

# Government Assistance, Race, and Political Trust

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## INTRODUCTION

### Motivating Literature

- A relationship between welfare programs and political trust was established in a 2022 randomized controlled trial in the Netherlands
  - Policy satisfaction was found to be the mediating factor in this relationship
- The Political Reality Model explains the overall gap in political trust between white and Black Americans
  - Mistreatment and political exclusion by governments were found to explain the gap in trust; i.e. Black Americans' lower trust is a result of experiences with systemic racism



### Research Questions

- Is there a relationship between receiving government assistance and political trust in the United States? If so, is it direct or indirect? Is the relationship equivalent across racial and ethnic groups?

## METHODS

### Sample

- Respondents (n=2,294) participated in the first wave of the ICPSR Outlook on Life Survey (2012). The OOL survey represents the U.S. resident, non-institutionalized adult population. Black respondents were over-sampled relative to the national population. 51.79% of respondents received some form of government assistance.

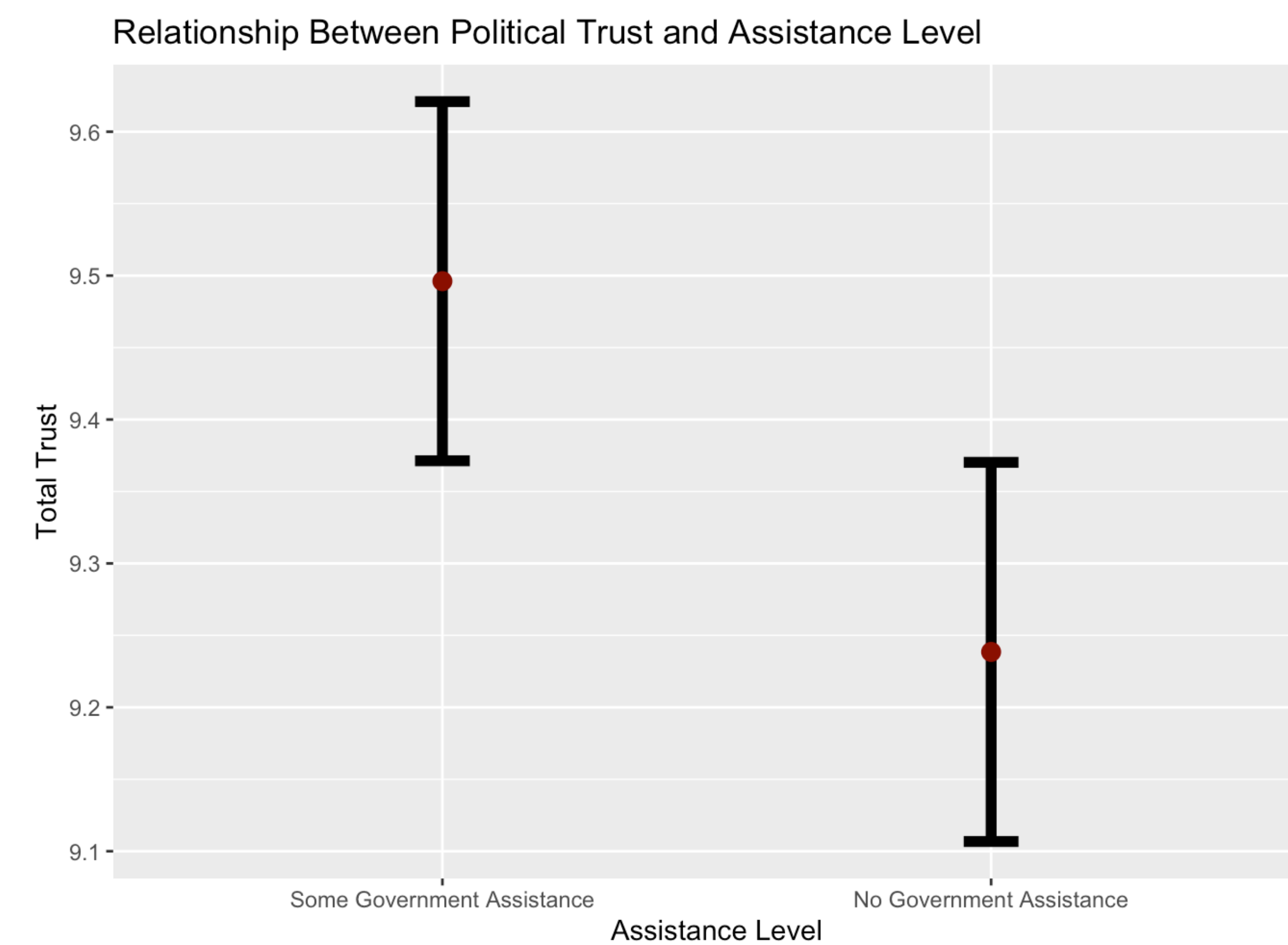
### Selected Variables

- Respondents reported their level of trust in four government institutions (Government in Washington, Legal System, Police, Public Schools) was recorded and coded on a 1-4 scale. These four responses were combined to form an overall trust scale of 4-16.
- Respondents' racial/ethnic demographic information was recorded through five categories (Black, Non-Hispanic; White, Non-Hispanic; Other, Non-Hispanic; 2+ Races, Non-Hispanic; Hispanic).
- Respondents indicated any income received from 11 government assistance programs (Social Security, Unemployment, TANF or Welfare, Food Stamps, Free or Reduced School Lunch and/or Breakfast, Supplemental Security Income, Energy Assistance, Poor Housing Assistance, Disability Payments, Veterans Payments, Survivor Payments).

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

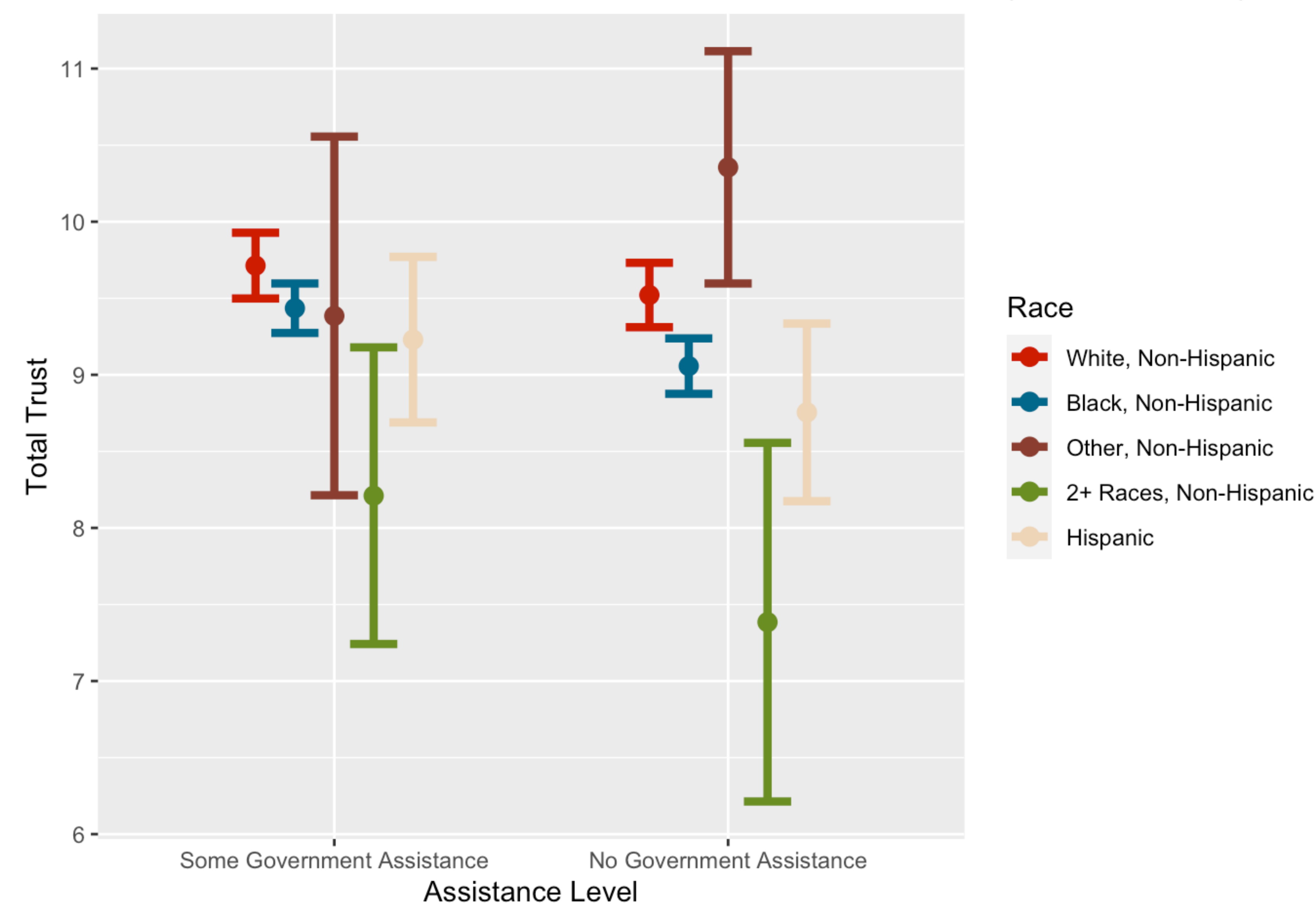
Special thanks to Prof. Valerie Nazzaro for all her support and problem-solving throughout the course.

## RESULTS



In a multivariate linear regression model, total trust in government institutions (Beta=0.258, CI 0.076-0.439, p=.005) was significantly and positively associated with receiving government assistance. On average, political trust reported by someone receiving government assistance is expected to be higher by 0.258 points than that reported by someone not receiving government assistance.

### Relationship Between Political Trust and Assistance Level by Race/Ethnicity



The overall significance of the relationship between assistance and trust is reliant on the relationship reported by Black respondents. A statistically significant relationship between trust and government assistance is not reflected in any other racial group.

## DISCUSSION/IMPLICATIONS

### Conclusions

- Total trust in government institutions is significantly and positively related with receiving government assistance among Black respondents
  - Results for trust in individual institutions reveal that there is a statistically significant positive relationship between trust in "the government in Washington" and receiving government assistance for both Black and white respondents
  - Trust in the legal system and in police had no significant relationship with government assistance
  - Trust in public schools was significantly related with government assistance for the whole sample, but not within any racial or ethnic group.
  - Improved trust in "the government in Washington" drives the overall relationship between political trust and receiving government assistance for Black respondents, and the overall relationship between trust and government assistance for the sample.
  - Although trust in "the government in Washington" was significantly related with government assistance for white respondents, this relationship was not strong enough to be present in analysis of overall trust
- The OOL Survey was conducted in 2012. Due to the mediating role of policy satisfaction in the relationship between political trust and government assistance, it is unclear if these results reflect a current relationship between political trust and government assistance. Policy changes in the past 11 years could affect the overall relationship, or relationship for a particular group, if policy satisfaction has changed since the Survey was conducted.

### Why Does Trust Matter?

Political trust is related to citizens' perceptions of political legitimacy.

- "Low levels of political trust can undermine the effective governing of a society and carry with them a potential threat for the functioning of democratic processes."

In the United States, federal (and most state and local) government systems were created with exclusion of Black people in mind. The racialized origin and perpetuated systemic racism within our political system is reflected in the mistreatment and continued exclusion from political power faced by Black Americans and evidenced in the Political Reality Model.

- To earn the trust of Black Americans and accordingly preserve their legitimacy, government institutions must improve the political reality experienced by Black communities.

The results outlined in this work suggest that successful government assistance programs may be one mechanism through which governments can earn trust from Black constituents. Particularly, trust in "the government in Washington" drives the relationship between trust and receiving government assistance among Black respondents. However, as evidenced by the remaining trust gap between white and Black Americans when controlling for government assistance, these programs alone are insufficient to entirely resolve this gap. Further research is necessary to determine the exact mechanism by which the relationship between trust and assistance operates.

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