



The Association Between Trust in Media and Levels of Education in the U.S.

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Introduction

- Education is positively related to greater political participation and conscientious media engagement. (Goubin et al., 2025, Jha 2023).
- Trust in media is directly related to the health of a democracy as lower trust in the media is correlated with higher levels of political polarization, misinformation, and anti-intellectualism. (Holcomb 2024, Ladd 2010, Blankenship & Stewart 2019).
- Education is both negatively and positively associated with trust in media across studies, however, recent studies point towards positive association. (Tsfati 2014, Gronke 2007, Knudsen 2022).

Research Questions

- Are voters who have higher levels of degree attainment more likely to have trust in the media compared to those who have lower levels of degree attainment?
- Does this relationship differ between those who voted for Trump or for Harris in the 2024 presidential election?

Methods

Sample

- Respondents (n=4964) were drawn from the 2024 American National Election Survey (ANES), a survey representative of the total eligible voting population of the United States.

Measures

- Final Level of Education* was measured by categorizing all respondents into five main categories of: Less than high school, High school, Some post high school, Bachelors, Graduate
- Degree of Trust in Media* was measured with the question "In general, how much trust and confidence do you have in the news media when it comes to reporting the news fully, accurately, and fairly?" Possible responses ranged from 1 (none) to 5 (a great deal).
- Presidential Vote* was measured via categorizing whether voters voted for Trump or Harris, with independent candidates being categorized as other, and non-voters as N/A.

Results

Bivariate

- A third of the voters had some post-HS schooling and a quarter of the voters had a bachelors degree.
- ANOVA analysis showed that voter's media trust differed across final levels of education ($F = 13.42$).
- The majority of voters have moderate to little trust in the media, despite varying levels of education in the 2024 election (Fig. 1).
- Linear regression analysis showed that voter's political leaning and ultimate presidential vote had a statistically significant impact on trust in media ($\text{Beta} = -1.14$, $T = -36.79$, $P = 0.001$).

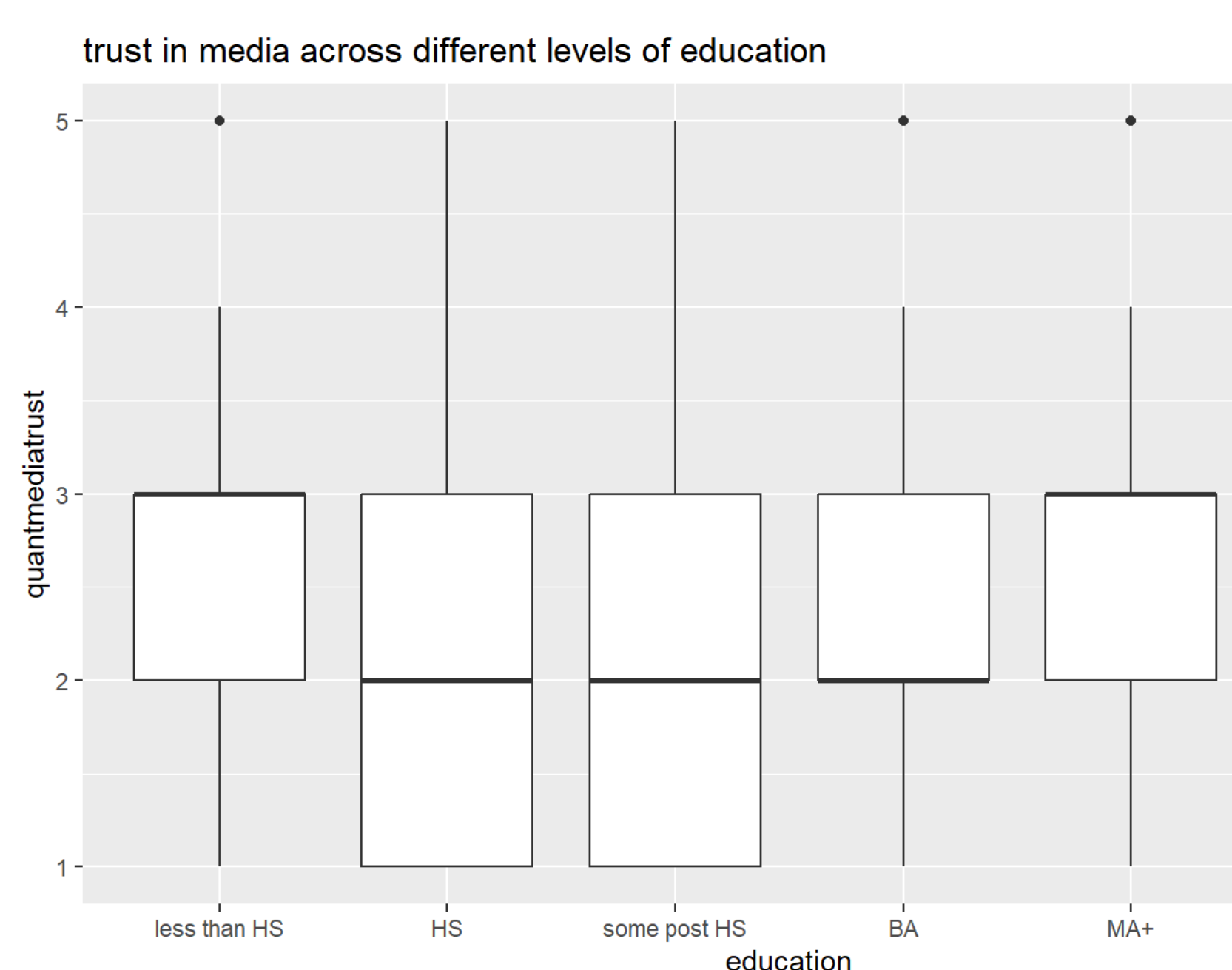


Figure 1: Degrees of trust in media across different levels of education

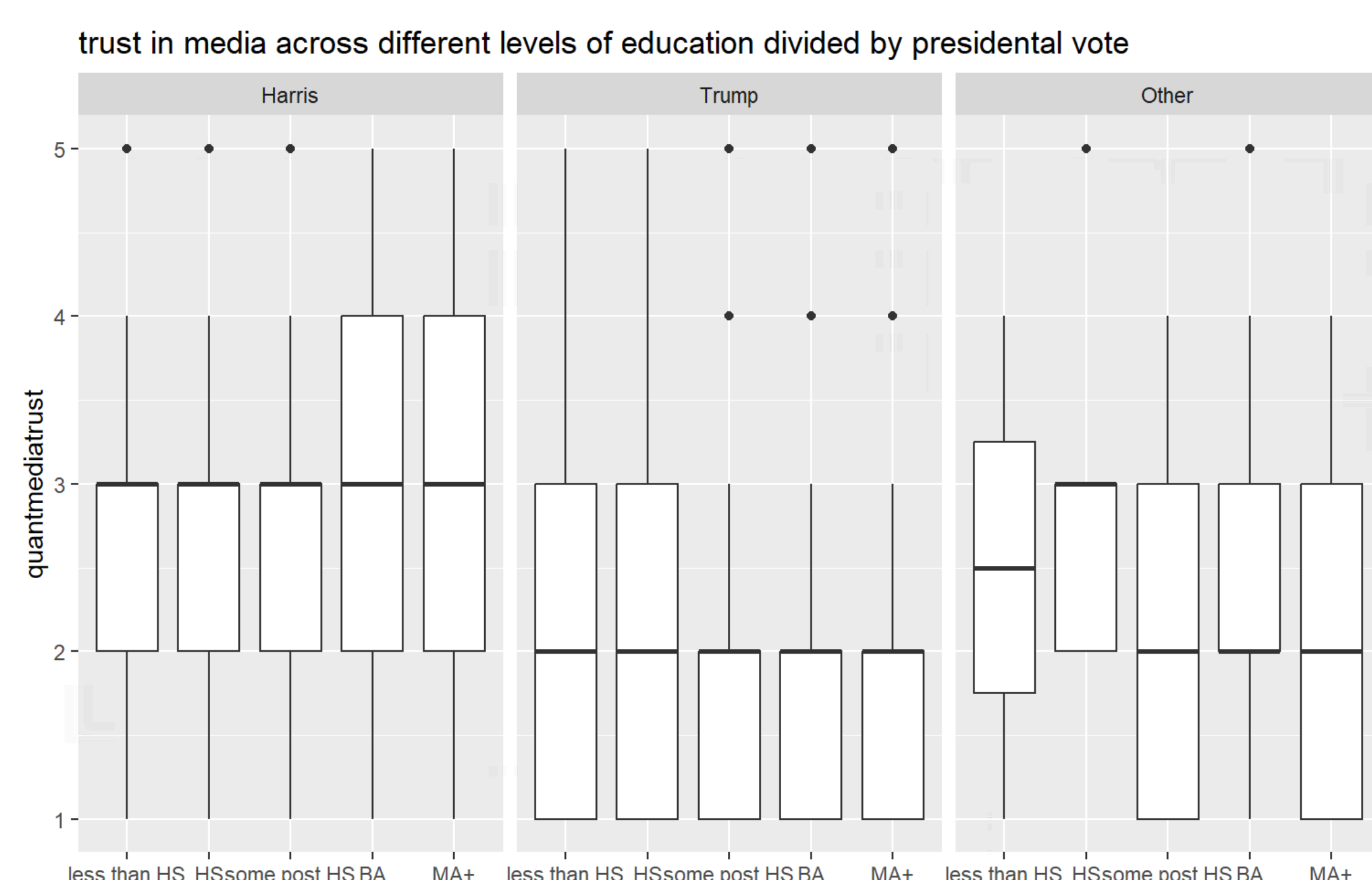


Figure 2: Degrees of trust in media across different levels of education divided by presidential vote

Multivariate

- We ran a multivariate regression with education factoring for presidential voting against trust in media.
- Multiple linear regression analyses showed that for voters who voted for Trump, their trust in media was on average -1.5 points less than voters who voted for Harris ($\text{Beta} = -1.15$, $T = -35.97$, $P = 0.001$) (Fig.2).
- A multivariate regression with education moderating for presidential voting against trust in media showed that presidential vote significantly moderates the degrees of trust voters have in relation to their education levels (beta coefficients for the Trump voters with education levels post HS to MA+ were significantly moderated at a 5% significant level p value < 0.001).
- For individuals who voted for Trump as opposed to Harris, those who obtained a post graduate degree on average had a -1.1 lower trust in media score as opposed to those who did not obtain a high school degree.

Discussion

- Examining the relationship between education and voting, accounting for voting as a moderator, we found that during 2024, Trump voters, especially those with higher degrees, on average, are less likely to trust the media, while Harris voters, on average, are more likely to trust the media.
- These findings may contribute to political science research regarding increasing political polarization and its relationship to the media.
- Future research is needed to determine if these results are specific to the polarization of the 2024 political climate and the role of other covariates (e.g. income, gender, and race) not explored in this study.

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