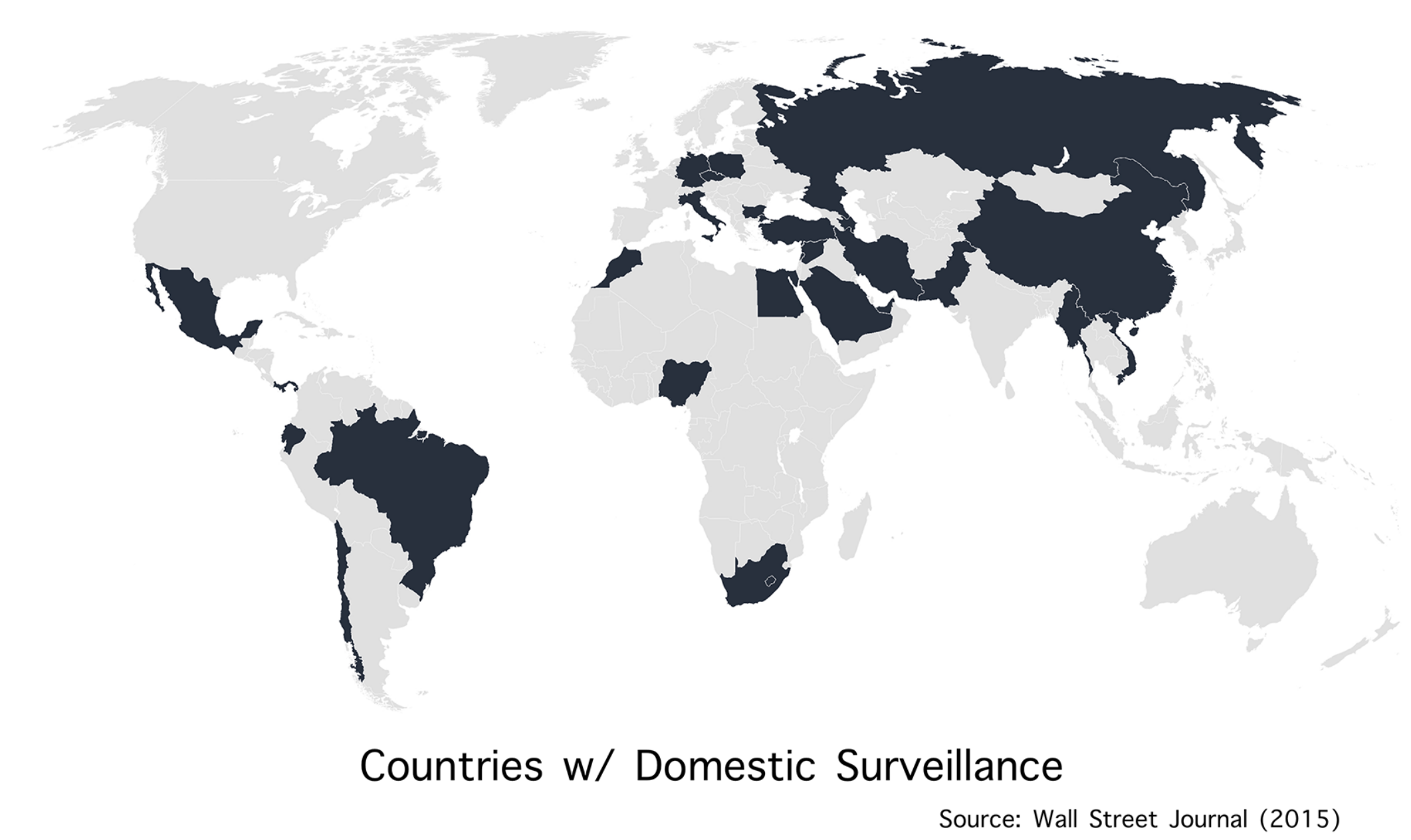


THE SOCIAL COSTS OF DIGITAL VS. IN-PERSON SURVEILLANCE

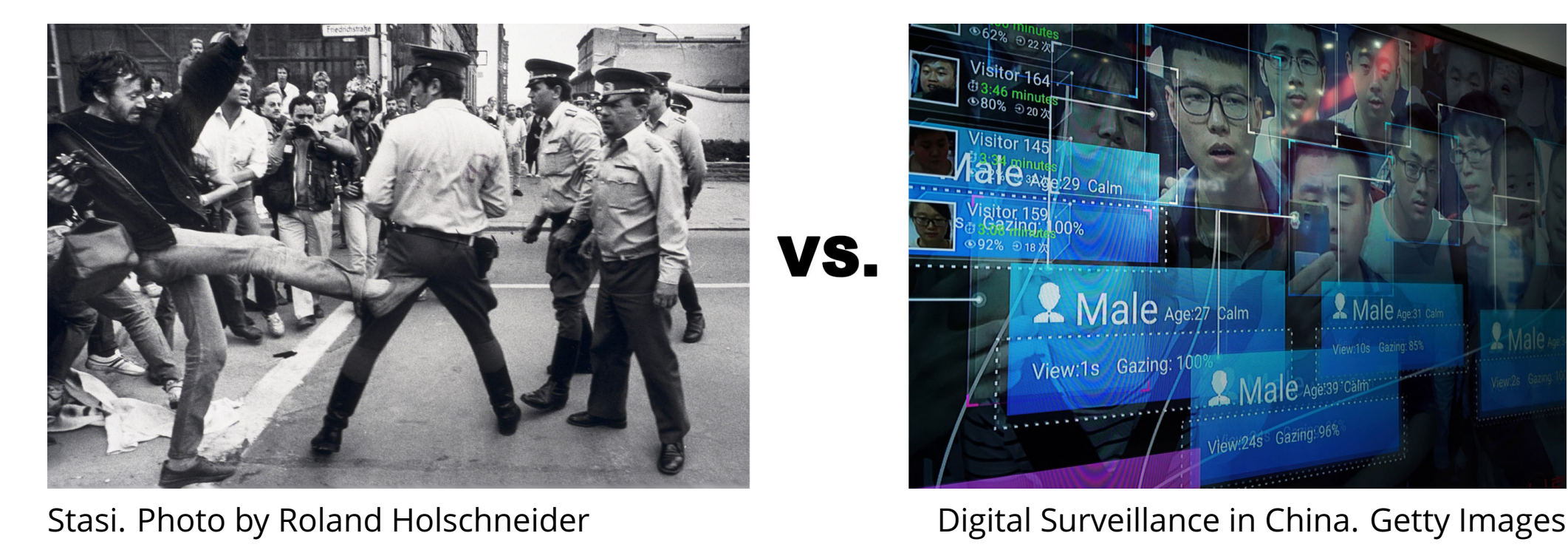
Experimental and Observational Evidence from China

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INTRODUCTION



Autocracies around the world are experiencing significant growth in domestic surveillance in the digital age.



Research Question:
What are the social costs of digital surveillance compared with those of in-person surveillance?

Social Trust Civic Participation Regime Legitimacy

Findings:

- Digital surveillance discourages protests, lowers individuals' beliefs on protest coordination, and induces self-censorship.
- Compared with in-person surveillance, digital surveillance is less likely to lower trust and regime legitimacy.

THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

Similarities: In-person & digital surveillance \Rightarrow *targeted repression* \Rightarrow participation (\searrow) & self-censorship (\nearrow).

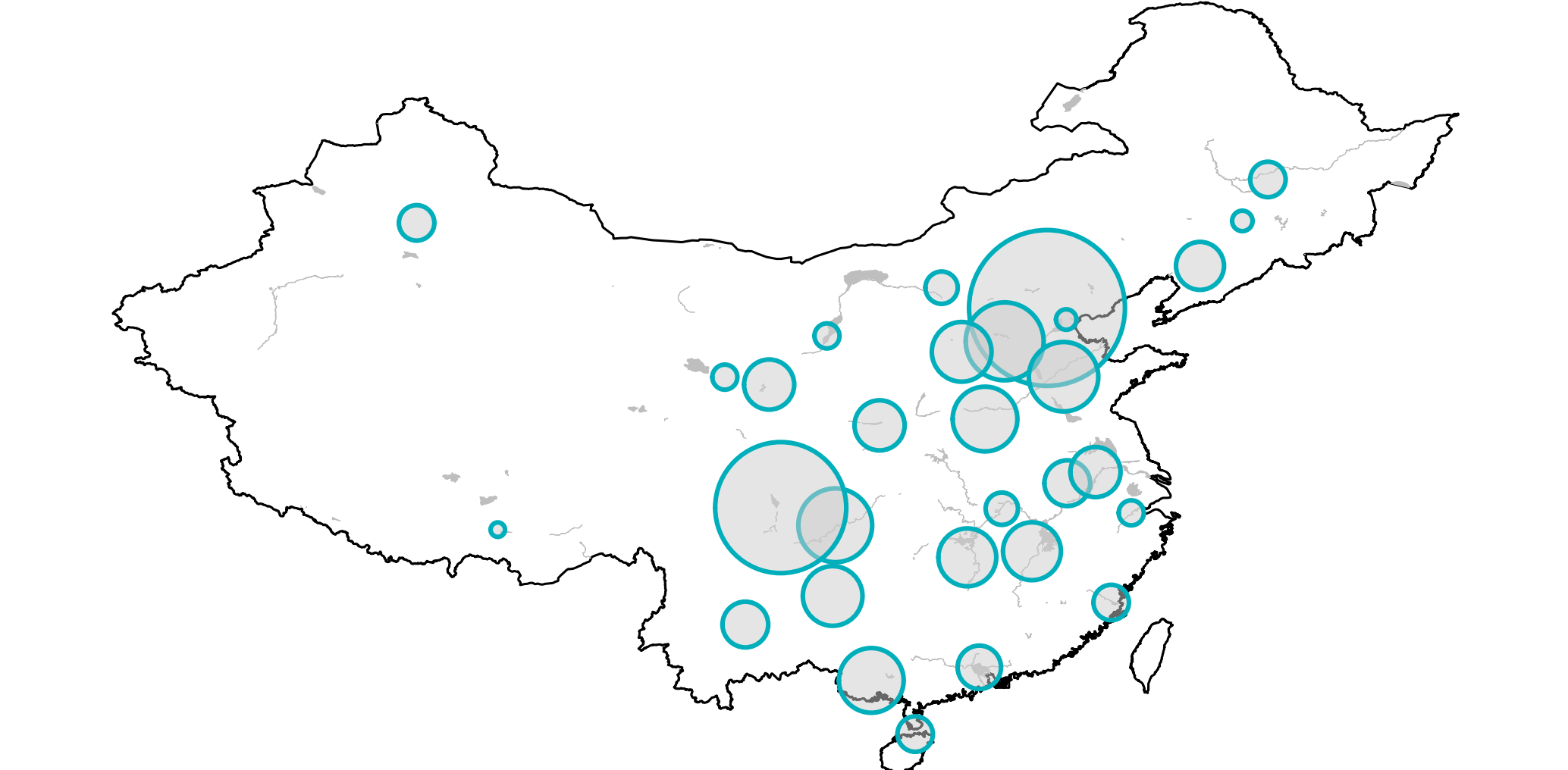
Differences:

In-person surveillance	vs.	Digital surveillance
Human intrusion		No human intrusion
Trust (\searrow)		Trust (\leftrightarrow)
Legitimacy (\searrow)		Legitimacy (\leftrightarrow)

EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN



A survey experiment among 539 students in two universities in North and West China conducted in March 2019.



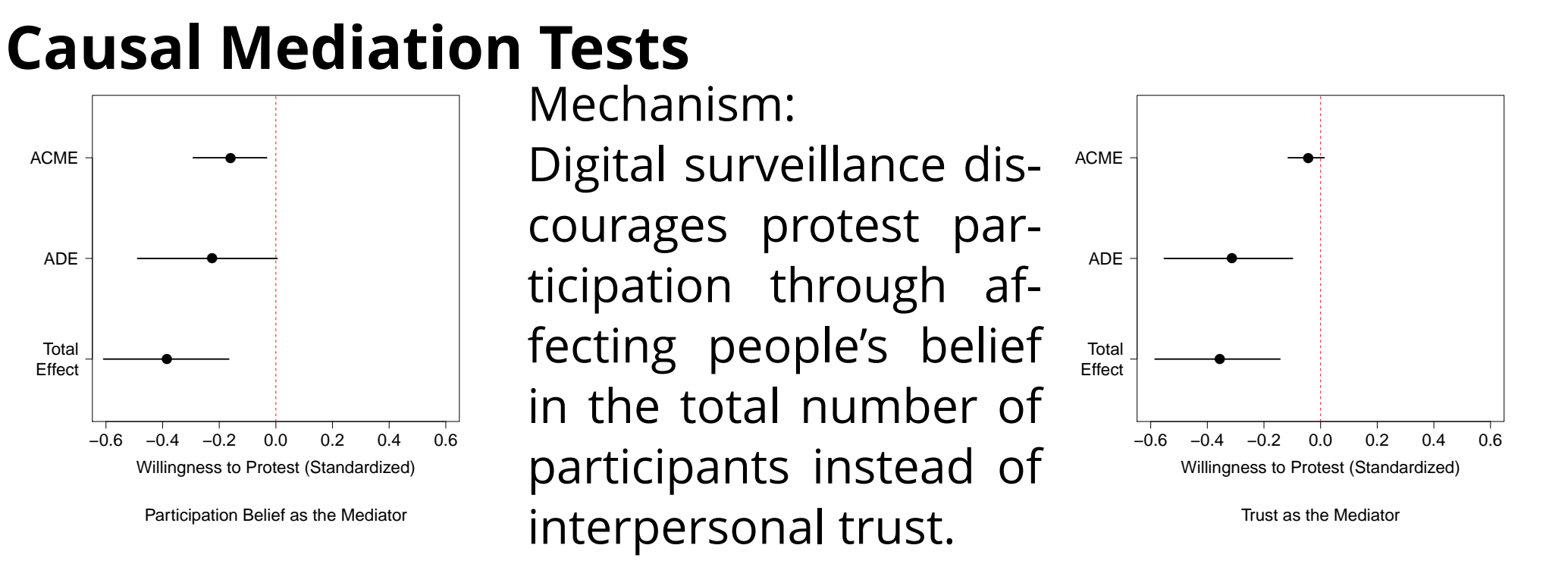
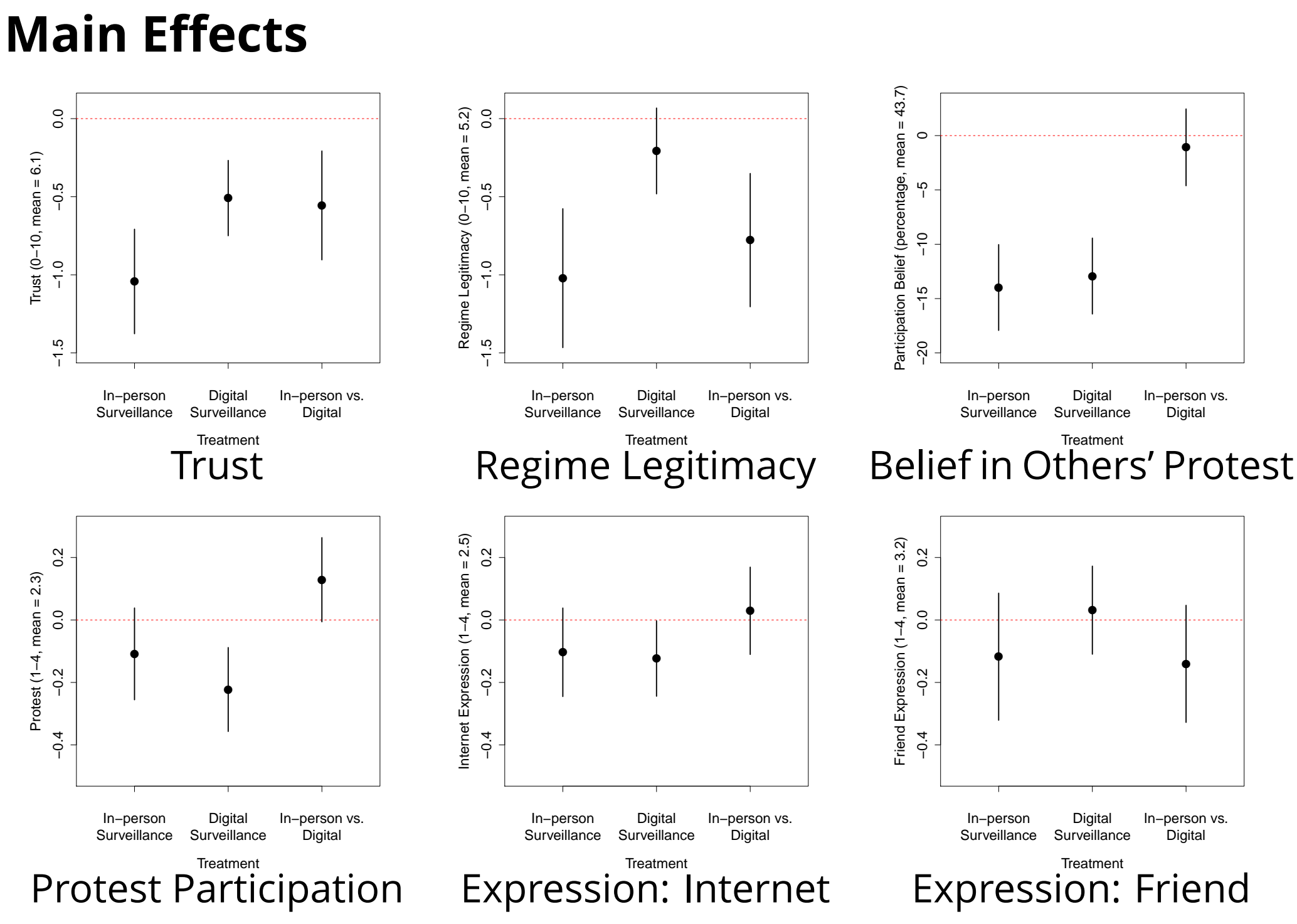
	Within-Subjects Design			Between-Subjects Design		
	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5	Group 6
Pre-test:	Yes	Yes	Yes	--	--	--
Assignment:	Control	Treated	Treated	Control	Treated	Treated
Treatment:	No Info	In-person	Digital	No Info	In-person	Digital
Post-test:	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N:	124	103	126	61	64	61

Treatment Vignettes:

- In-person surveillance:** "The school authorities approached some of the students in your residence hall and promised them some benefits. In exchange, those students agreed to secretly investigate and report the names of the participants."
- Digital surveillance:** "The school authorities have the ability to monitor students' online activities (on social media/apps, websites, forums, etc.) through the university's Internet servers to identify the participants."

Table 2: Balance Check, Within Subject Sample					
	obs.	Control	Human	Digital	p-value
Age	425	20.59	20.67	20.73	0.852
Female (F=1)	431	0.52	0.48	0.51	0.864
Income (1-9)	428	6.69	6.72	6.78	0.909
Income Sat. (0-10)	433	6.68	7.19	6.79	0.179
Party (Yes=1)	434	0.13	0.12	0.11	0.831
Offical Org. (Yes=1)	434	0.47	0.51	0.53	0.542
Stud. Org. (Yes=1)	433	0.64	0.65	0.59	0.521
Commu. Serv. (1-5)	434	2.49	2.56	2.51	0.761
Speech (1-5)	433	3.14	3.15	3.06	0.549
Media: News (1-5)	423	2.06	2.18	2.11	0.476
Media: TV (1-5)	426	3.09	3.03	3.02	0.818
Media: Phone (1-5)	434	4.70	4.74	4.80	0.218
Distrust (0-10)	433	4.38	4.53	3.72	0.051
Diss. Politics (1-5)	432	2.34	2.18	2.25	0.392

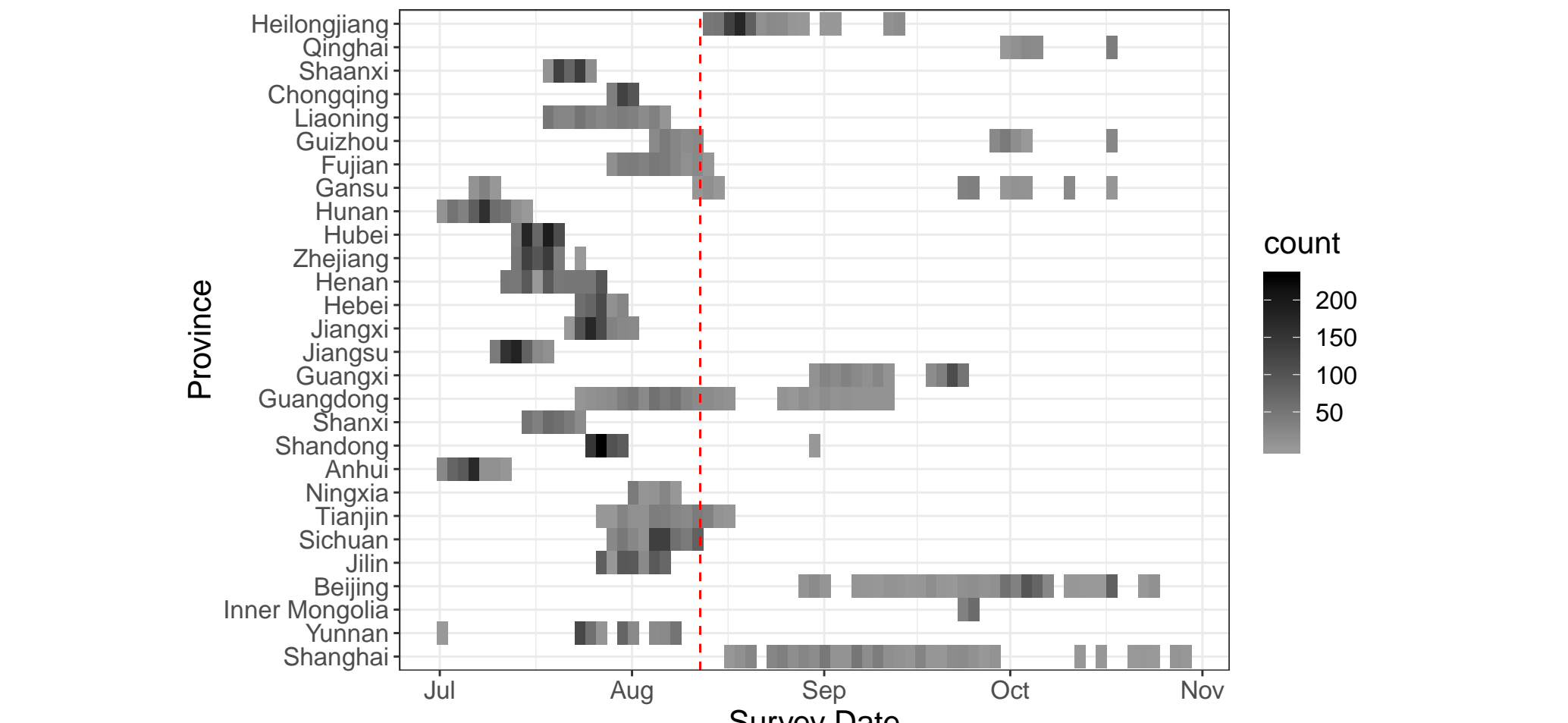
EXPERIMENTAL FINDINGS



REGRESSION DISCONTINUITY IN TIME

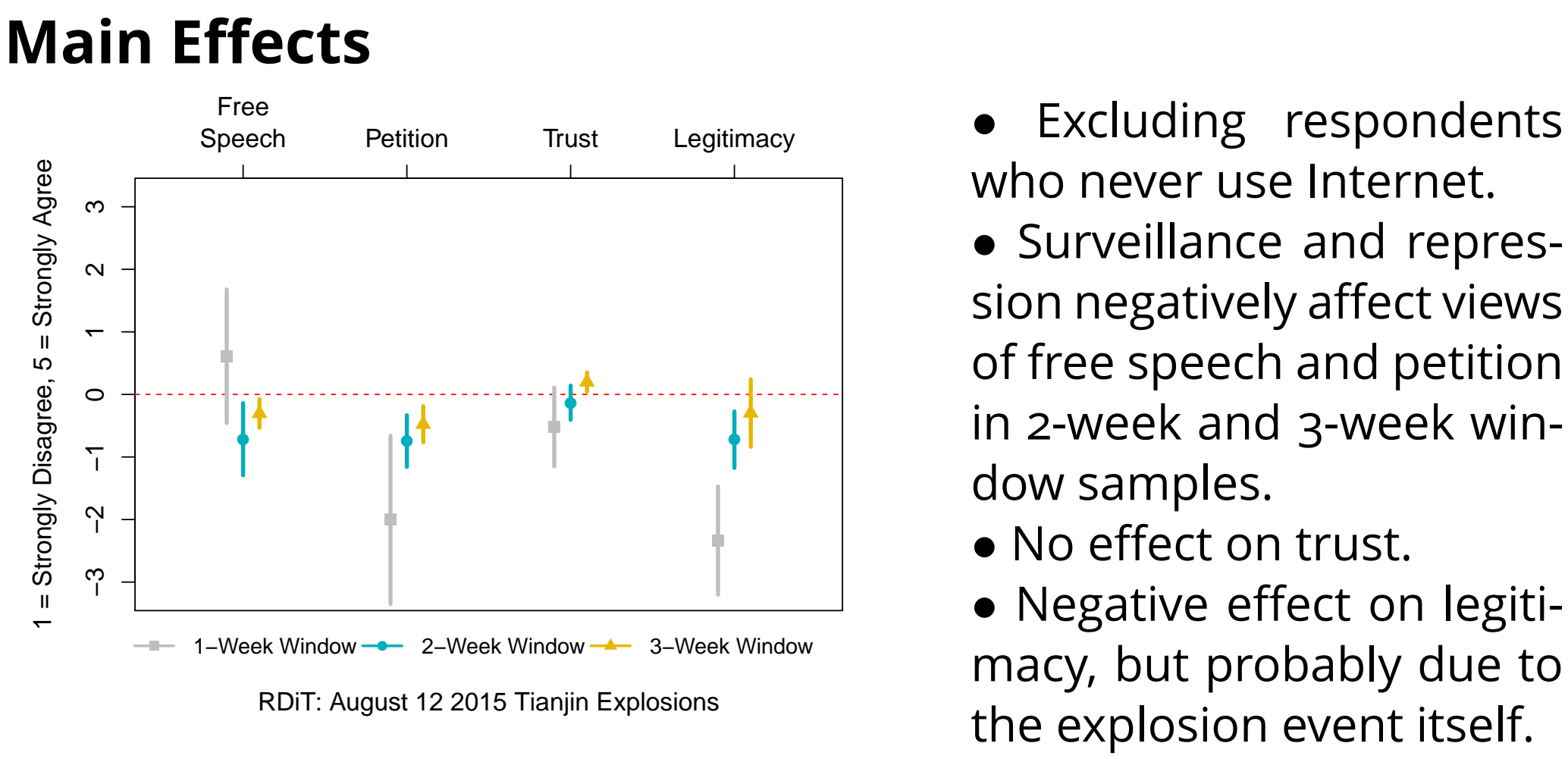


The Port of Tianjin. August 12, 2015. Detonation of about 800 tonnes of ammonium nitrate (336 tons TNT equivalent). 173 people killed, thousands injured. Online surveillance and censorship up tenfold afterward.

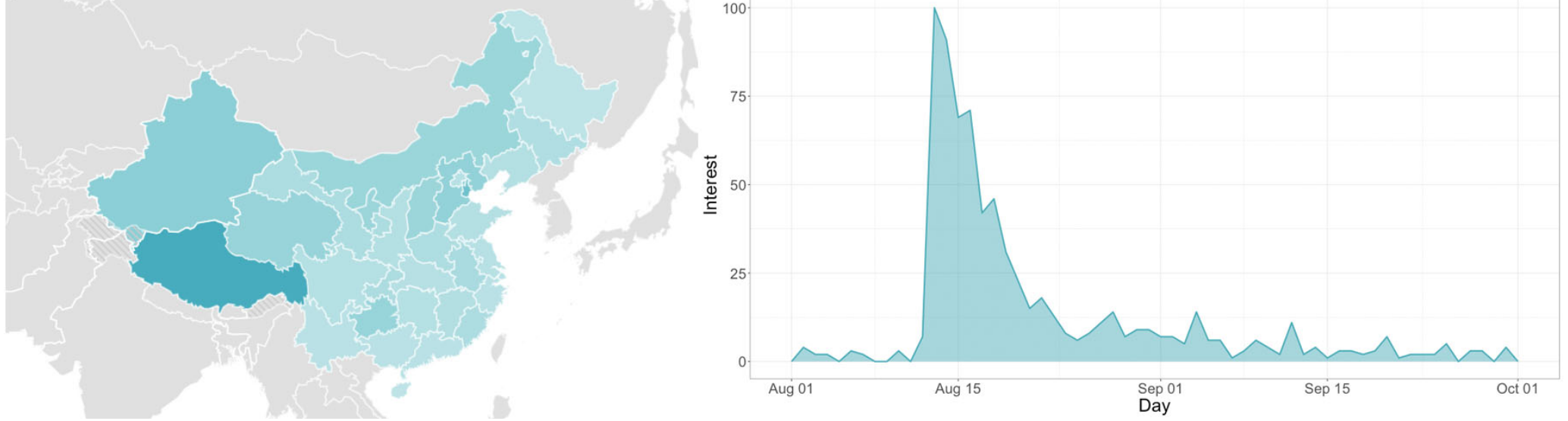


A regression discontinuity design based on the 2015 Chinese General Social Survey to establish external validity.

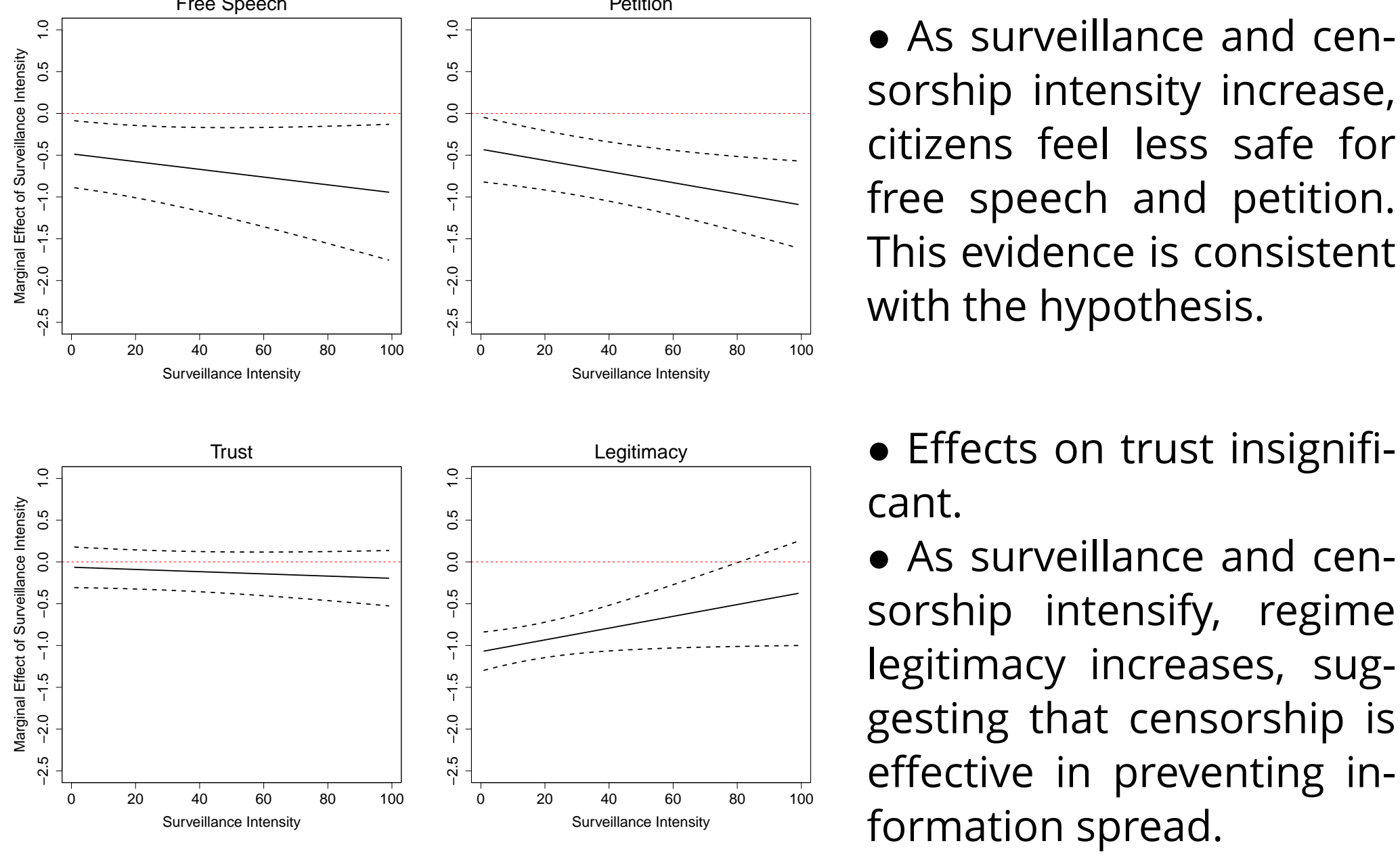
RDIT FINDINGS



Mechanism Tests



Google is blocked in Mainland China. More searches in a province reflect weaker surveillance and censorship. Using the reverse of Google search interests as a proxy for surveillance intensity, controlling for distance to Tianjin.



CONCLUSION

- Experimental and observational evidence suggests that both digital and in-person surveillance are effective in inducing self-censorship and deterring protests.
- Experimental evidence suggests that digital surveillance is less likely to lower trust and reduce regime legitimacy than in-person surveillance.
- The reduced social costs of surveillance in the digital age imply that dictators might be more likely to rely on digital surveillance for social control.