

The Association Between Naturalized Citizenship Status and Governmental Trust in the United States

Sumedha Mahesh, QAC 201, Wesleyan University



Introduction

- Studies have examined the relationship between naturalized citizenship and governmental trust identifying discrimination and assimilation factors to have effects (Adman, Stromblad, 2015; Tyrberg, 2024).
 - Varying opinions with some scholars concluding naturalized citizens have higher levels of trust and others concluding lower levels (Nowrasteh & Forrester, 2019; Wilkes & Wu, 2019).
- Past studies often focus on immigrants as a whole, making it hard to isolate the views of naturalized citizens (Nowrasteh & Forrester, 2019; Wilkes & Wu, 2019).
 - Naturalized citizen's views is imperative to understanding US voters' relationship with the government
- Scholars have examined this relationship in countries such as Switzerland, Canada, etc., but there is a lack of literature on US society (Adman, Stromblad, 2015; Tyrberg, 2024; Aptekar, 2012; Aremu-Ogundeji, 2025).

Research Questions

- Is there a relationship between institutional trust and path of citizenship (naturalized versus US-born)?
- Does this association change, when factoring in other variables that might affect institutional trust?

Methods

Sample

- U.S.-born adults who answered demographic and governmental trust questions (N = 5,247) were drawn from pre- and post-election interviews of the 2024 American National Election Studies (ANES) Time Series.
- ANES is a nationally representative survey of adult American voters, including US-born and naturalized citizens.

Measures

- Naturalization Status:
 - Support was measured using ANES item: "In what state, country, or territory were you born?" Possible responses were 1 (A US State), 2 (Puerto Rico), 3 (Another US Territory), and 4 (Another Country). These were then coded into binary variables.
 - Recoded: US-born = 1 (includes individuals who responded 1, 2, or 3), naturalized = 0 (individuals who responded 4); "N/A" and missing responses" excluded.
- Governmental Trust:
 - Trust was measured using ANES item, "How often can you trust the federal government in Washington to do what is right?"
 - Responses ranged from 1 (always) to 5 (never).
 - Recoded: high trust = 1 (individuals who responded w/ 1-3), low trust (responses 4&5)

Results

Univariate

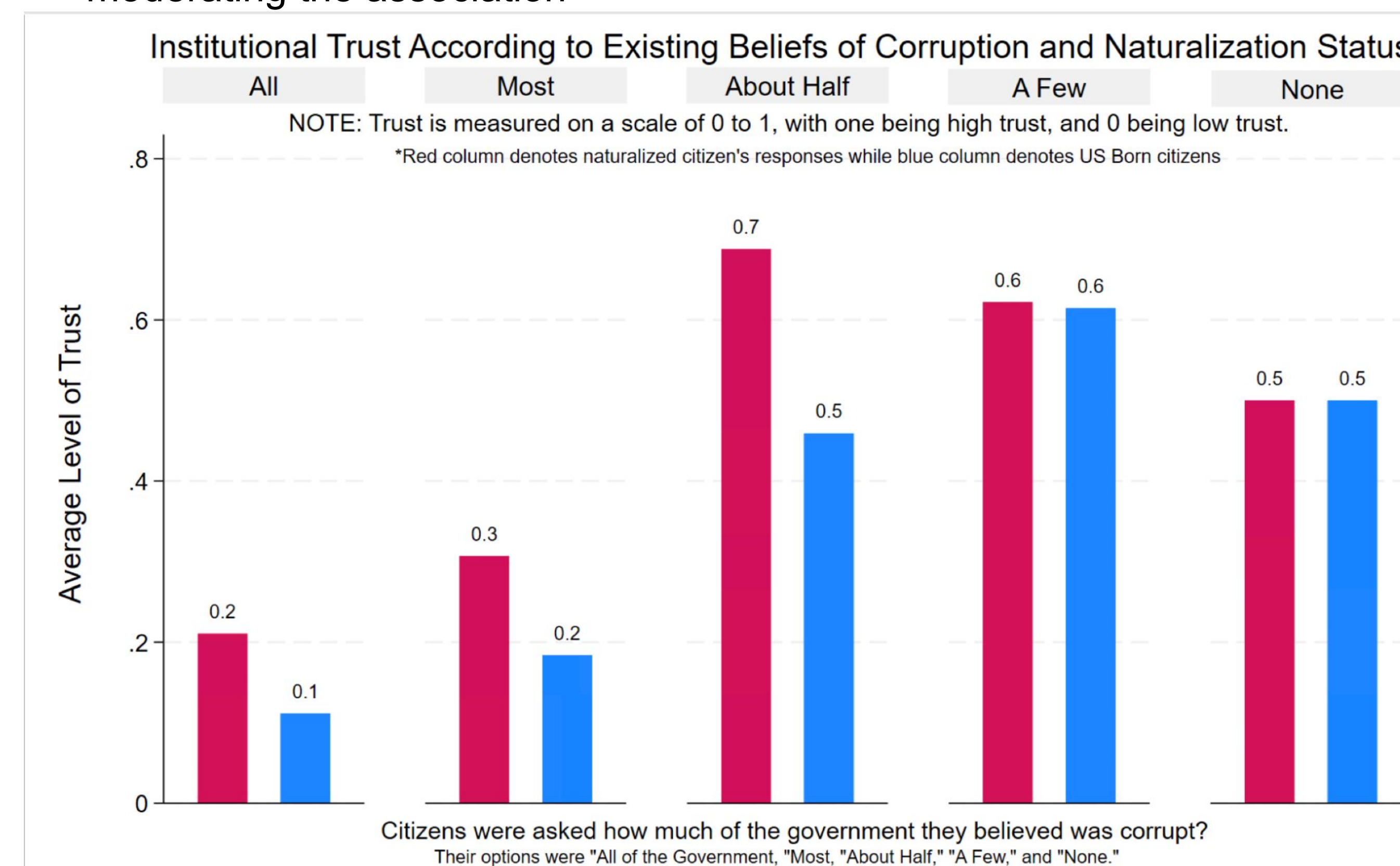
- **1.16% of US-citizens** "always" trusted the US government to do what is right while the majority, **41.89%** trusted the government "some of the time."
- Naturalization Status: US-born (90.79%), Naturalized (9.21%)

Bivariate

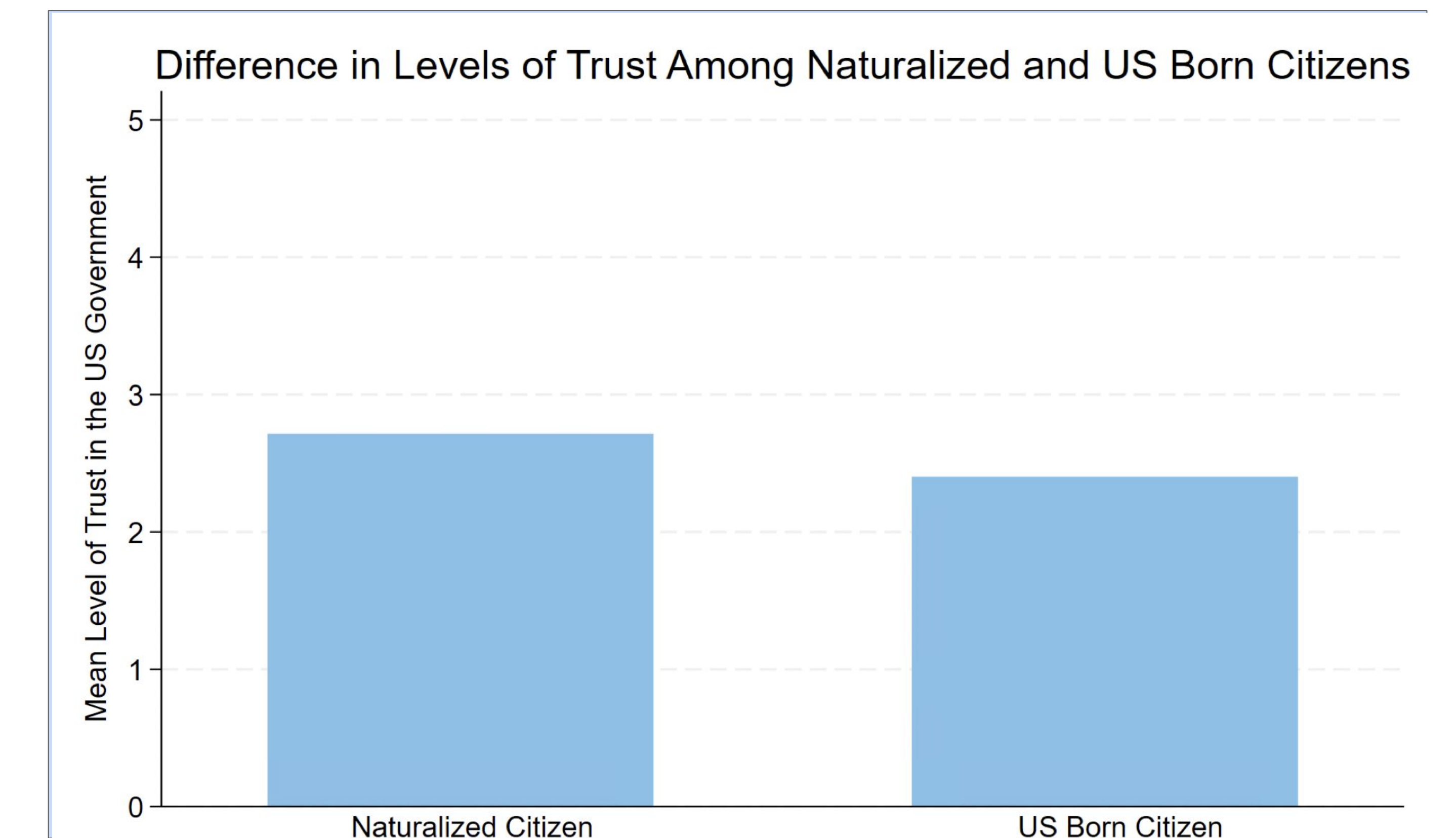
- Chi-square analysis showed that **US-born status was significantly associated with governmental trust**, $\chi^2(1) = 33.12$, $p < 0.001$, $p=0.000$
- Support was higher among naturalized citizens:
 - Levels of "High Trust" - 41.17% (US-Born), 54.79% (Naturalized)
- Post-hoc tests indicated there was a significant negative association between US-born status and governmental trust
 - Association is weak with a value of -0.08

Multivariate

- Logistic regression showed that **US-Born citizens were significantly less likely to have high levels of trust in the government** compared to naturalized citizens after controlling for corruption beliefs
- Average level of trust rises among both groups as corruption belief decreases until the "A Few" response (Figure 1).
 - As corruption belief decreases, citizenship status has less of an effect, moderating the association



- Logistic Regression: US Born citizens are 39 percent less likely to have high levels of governmental trust as opposed to naturalized citizens, holding corruption believes constant
- Corruption: Individuals believing there to be low levels of governmental corruption are 2.37 times higher odds of trusting the government
 - Indicates that corruption weakens the association between naturalization status and governmental trust due to it's strong association with governmental trust



- (Figure 2). Indicates there to be a small gap in governmental trust between naturalized and US Born citizens
- **US-Born citizens have lower average rates of governmental trust** compared to naturalized citizens

Discussion

- **Naturalization status significantly affects an individual's trust in the government**, and this relationship remains after controlling for corruption beliefs
- **Decrease in corruption beliefs stabilizes differences in governmental trust b/w naturalized and US-born citizens**, indicating that corruption-belief partially affects governmental trust among citizens
 - Naturalization status still remains significant
- Due to a lack of cross-sectional data, it is hard to analyze the evolution of governmental trust, pinpointing when governmental trust starts to decrease among citizens
 - Future research: examine if time lived in a country potentially affects governmental trust over time
- Future research could investigate the mechanisms through which naturalization status affects governmental trust
 - Ex. prior political experiences, exposure to different regimes, etc.

References

Adman, P., & Strömblad, P. (2015). Political trust as modest expectations: Exploring immigrants' falling confidence in Swedish political institutions. *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, 5(3), 107. <https://doi.org/10.1515/njmr-2015-0007>

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Wilkes, R., & Wu, C. (2019). Immigration, discrimination, and trust: A simply complex relationship. *Frontiers in Sociology*, 4(32). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2019.00032>