



The Relationship Between Self-Reported Economic Security and Level of Trust in Government



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Introduction

- Lack of trust in the federal government is a substantial issue for the United States especially recently. From a trust level of 73% in 1958 to 22% in 2024, it is clear that much trust has been lost (Bell, 2024).
- A lower level of trust in government is observed in groups with the poorest access to government resources, and this diminished level of trust was expressly noted among older and low-income respondents (Meyer et al., 2013).
- Past research focuses on the more general impact of income inequality rather than economic security (Kettl, 2018; Macdonald, 2020; Benabou, 2000).

Research Questions

- Are Americans who have a low level of self-reported economic security less trusting of the federal government?
- Does this relationship differ between those who identify as Democrats and Republicans?

Methods

Sample

- Respondents (n=8,188) were drawn from the American National Election Studies Survey of 2020, a nationally representative sample of non-institutionalized adults in the U.S.

Measures

- Self-reported feelings of financial security were measured with the question "So far as you and your family are concerned, how worried are you about your current financial situation?" Possible responses ranged from 1(Not at all worried) to 5(Extremely worried).
- The level of trust in the federal government was measured with the question "How often can you trust the federal government to do what is right?" Possible responses ranged from 1(Never) to 5(Always).
- A binary trust variable was created by coding a level of trust from 1 to 3 as 0(no trust) and a level of 4 or 5 to 1(trust).

Results

Multivariate

- Logistic regression analyses showed that trust in the federal government is not significantly associated with levels of economic security.
- Political party affiliation is a more influential predictor of trust in government, rather than self-reported feelings of economic security.
- Logistic regression analyses showed that after accounting for race, income level, economic security level, and gender, trust in the federal government is significantly associated with party affiliation. (O.R. 1.596, CI 1.29-1.98, $p < 0.001$)
- The odds for trusting the federal government is 1.596 times higher for Republicans than for Democrats, holding all other variables fixed. (O.R. 1.596, C.I. 1.29-1.98, $p < 0.001$)

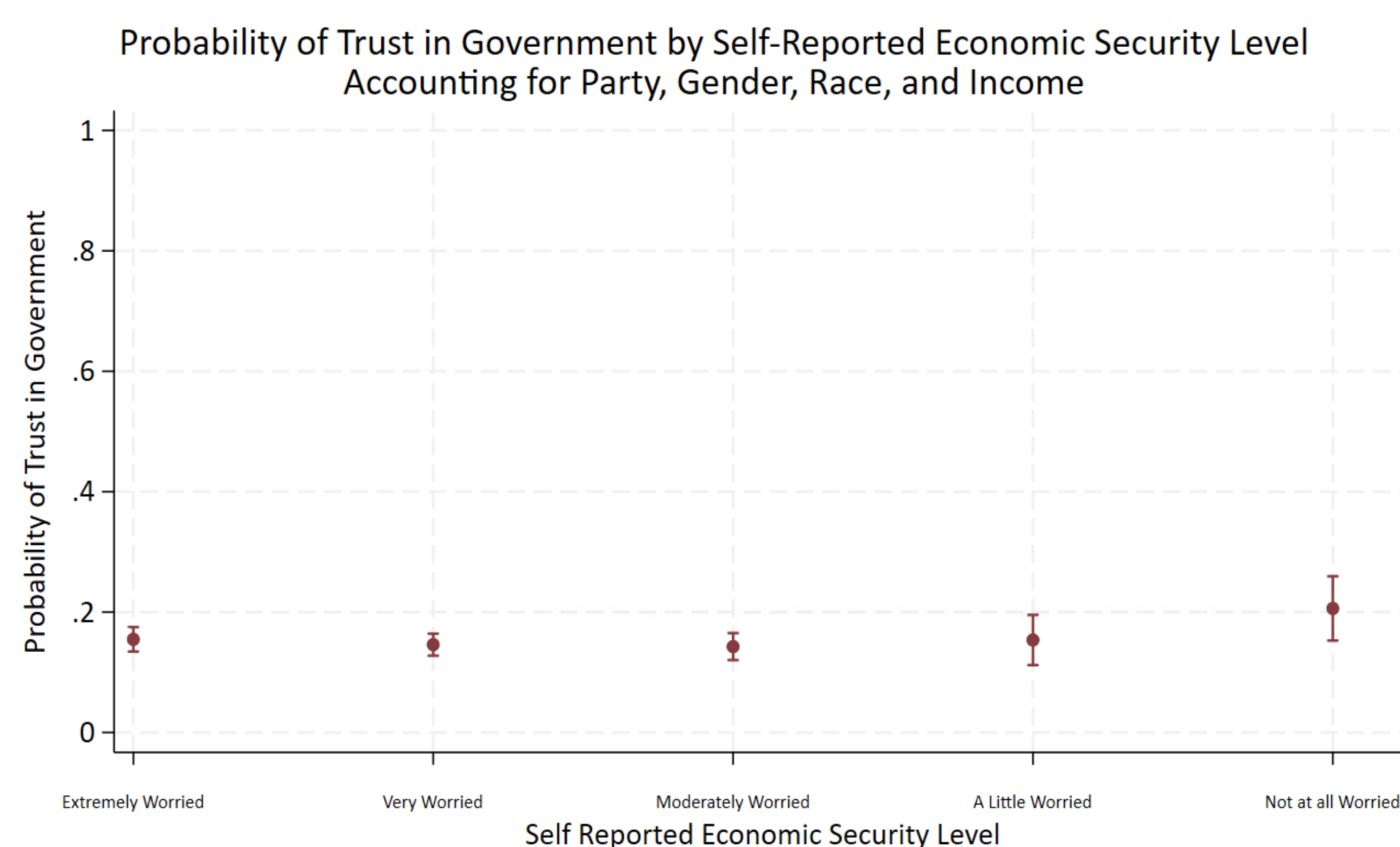


Figure 1: Probability of Trust in Government by Self-Reported Economic Security Level Accounting for Party, Gender, Race, and Income

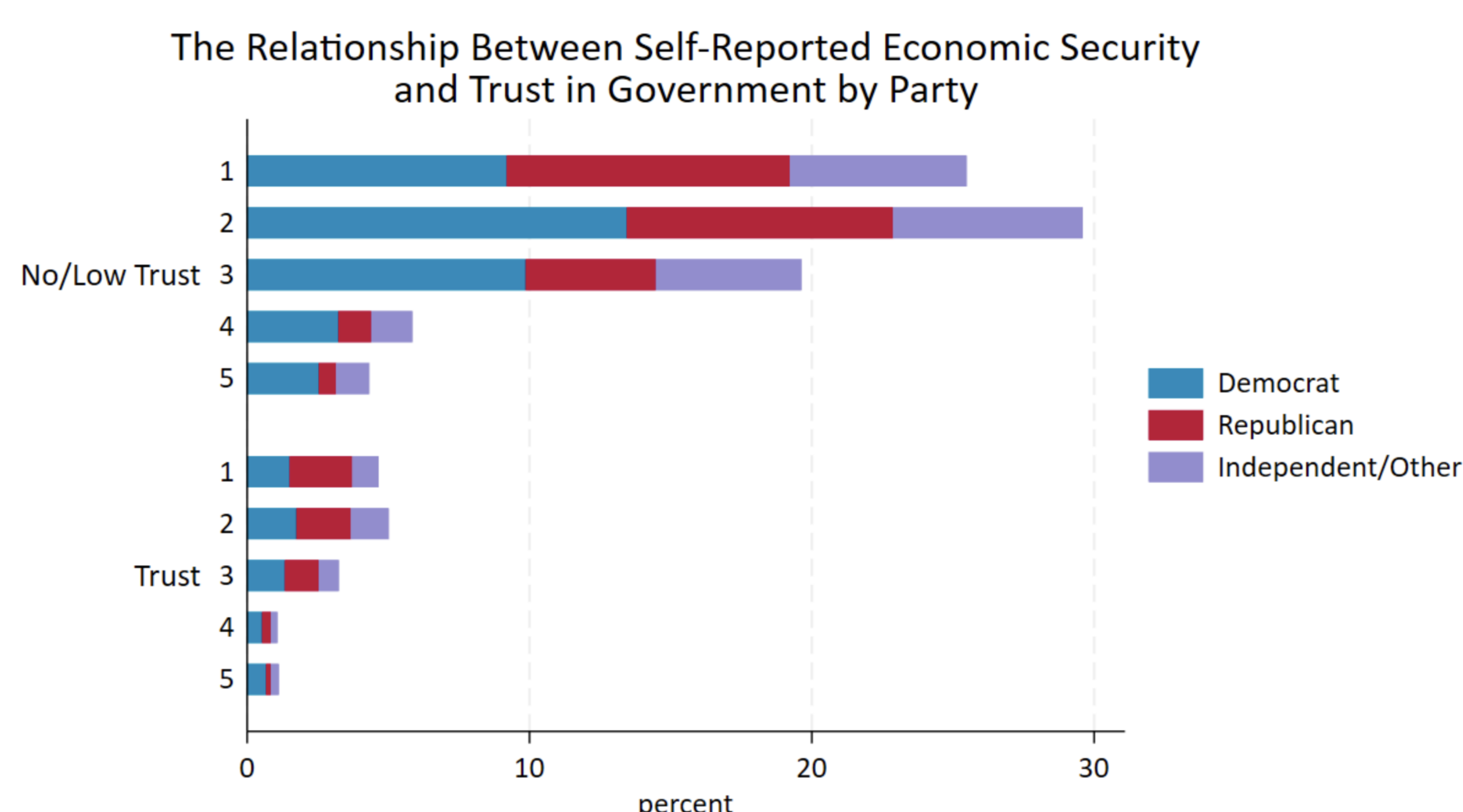


Figure 2: The Relationship Between Self-Reported Economic Security and Trust in Government by Party

Discussion

- Those with lower self-reported economic security do not have a significantly different level of trust compared to those with self-reported high economic security.
- Rather than self-reported economic security, party is the significant predictor of trust in government. Republicans, as of pre-2020 election, had more trust in federal government than Democrats.
- Further research is needed to determine the role of other covariates such as who the respondent voted for in 2020 and whether they specifically supported former President Trump.

References

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