



How do Identity Characteristics affect Trust in Government?

Brady Thaxton

Political Science, University of New Hampshire, Durham, NH 03824



Introduction and Thesis

Public trust in government plays a critical role in shaping democratic stability, civic engagement, and political behavior. However, levels of trust are not evenly distributed across the American electorate. Race and partisan identity have historically influenced perceptions of government, especially during periods of political and social upheaval.

I predicted that identity characteristics would be very strong predictors of trust in government.

Using data from the 2020 ANES, this project examines how trust in government varies by race and party identification. By analyzing patterns across demographic and partisan groups, this study highlights the complex, and at times fragmented, relationship between individual identities and attitudes toward government authority. American democracy in the contemporary era.

Methodology

Data Source: 2020 American National Election Study (ANES), a nationally representative survey.

Variable Recoding: Trust in government collapsed into three categories (*Trust Most of the Time*, *Trust Half the Time*, *Trust Rarely*); Race categorized into six groups (White, Black, Hispanic, Asian/Native Hawaiian, Native American/Alaskan, Multiple Race [Non-Hispanic]); Party ID simplified into Democrat, Republican, Neither. **Sample Restriction:** Excluded respondents with missing data on trust, race, education, party ID, or age.

Analysis: Proportion tables and three-way cross-tabulations (Party ID × Race × Trust in Government); Pearson's Chi-Square tests and Cramér's V calculated to assess significance and association strength.

Software: Analyses and visual aids produced in RStudio.

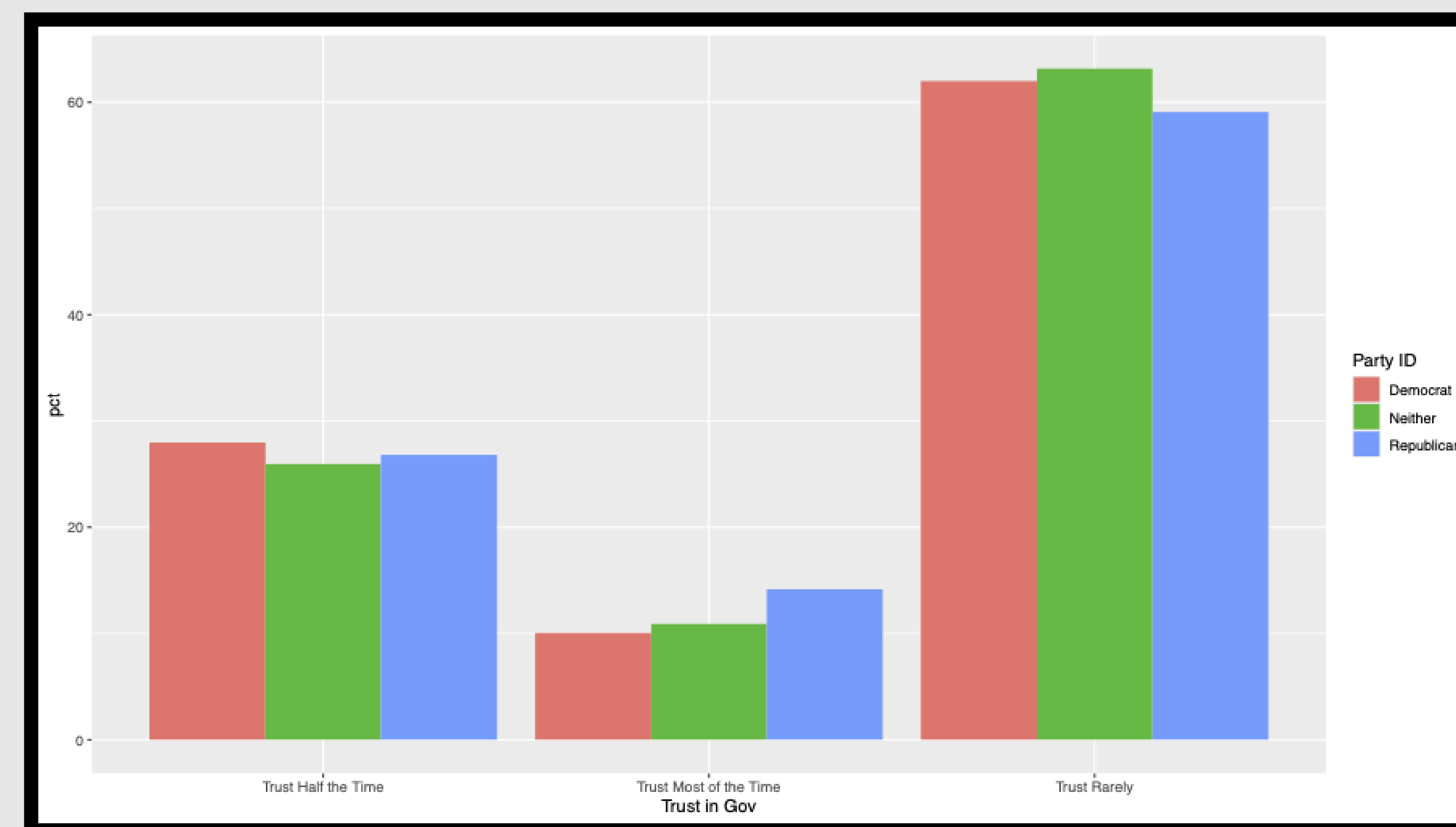
Results

Analysis of the 2020 ANES data reveals that both race and party identification are statistically associated with trust in government ($p < 0.001$ for both). However, the strength of these associations is not nearly as significant as my thesis proposed, with Cramér's V values of 0.082 for race and 0.107 for Party ID.

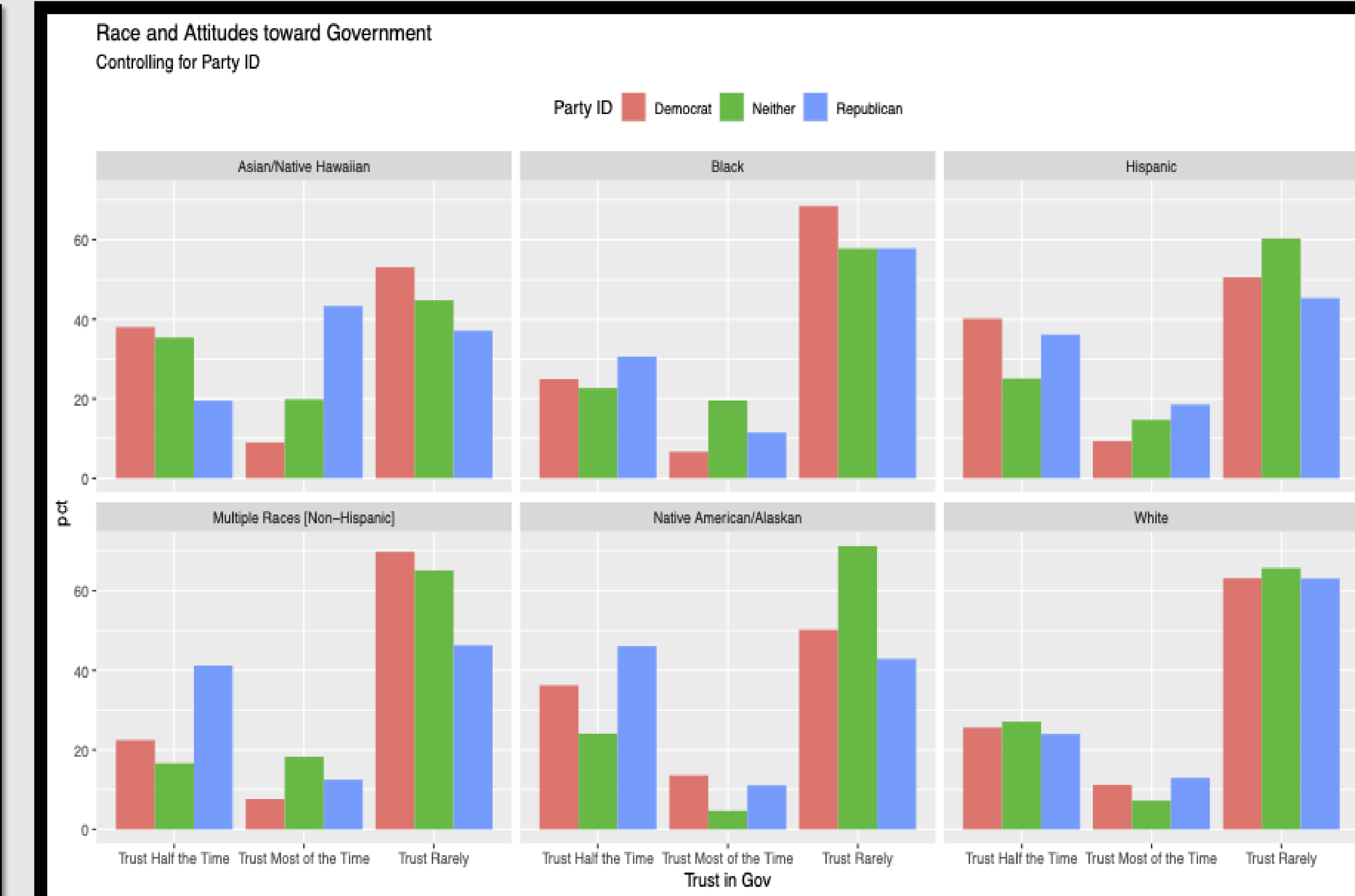
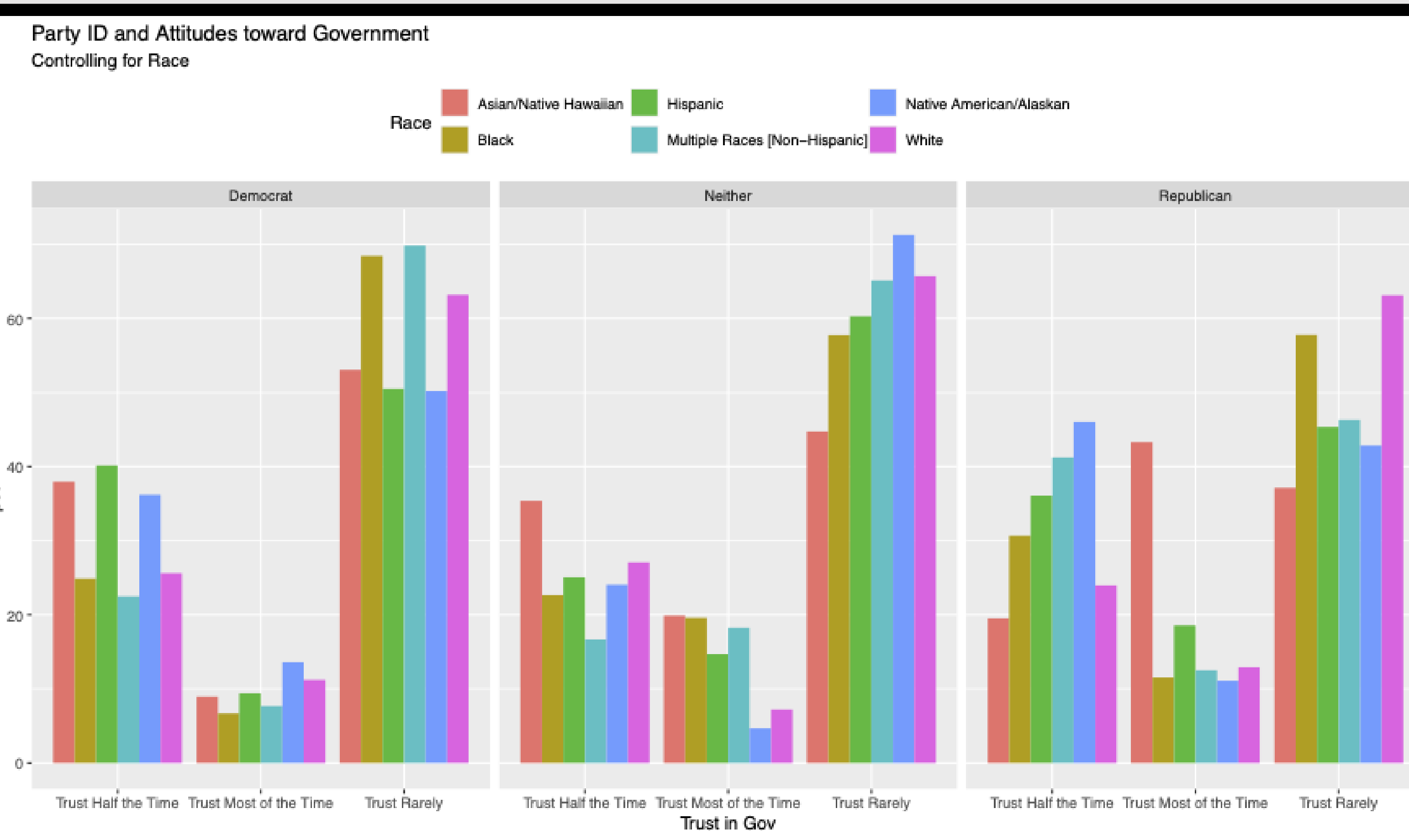
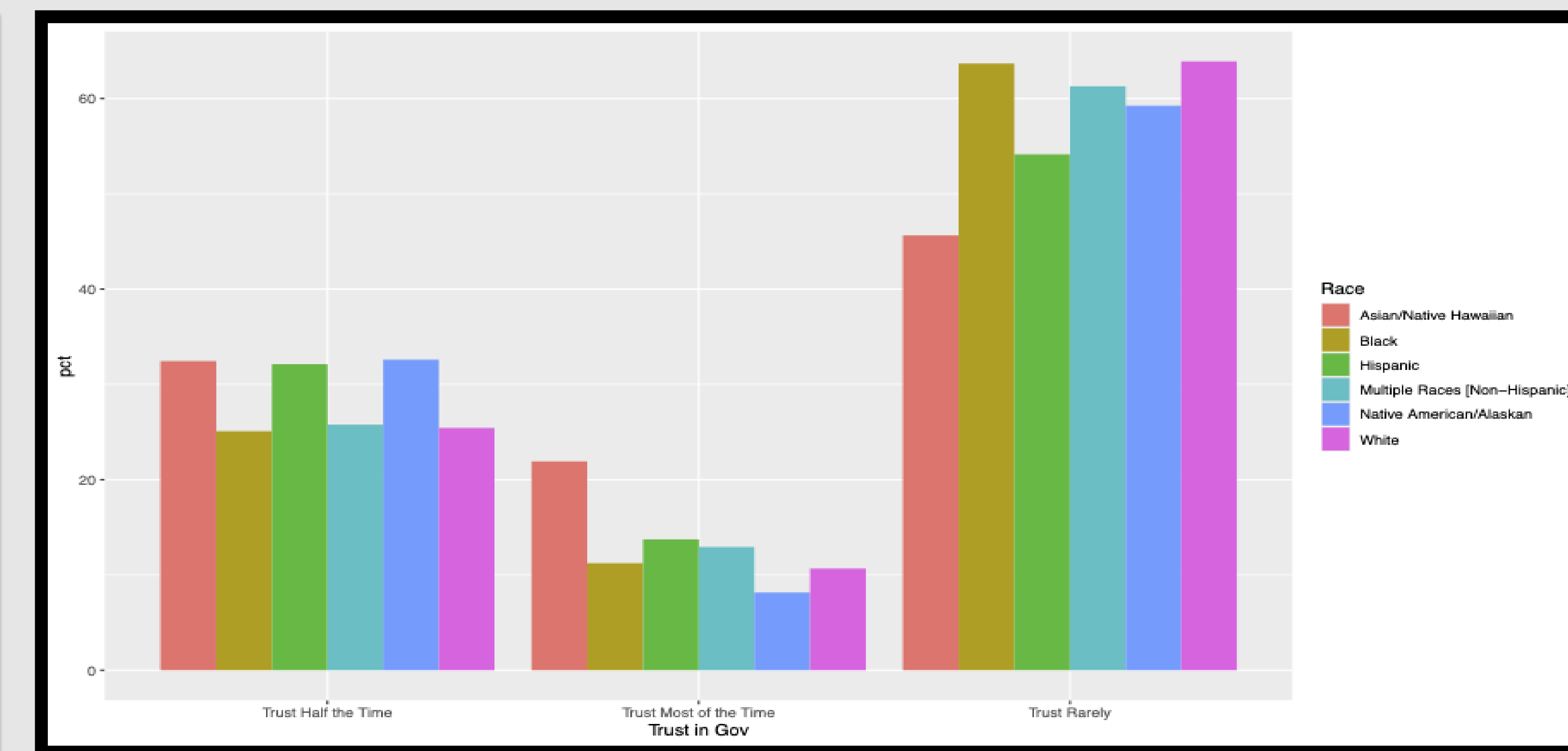
This suggests that while both Race and Party ID influence trust, neither variable serves as a strong predictor on its own. Visualizations show that trust levels are moderately higher among Democrats compared to Republicans and those identifying with neither party. Trust in government tends to be lower overall among Black respondents, but significant variability exists within all racial groups. While trust in government among white people tends to be higher.

Visual Aids

Trust and Party ID



Trust and Race



Conclusions

While race and party identification are statistically associated with trust in government, the overall strength of these relationships is significantly weaker than my thesis alluded to. This indicates that trust in government cannot be fully explained by demographic or partisan identities alone.

While consistent with prior research in finding statistically significant relationships between identity and trust, this study reveals even weaker associations (Cramér's V = 0.082 for race; 0.107 for party ID) than the literature contends, highlighting the growing complexity of political trust in contemporary America.

The complex dynamic of the 2020 election year could be indicative of the data mirroring the literature in a lesser magnitude.

Future Research

With the division that resulted from the first Trump candidacy and the division of the Republican as pro or anti-Trump, I propose that the data might show that those who traditionally identified as Republican could have declined to do so based on the party division. Additionally, I predict that the COVID pandemic may skew these numbers in a way that previous ANES data may not show. Politics then were so contentious and different from the contemporary political sphere. I would investigate the change in those who identify as Republican and as neither.

Going forward, I would investigate the change in party ID from the previous ANES. A longer analysis would also include two other variables that I found were statistically significant, age and education.

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