated by univariate regressions, treating attributes as categorical with "missing value," and other methods. Results are extremely similar.
- There are small number of logical restrictions forbidding certain attributes from appearing together. Accounting for this makes no difference.
- Standard errors are clustered by respondent, each of whom answers 10 experiments.

Data

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- 44 policy questions

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- 2-4 attributes randomly chosen per experiment
- 10 experiments per respondent
- 494,169 respondents from Nationscape
- For a total of 4,941,690 experiments

Policies

- Chosen for diverse levels of support, subjective guess about importance to 2020 election (in early 2019)

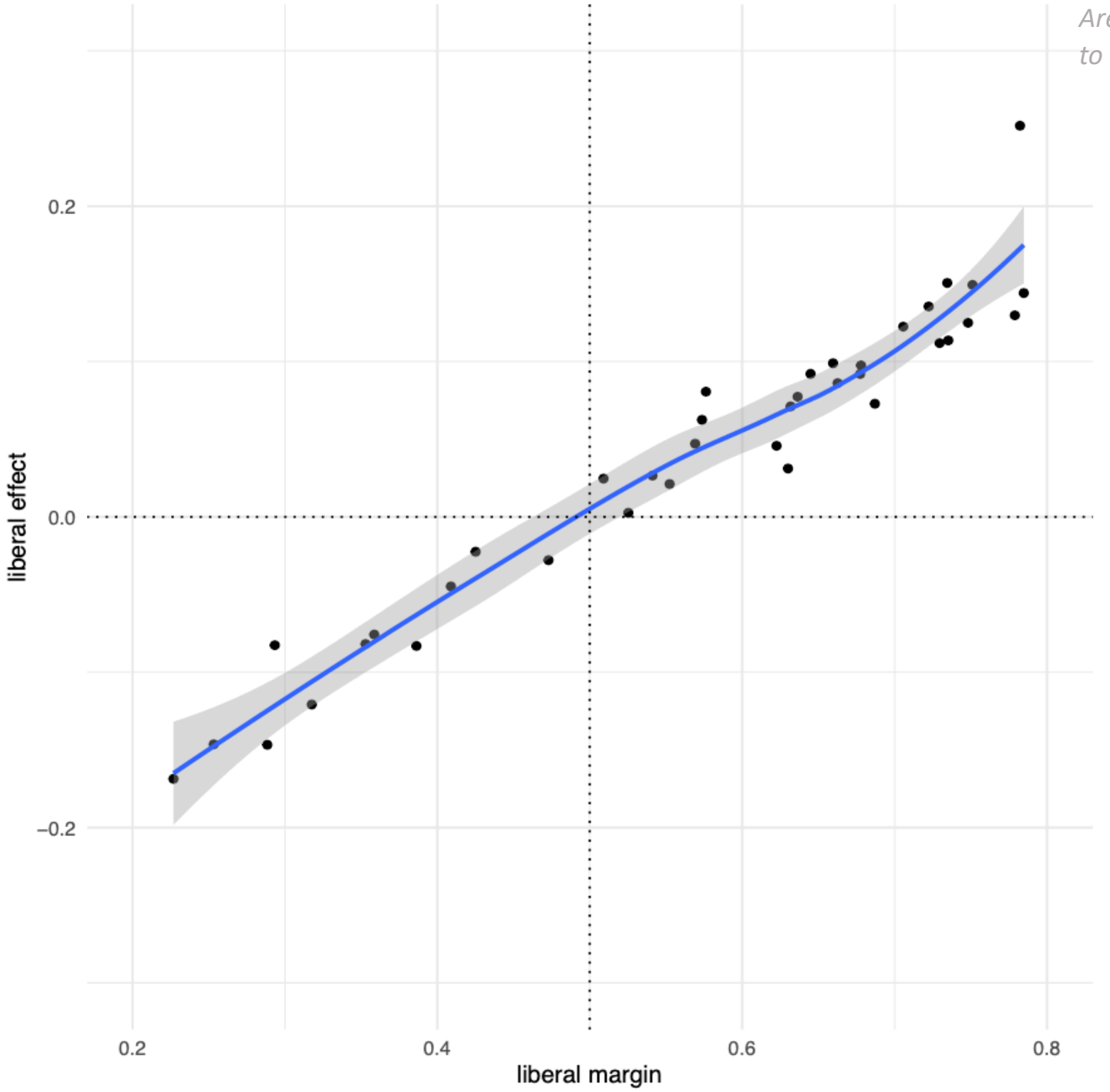
Table 1: Policy areas included in the experiment

Policy Area	Number of Attributes
Abortion	5
Environmental Regulation	4
Gun Control	5
Health	4
Immigration and Border Security	8
Labor	4
Taxes	4
Other	10

- Coded in the liberal direction

Results

r = 0.98



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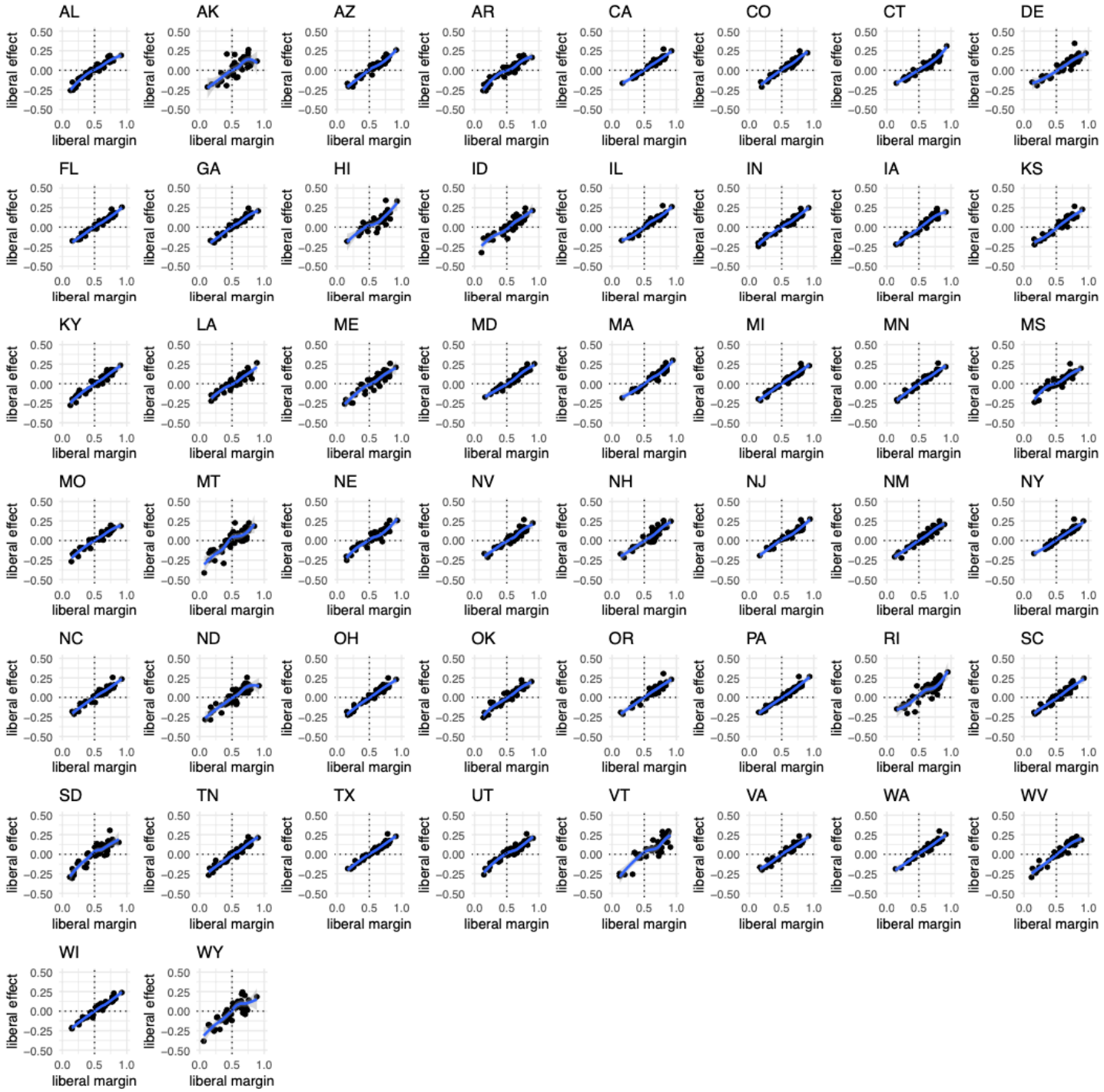
Conjoint effects track margins *very* closely

- This is despite the fact that intensity varies tremendously across issues (Sides, Tausanovitch, and Vavreck 2022)
- The balance of intensity across supporters and opponents does not favor the minority side
- There are no cases where the vote maximizing position disagrees with the majority

But perhaps we haven't looked hard enough?

- Policy in the United States is made at the state level as well. Maybe in some states the story is different?

- We may also care about which policies are vote-maximizing *within* political parties, because members of each party often nominate their own candidates.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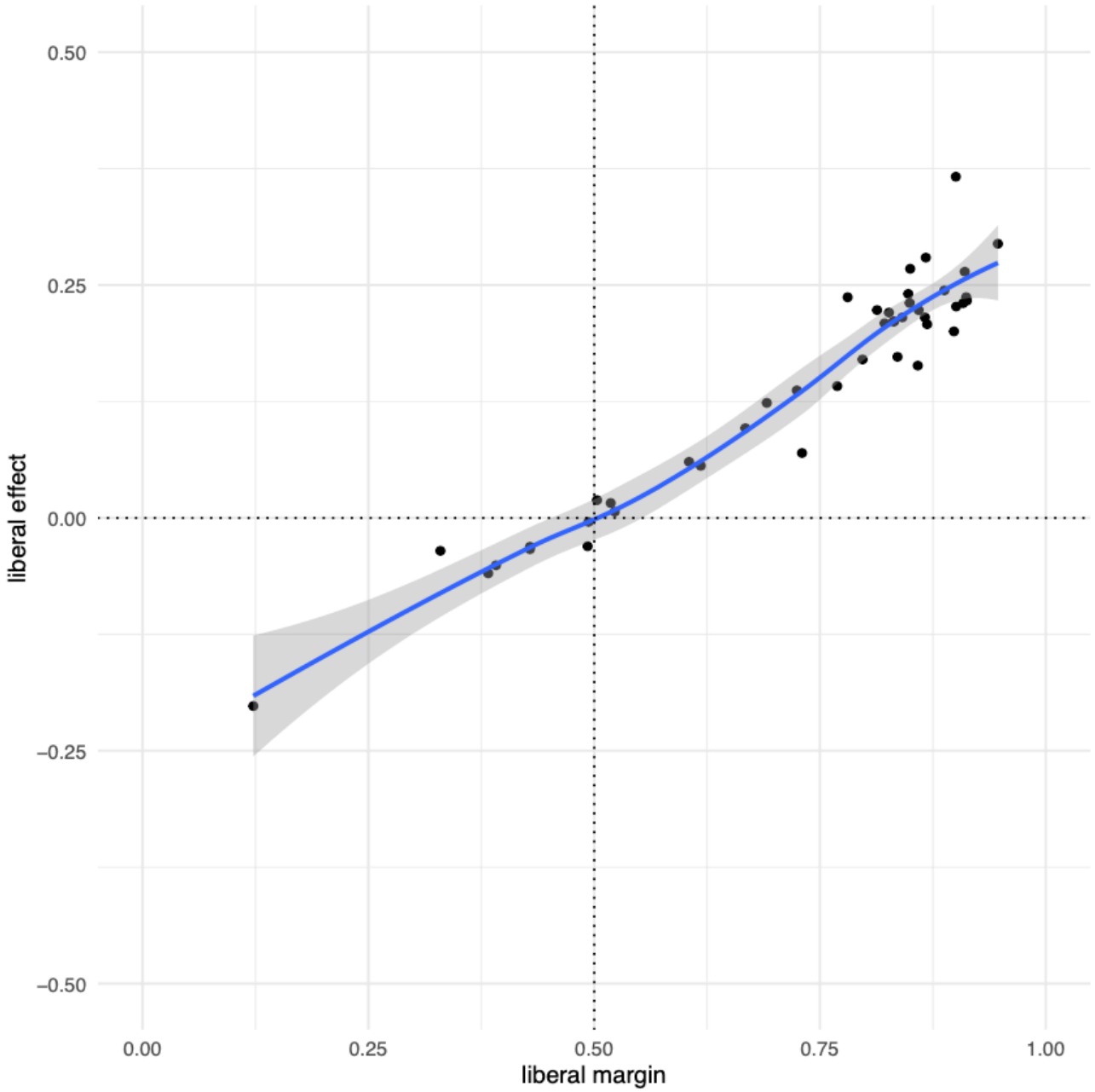
median
r = 0.96

Democrats



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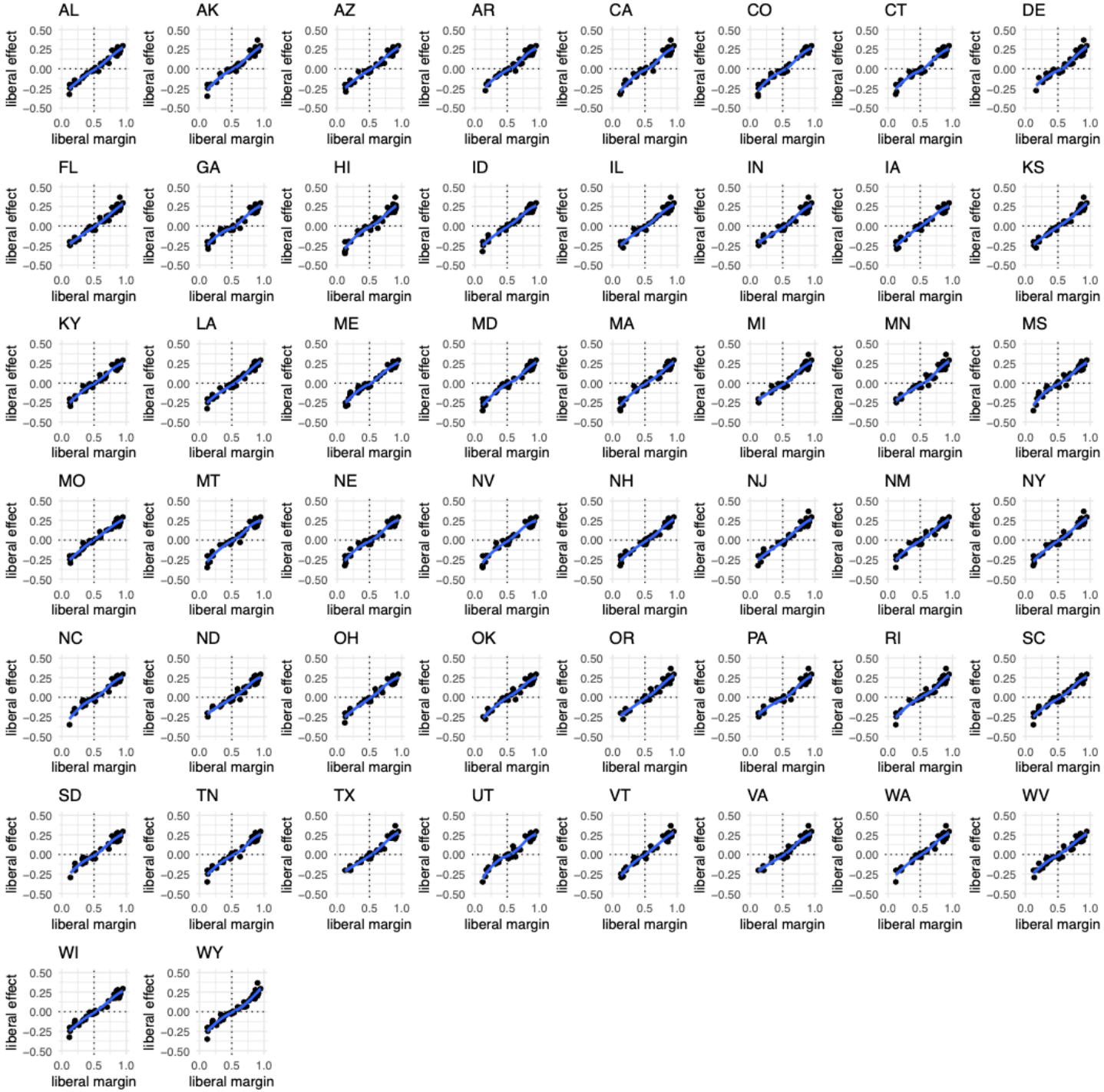
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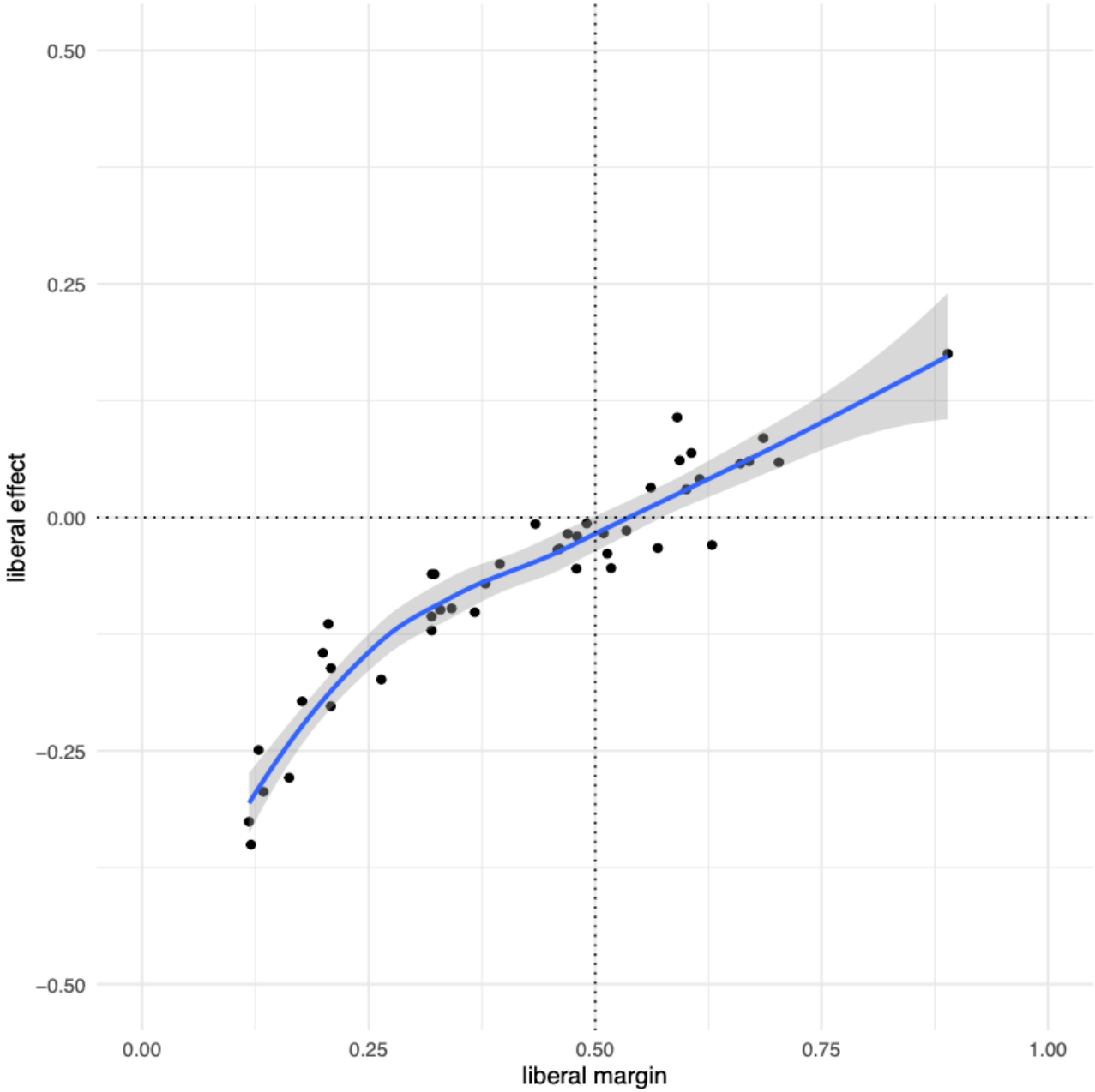
Republicans



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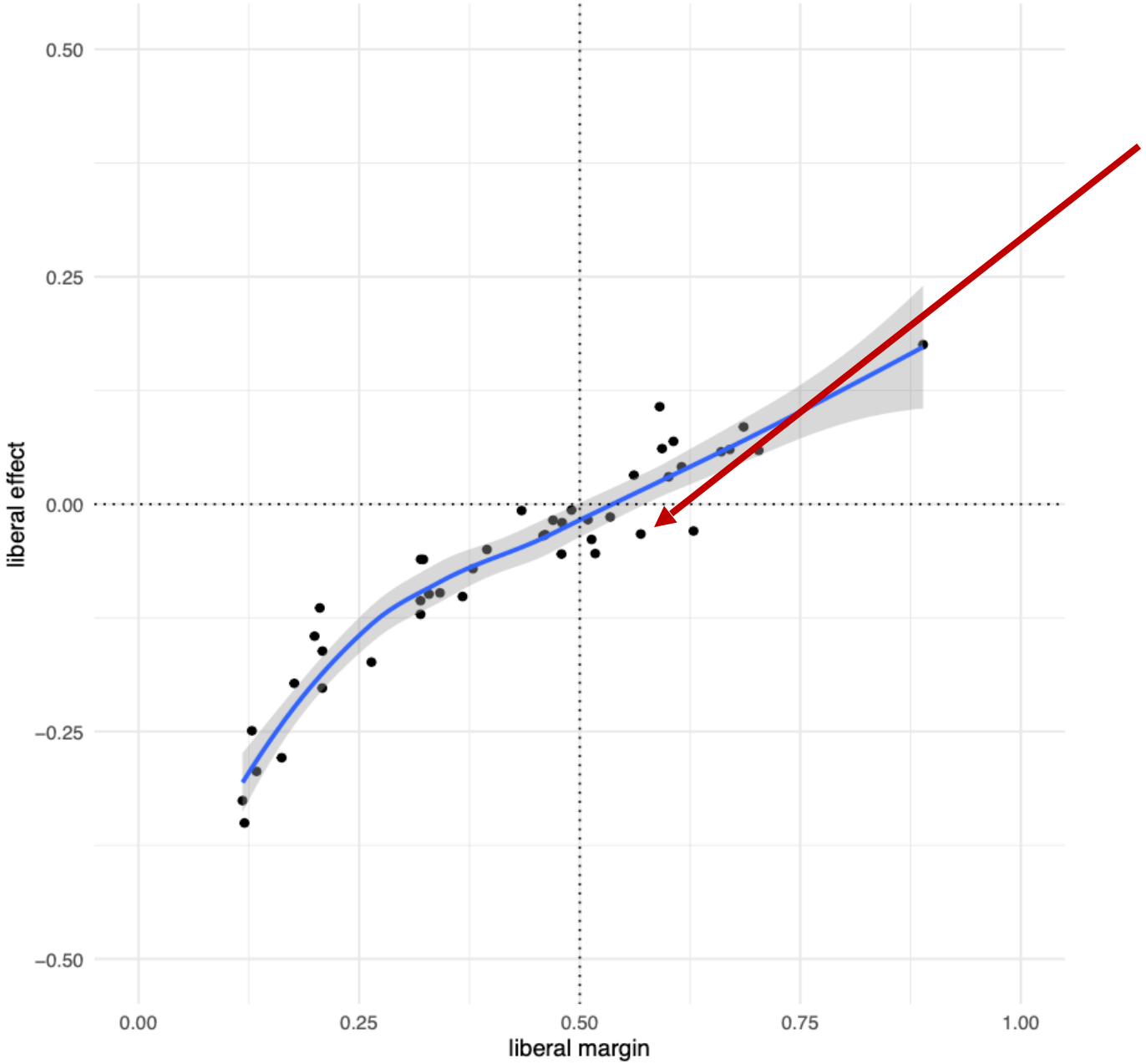

Do not ban people from predominantly Muslim countries from entering the United States

57% agree
But -.03 effect

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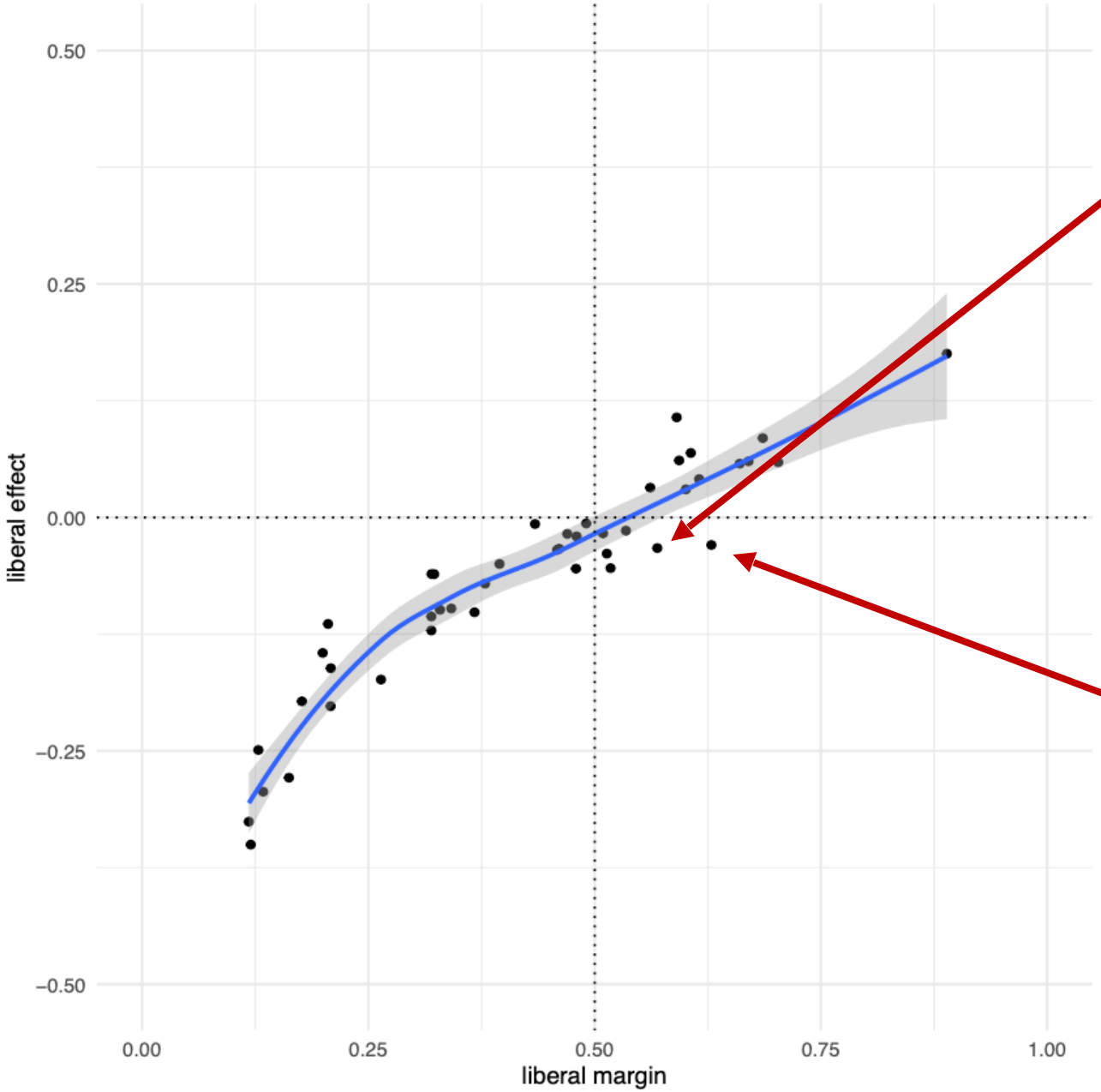

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Permit abortion under some circumstances

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Counter-Majoritarian Policies in the Republican Party

Policy	Margin	Effect
Allow transgender people to serve in the military	53%	-0.01
Create a public government registry of gun ownership	51%	-0.04
Do not ban people from predominantly Muslim countries from entering the United States	57%	-0.03
Limit trade with other countries	51%	-0.02
Permit abortion in cases other than rape, incest, or when the woman's life is in danger	52%	-0.05
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79% of the general public opposes a blanket abortion ban.

The Washington Post
Democracy Dies in Darkness

MONKEY CAGE

In many states with antiabortion laws, majorities favor abortion rights

Will purple states' laws eventually reflect their voters' views?

Analysis by Jake Grumbach and Christopher Warshaw

June 25, 2022 at 7:45 a.m. EDT

People in Atlanta protest the Supreme Court's abortion decision on June 24. (Elijah Nouvelage/Getty Images)

Conclusion

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- However there are some important exceptions within the Republican party (and possibly others)
- Intensity varies substantially across issues, but it typically favors the majority

Extra Slides

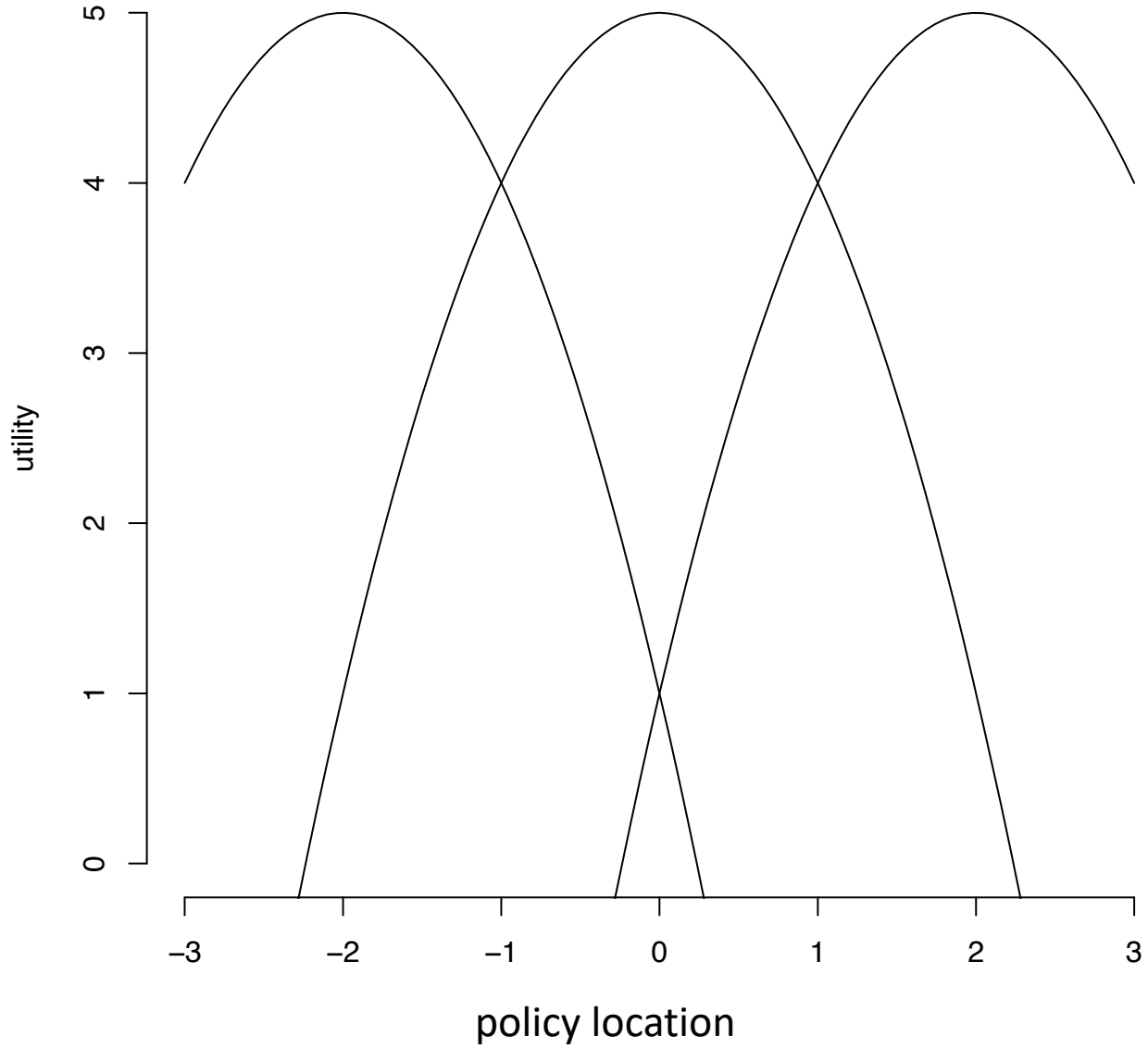
Preference Intensity

- “If two significant conflicting groups have unequal probabilities of caring, the voting strategies representatives must adopt are dependent on the magnitude of those probabilities.” – Mo Fiorina (1974, p. 55)

- “As constituents become more intense, the congressman will weigh their opinions more heavily.” –John Kingdon (1989, p. 35)

- “All else equal, legislators follow the preferences of those who feel the most intensely about an issue.” – Doug Arnold (1992, p. 83)

Example: Spatial Voting on 1 Policy



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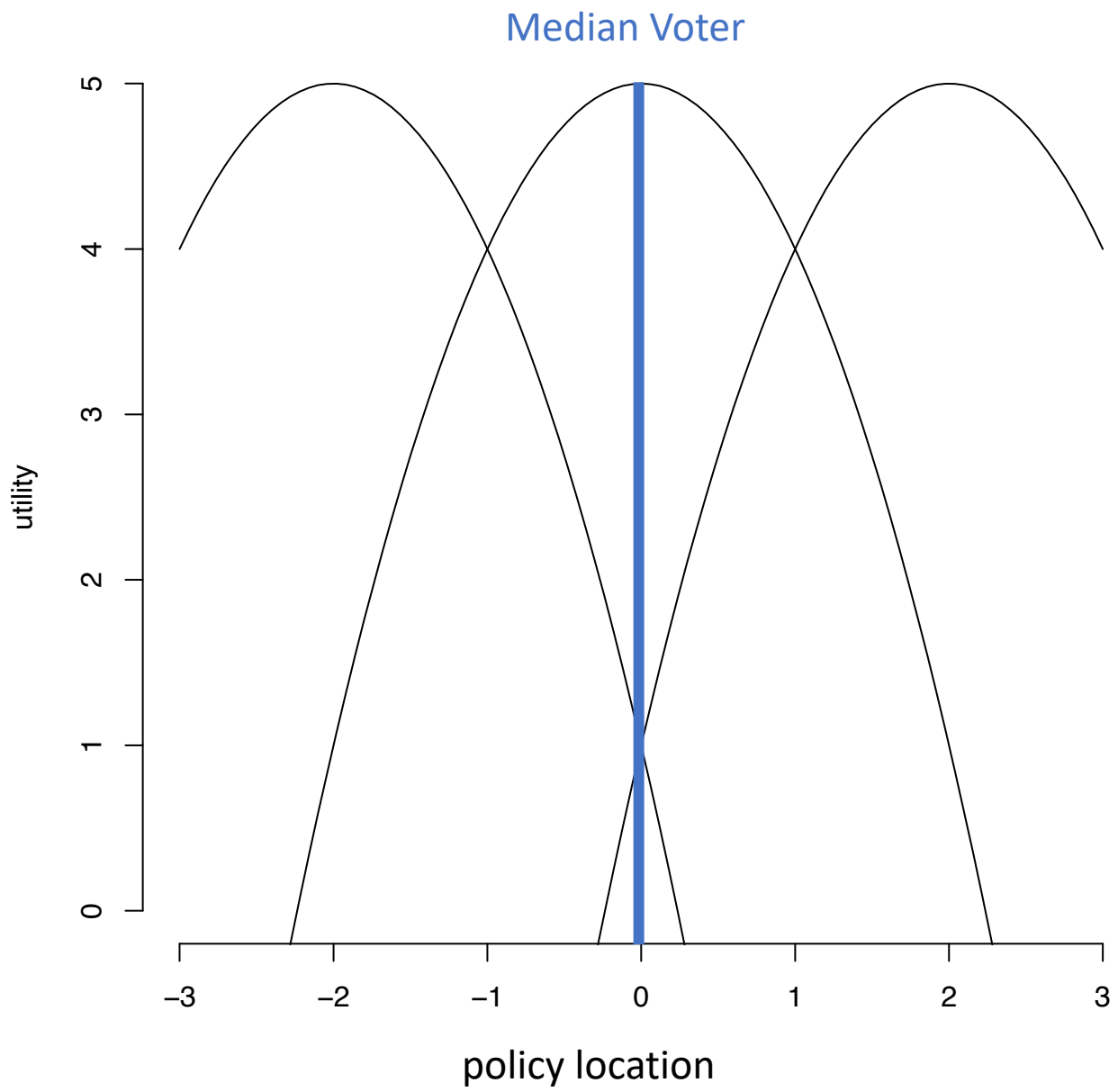
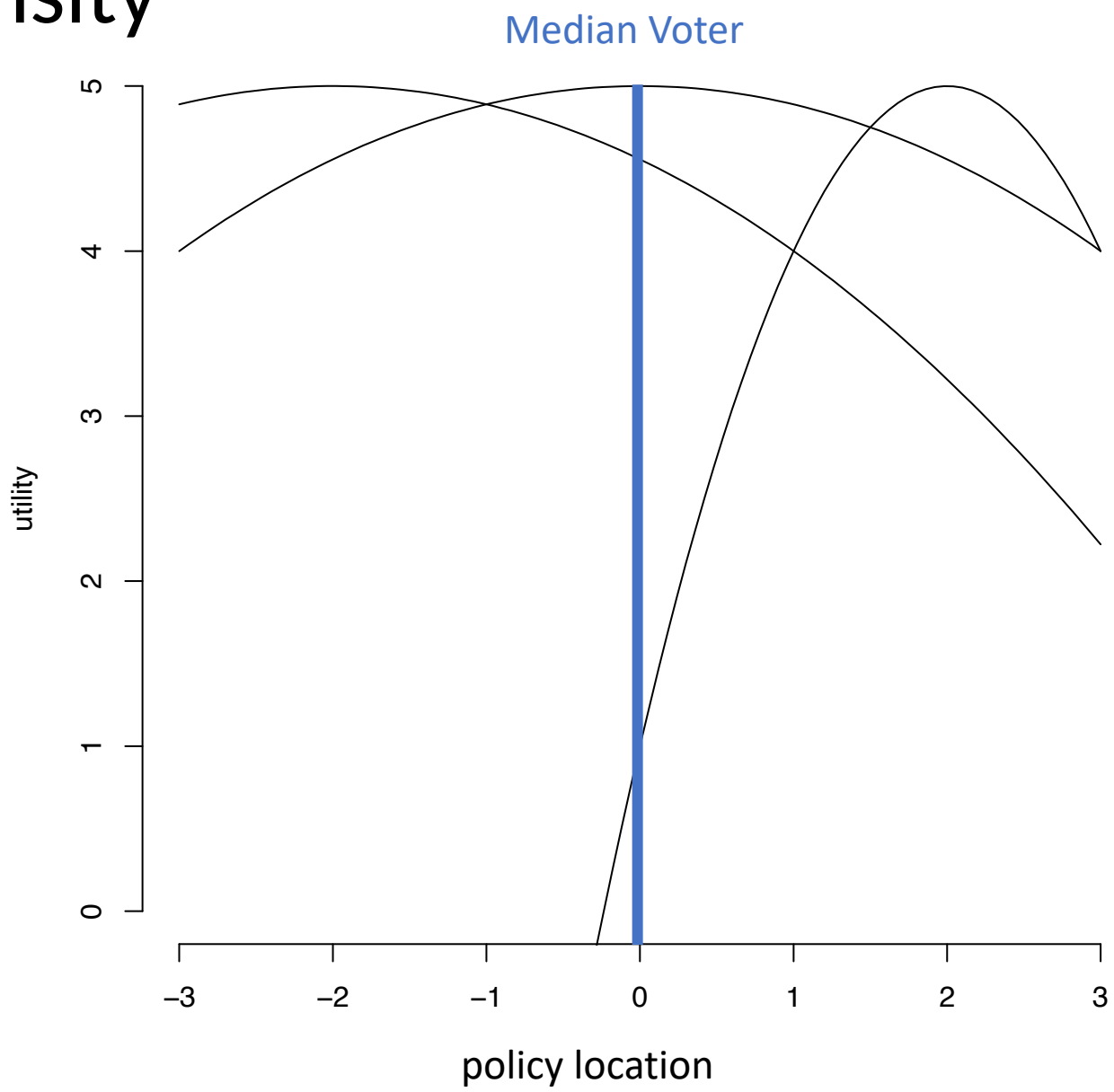


Spatial Voting w/ heterogeneous intensity



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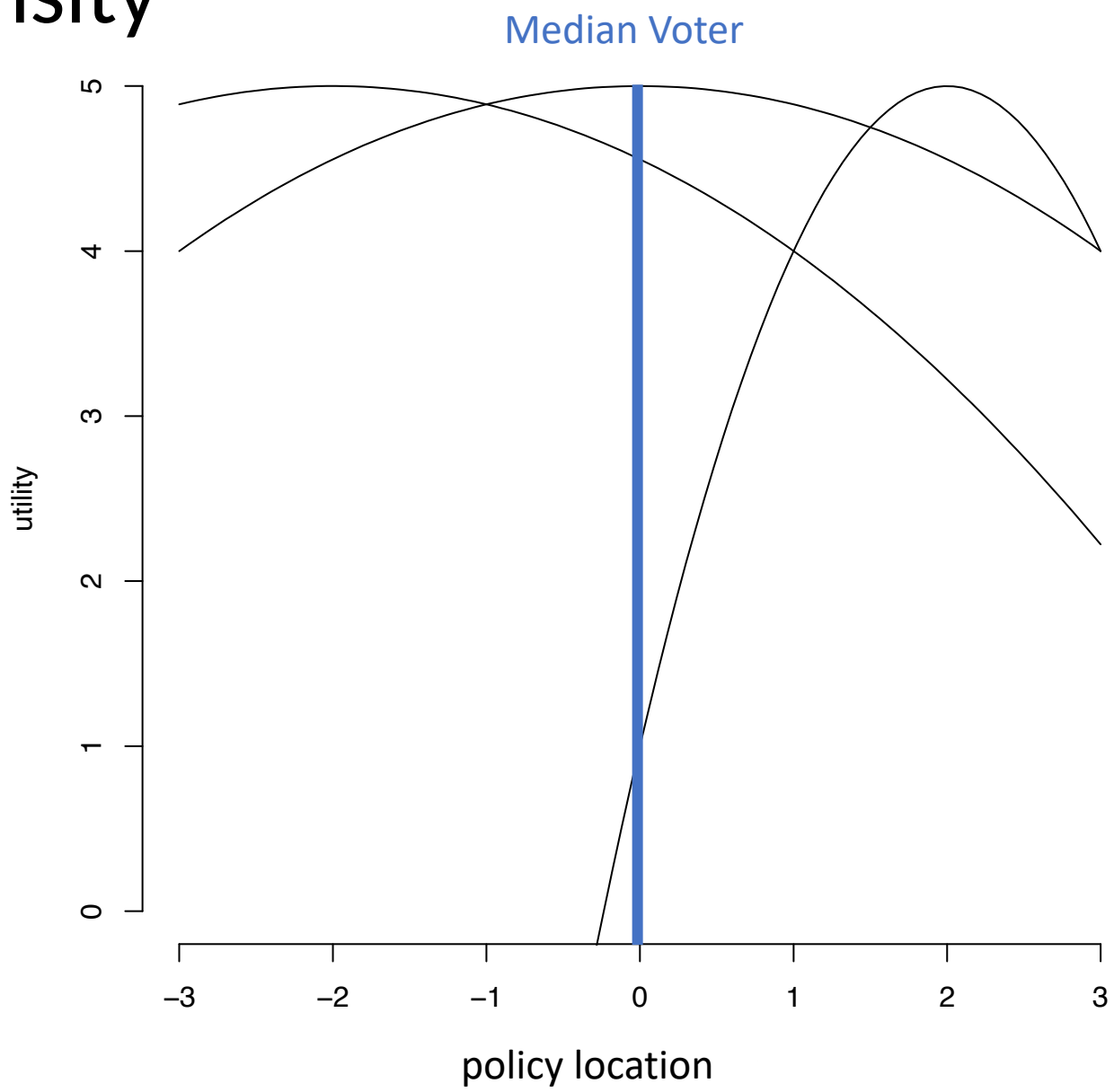
For more intense voters, policy has a greater effect on probabilistic choices.



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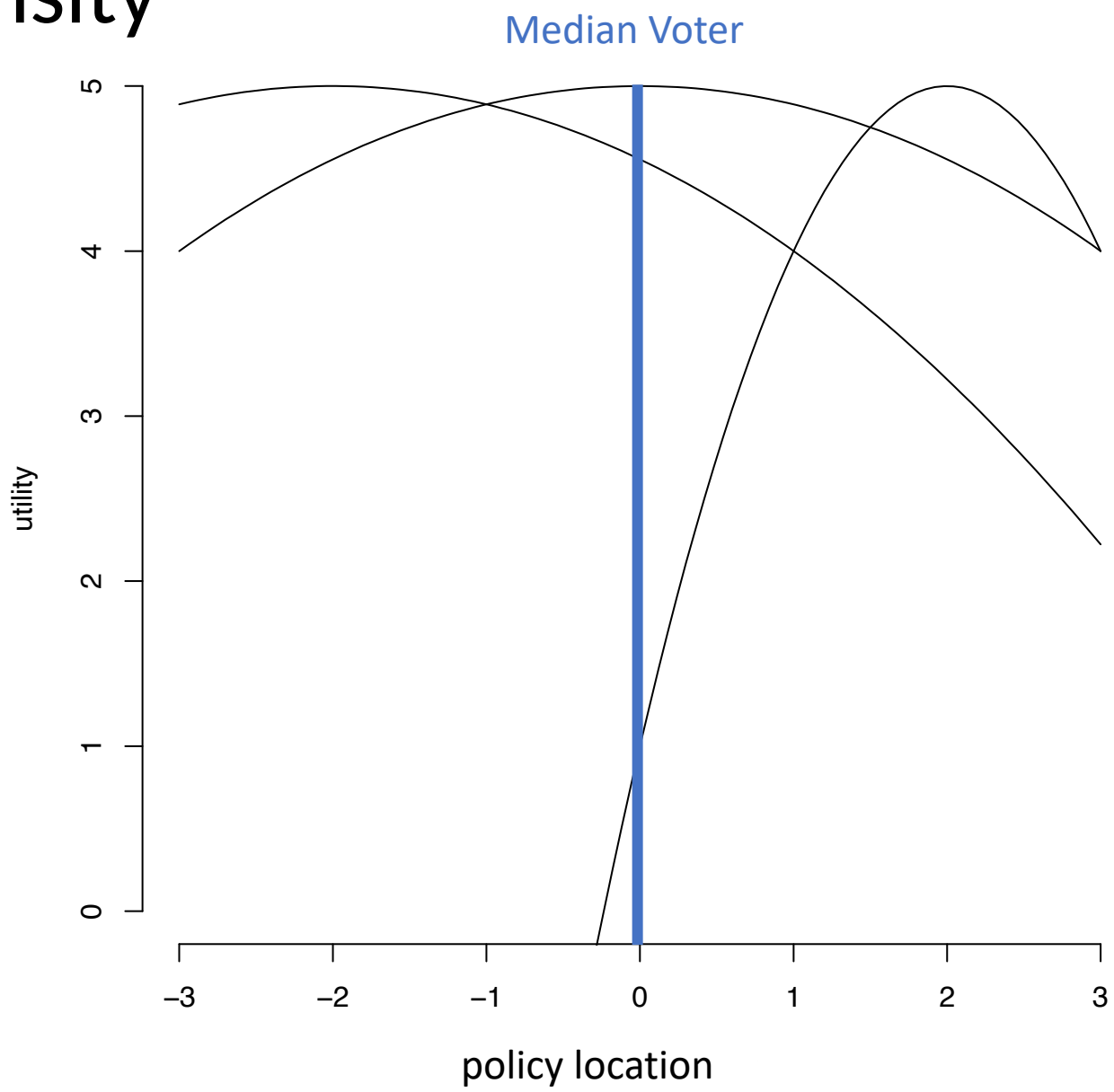

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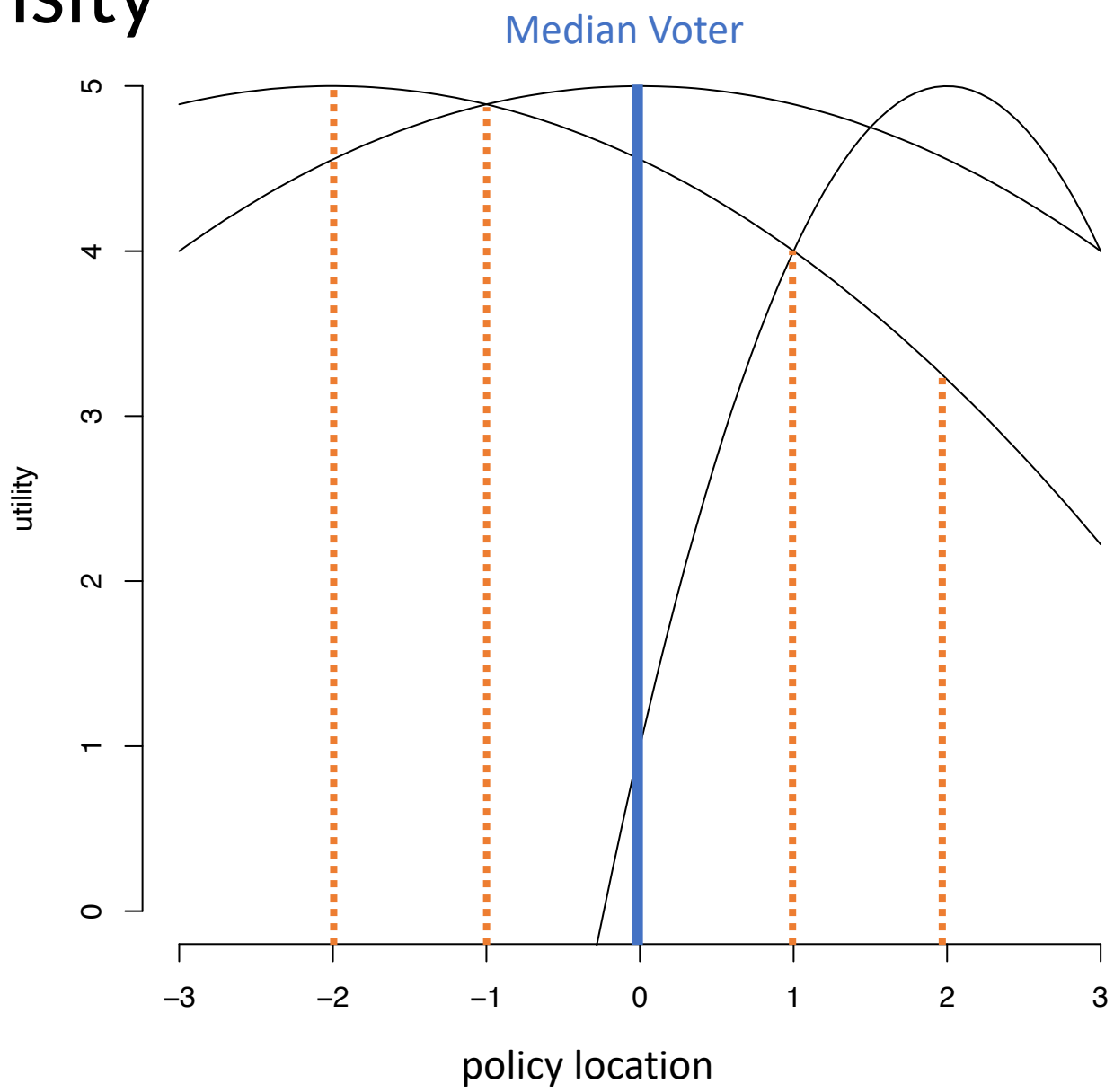

Probabilistic voting + heterogeneous intensity = non-median outcomes

Note that intensity also can vary with distance, depending on the utility function

Measuring Intensity

- Related quantities:
  - Policy covariates (e.g. Ansolabehere, Rodden Snyder 2008)
  - Issue Publics (e.g. Converse 1964)
  - Subconstituencies (e.g. Bishin 2009)
  - Attitude Strength (e.g. Krosnick 1990)
  - Most Important Problem (e.g. Jones 1994)
  - Likert scales

- However the fundamental goal is to understand the role that issues play in choices
  - Conjoint analysis (Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto, 2013)

Instrument

1. Ask simple agree/disagree policy questions

2. Randomly select 2-4 of these policies for inclusion in a conjoint experiment

3. Randomly assign affirmative and negative versions of policies to two different sets

4. Respondents choose the set they prefer

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- Revealed Importance captures intensity among supporters and/or opponents of a policy

Example

- Policy*: Impeach (then) President Trump

- AMCE close to 0. Close to as many people support this as oppose it, and intensity is balanced.

- Very high revealed importance.
  - Supporters very likely to choose a set that supports this policy.
  - Opponents are very likely to choose a set that opposes this policy.

COVID-19: See weekly updates on Americans' perspectives ×

democracy fund
VOTER STUDY GROUP

Publications Data Blog News & Events Nationscape

NATIONSCAPE

A comprehensive view of the American electorate

Democracy Fund + UCLA Nationscape is one of the largest public opinion surveys ever conducted — interviewing people in nearly every county, congressional district, and mid-sized U.S. city in the leadup to the 2020 election. Nationscape is fielded by Lucid.

Conducting more than 500,000 interviews over 16 months, the survey sheds light on attitudes and issues as they take shape. Nationscape is designed to answer the questions most urgent to American democracy across multiple dimensions.

PEOPLE

Providing in-depth insights into subgroups of Americans, including those often missed in traditional polling.

PLACES

Telling rich stories about perspectives distinct to municipalities and geographies like rural and urban, coastal and interior.

TIME

Tracking attitudes over the course of the election and as local, national, and global headlines break.

Nationscape Data

- 500,000+ online interviews via Lucid
- June of 2019 to January of 2020
- 10 conjoint experiments per interview
- 44 policy items*

Lynn Vavreck

Professor & Principal Investigator, UCLA

Lynn Vavreck is the Marvin Hoffenberg Professor of American Politics and Public Policy at UCLA, a contributing columnist to "The Upshot" at *The New York Times*, and a recipient of the Andrew F. Carnegie Prize in the Humanities and Social Sciences. She is the author of five books, including "Identity Crisis: The 2016 Presidential Campaign and the Battle for the Meaning of America" (with John Sides and Michael Tesler), and "The Gamble: Choice and Chance in the 2012 Presidential Election" (with John Sides). Her research has been supported by the National Science Foundation, and she has served on the advisory boards of both the British and American National Election Studies.

Learn More

Chris Tausanovitch

Associate Professor & Principal Investigator, UCLA

Chris Tausanovitch is an associate professor of political science and vice chair of the UCLA Political Science department. He is a recipient of the American Political Science Association's Congressional Fellowship and a former staffer on the U.S. Senate Finance Committee. He is the principal investigator, with Chris Warshaw, of The American Ideology Project, an effort to characterize the political liberalism/conservatism of states, congressional districts, cities, state legislative districts, counties, and voters by building a 275,000-person super-survey of Americans. His work on democracy and representation has been published in *The American Political Science Review*, *The Journal of Politics*, and *Political Analysis*, among other outlets.

Learn More

Alex Rossel Hayes

Ph.D. Student & Project Manager, UCLA

Alex Rossell Hayes is a Ph.D. student in the Department of Political Science at UCLA where he studies comparative political institutions and behavior with a focus on immigration and radical populism. His work has been published in the *Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies*, and *Regional Labor Review*. In 2017, Alex developed and implemented a U.S. Civics curriculum at the Central American Refugee Center in Hempstead, NY, where he also taught English classes. Alex earned multiple B.A. degrees at Hofstra University in political science, economics, and public policy & public service before starting graduate work at UCLA. He is a native of Baltimore, MD, a language geek, and a very amateur musician and composer.

Aaron Rudkin

Ph.D. Candidate & Project Developer, UCLA

Aaron Rudkin is a Ph.D. candidate in Political Science at UCLA. He is originally from Newfoundland, Canada, where he worked as a programmer and system administrator before attending graduate school. His methodological interests include reproducibility and open science; causal inference; text as data; and social data scraping. His substantive interests include legislative institutions in the U.S. and other democracies; ideology among political elites; legislator position-taking; and message transmission. He has past degrees from University of Ottawa and Memorial University of Newfoundland. Aaron and his wife enjoy Korean barbecue, indoor gardening, and trivia.

Derek Holliday

Ph.D. Candidate & Project Coordinator, UCLA

Derek Holliday is a Ph.D. student in the Department of Political Science at UCLA where he studies representation in state and local politics and the nationalization of political behavior. His methodological interests include text-as-data and machine learning applications in social science. Prior to his graduate studies, Derek earned a B.A. in political science and philosophy from Rice University in Houston, TX, and worked as a contractor for the U.S. Department of Education in Washington, D.C. He grew up just outside Seattle, WA, and enjoys mountain/ultra-running, fantasy baseball, and a good cup of coffee.

Tyler Thomas Reny

Former Project Coordinator, UCLA

Tyler Thomas Reny was a former project coordinator for Nationscape (2019-2020) and is now a postdoctoral research fellow at Washington University in St. Louis. He received his Ph.D. in political science at UCLA in 2020. His research focuses on the causes and consequences of racial attitudes in American politics and has been published in the *American Political Science Review*, *British Journal of Political Science*, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *Political Psychology*, *Comparative Political Studies*, and *Political Research Quarterly*, among others. Before graduate school, Tyler worked at New American Leaders, a New York City based non-profit that trains first- and second-generation immigrants to run for public office. He earned a B.A. at Skidmore College in political science and Spanish and an M.A. from the University of Washington. He grew up in Mid-Coast Maine and enjoys fancy cocktails, cooking, and eating delicious food.

democracy fund VOTER STUDY GROUP

UCLA

USA TODAY

LUCID

What did we ask about?

Immigration
Mass deportation
Separate immigrant children
Dreamer path to citizenship
Broad path to citizenship
Build a wall
Ban Muslim immigrants
Citizenship for wire transfers

Guns
Ban guns
Ban assault rifles
Universal gun background checks
Limit gun magazines
Public guns registry

Abortion
Ban all abortion
Allow limited abortion
Allow late term abortion
Require abortion waiting period
Abortion coverage optional

Health Insurance
Federal health insurance
Medicare for all
Low-income health subsidy
Healthcare public option

Economics
Debt free state college
$15 minimum wage
12 weeks maternity leave
Universal jobs guarantee
Raise taxes over $600,000
Cut taxes under $100,000
Raise taxes over $250,000
Limit trade

Military
Reduce military size
No military support for Israel
Allow transgender people military

Environment
Cap carbon emissions
Big environmental program
Green new deal
More oil gas drilling

Other Topics
Slave reparations
Impeach Trump
Ten commandments in public buildings
Right to work
Provide school vouchers

What did we ask about?

Immigration	Guns	Abortion	Health Insurance
Mass deportation	Ban guns	Ban all abortion	Federal health insurance
Separate immigrant children	Ban assault rifles	Allow limited abortion	Medicare for all
Dreamer path to citizenship	Universal gun background checks	Allow late term abortion	Low-income health subsidy
Broad path to citizenship	Limit gun magazines	Require abortion waiting period	Healthcare public option
Build a wall	Public guns registry	Abortion coverage optional	
Ban Muslim immigrants			
Citizenship for wire transfers			

Economics	Military	Environment	Other Topics
Debt free state college	Reduce military size	Cap carbon emissions	Slave reparations
$15 minimum wage	No military support for Israel	Big environmental program	Impeach Trump
12 weeks maternity leave	Allow transgender people military	Green new deal	Ten commandments in public buildings
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Raise taxes over $600,000			Provide school vouchers
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We'd like to know whether you agree or disagree with each of the following policies:

	Agree	Disagree	Not Sure
Build a wall on the southern US border	○	○	○
Cap carbon emissions to combat climate change	○	○	○
Require background checks for all gun purchases	○	○	○
Cut taxes for families making less than $100,000 per year	○	○	○
Eliminate the estate tax	○	○	○
Raise taxes on families making over $600,000	○	○	○
Ensure that all students can graduate from state colleges debt free	○	○	○
Never permit abortion	○	○	○
Permit abortion in cases other than rape, incest, or when the woman's life is in danger	○	○	○
Permit late term abortion	○	○	○

And what about these policies?

	Agree	Disagree	Not Sure
${e://Field/policy1}	○	○	○
${e://Field/policy2}	○	○	○
${e://Field/policy3}	○	○	○
${e://Field/policy4}	○	○	○
${e://Field/policy5}	○	○	○
${e://Field/policy6}	○	○	○
${e://Field/policy7}	○	○	○
${e://Field/policy8}	○	○	○
${e://Field/policy9}	○	○	○
${e://Field/policy10}	○	○	○

Finally, what about these policies?

	Agree	Disagree	Not sure
Provide government-run health insurance to all Americans	○	○	○
Provide the option to purchase government-run insurance to all Americans	○	○	○
Subsidize health insurance for lower income people not receiving Medicare or Medicaid	○	○	○
Create a path to citizenship for all undocumented immigrants	○	○	○
Create a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants brought here as children	○	○	○
Deport all undocumented immigrants	○	○	○
Ban all guns	○	○	○
Ban assault rifles	○	○	○
Limit gun magazines to 10 bullets	○	○	○

Finally, what about these policies?

	Agree	Disagree	Not sure
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Ban all guns	○	○	○
Ban assault rifles	○	○	○
Limit gun magazines to 10 bullets	○	○	○

Given this choice, which one would you prefer?

Set A	Set B
Do not allow the display of the Ten Commandments in public schools and courthouses	Allow the display of the Ten Commandments in public schools and courthouses
Provide government-run health insurance to all Americans	Do not provide government-run health insurance to all Americans
Do not create a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants brought here as children	Create a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants brought here as children

- ◯ Set A
- ◯ Set B

Given this choice, which one would you prefer?

Set A	Set B
Do not allow the display of the Ten Commandments in public schools and courthouses	Allow the display of the Ten Commandments in public schools and courthouses
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- ○ Set A
- ○ Set B

Some important implementation notes

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- Not all issues appear equally often
  - Some policy items always asked, some asked at random
  - *Some policy items appear in the first 5 experiments, others only in the second 5*

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  - *Some items cannot appear together; non-independence*

- Some non-policy items in the conjoint
  - Descriptive representation items: e.g. “Elect a female president,” “Elect a Latino member of Congress”
  - Intensity can’t be estimated for these items

Items in italics can bias the analysis. This is addressed in additional slides.

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- **Revealed Importance** = AMCE conditional on position

- “Conditional Conjoint Analysis”

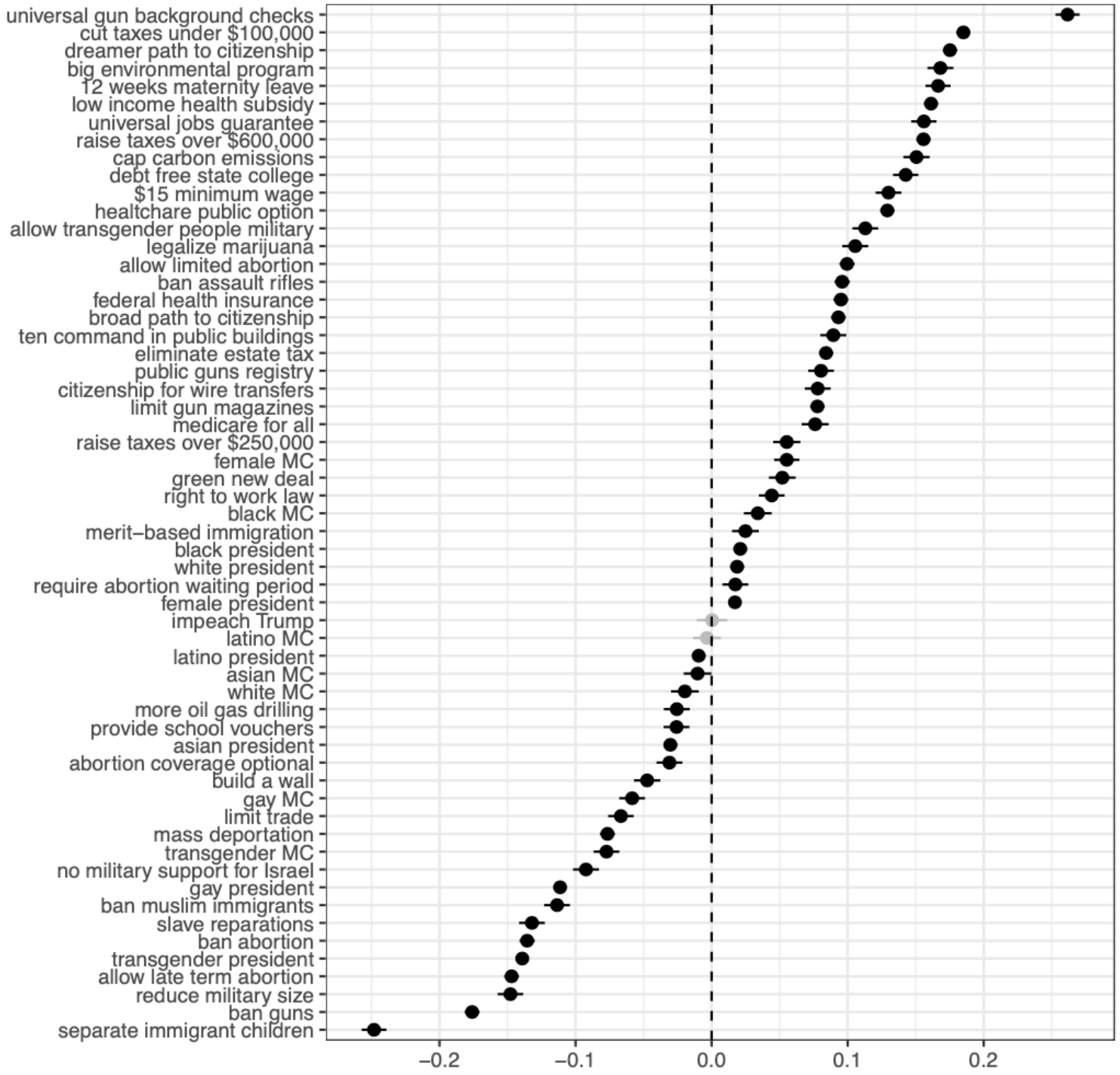
Results: variation in intensity

- First we will look at the AMCEs for all respondents

- Then Revealed Importance

Overall Conjoint AMCEs

- Analogous to votes moved



Overall Conjoint AMCEs

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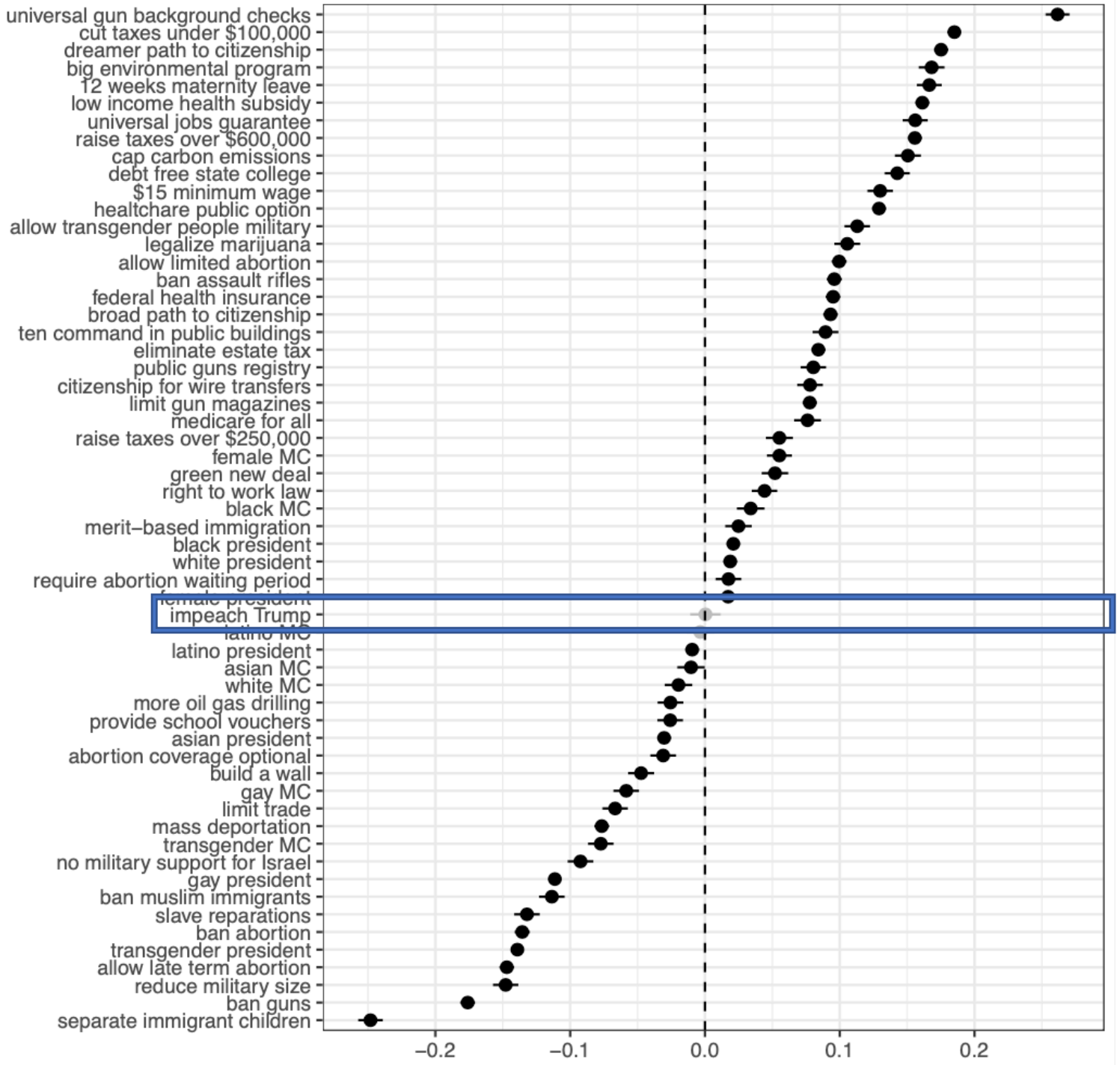
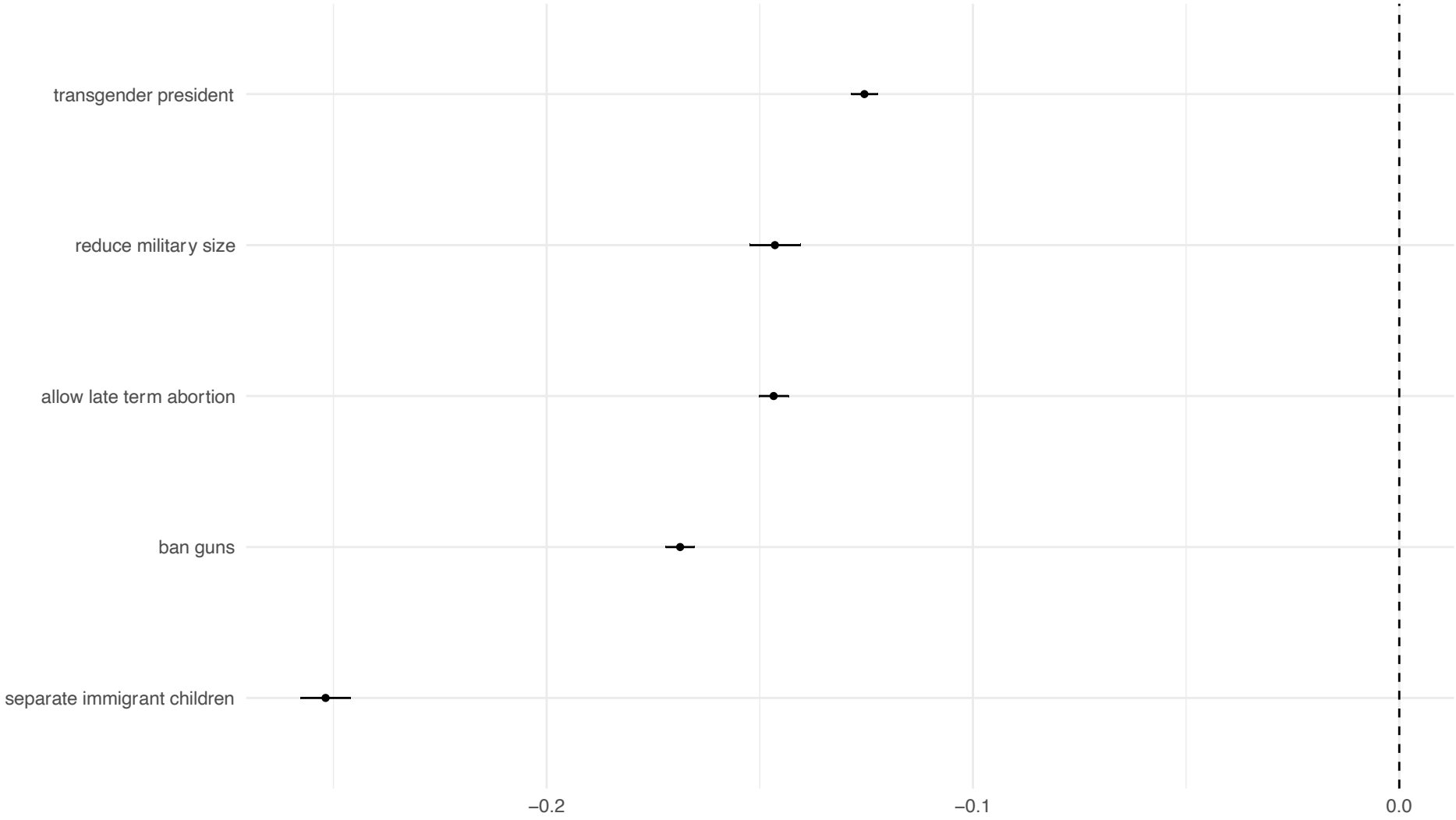
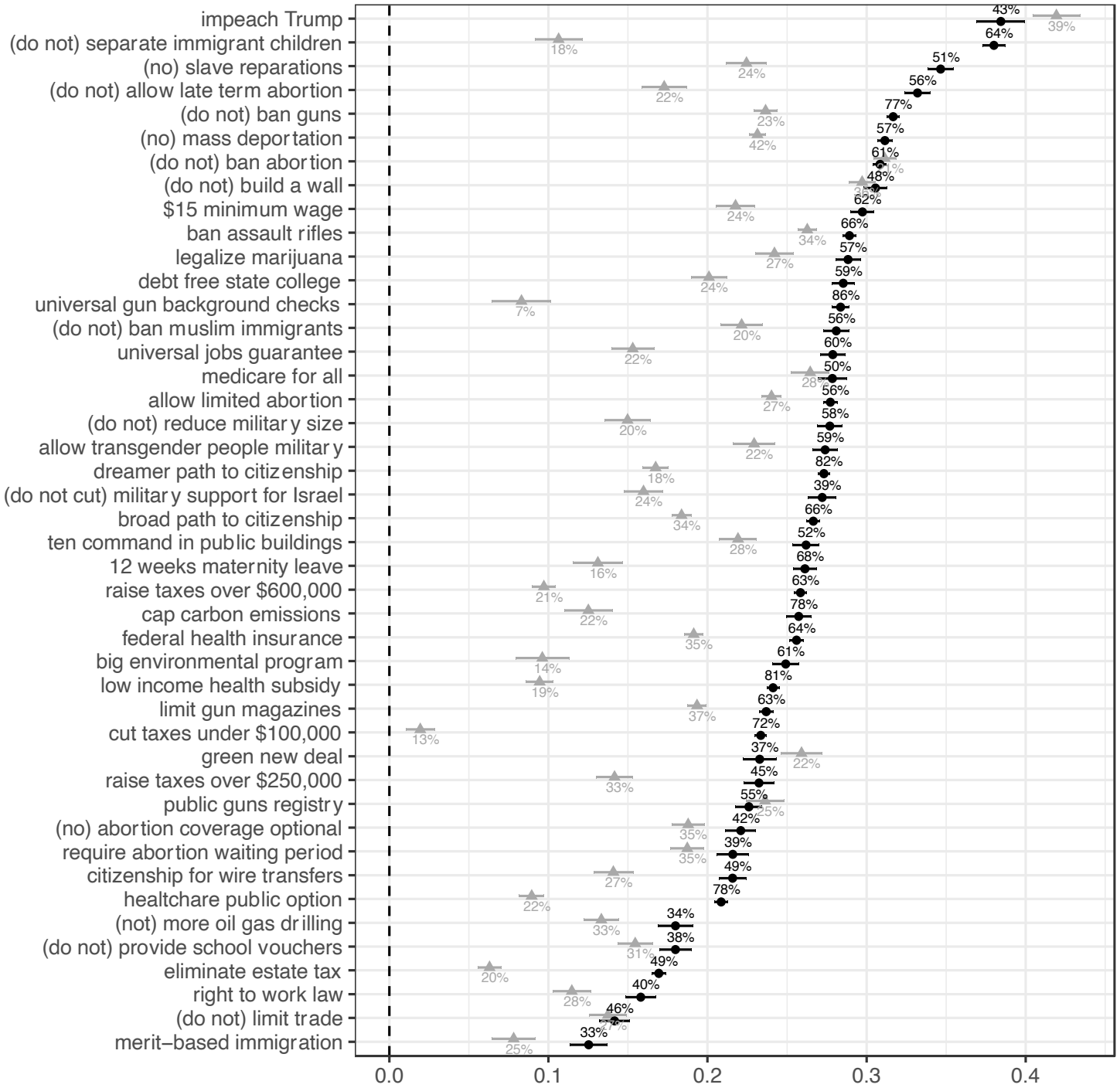


Lowest 5 AMCEs

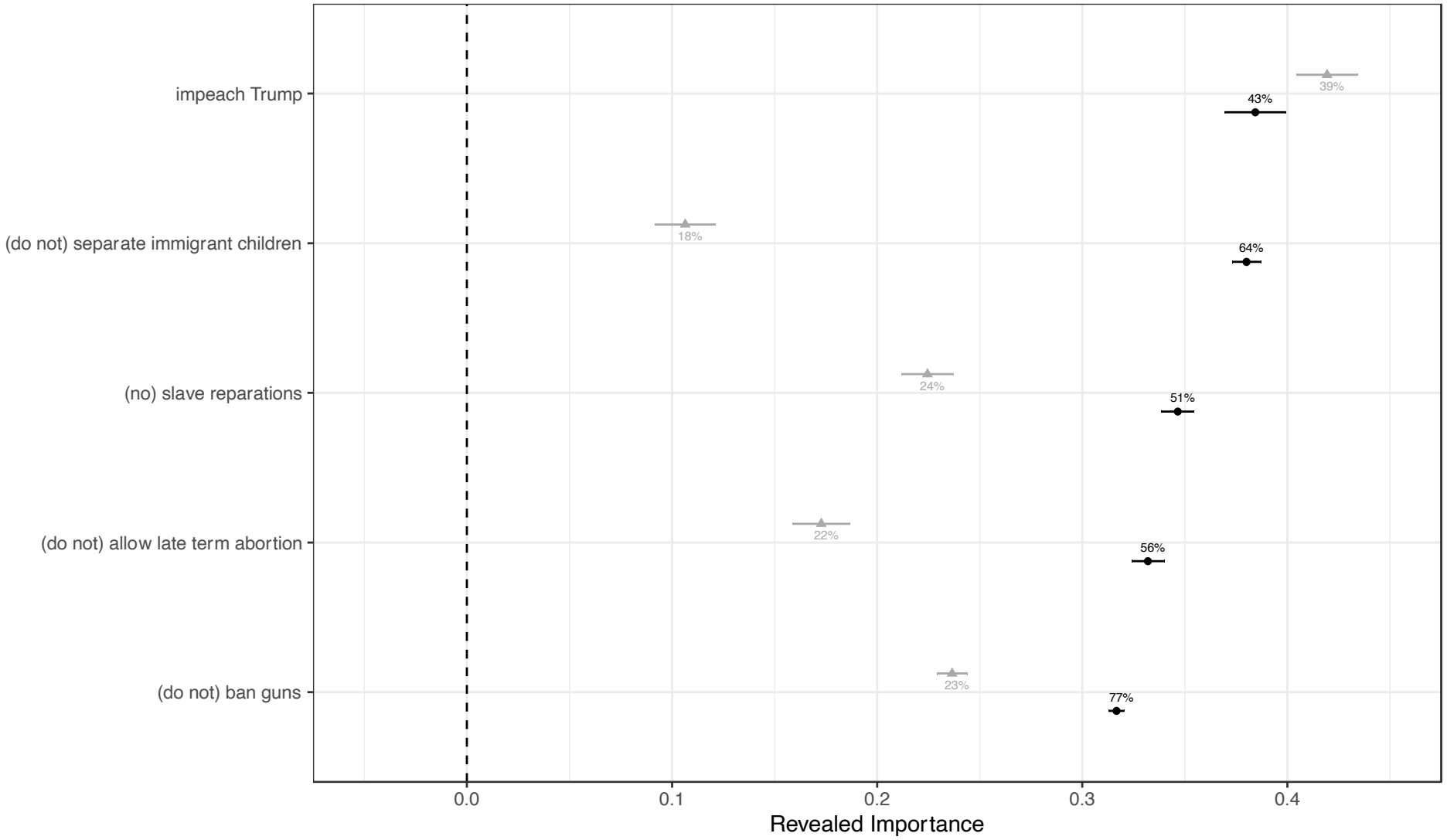


Revealed Importance

- Preference intensity by position
- Plurality position on y-axis, and effect in black
- Minority position in grey
- Percentages are percent supporting that view



Revealed Importance: Top 5



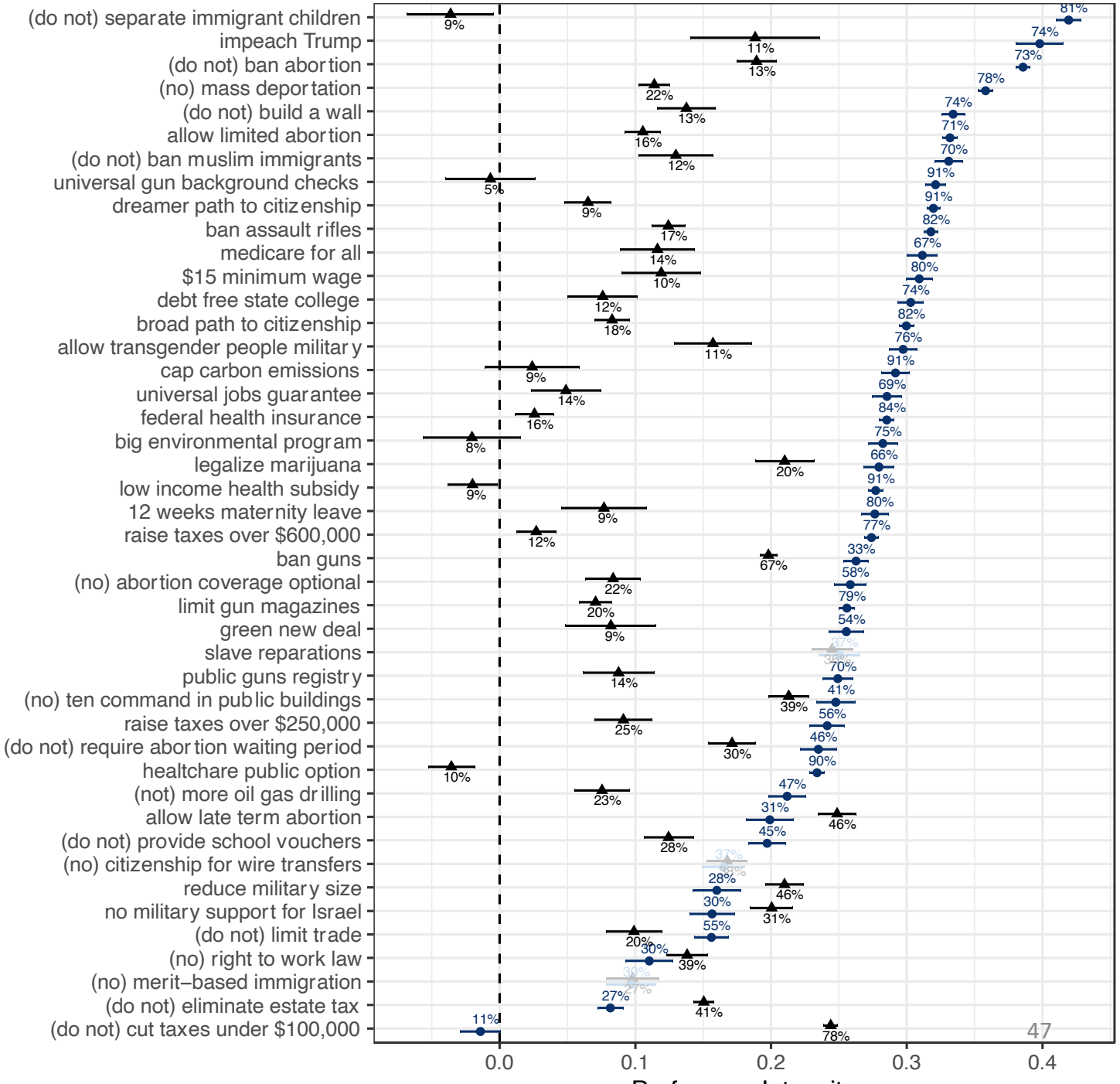
Results: intensity of partisans

- Expectations:
  1. Democrats sometimes hold conservative views but care more about their liberal views
  2. Republicans sometimes hold liberal views but care more about their conservative views

- In some cases liberalism of a policy position will be ambiguous (e.g. cutting taxes for low income people)

Revealed Importance for Democrats

- Preference intensity by position
- Blue = “liberal”



Revealed Importance for Democrats

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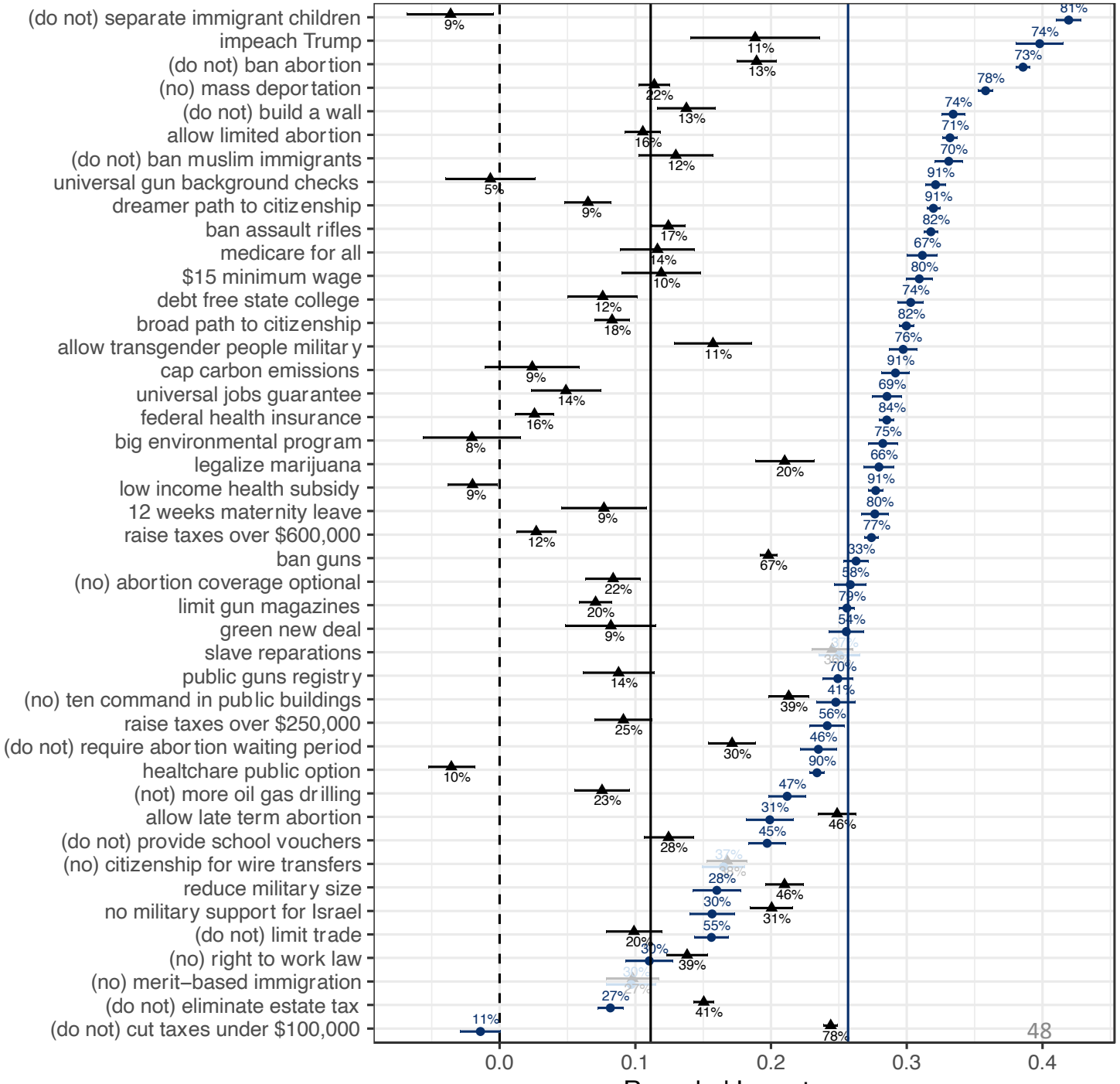
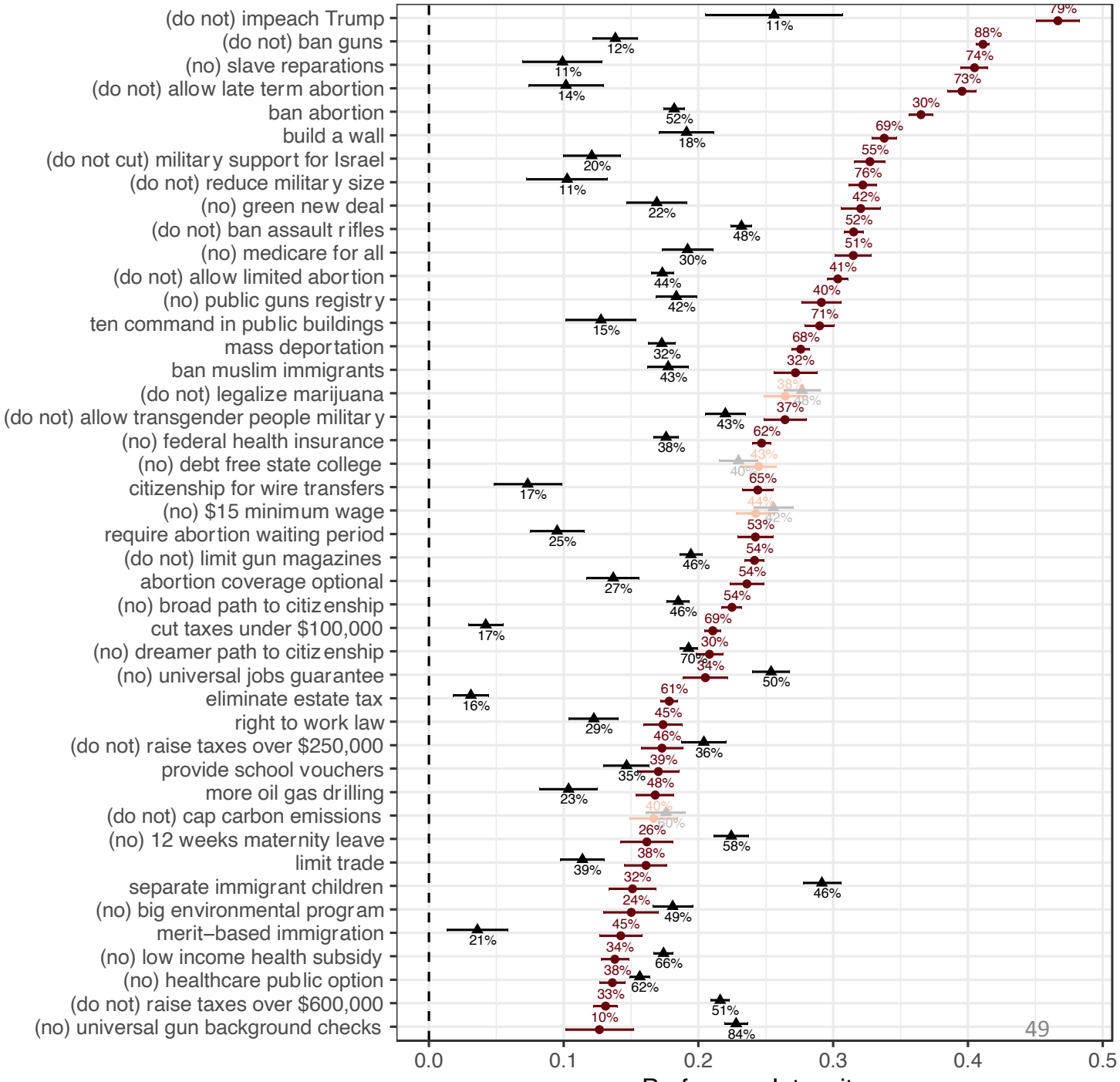


Revealed Importance for Republicans

- Preference intensity by position
- Red = “conservative”



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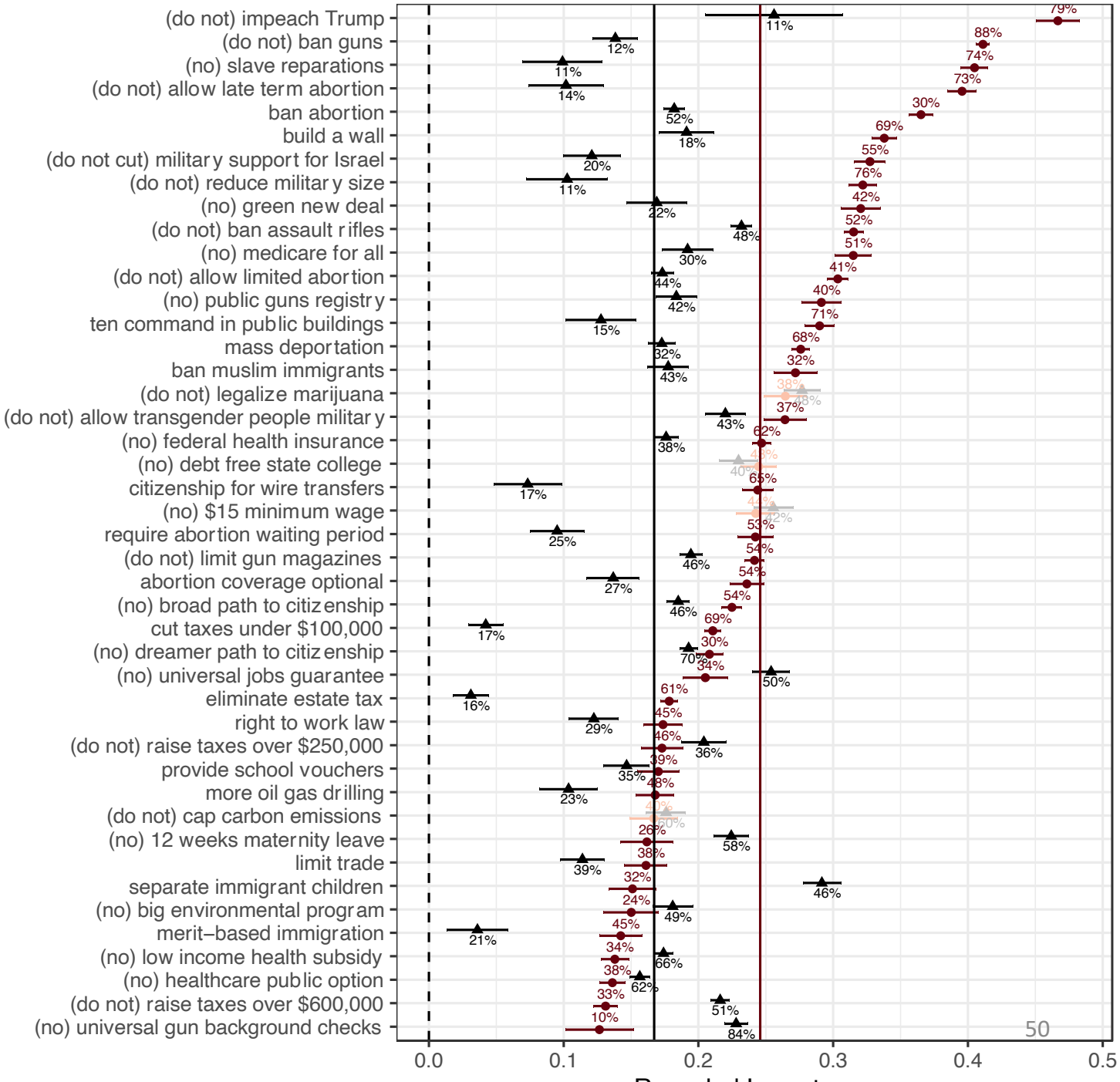

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- Important test case: Can intensity justify party identification when policy preferences alone are insufficient?

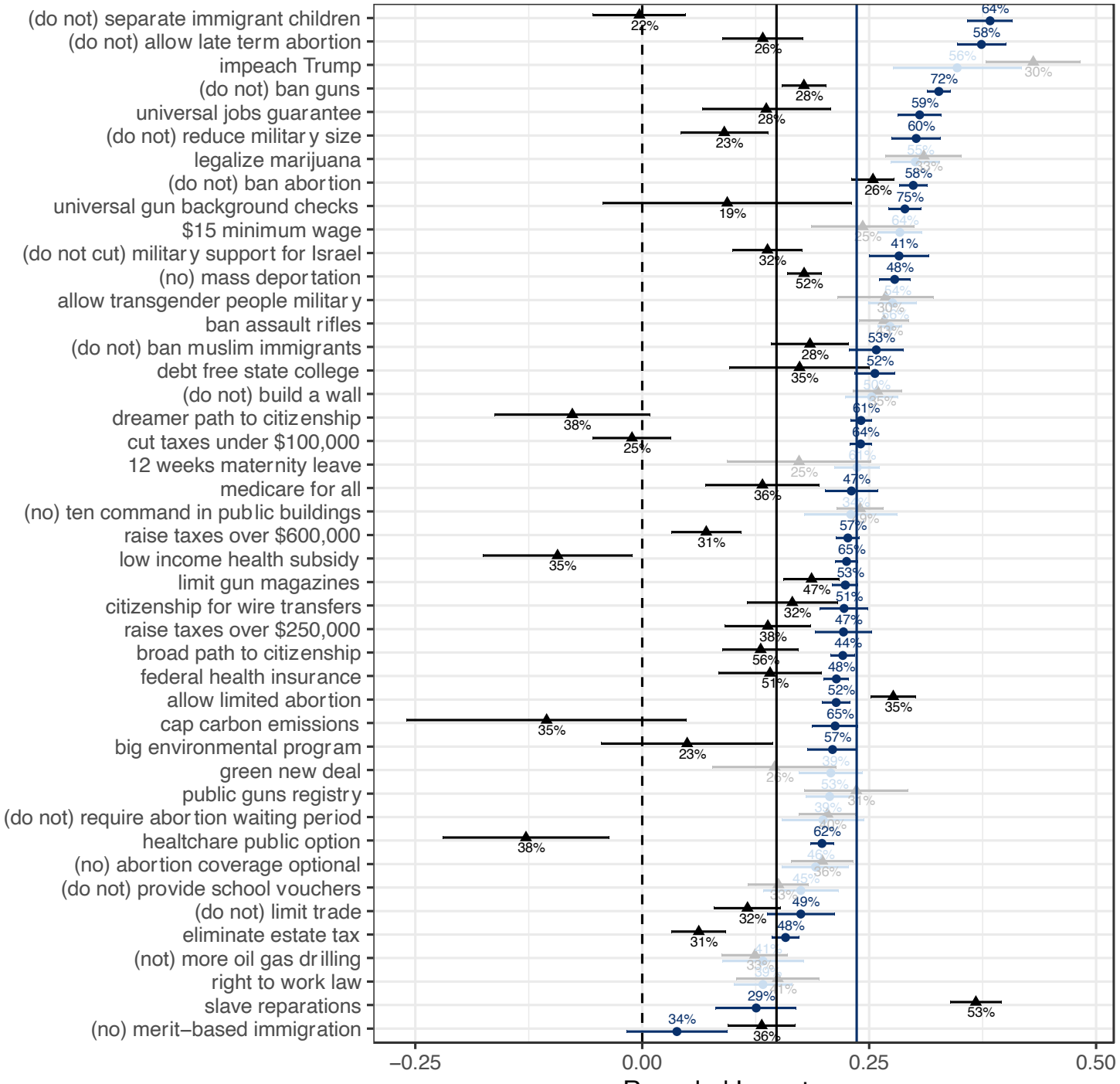
- Mismatched partisans: simple ideological scale puts them closer to the median member of the other party. 20% of Rs and 23% of Ds.

- Preview:
  - Mismatched Democrats feel more strongly about issues where they agree with a majority of their fellow Democrats, and likewise with mismatched Republicans

  - *Not* generally true that mismatched partisans feel more intensely about *liberal* policies if they are Democrats and *conservative* policies if they are Republicans.

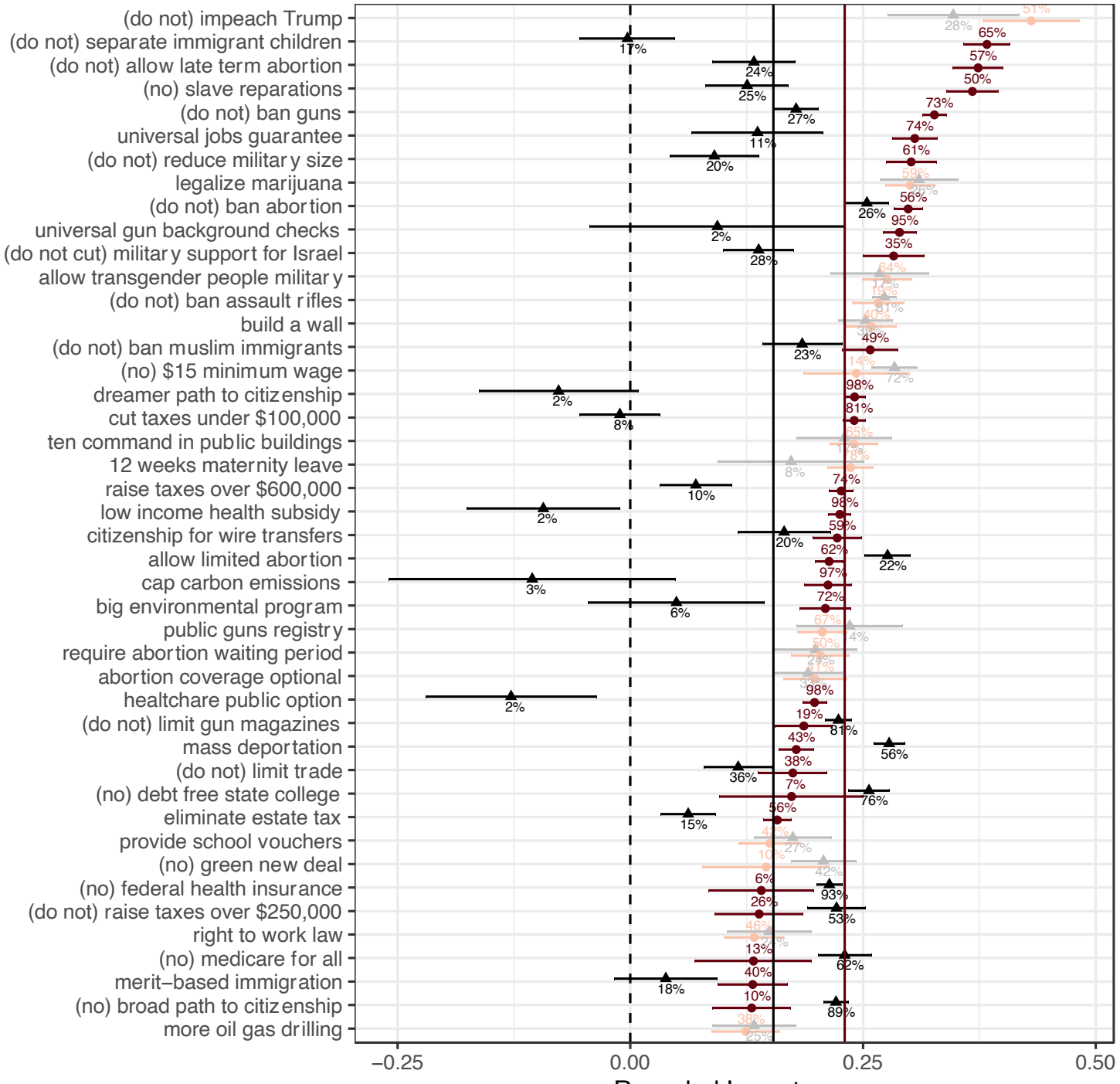
Revealed Importance for mismatched Democrats

- Issues are arranged so the *majority Democrat* direction is blue



Revealed Importance for mismatched Republicans

- Issues are arranged so the *majority Republican* direction is red



Mismatched partisans

- Mismatched partisans *do* care more about the issues on which they agree with the majority of their chosen party

- They are perhaps not mismatched!

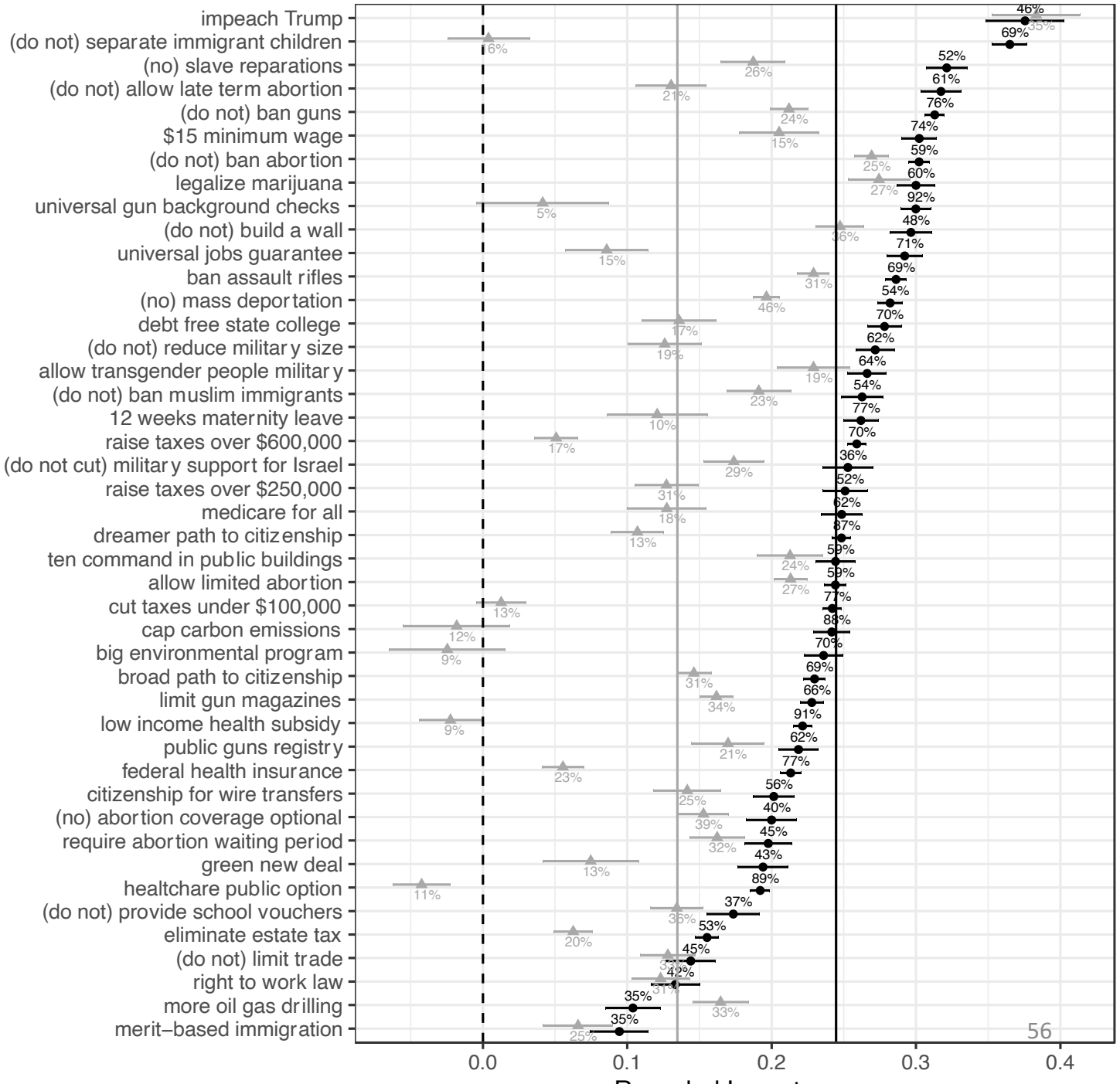
Intensity of moderates

- Expectation:
  - Moderates sometimes hold extreme views but care more about their moderate views

- Moderates have scaled ideal points in the middle tercile; moderate positions are plurality positions

Revealed Importance for Moderates

- Issues are arranged so the black direction is the plurality view



Moderates are “real”

- They appear to prioritize their moderate views, even though they have some extreme views
- Suggests that moderates are not simply innocent of ideology
- Supports finding that moderates matter; modest penalty for extremism

In summary

- There is substantial variation in preference intensity across issues. This is measurable and we should expect it to effect politics in a myriad of ways.

- Preference intensity can help rationalize voter partisanship when voters have diverse views.

- Moderates prioritize moderate issues.

Does Intensity Matter?

The Washington Post
Democracy Dies in Darkness

MONKEY CAGE

In many states with antiabortion laws, majorities favor abortion rights

Will purple states' laws eventually reflect their voters' views?

Analysis by Jake Grumbach and Christopher Warshaw

June 25, 2022 at 7:45 a.m. EDT

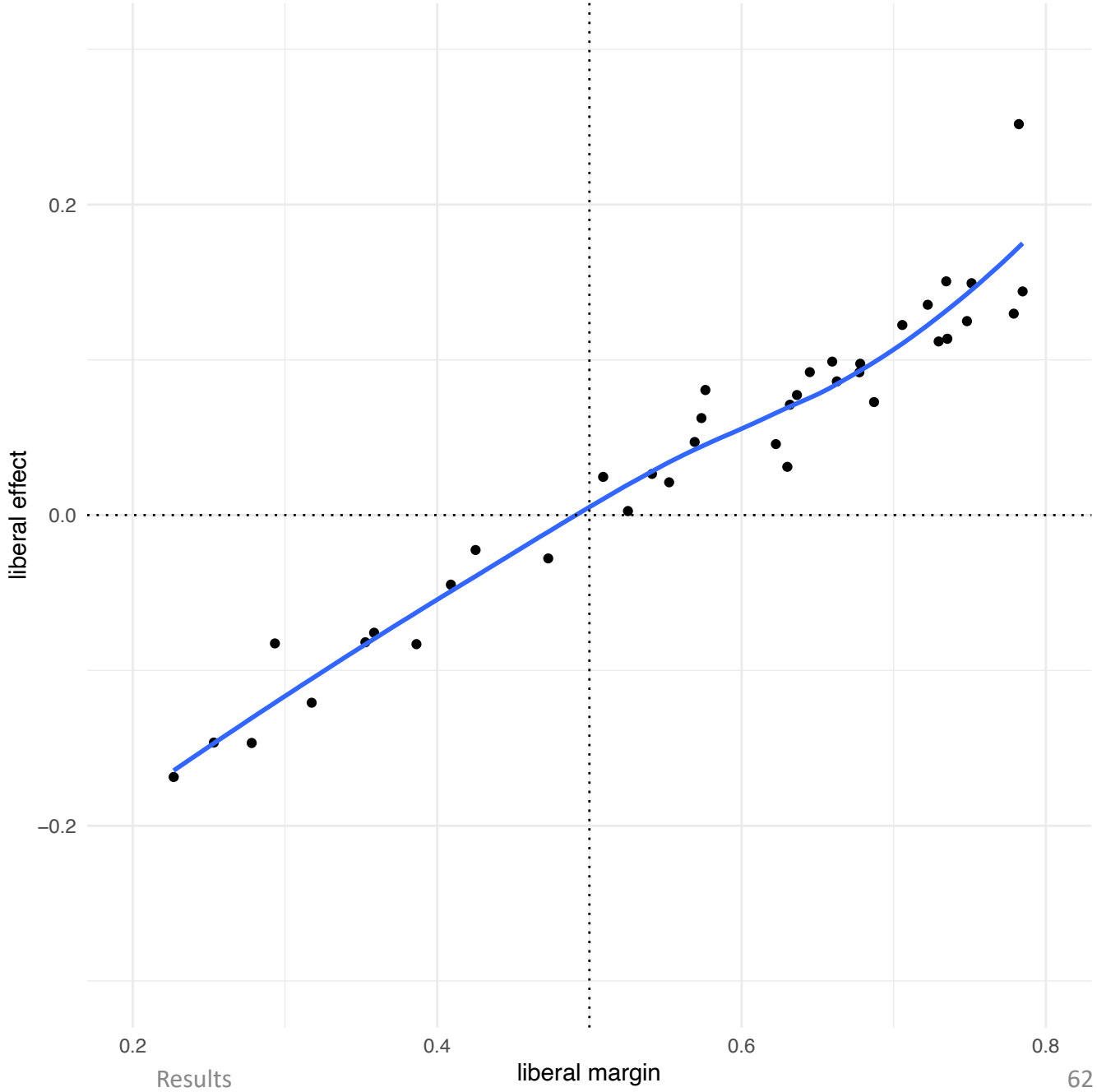
People in Atlanta protest the Supreme Court's abortion decision on June 24. (Elijah Nouvelage/Getty Images)

Revealed importance varies!

- Some issues “matter” much more than others
- Not new or surprising, but should be *fundamental* in studies of representation
- Incongruence on issues with low revealed importance is much easier to explain
- BUT, can it explain counter-majoritarian policymaking?

Margin vs AMCE

- Margin in favor is a strong predictor of AMCE
- No opportunities for counter-majoritarian outcomes



Margin vs AMCE for Democrats

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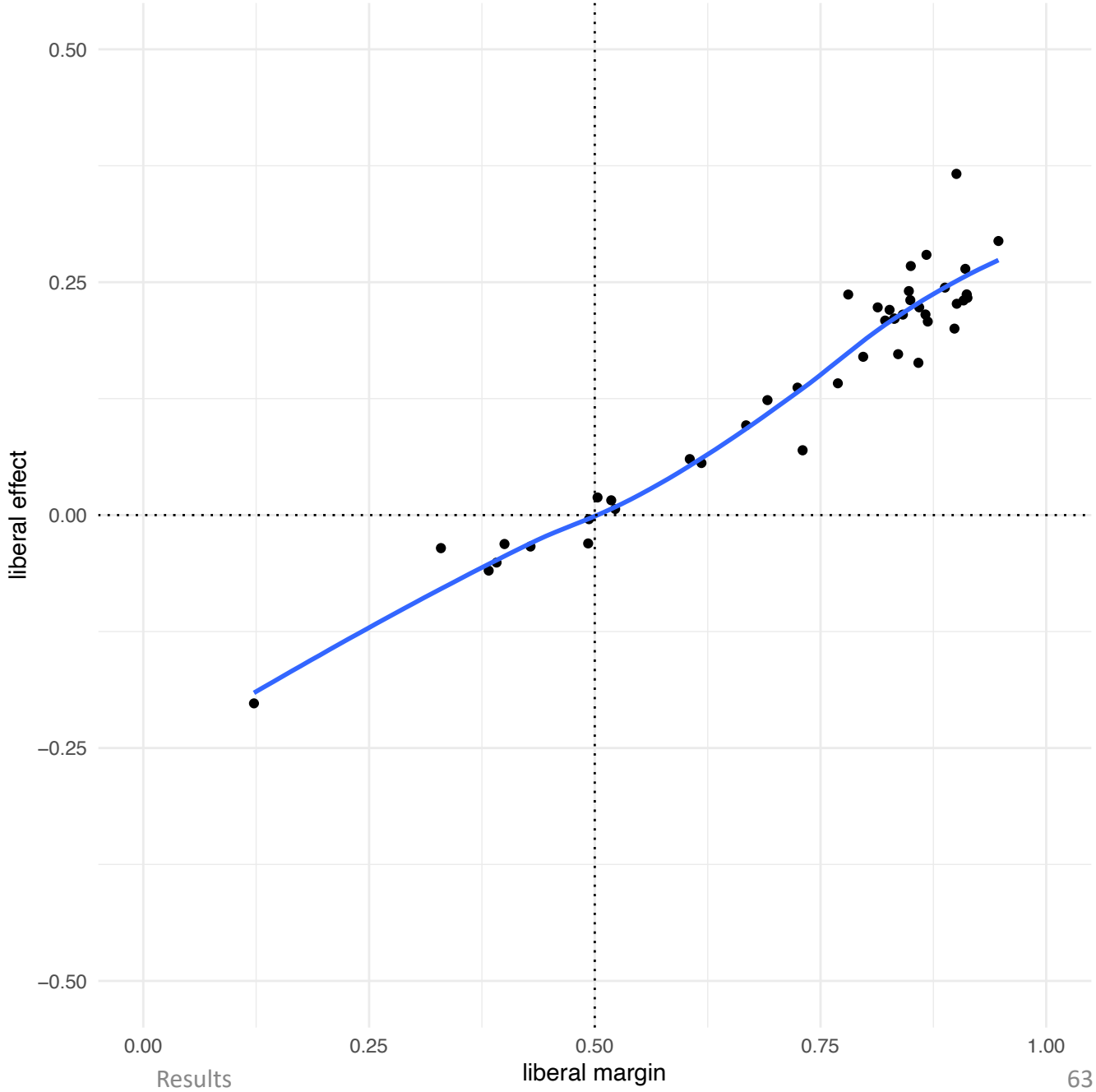

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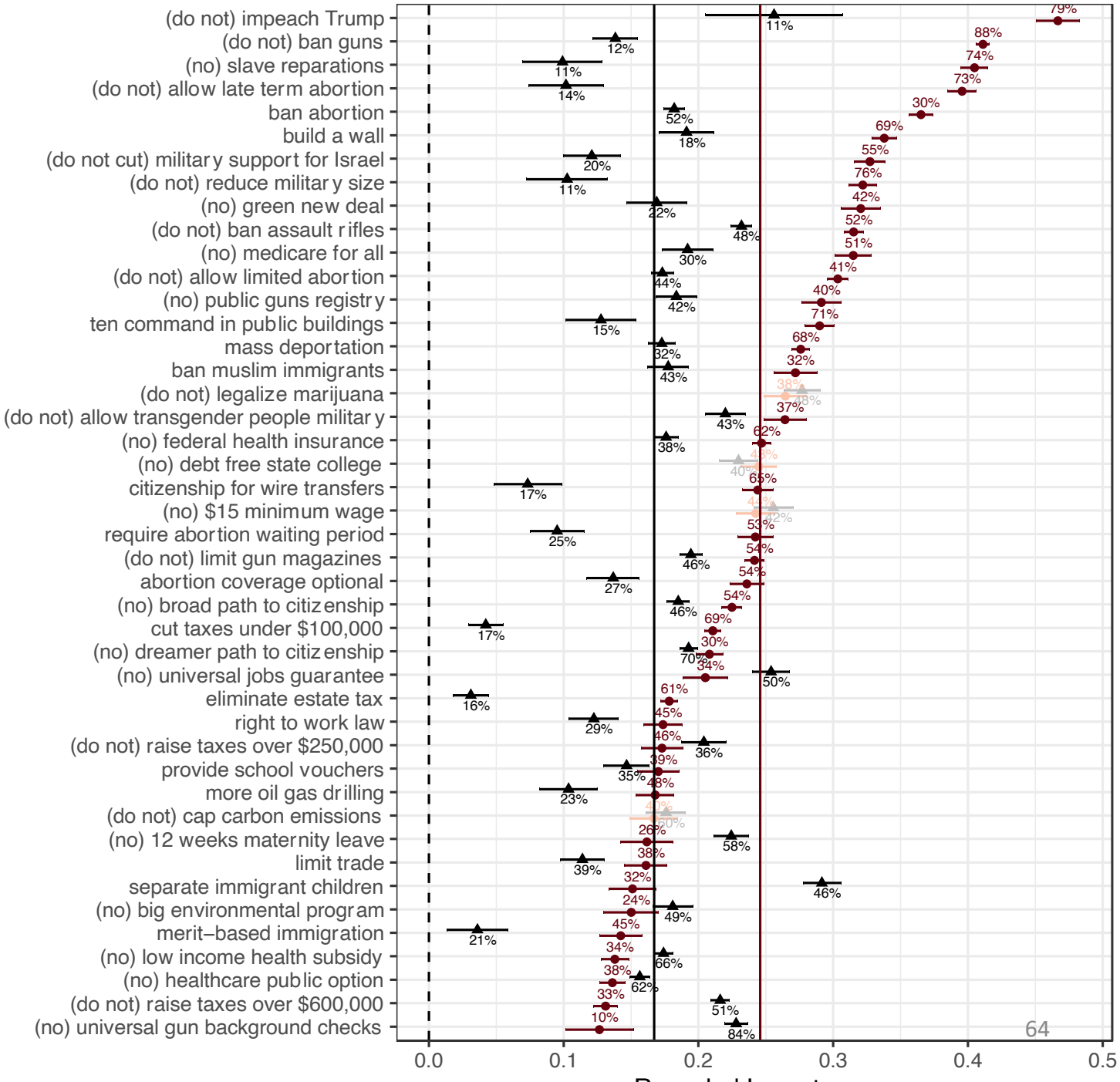

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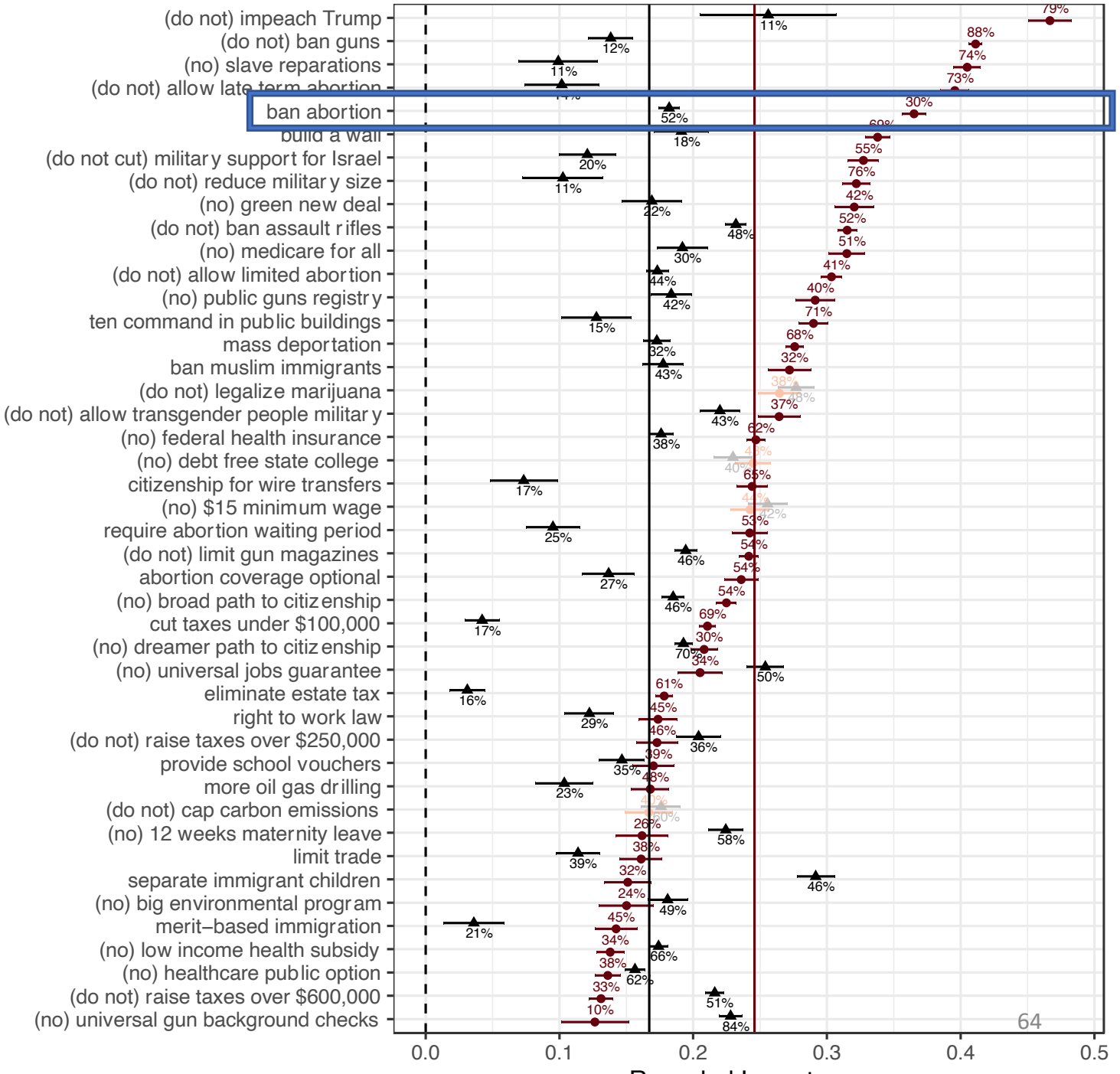

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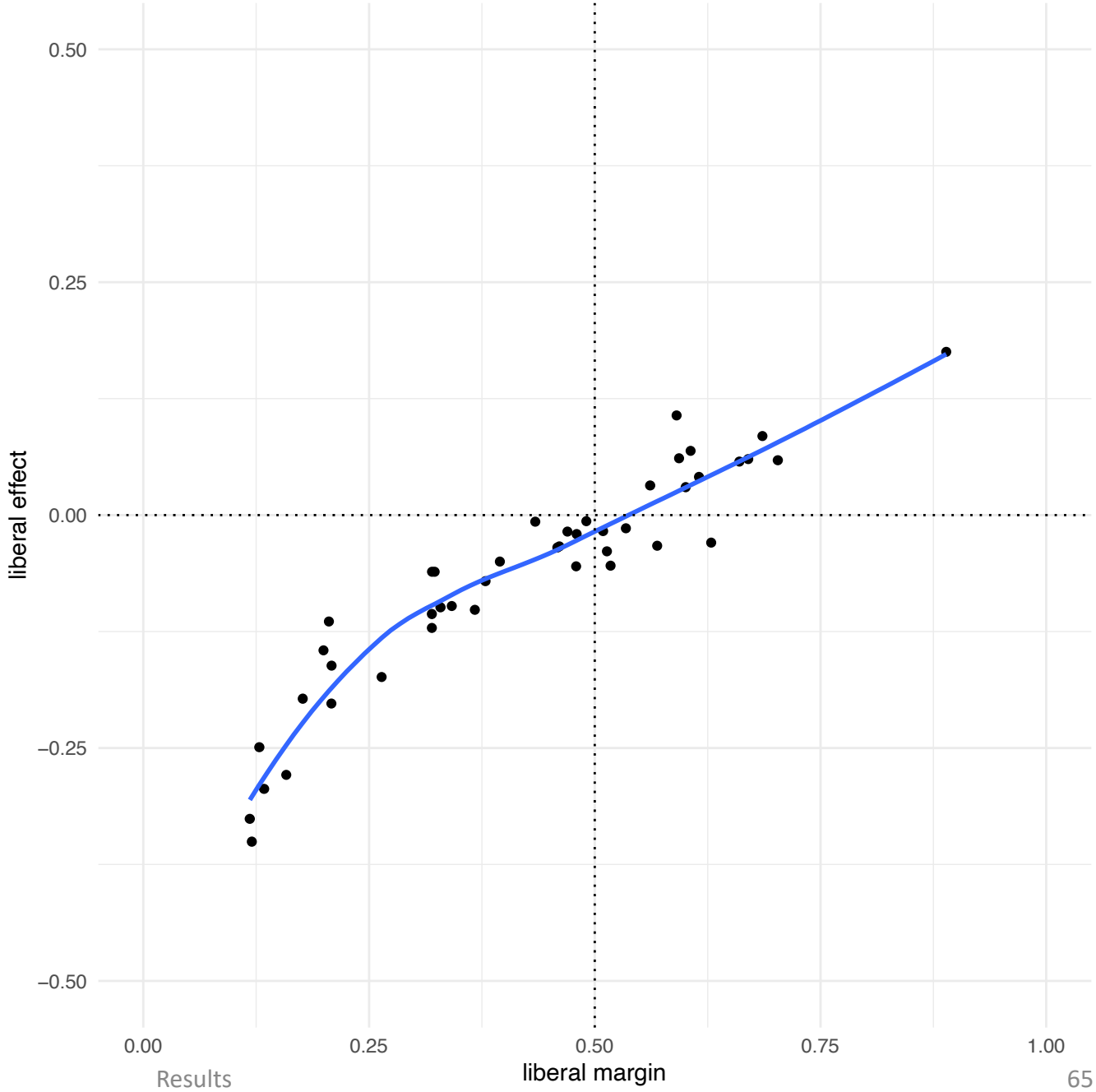
- Margin in favor is a strong predictor of AMCE
- *Some important opportunities for counter-majoritarian outcomes*



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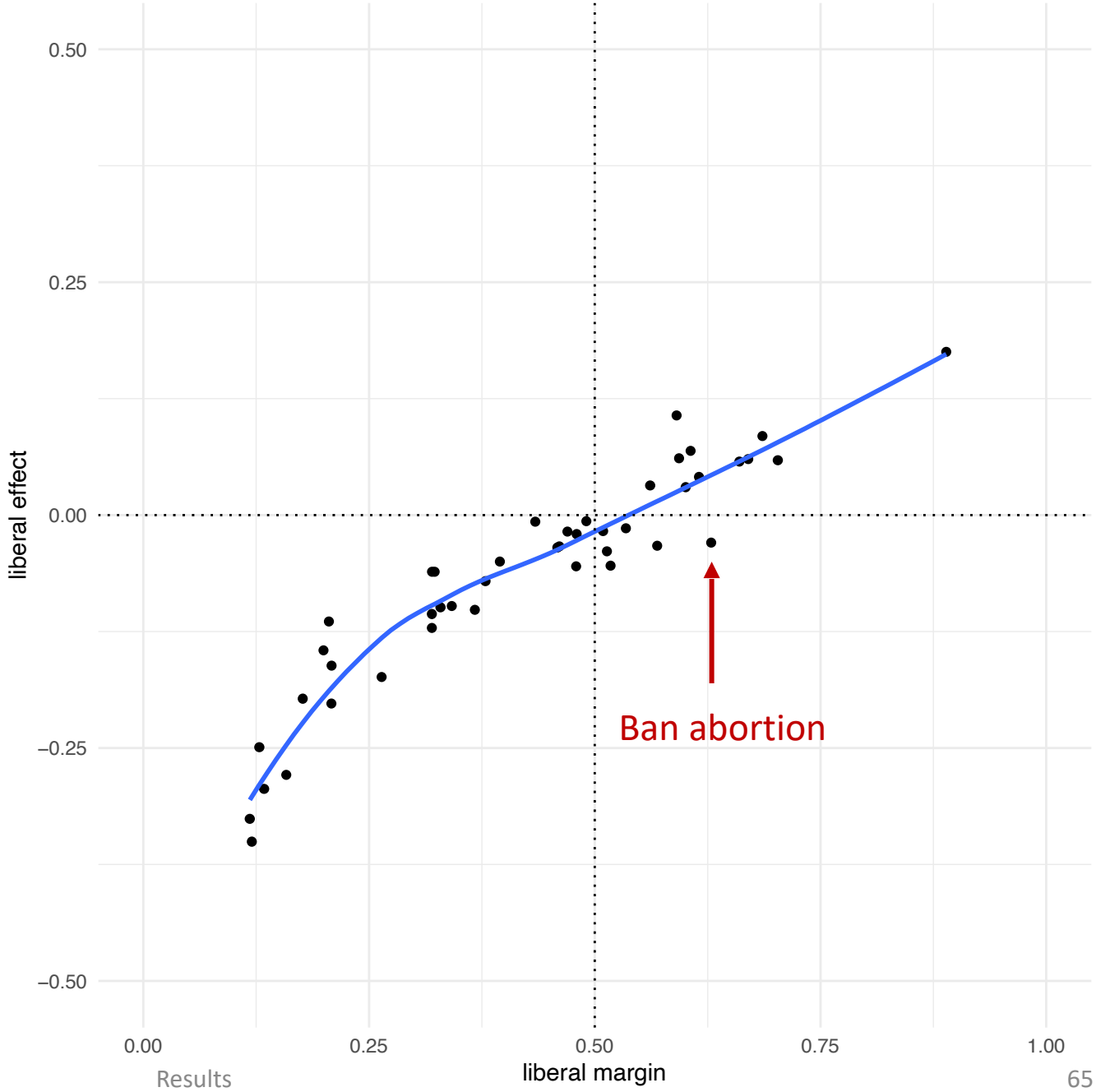
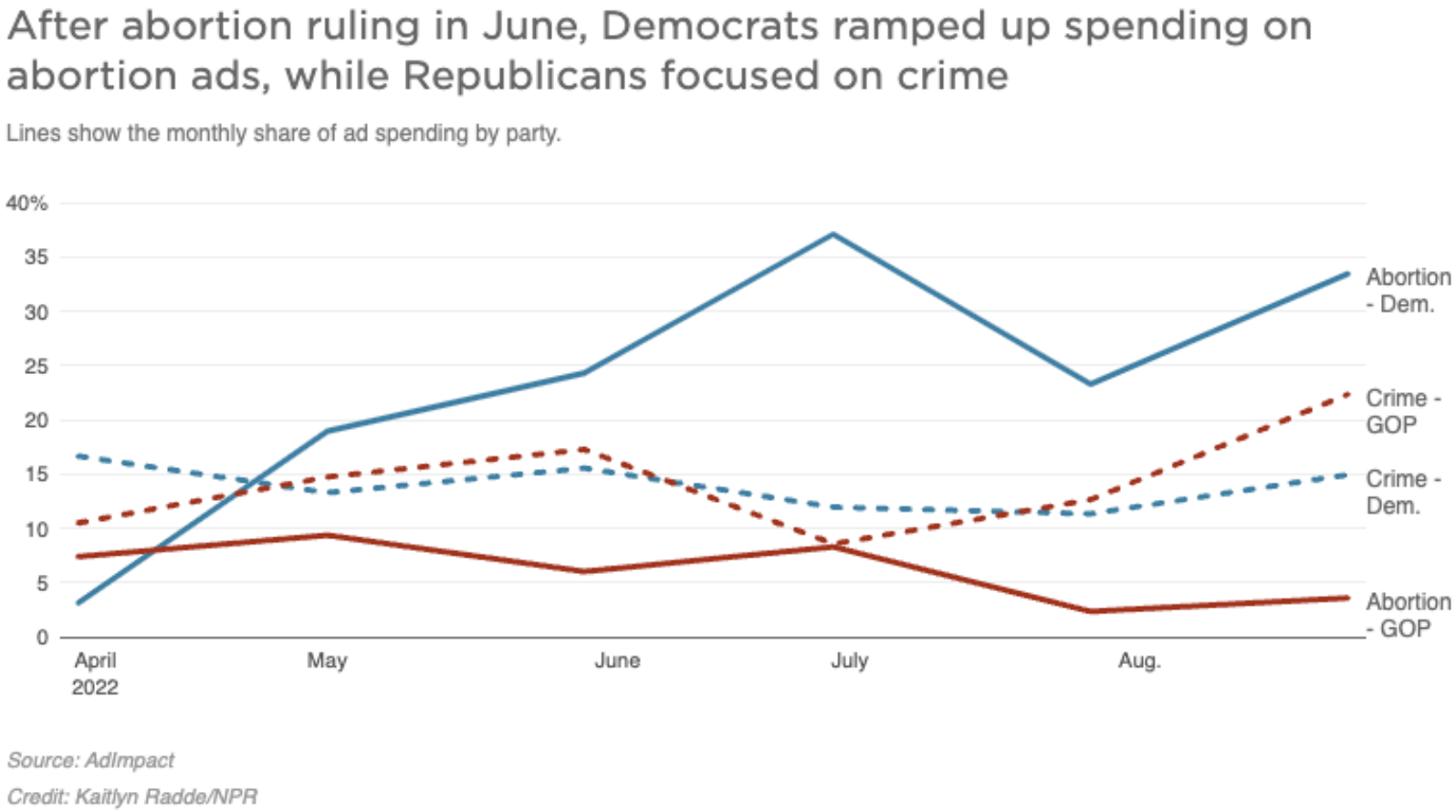


Back to abortion



Review of the results

- Is there important variation in preference intensity?

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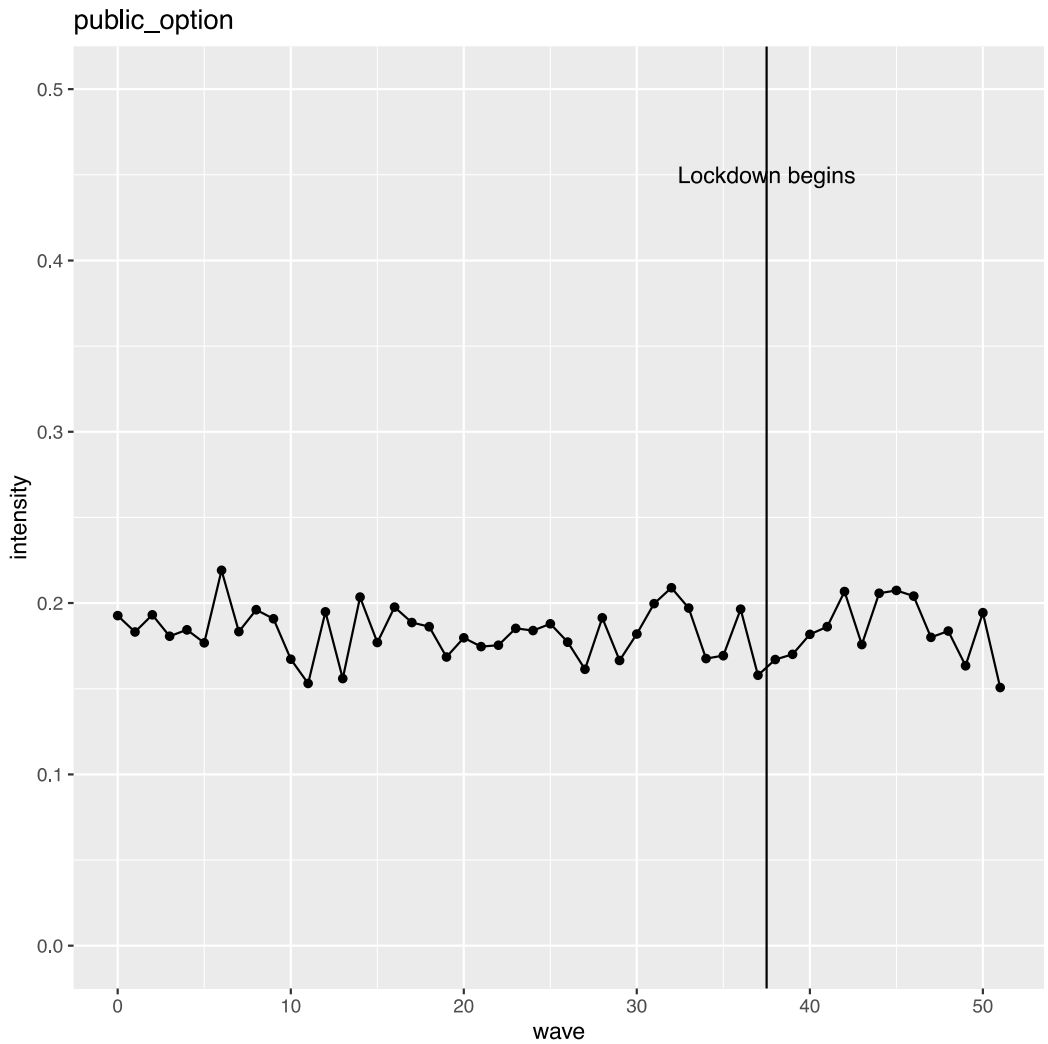
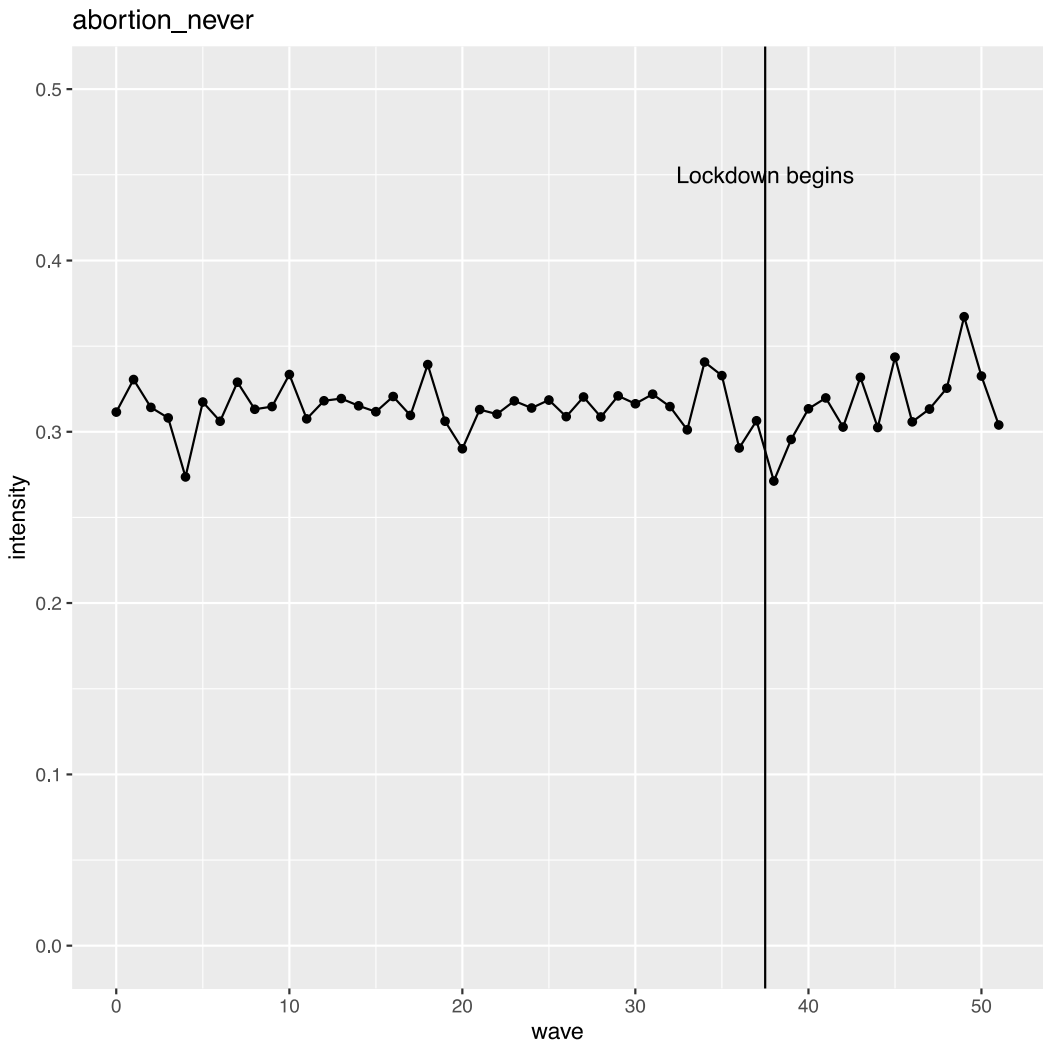
- Is there important variation in preference intensity?
  - Yes
- Can preference intensity better rationalize partisan self-identification?
  - Yes
- Do moderates prioritize moderate issues?
  - Yes
- Does intensity have the potential to matter for outcomes?
  - Only occasionally

Future research

- Do primary elections candidates respond to voter priorities?
  - Hypothesis: candidates can benefit from counter-majoritarian stances if minority view is intensely held.
- Does local context shape what voters care about?
  - Hypothesis: conditional on strength of partisanship, geography matters little.
- Alternate methods of eliciting priorities using conjoint data
  - Hypothesis: method based on repeating the *same* comparisons will yield similar results.

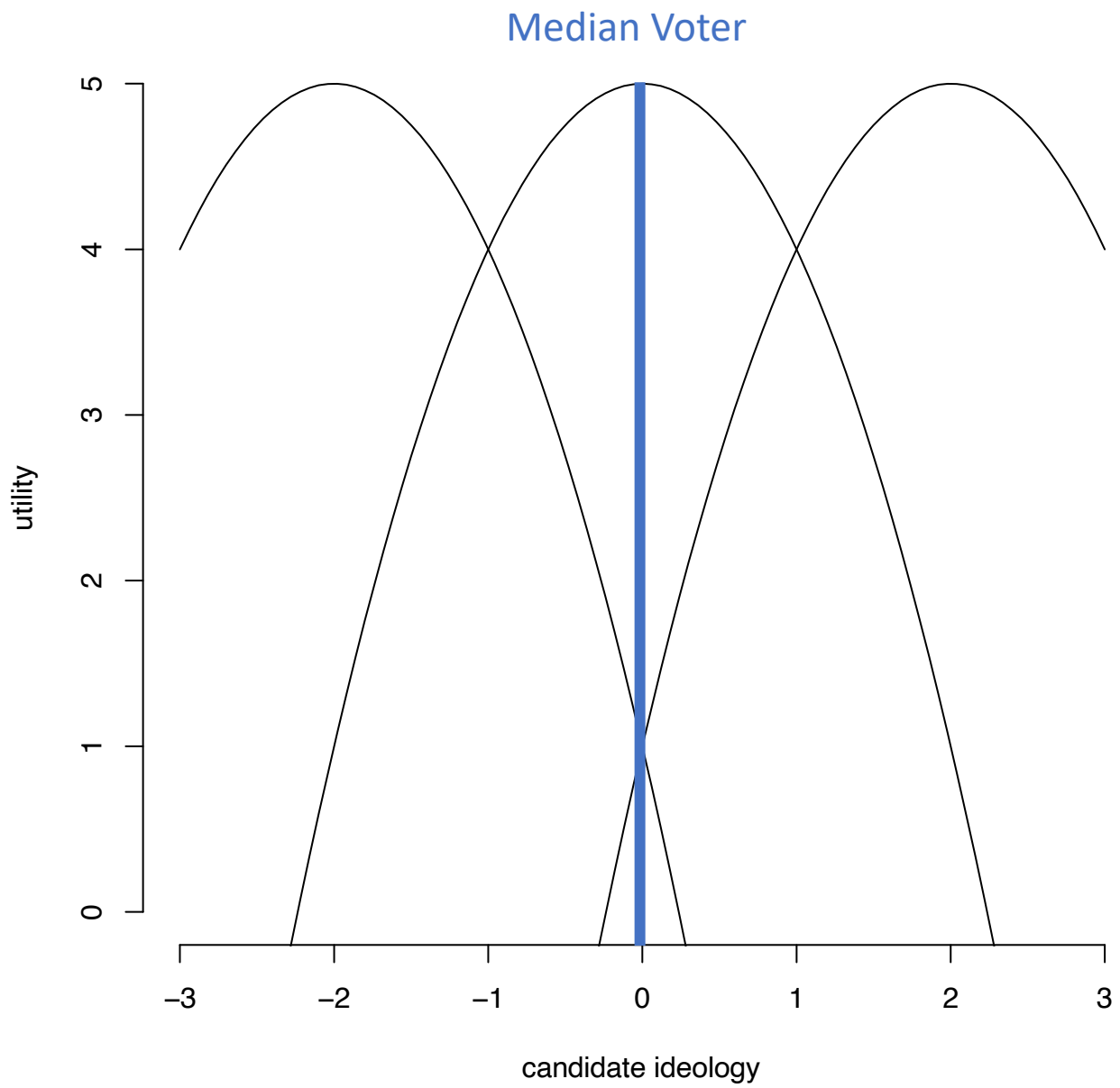
Views and intensity are incredibly stable



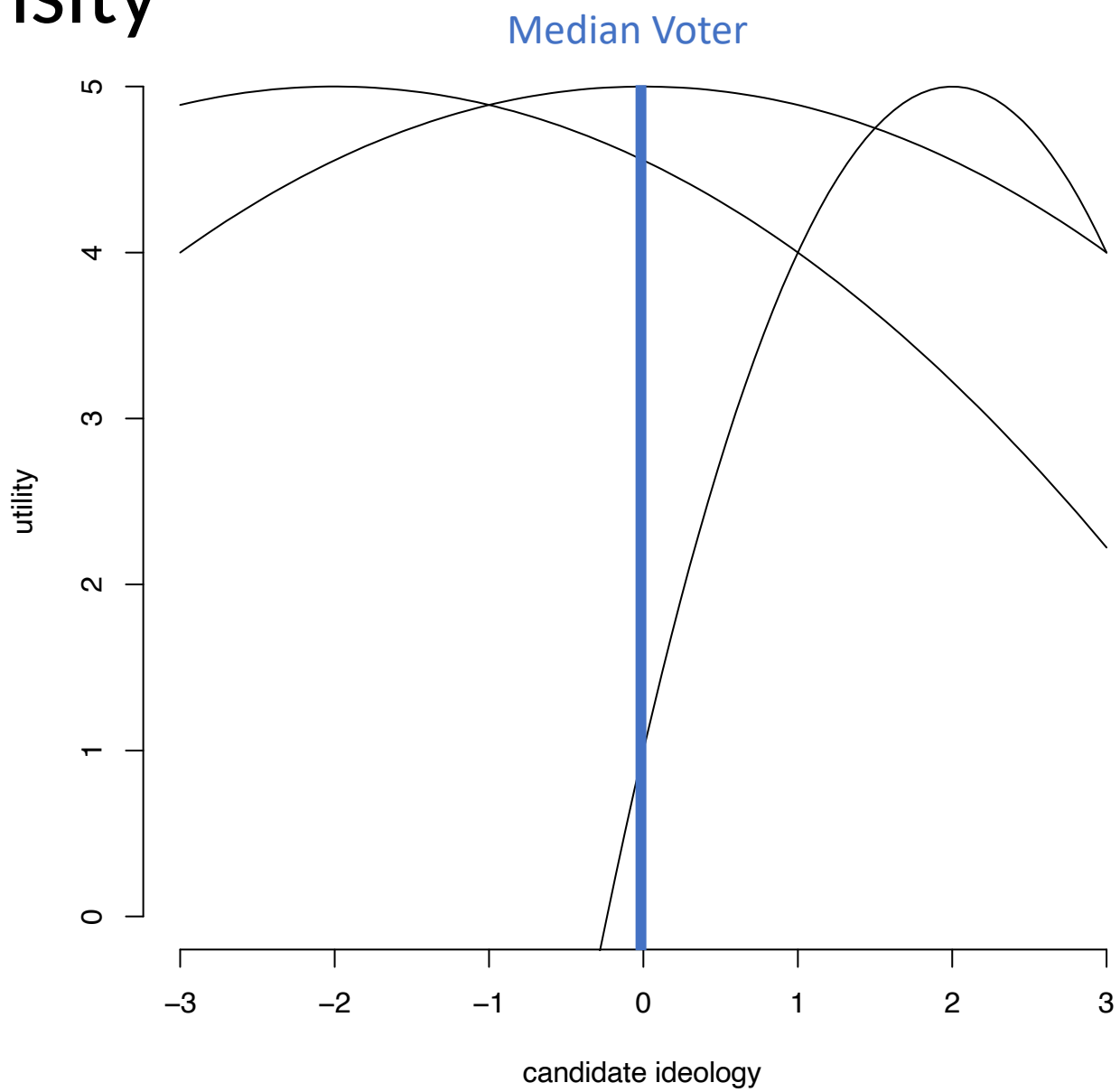


Extra Slides

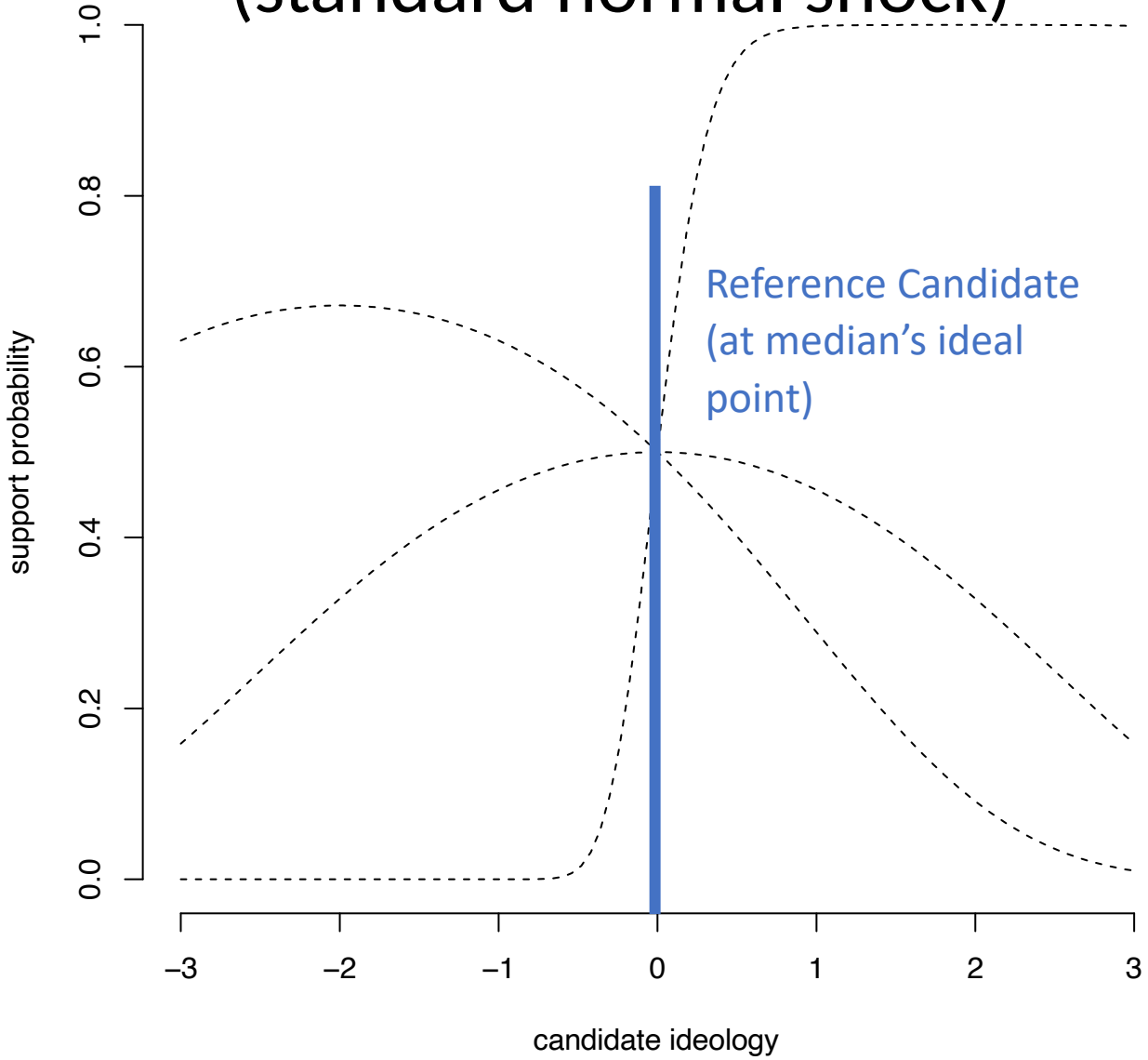
Spatial Voting



Spatial Voting w/ heterogeneous intensity



Heterogeneous intensity and stochastic voting (standard normal shock)



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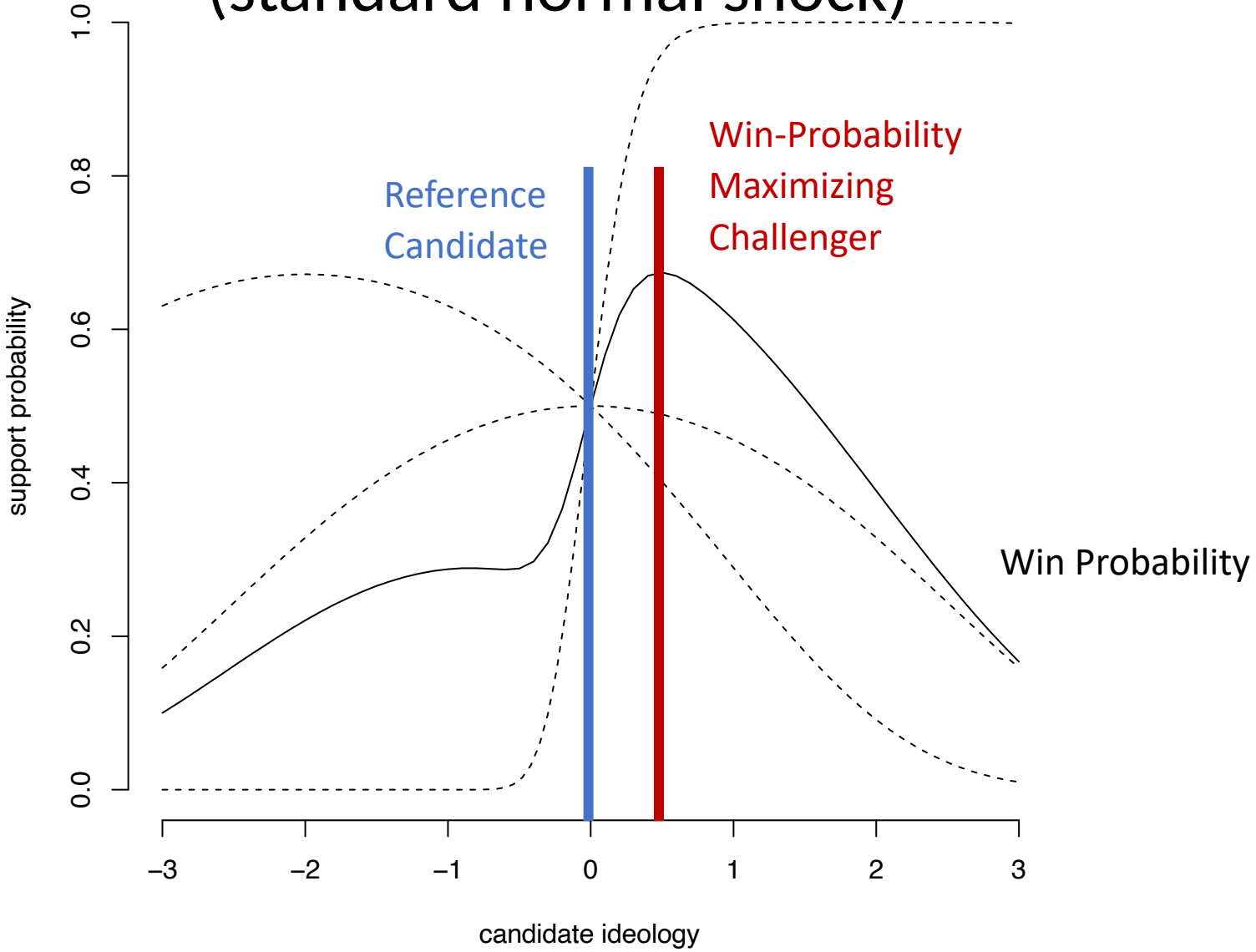


“Short list” items

- Permit abortion in cases other than rape, incest, or when the woman's life is in danger
- Permit late term abortion
- Permit abortion at any time during the pregnancy
- Provide government-run health insurance to all Americans
- Provide the option to purchase government-run insurance to all Americans
- Subsidize health insurance for lower income people not receiving Medicare or Medicaid
- Create a path to citizenship for all undocumented immigrants
- Create a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants brought here as children
- Deport all undocumented immigrants
- Ban all guns
- Ban assault rifles
- Limit gun magazines to 10 bullets
- Cut taxes for families making less than $100,000
- Eliminate estate tax
- Raise taxes on families making over $600,000
- *Elect a black/white/Latino/Asian president*
- *Elect a female president*
- *Elect a gay president*
- *Elect a transgender president*

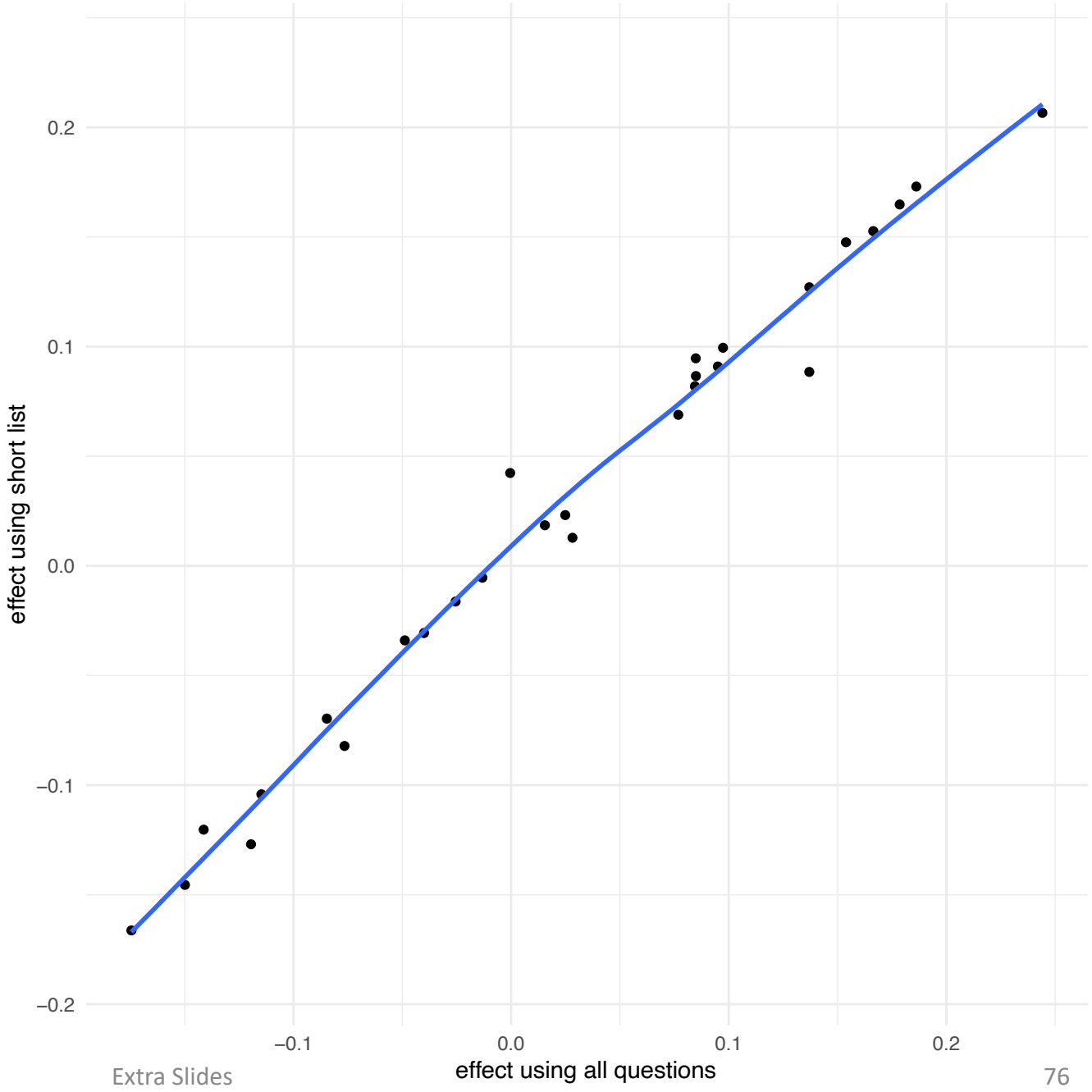
Additional "Long list" items

* = policy question asked at random

- Cap carbon emissions to combat climate change
- Build a wall on the southern border
- Make a large-scale investment in technology to protect the environment*
- Require background checks for all gun purchases
- Ensure that all students can graduate from state colleges debt free
- Require a waiting period and ultrasound before an abortion can be obtained*
- Limit trade with other countries*
- Raise the minimum wage to $15/hour*
- Grant reparations payments to the descendants of slaves*
- Ban people from predominantly Muslim countries from entering the United States*
- Require companies to provide 12 weeks of paid maternity leave for employees*
- Withdraw military support for the state of Israel*
- *Elect a black/white/Latino/Asian member of Congress in your district*
- *Elect a female member of Congress in your district*
- *Elect a gay member of Congress in your district*
- *Elect a transgender member of Congress in your district*
- Legalize marijuana*
- Allow employers to decline coverage of abortions in insurance plans*
- Create a public government registry of gun ownership*
- Separate children from their parents when parents can be prosecuted for illegal entry into the US*
- Allow transgender people to serve in the military*
- Require proof of citizenship or legal residence to wire money to another country from the USA*
- Guarantee jobs for all Americans*
- Reduce the size of the US military*
- Allow people to work in unionized workplaces without paying union dues*
- Provide tax-funded vouchers to be used for private or religious schools*
- Impeach President Trump*
- Enact a Green New Deal*
- Enact Medicare-for-All*
- Shift from a more family-based to a more merit-based immigration system*
- Raise taxes on families making over $250,000*
- Remove barriers to domestic oil and gas drilling*
- Allow the display of the Ten Commandments in public schools and courthouses*

Test of whether effects for items on the short list of questions are similar when they are included in a longer list.

$R^2 = .98$



Logical restrictions

abortion
ban abortion
allow limited abortion
allow late term abortion

healthcare
federal health insurance
healtchare public option
low income health subsidy
medicare for all

immigration
broad path to citizenship
dreamer path to citizenship
mass deportation

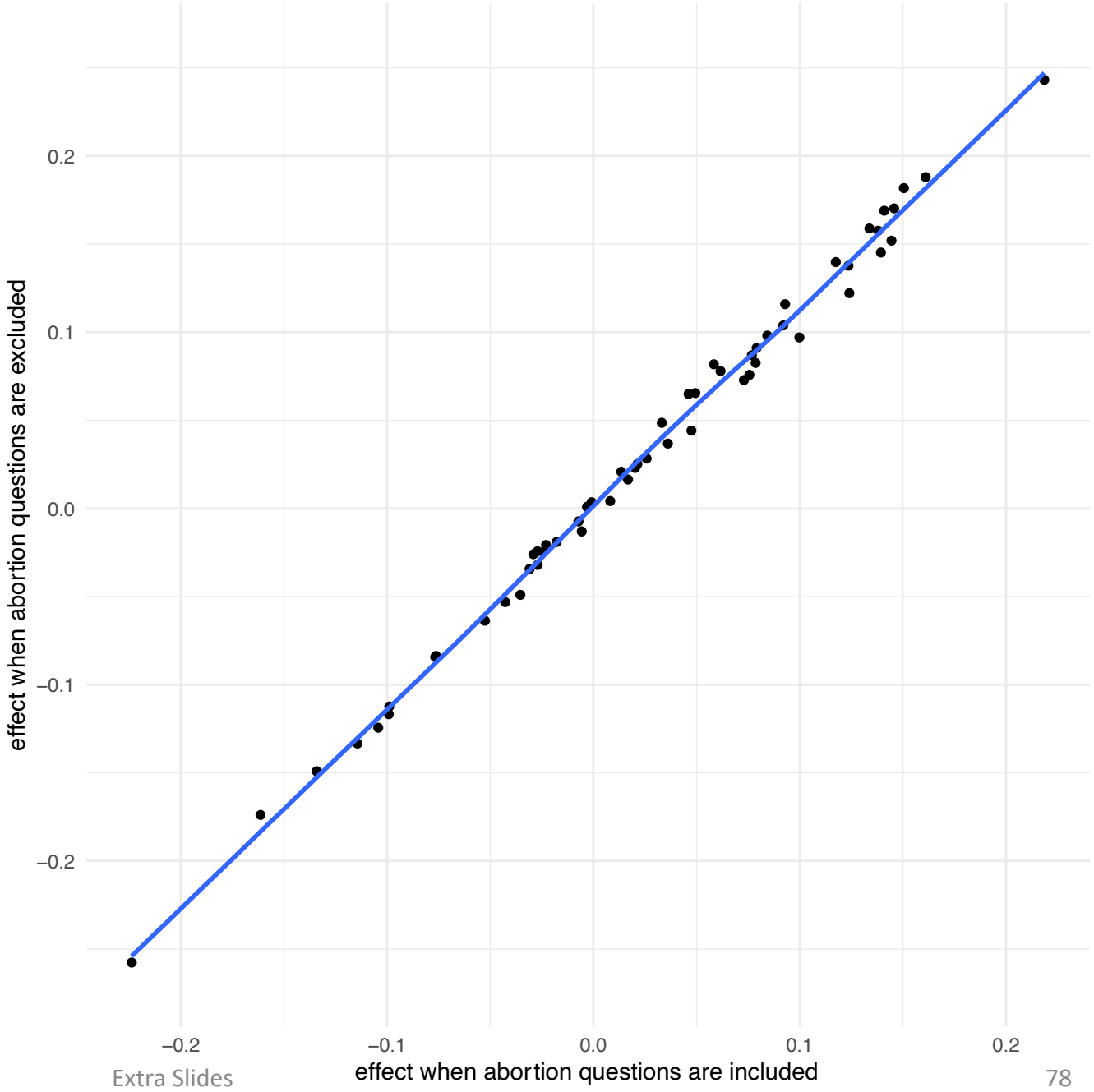
guns
ban guns
ban assault rifles
limit gun magazines

taxes
cut taxes under $100,000
eliminate estate tax
raise taxes over $600,000
raise taxes over $250,000

environment
cap carbon emissions
big environmental program
green new deal

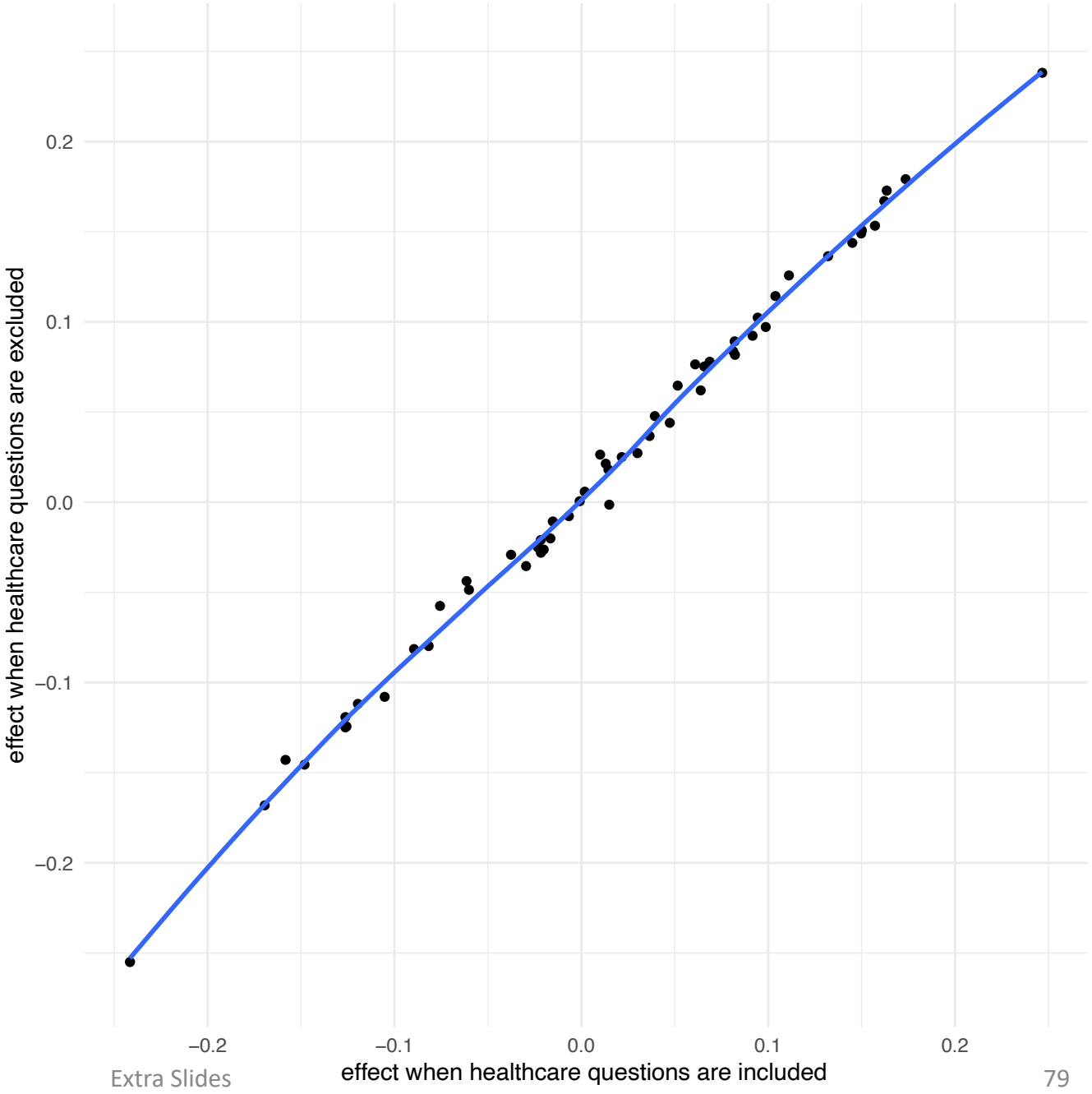
Test of whether logical restriction is impactful on **abortion** items.

$R^2 = .99$



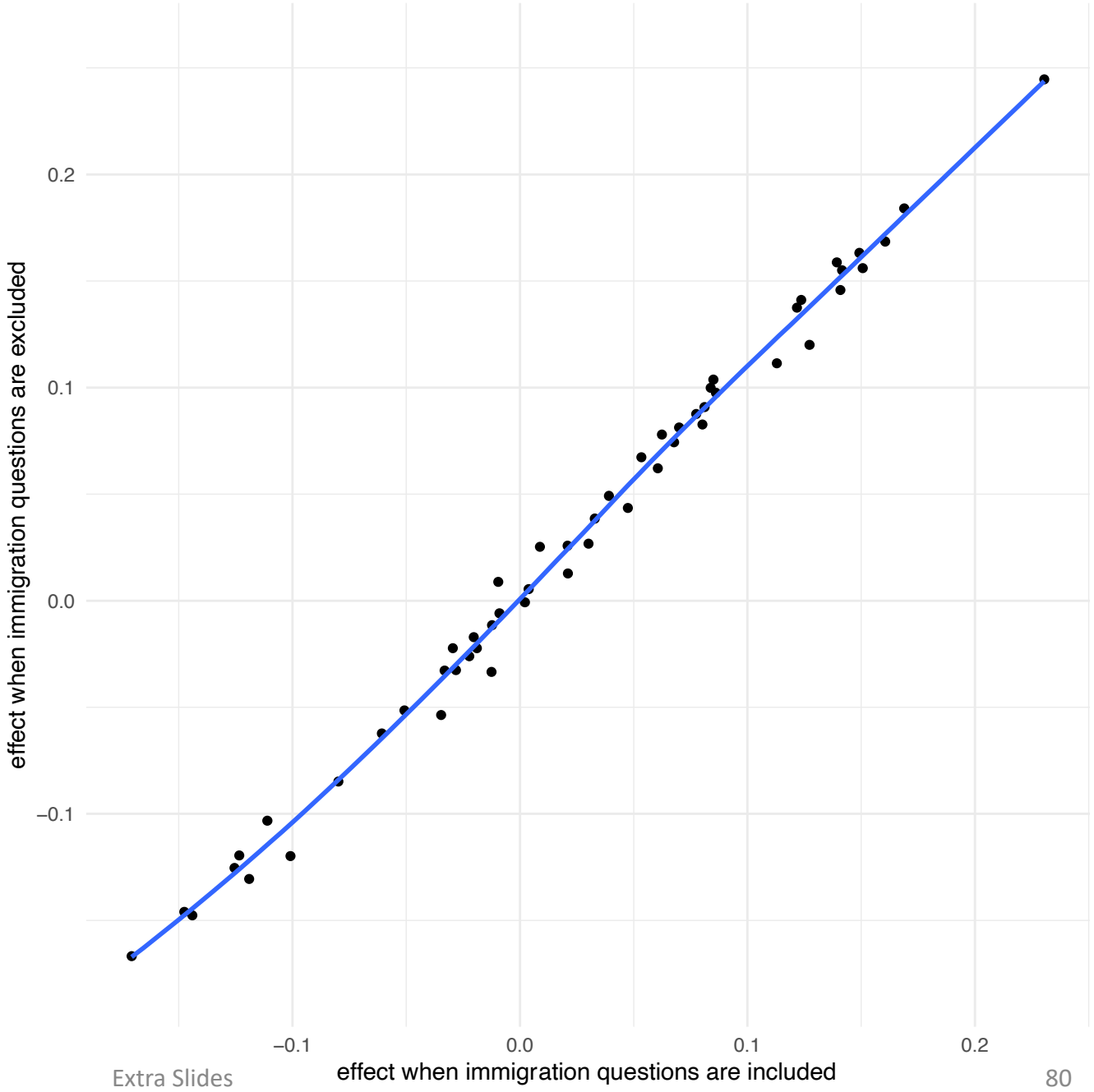
Test of whether logical restriction is impactful on **healthcare** items.

$R^2 = .99$



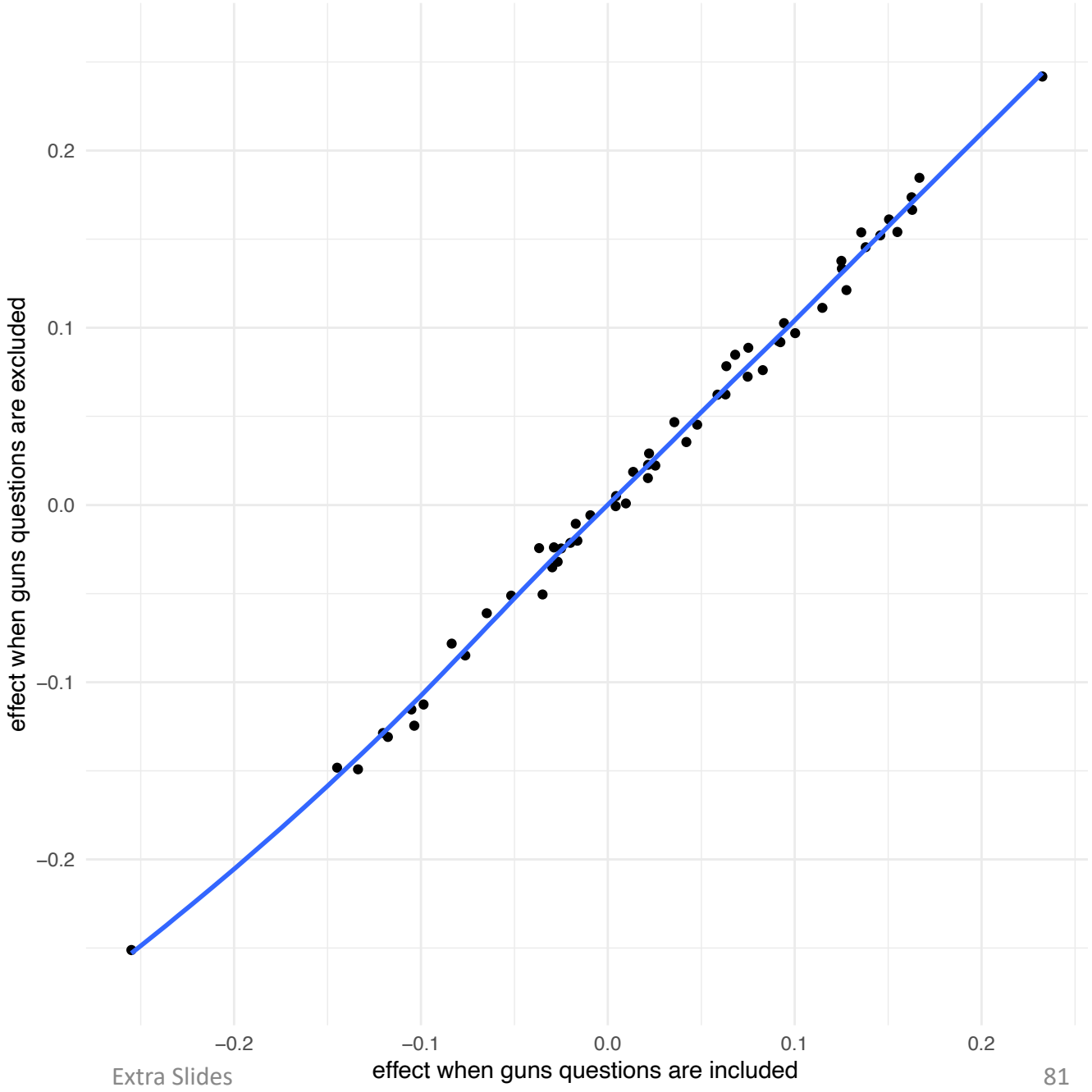
Test of whether logical restriction is impactful on **immigration** items.

$R^2 = .99$



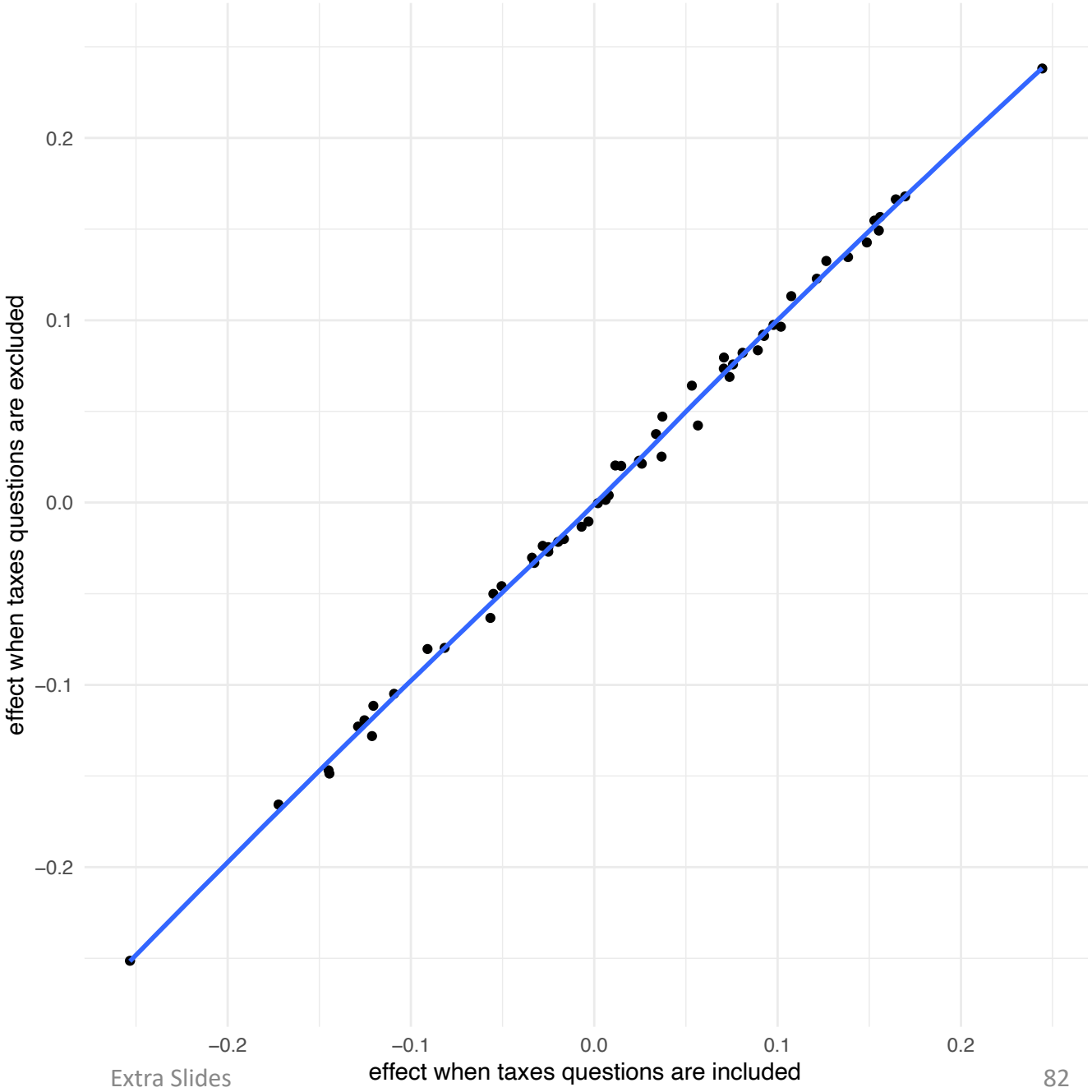
Test of whether logical restriction is impactful on **guns** items.

$R^2 = .99$



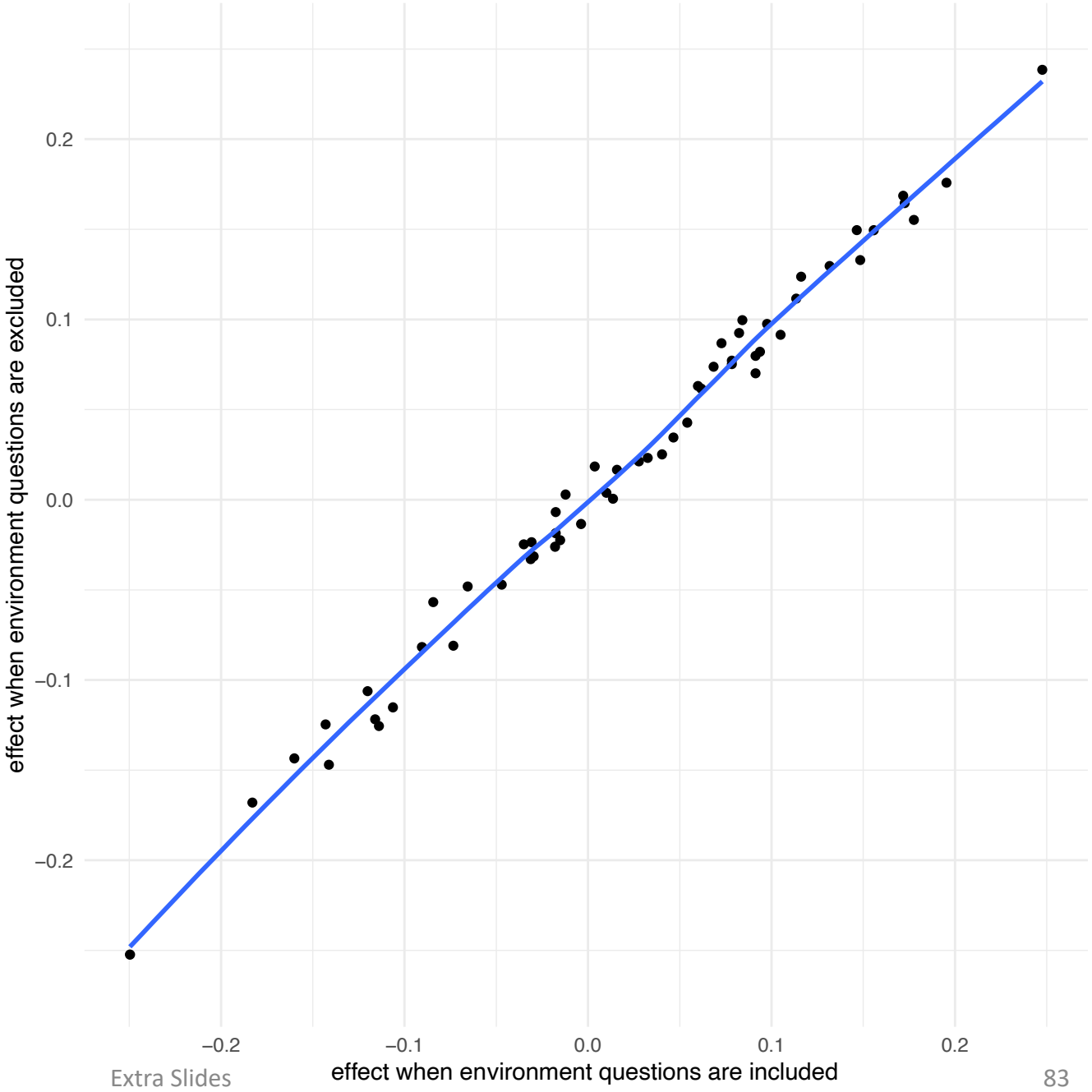
Test of whether logical restriction is impactful on **taxes** items.

$R^2 = .99$

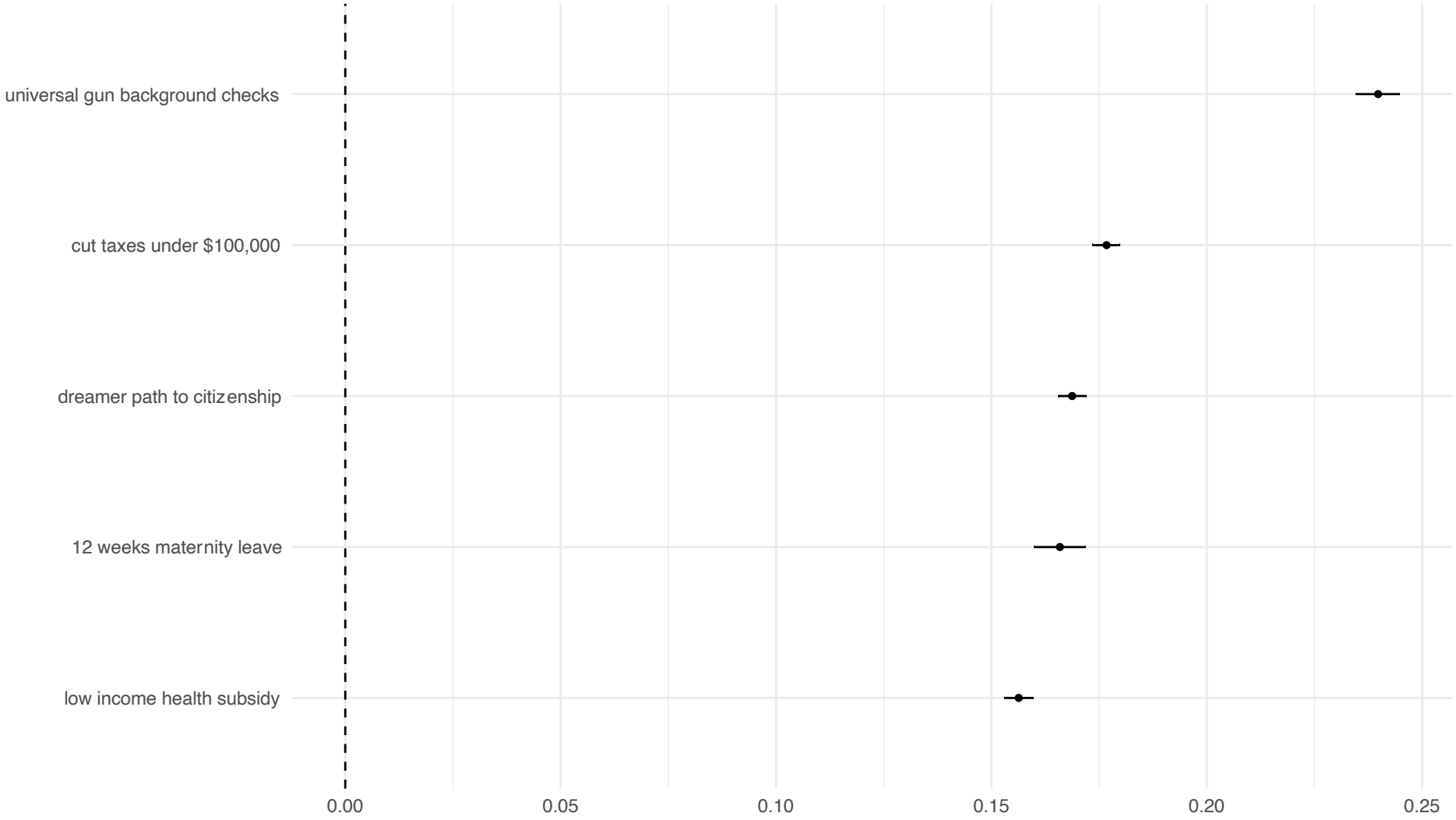


Test of whether logical restriction is impactful on **environment** items.

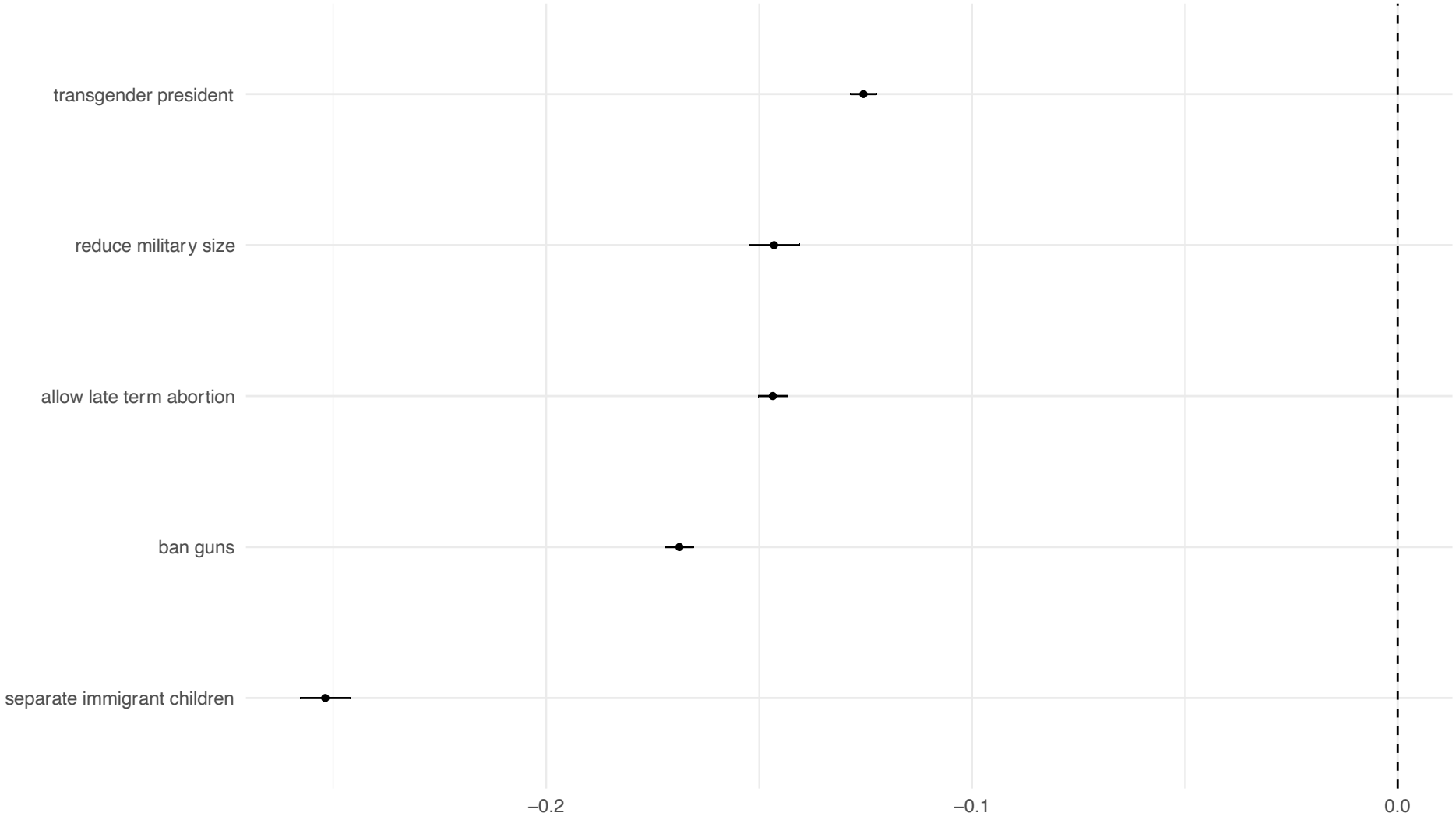
$R^2 = .99$



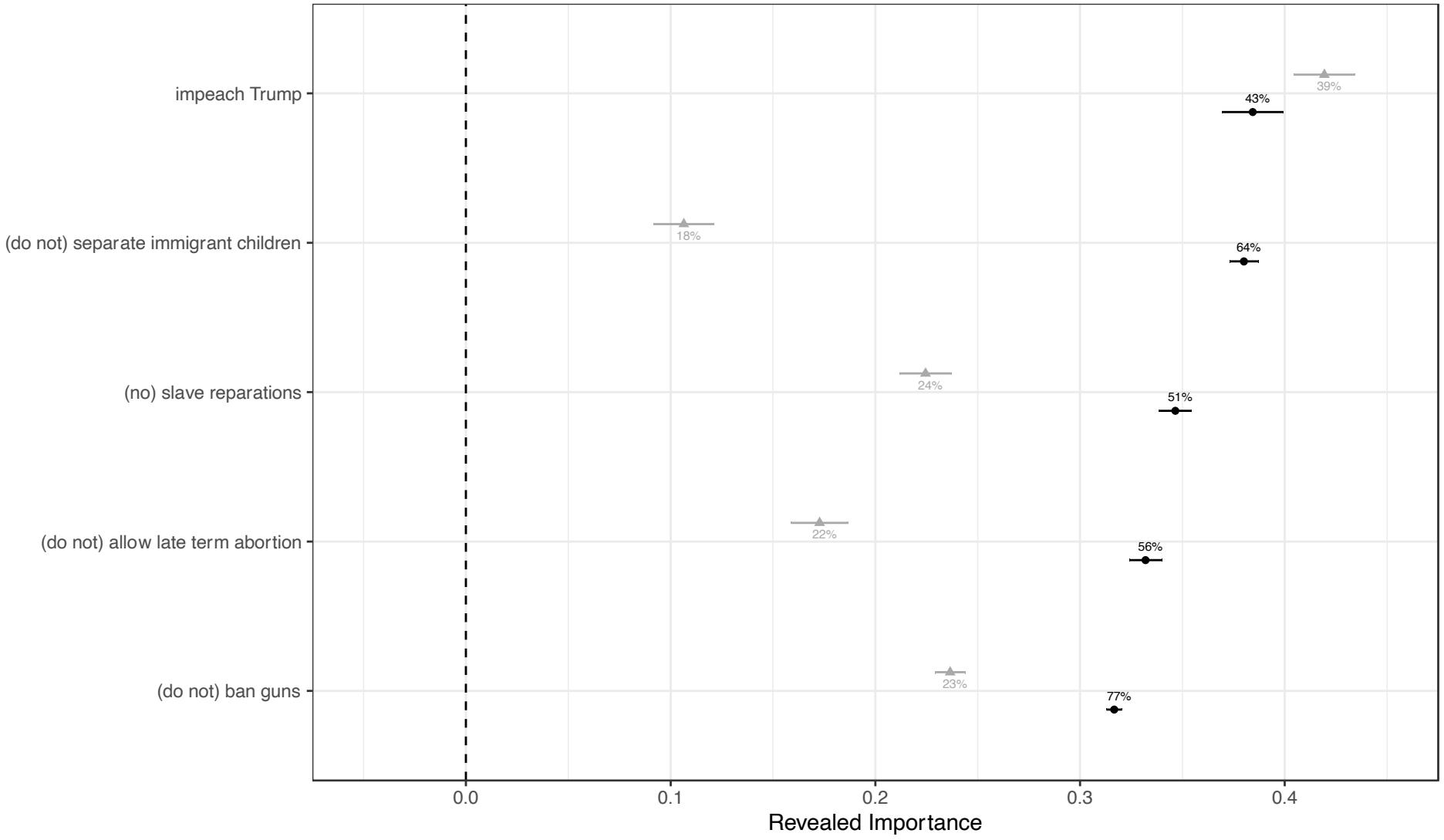
Highest 5 AMCEs



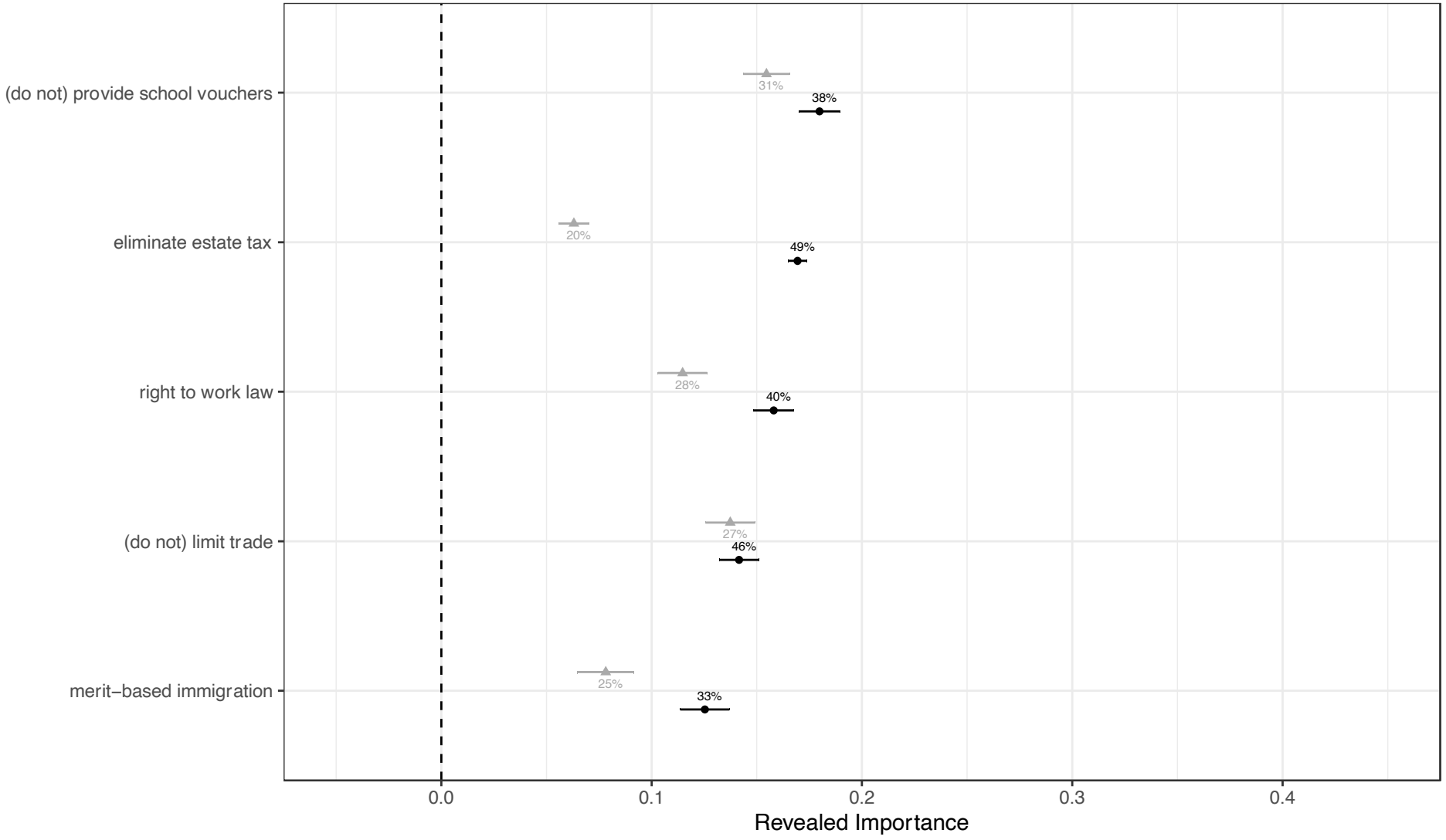
Lowest 5 AMCEs



Revealed Importance: Top 5

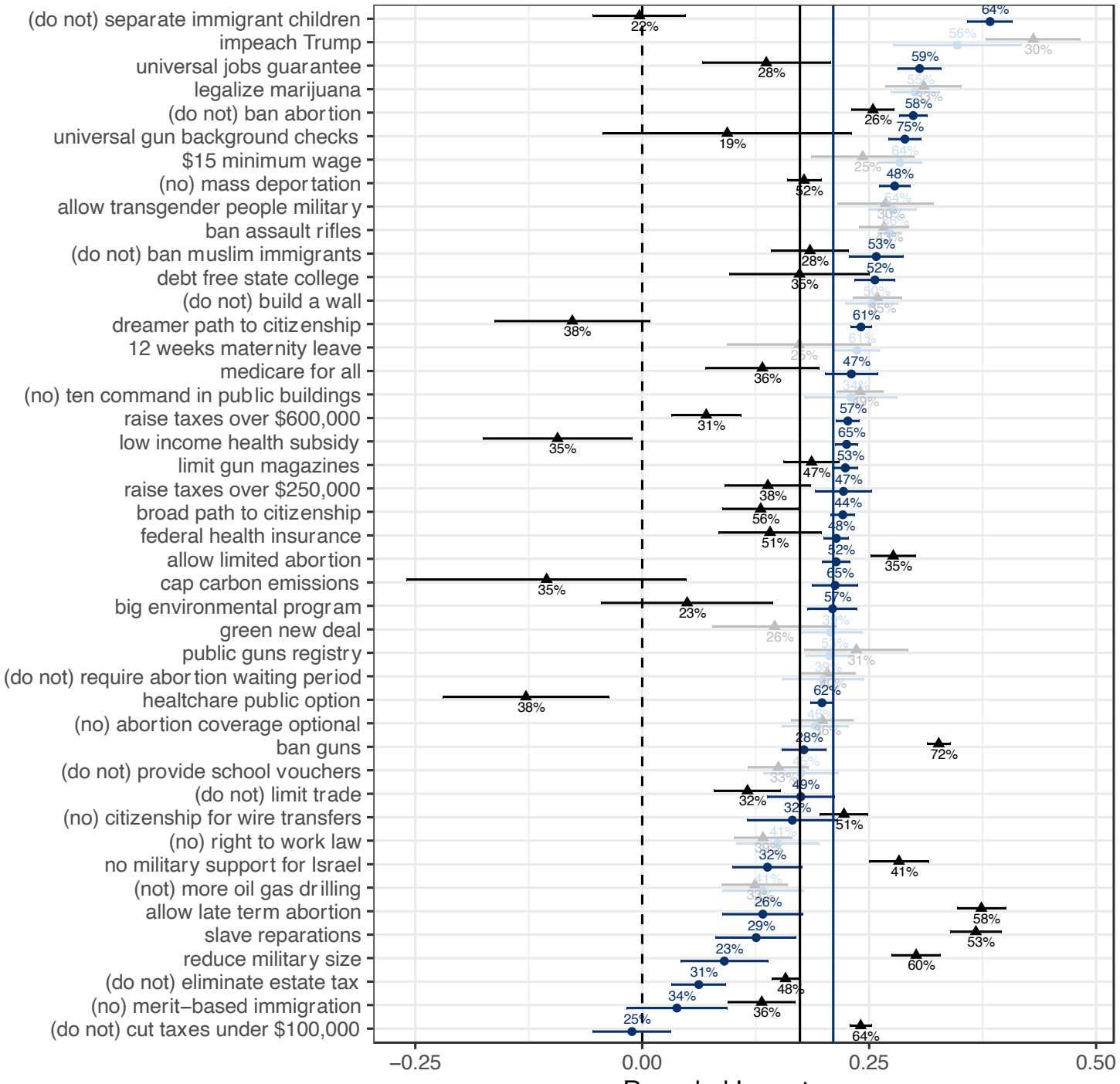


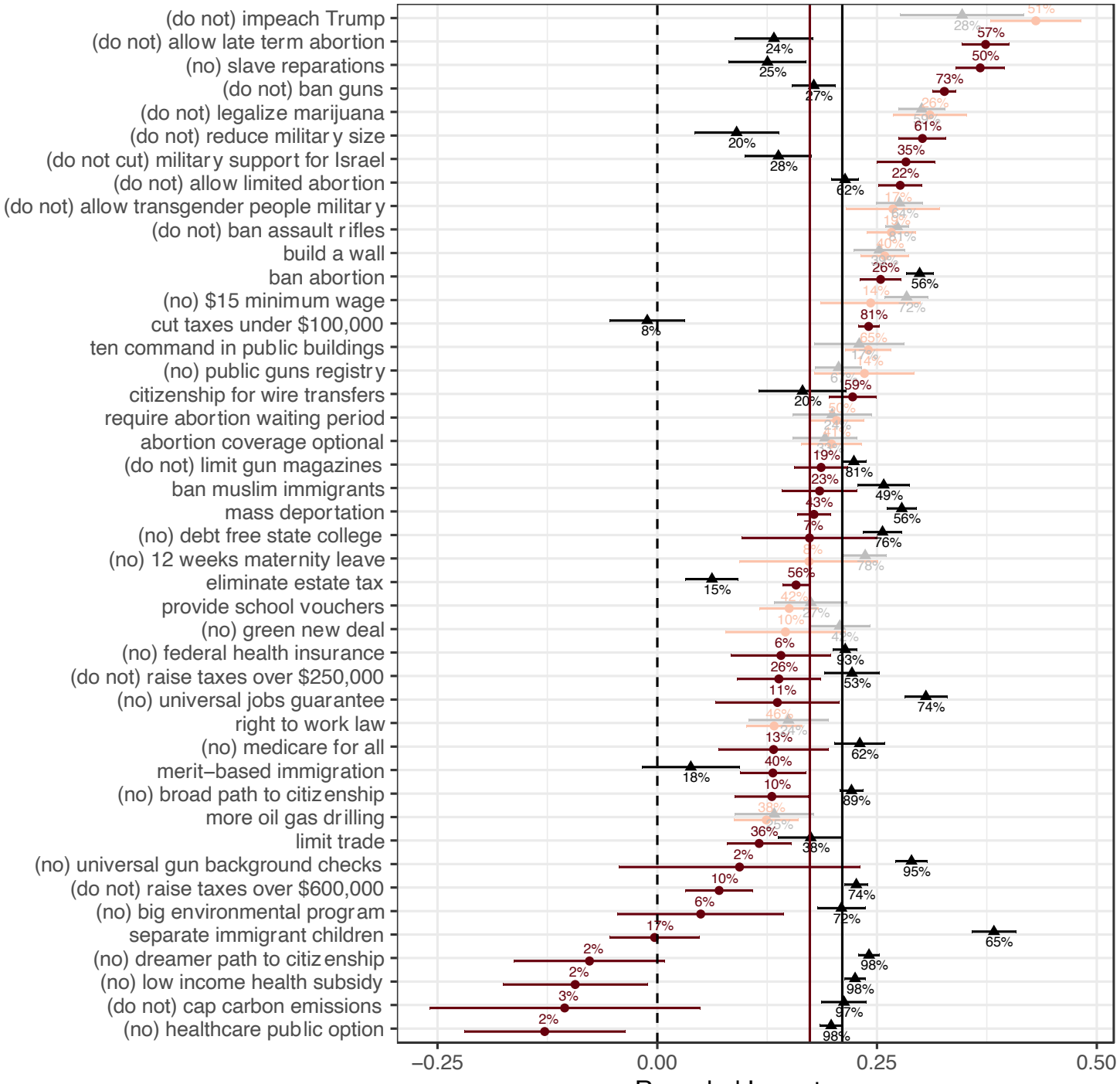
Revealed Importance: Bottom 5



Revealed Importance for mismatched Democrats

- Issues are arranged so the *liberal* direction is blue



Revealed Importance for mismatched Republicans

- Issues are arranged so the *conservative* direction is red