

# The Relationship Between Social Trust and Welfare Support in the United States

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## Introduction

- Social trust has been theorized as an evolved tool that maximizes cooperative survival success (Peterson, et al. 2012)
- Some findings point to social trust being increased by government economic regulation (Aghion, et al., 2010)
- In a survey of various democratic European countries, it was concluded that reduced selectivity in healthcare coverage is correlated to increased social trust (Mewes, 2024)
- There has been research done on the populations of the United States as relates to redistributive ideology, finding that many views on redistributive governance are informed by perceived effort by recipients rather than measurable benefit to the country or economy (Fong, 2001)
- There is evidence for a relationship between high trust societies and less extreme political views, as well as low trust societies and more extreme political views (Pitlik, et al. 2021)

## Methods

### Sample

The General Social Survey Release 2, or GSS R2, was released in 2024. It is a survey of people eighteen years and older that are living in non-institutionalized households in the United States and was completed by NORC at the University of Chicago. 3,309 participants had data collected through in-person interviews, web questionnaires, and phone calls.

### Measures

Trustworthiness of others was measured with: “generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can’t be too careful in dealing with people”

Recoded to:

Can’t trust = 1

Depends = 2

Can trust = 3

Skipped = NA

Support for welfare was quantified with the question

“Some people think that the government in Washington should do everything possible to improve the standard of living of all poor Americans; they are at Point 1 on this card. Other people think it is not the government’s responsibility, and that each person should take care of himself/herself; they are at Point 5. Where would you place yourself on this scale?”

## Research Questions

What is the relationship between social trust and views regarding support for government welfare in the United States?  
 Does this relationship diverge from trends in other countries?  
 Do sex, party affiliation, and/or perceived fairness of others moderate or confound this relationship?

## Results

### Univariate

- The most common response was 3, indicating a neutral stance on government changes to helping poor people  
 → 3 (neutral) made up 42.8% of non-excluded responses (fig. 1)

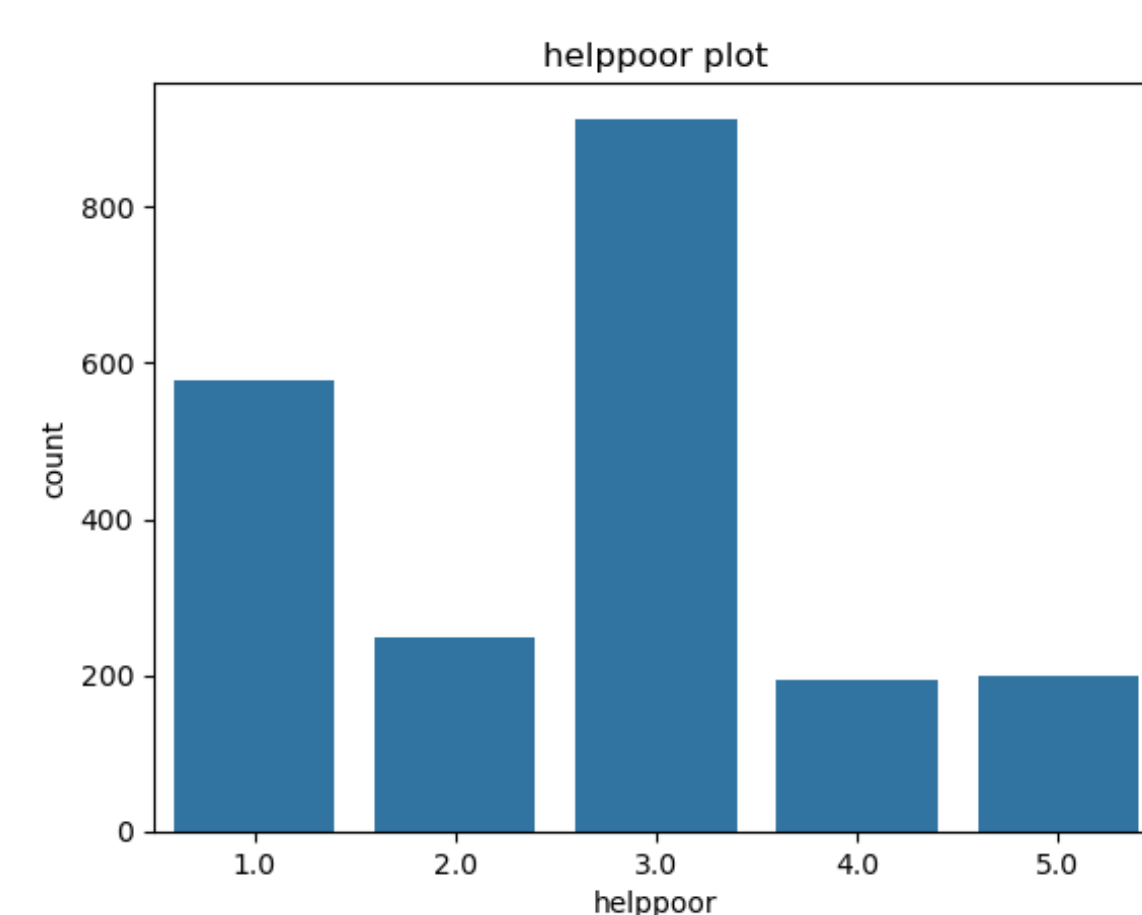


Figure 1: Distribution of beliefs about government assistance of poor people, with 1 indicating strong support for decreased assistance and 5 indicating strong support for increased assistance

### Bivariate

- An ANOVA test was used to test the effect of social trust on welfare support
- No significant effect was found of trust response value on helppoor response value (R-Squared = 0.002)
- No significant differences found between groups of trust response values

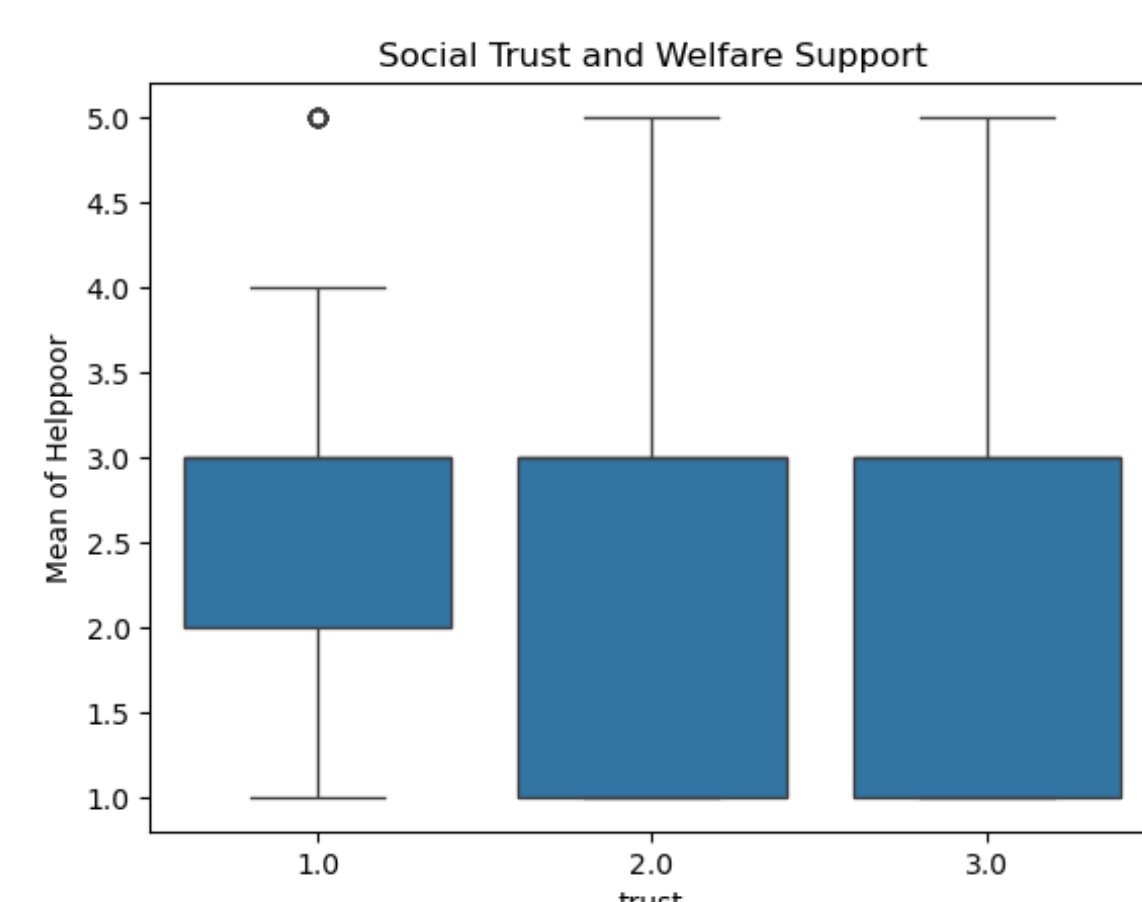


Figure 2: Graph of social trust and welfare support spread

### Multivariate

- The relationship between trust and helppoor, which were found to be insignificant through ANOVA, were further investigated by controlling for possible confounding or mediating variables
- Sex, perceived fairness of others, and party affiliation were incorporated, and none of them altered the insignificance of the relationship between trust and helppoor

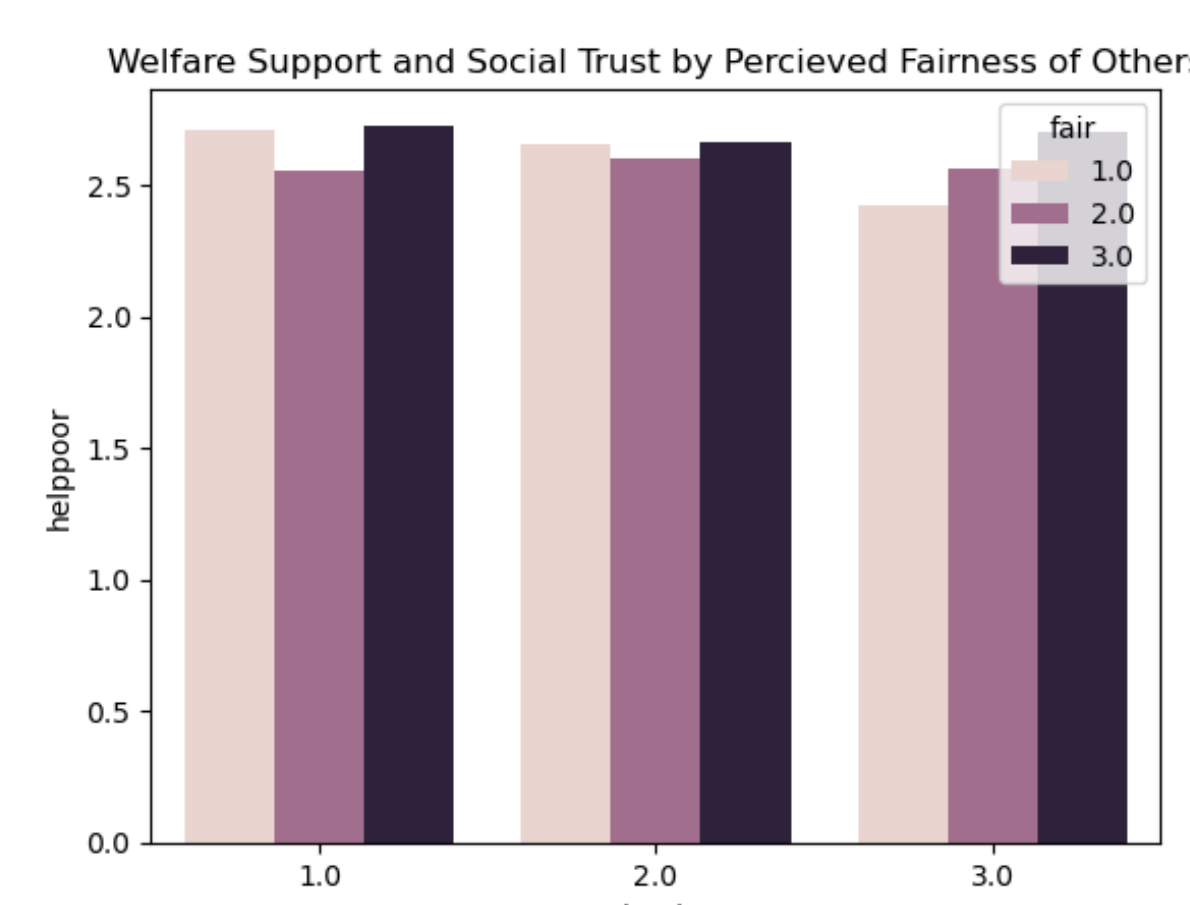


Figure 3: Graph of social trust and welfare support by perceived fairness of others

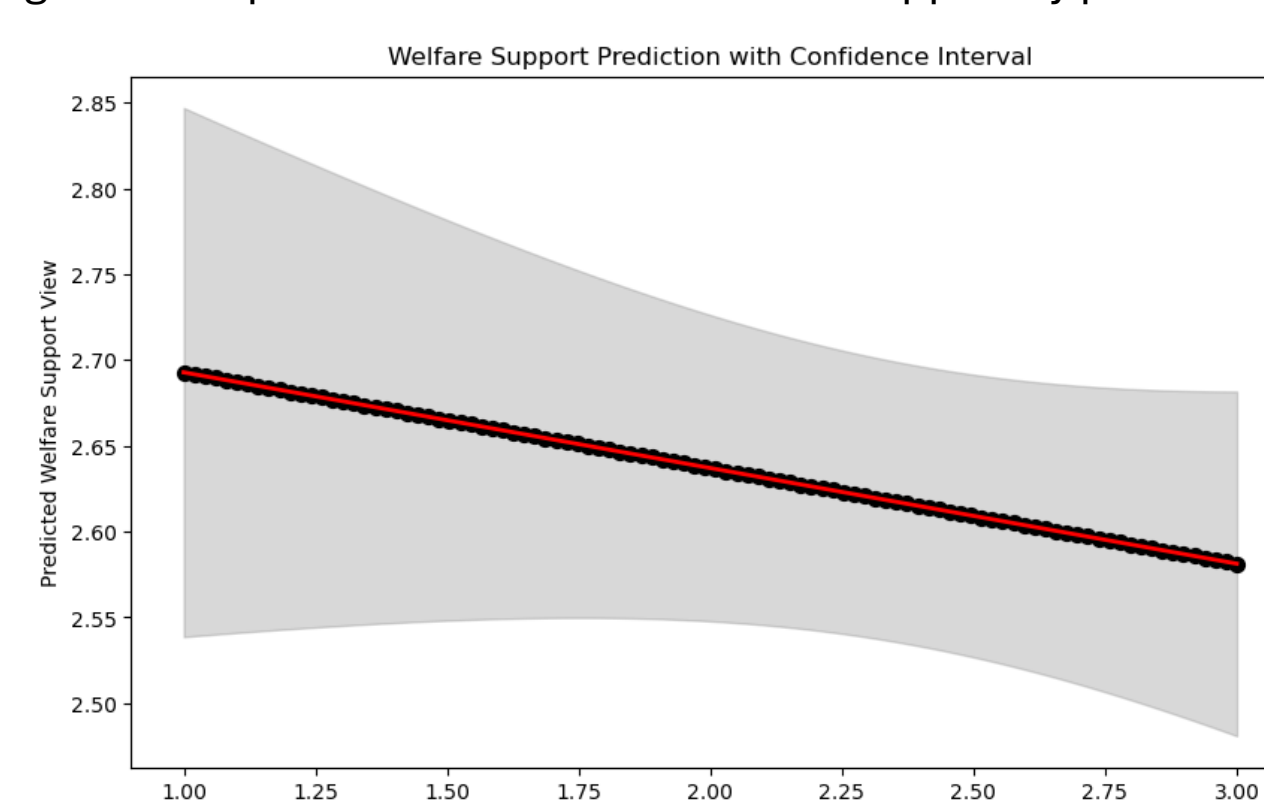


Figure 4: Multiple linear regression of trust and helppoor

## Discussion

- Implication: the United States population does **not** exhibit a relationship between views towards changes to government support of poor people and social trust
- This could be understood as a flaw of the metric of social trust (Topre & Lolle, 2011)
- The United States is uniquely polarized, which could have an effect on the altruistic views of its inhabitants
- Party affiliation was not a significant confounding variable in the relationship, so this is not just a representation of party differences, but one of American society as a whole

### Citations

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Pitlik H, Rode M (2021) Radical Distrust: Are Economic Policy Attitudes Tempered by Social Trust? Social Indicators Research 158:485–506.

Topre L, Lolle H (2011) Identifying Social Trust in Cross-Country Analysis: Do We Really Measure the Same? Social Indicators Research 103:481–500.