

# The Relationship Between Immigration and Political Trust in the United States Among Eligible Voters Surveyed in 2020

Allison Pae, Wesleyan University



## Introduction

In theory, the United States, as a representative democracy, relies on civic participation and civilian investment in government's affairs. However, the continually changing landscape of current events, like the COVID-19 pandemic and Trump's presidency (Schraff et al 2021; Justwan & Williamson 2022), have fundamentally altered political trust in the US.

The existing literature on immigration and political trust generally splits between two veins: prior experiences in the country of origin and the impacts of experiences with the host country's institutions (Nannestad et. al 2014; Wals and Rudolph 2019; Wilkes & Wu 2019).

## Research Question

Are individuals' political trust associated with whether they were born in the US, a US territory, or another country?

## Methods

### Sample

Nationally representative sample of voters surveyed before and after the 2020 presidential election (N = 4191).

### Measures

Respondent birthplace was measured with the question, "In what state, country, or territory were you born?" Responses were aggregated to "born in a US state or DC," "born in a US territory," and "foreign born."

Political trust was measured with three questions: trust in the government to do what is right (1 to 5), perceptions about government corruption (1 to 5), and trusting ordinary people or experts about public policy (1 to 3). Responses were summed to create a score from 3 to 13.

Respondent race was self-identified. Party registration was self-identified. ANES combined independent voters with people who do not identify with a party.

## Results

### Univariate

Survey respondents had a mean political trust of 7.2. 79.1% of respondents had a trust score equal or less than 8.

89% of respondents were born in the US and 9% were foreign born.

## Results continued

### Multivariate

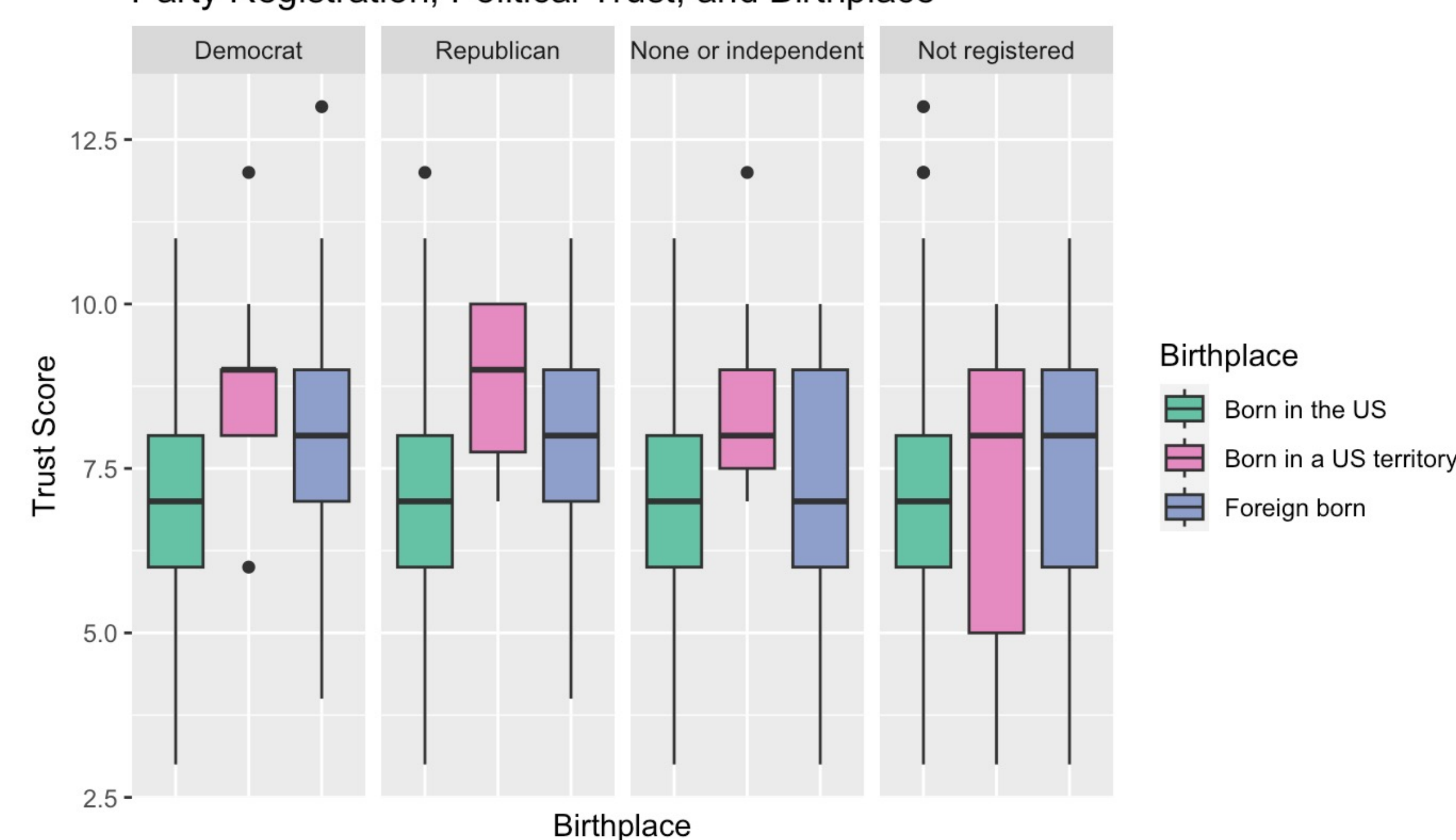
Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) revealed that birthplace and political trust were significantly associated, with a p-value less than 0.05 and F of 13.26. Post hoc comparisons of mean political trust score by birthplace revealed that respondents born outside of the US have significantly higher levels of political trust compared to those born in the US.

Post hoc tests show that there is a significant difference between those born in a US territory and those born in the US ( $p=0.001$ ). However, there is not a significant difference between those born in a US territory and those born outside the US ( $p=0.092$ ).

Someone born in the US is expected to have a political trust score of 7.384. Being born outside of the US is expected to increase this score by 0.209.

After controlling for race and party registration, birthplace is still significantly associated with political trust for individuals born in the US ( $p=2.2 \times 10^{-16}$ ), born in a US territory ( $p=0.0038$ ), and born outside the US ( $p=0.029$ ).

Party Registration, Political Trust, and Birthplace

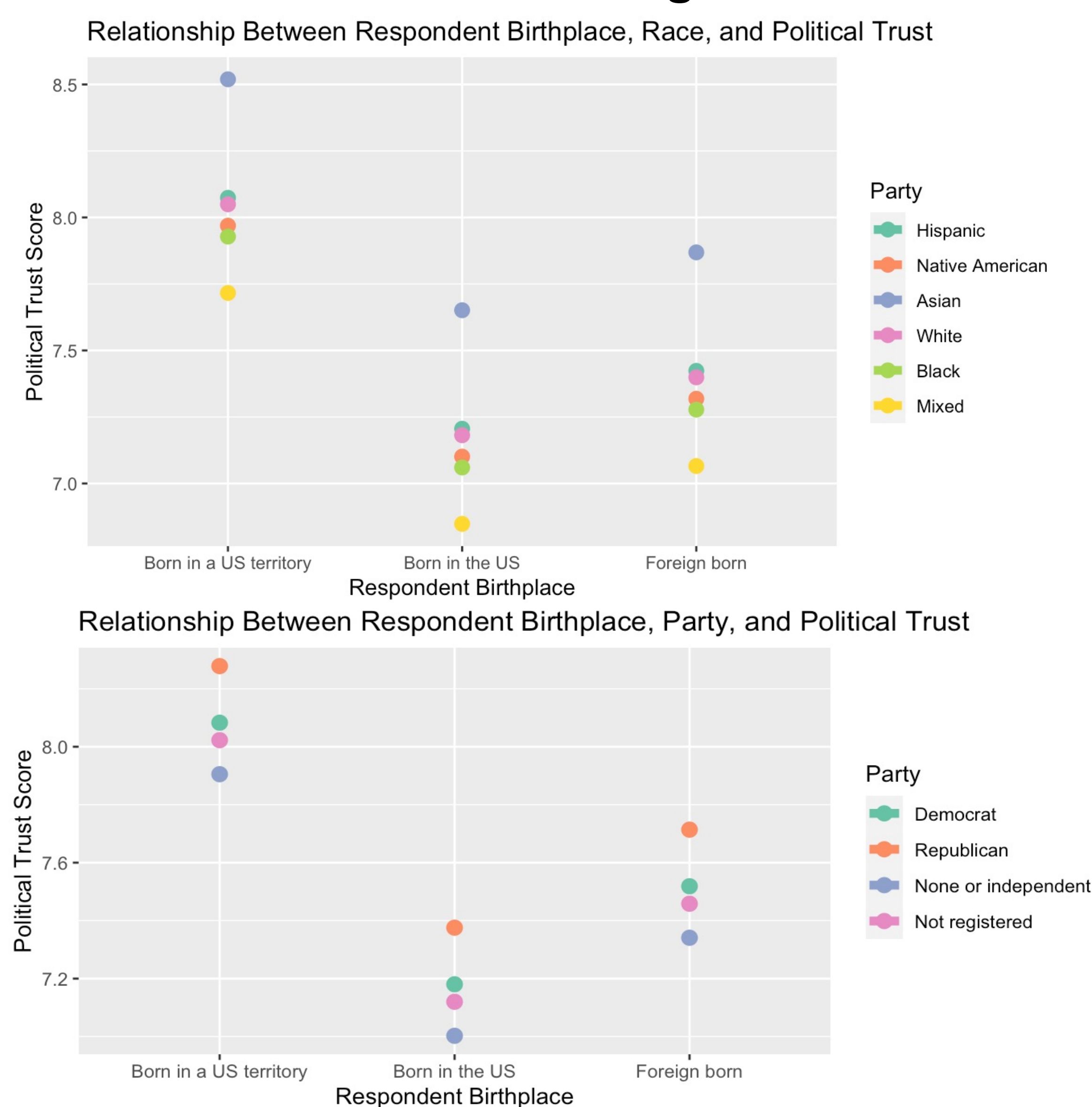


In the multivariate linear regression, all the differences between respondents of different party identifications were significant ( $p<0.05$ ). Democrats were predicted to have a 0.183 lower political trust score than Republicans ( $p=0.03$ ). Respondents who identified as none or independent were predicted to have a 0.369 lower political trust score than Republicans ( $p=7.83 \times e^{-5}$ ). Finally, respondents who were unregistered were predicted to have a 0.252 lower score than Republicans ( $p=0.0029$ ).

However, once respondents were categorized by race, the differences were only significant for Asian ( $p=0.0003$ ) and mixed ( $p=0.022$ ) individuals. Asian respondents were predicted to have a 0.525 higher political trust score than white respondents, while mixed respondents were predicted to have a 0.301 lower political trust score than white respondents.

## Results continued

### Predicted Multivariate Ranges



## Discussion

Individuals born in the US tend to have lower political trust than those born outside of the US or in a US territory.

Notably, race as not a significant factor in political trust except for Asian and mixed individuals.

The ANES dataset only focuses on surveying eligible voters, meaning that undocumented people were not included in this study. Undocumented people make up about 22% of the foreign-born population in the US, meaning a substantial amount of people were not represented (Pew Research Center).

Further research is required to understand the relationship between party identification, political trust, and birthplace. ANES should not combine of "none" and independent voters, especially since 43% of US adults now identify as independent (Gallup)

## Sources

In U.S., New Record 43% Are Political Independents. (n.d.). Retrieved April 30, 2024, from <https://news.gallup.com/poll/180440/new-record-political-independents.aspx>  
Justwan, F., & Williamson, R. D. (2022). Trump and Trust: Examining the Relationship between Claims of Fraud and Citizen Attitudes. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 55(3), 462–469. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096522000221>  
Krogstad, J. S. P., and J. M. (2023, November 16). What we know about unauthorized immigrants living in the U.S. *Pew Research Center*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/11/16/what-we-know-about-unauthorized-immigrants-living-in-the-us/>  
Nannestad, P., Svendsen, G. T., Dinesen, P. T., & Sønderskov, K. M. (2014). Do Institutions or Culture Determine the Level of Social Trust? The Natural Experiment of Migration from Non-western to Western Countries. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 40(4), 544–565. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2013.830499>  
Schraff, D. (2021). Political trust during the Covid-19 pandemic: Rally around the flag or lockdown effects? *European Journal of Political Research*, 60(4), 1007–1017. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12425>  
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>