



Do You Trust Me: An Analysis of Political Beliefs and Trust in Politicians

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Abstract

The authors investigated trust in politicians and hypothesized that the more aligned a person's political beliefs are with a politician's beliefs, the more likely that person is to trust the politician. 150 participants completed a survey regarding their own political beliefs and their trust in a fictional politician, Senator John Smith. As predicted, results showed a positive relationship between the similarity of political beliefs and the level of trust in a politician ($r=.473$, $p=.0001$).

Introduction

Trust is defined as a firm belief in the reliability, truth, ability, or strength of someone or something (Allee, 1997). There is a common notion that in order to trust someone, their actions must match their words. Research by Dalton (2005) showed public doubts about politicians and government have spread across almost all advanced democracies. Previous studies by Bowler and Karp (2004) have also found that scandalous behavior of politicians may be partly to blame for the low levels of political support observed in recent years. Though political support may be less than it was in the past, leaders who are attuned to their followers' group identity still tend to be seen as more fair and trustworthy than leaders who go against their followers' identity or beliefs (Ullrich, Christ & Dick, 2009). In previous research Byrne, Bond, and Diamond (1969) hypothesized that when exposed to the views of two political candidates subjects would vote for the candidate with whom they share the greater proportion of similar attitudes.

Method

There were 150 participants in the present study (119 female and 30 male). The majority of participants identified as White (124) and the remainder as Black or African-American, Mixed Race, Asian, Middle Eastern, Hispanic or Latinx, or other. The age of participants ranged from 18 to 71 or older with the mean age falling between 21 and 30. Participants identified themselves as being Democratic (91), Republican (20), Independent (30), and other (6). Participants filled out an online digital survey that asked questions about their own political beliefs and their trust in a fictional politician. Responses were based on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Hypotheses

- The more a participant's political beliefs align with a politician's beliefs, the more likely that participant is to trust the politician
- The more conservative a participant's beliefs, the more likely the participant is to trust conservative Senator John Smith

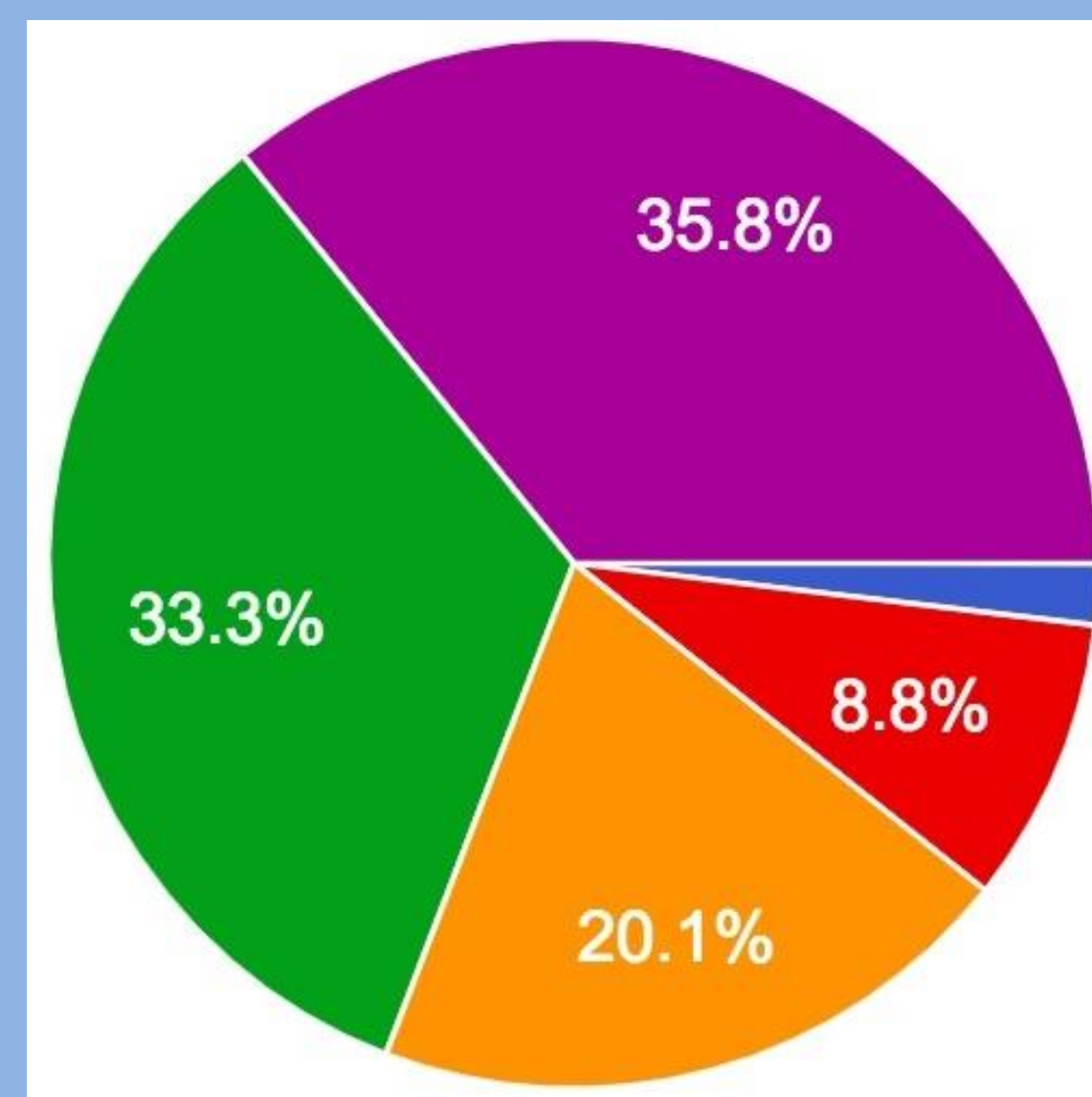
Results

- A Cronbach's Alpha was used to test the reliability of the five questions based on trust. The trust questions were found to be highly reliable (5 items; $\alpha=.884$).
- A Pearson's r indicated that the relationship between political scores and trust scores was positive and significant ($r=.474$, $p=.0001$).

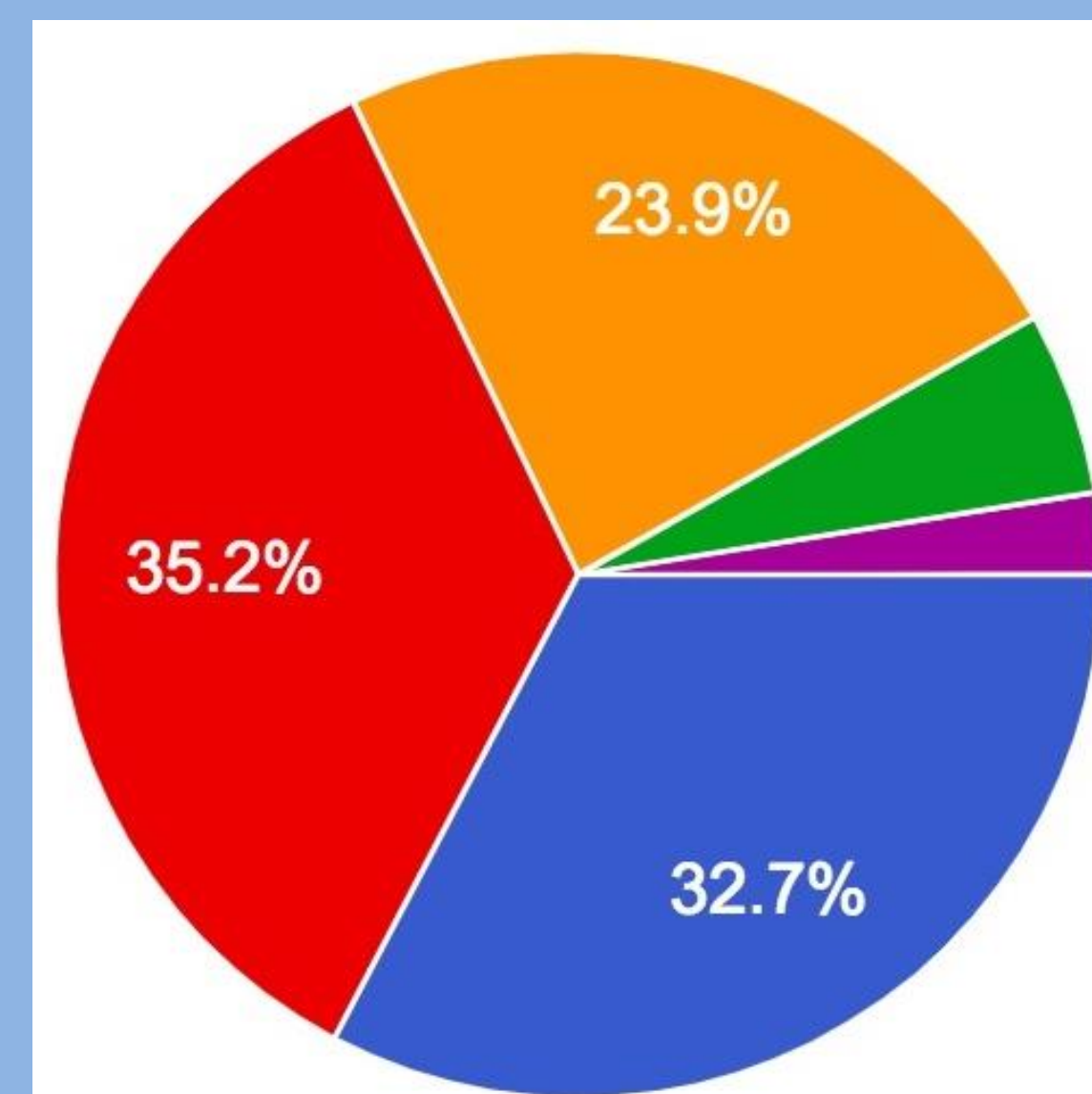
Discussion

- The results supported the hypothesis that the more aligned a person's political beliefs are with a politician's beliefs; the more likely that person is to trust the politician.
- Limitations included the demographics of the participants. Results were consistent with those in previous studies and have interesting implications for understanding U. S. voting patterns.
- Future research might investigate if the gender of politicians affects trust and if the gender of voters affect who they consider more trustworthy.

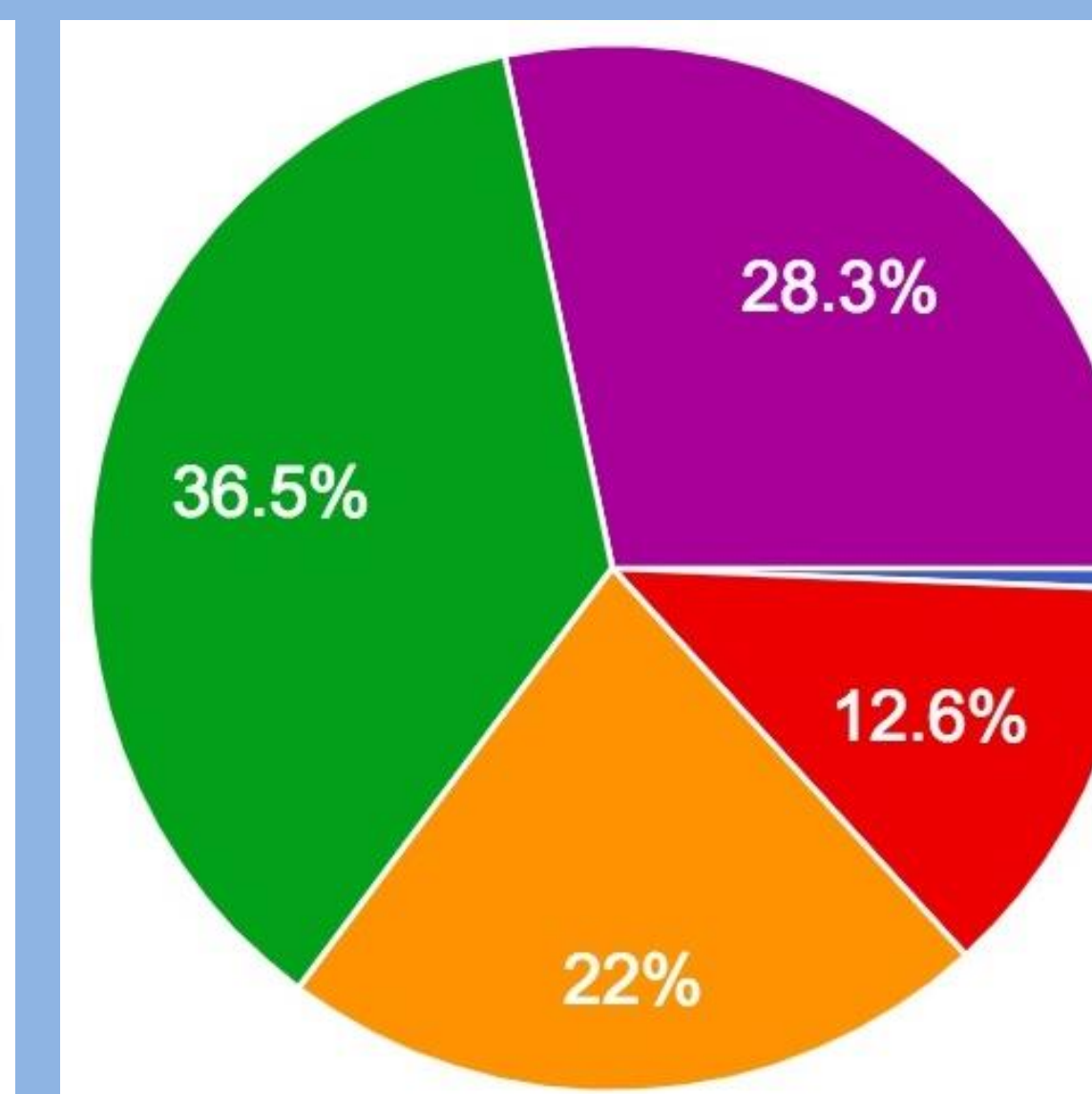
I believe the politician is trustworthy.



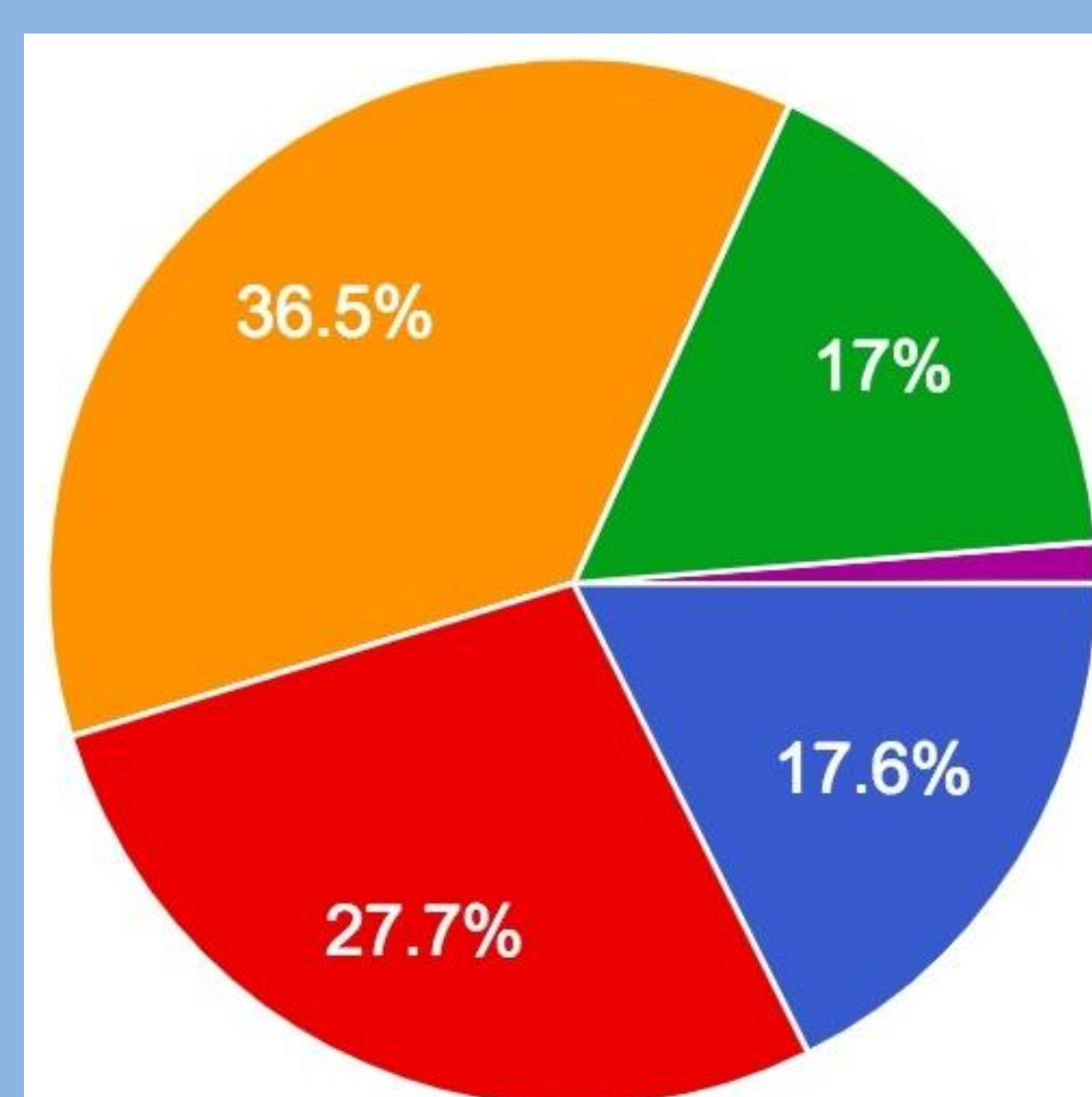
I do not believe in the reliability of the politician.



I believe the politician will tell the truth.



I do not believe the politician will keep promises.



Key

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

I believe I can count on the politician to be honest.

