



American people's trust in Business and Courts is affected by religious and political affiliation

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Introduction

- Research shows that trust between individuals is enhanced when one is religious (Tan and Vogul, 2008).
- Religious individuals whose religion is a majority in their region are more trusting than those with a minority (Gupta et al., 2018).
- Catholics exhibit less trust in strangers than Protestants. (Welch, Sikkink, & Loveland, 2007)
- Religion has been shown to be correlated with trust in strangers, however less research has been done on how religion affects willingness to trust large institutions.
- This area is largely unexplored and could yield new and useful insights into the behavior of large populations in relation to the important institutions of America.

Research Questions

- Is religious affiliation correlated with trust in other large institutions?
- How does political affiliation affect this correlation?

Methods

Sample

- Respondents (n=588) were drawn from the 2018 General Social Survey (GSS), a nationally representative sample of English-speaking, non-institutionalized adults in the U.S.

Measures

- Reported religious affiliation were Catholic, Protestant, and no religious affiliation (None).
- Reported political affiliations were: strong Republican, not very strong Republican, strong Democrat, not very strong Democrat (filed into "Democrat" or "Republican")
- Trust scores for American courts and large private businesses were reported from 1-10 from no trust to complete trust.

Results

Bivariate

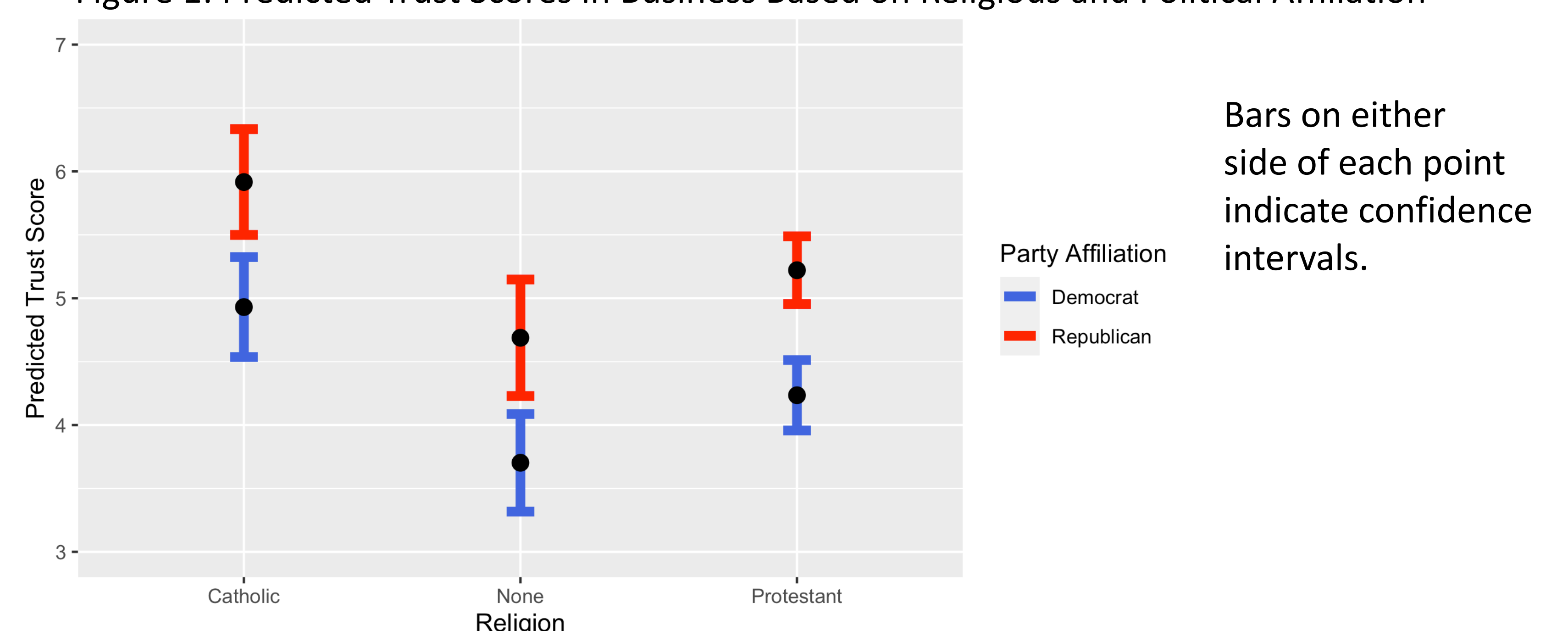
- ANOVA analysis shows a significant association between religious affiliation and trust in big businesses ($p < 0.05$) and in American courts ($p < 0.05$), decreasing from Catholics to Protestants to None.
- A TukeyHSD post-hoc test shows a significant difference between each group ($p < 0.05$) for businesses, however difference between Protestants and None in trust scores given to courts lacks significance ($p = 0.87$).

Multivariate:

Business

- When controlling for political affiliation, differences between religious affiliation remain significant ($p < 0.05$), political affiliation is revealed to also be a significant determinant of trust scores ($p = 2.33e-08$).
- Linear Modeling predicts a Republican will rate big businesses 0.99 points higher on a trust scale than a Democrat would.
- A Protestants' trust score for business is predicted to be an average of 0.54 points higher than None, and Catholics are predicted to rate businesses 1.23 points higher.

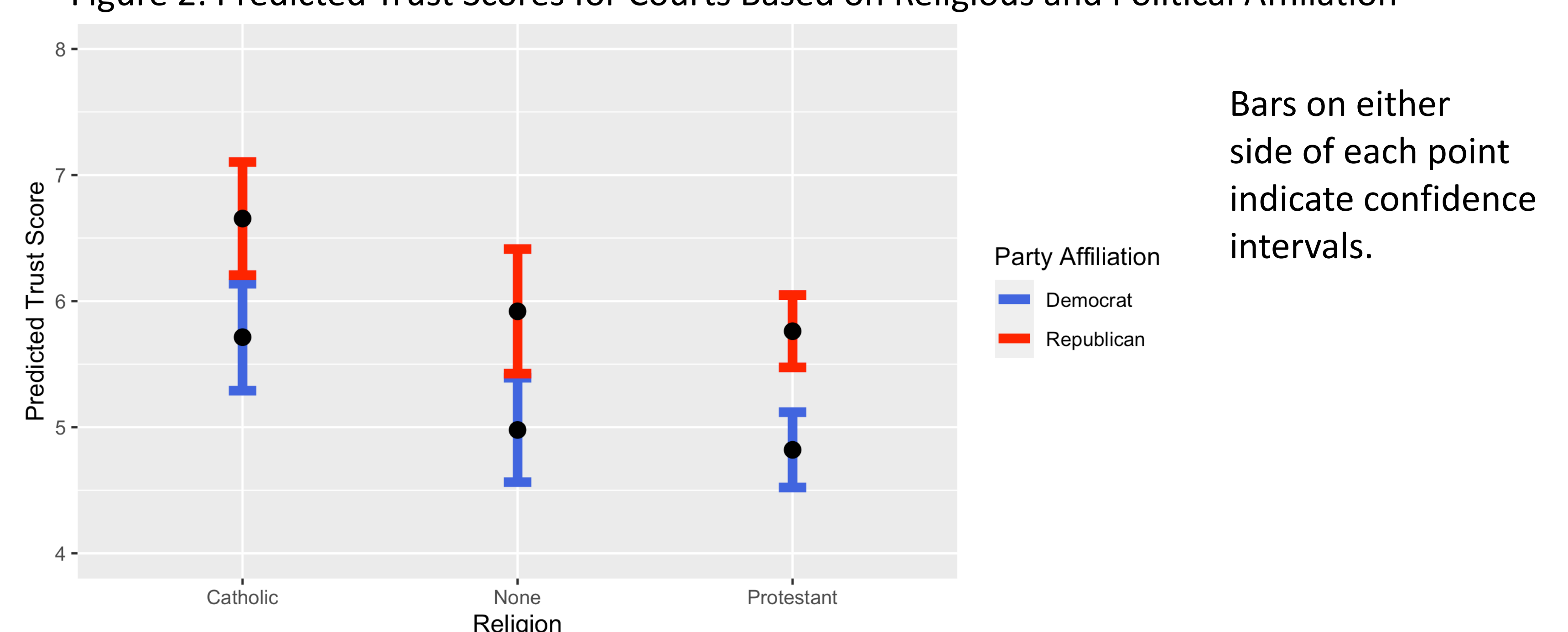
Figure 1: Predicted Trust Scores in Business Based on Religious and Political Affiliation



Courts

- A Linear model shows political affiliation to be a significant factor in trust scores ($p = 6.66e-07$). In addition, Catholics are most trusting of courts, while Protestants and None lack a significant difference from each other.
- Modeling predicts that a Republican will rate Courts an average of 0.97 points higher than a Democrat, and that a Catholic's trust score will be an average of 0.74 points higher than None.

Figure 2: Predicted Trust Scores for Courts Based on Religious and Political Affiliation



Discussion

- Independently of each other, both political and religious affiliation have a significant impact on trust placed in businesses and courts.
- Political trust score differences can be explained both by political platforms and party ideologies. Religious differences are particularly interesting because they are not so easily linked to a political project, there seems to be a less obvious cause here.
- Given previous research demonstrating lower trust from Catholics, and their smaller population than Protestants, it is surprising that they respond with such high trust score. This suggests some significant reason currently beyond our knowledge that causes Catholics' trust in these institutions to be so high.
- Greater trust by Catholics in these powerful organizations may mean increased vulnerability to predatory marketing and misinformation, lower trust by Protestants and None on the other hand could translate to lack of trust in other government programs such as vaccination and public education.
- If further research confirms these data, interviews and other qualitative methods may be useful for demonstrating a more direct causation for this trust difference based on religion.