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Explaining Political Trust among African Americans

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African Americans have low levels of political trust when compared to white Americans. Explanations of African American's political trust remain minimal. Utilizing data taken from the 1996 National Black Election Study and ordered probit to analyze the data, this study examines four explanations of African American political trust. It estimates political trust as a function of demographics, perceptions about the economy, beneficence from the government, and race orientation. Results show support for most of these factors, but no support for government beneficence. Social location, economic evaluations, and orientation to race influence African American political trust. I conclude that group-centric perceptions of African Americans' conditions play an important role in explaining the race's political trust.

Political trust is an evaluative judgment of the job performance of the federal government (Miller 1974). It is the perception of how well the government in Washington, D.C. is doing its job compared to public expectations. Over time, Americans have become increasingly distrusting of government (Putnam 1995; Damico et al 2000; Putnam 2000; Tate 2003). Studies on political trust widely confirm speculations that African Americans are less trusting than whites (Putnam 1995; Lawrence 1997; Rahn and Transue 1998; Putnam 2000; Tate 2003). To understand this gap, we need to understand African American-political trust.

As a group, African Americans have low levels of political trust. Needed is a strong, broad-based theoretical exploration for understanding African-American political trust. Advanced here in this study is the contention that demographic characteristics, national and comparative racial economic evaluations, beneficence from the government, and race orientation determine political trust among African Americans. Research on white political trust addresses demographic characteristics and national economic evaluations, as does this analysis. However, when examining the determinants of African American political trust, it behooves scholars to consider economic conditions between racial groups and the racial orientation of African Americans.

The extant literature, however, has primarily focused on racial consciousness and experiences with discrimination (Avery 2006, 2009; Mangum 2012; Nunnally 2012; Shingles 1981) as theoretical explanations of African Americans' distrust. While these explanations are highly useful, they omit the significance of other factors such as financial assistance from the government, general orientation to race, and various economic evaluations, which are important if one considers the race's economic position.

This article is one of the first to test several theoretical considerations that explain the low levels of trust in this community. Moreover, it is the first to show that economic conditions shape political trust among African Americans. Specifically, it shows that African

Americans political trust is partly a function of national economic conditions and the comparative economic conditions of Blacks and whites.

By studying African Americans' political trust, we gain more advantage over disentangling trust among Americans with historically unique (un)democratic experiences. Despite the fact that African Americans are no longer the largest minority group in the nation, they remain the most cohesive voting bloc, so understanding what drives political trust in this community is still important. Trust is important for democracy (Putnam 1993; Warren 1999). For the sake of democracy, it behooves us to understand attitudes that possibly detract from the feelings of a full democratic experience, and even more pertinently, that detract from faith in the American political system to operate in ways that fulfill its specific functions.

Prior Research

The literature on African Americans' political trust has mostly addressed the roles that descriptive (based on similar social characteristics) and substantive (based on similar policy interests) representation play in enhancing African Americans' political trust (Swain, 1995; Mansbridge, 1999; Gay, 2002; Tate, 2003). Therefore, exploring other explanations of African Americans' distrust is necessary in order to test various influences on this group's political trust.

Only a few works have addressed political trust among African Americans (Avery 2006; 2009; Mangum 2012; Nunnally 2012). Most pertinent here, Avery (2006; 2009) addresses whether political trust among African Americans shapes political participation. He argues that political trust affects African-American political participation differently than it does whites. This logic guides this investigation, for it focuses on the African-American experience, not just apply hypotheses and theories of white political trust. It purports that forces grounded in social location, perceptions of different economic realities, the nature of their tangible relationship with the government, and race orientation influence African-American political trust.

What effects does social location have on their political trust? The first explanation focuses on the import that demographics and social characteristics offer to explain African Americans' trust in government. This explanation posits that social location and life circumstances shape African Americans' trust attitudes. Similar to voter turnout where African Americans turnout more than their demographic characteristics would suggest, African Americans are expected to trust more than their demographic characteristics would suggest.

The dynamics behind political trust, according to the conventional wisdom, is that as national conditions improve, then trust in the government increases. While Miller (1974) advances the notion that lower levels of political trust suggest dissatisfaction with the overall political system, Citrin (1974) holds they are the result of the negative evaluations assigned to incumbents and public policies by the public. A review of the literature supports the claim that political trust is largely evaluations of the performance of public officials and political institutions and the level of satisfaction with policies (Avery 2006). Given the argument of Citrin (1974) that trust is a function of satisfaction with current conditions, and African Americans tend to be in worse economic positions than whites, do their economic assessments contribute to their level of political trust? That is, if economic assessments are favorable, are African Americans more trusting of government? The second explanation tests whether economic perceptions--either based on personal economic stakes, a comparison of racial groups' economic circumstances, or the nation's economic health--affect African Americans' political trust. I expect that relative deprivation or perceived unfairness in the

differences between African Americans and whites also play a part. If African Americans see whites doing better economically, then they will not trust government.

Citrin (1974) emphasizes satisfaction with current conditions as an indicator of trust. If people have a close business arrangement with the government, and they are benefitting in a tangible way, then they trust government. Those dependent on the government for assistance should be more trusting because they are getting benefits from the government on a monthly basis, and they need that assistance. The third explanation suggests that African American political trust is based on whether one benefits from government-sponsored programs, such as social welfare programs and military service. This is to suggest that beneficiaries of personal or household welfare assistance, persons in the military, or persons receiving military household benefits trust government more.

The unique experiences of African Americans make race an important factor. Race orientation posits that the political connectedness that many African Americans have with one another, also known in a more specific sense as linked fate (Dawson, 1994), may also reduce trust in government. Linked fate is a psychological connection that African Americans have with other African Americans, stemming from the group's experiences with historical racial discrimination. I suggest that race orientation and other attitudes that express a racial group-centered orientation, such as racial identity, race consciousness, and a desire for racial equality, indicate a heightened awareness of the effects of race on African Americans' historical and contemporary circumstances, government-related or societal, thus deteriorating African Americans' political trust.

Theoretical Background

Demographics and Political Trust

Demographic characteristics reflect people's social and political realities. I expect that age, region, education, income, social class, gender, and marital status will inform political trust. As for age, differences between older and younger African Americans explain levels of political trust. Trust studies often indicate younger people are less trusting than older people (Putnam 1995; Uslaner 1998). Older African Americans have a more acute sense of overt and institutionalized discrimination and racism than younger African Americans (Sigelman and Welch 1991). These older citizens also have more experiences that are direct or have viewed African Americans' struggle for equal and civil rights play out in the media. Older African Americans also are more likely to state they have experienced discrimination than younger African Americans. Inasmuch as times have changed, older African Americans believe that social, economic, and political conditions are much more favorable to African Americans than they were in the past. Older African Americans have witnessed numerous political advances that African Americans have made--African-American candidates elected to office and a number of laws passed to benefit African Americans--which can cast government in a better light. Younger African Americans, on the other hand, are less likely to experience racial discrimination and racism. Having a longer and darker frame of reference about African Americans' political journey towards more democratic experiences than younger African Americans should lead older African Americans to be more trusting of government.

For African Americans, education should have a negative relationship with trust in government. Well-educated African Americans should be more likely to know the political system and to know how the government continues to treat African Americans differently, often worse than whites. A formal education allows them to know better the history of harsh

treatment of African Americans in the United States. They pay more attention to public affairs and political campaigns and know that the interests and concerns of African Americans continue not met adequately. Well-educated African Americans are more sensitive to how policies affect people differently. They know how and why African Americans remain disadvantaged economically, socially, and politically compared with white Americans. That is, well-educated African Americans know the times have changed, but the lack of resources remains the same. Education informs African Americans about where they have come from, but also where they have yet to go. Through education, they become more aware of the gap between their resources and those of other groups. African Americans, comparing their history and social location with whites, and perceiving a gap in the results and a sense of relative deprivation, should be less trusting as their education level increases.

Income and social class should have a direct relationship with political trust. As income rises, so should trust in the government, but as income declines so should trust in government. Difficult economic conditions make people less generous in their perceptions of others (Brehm and Rahn 1997) and as a result, they view each other in terms that are more competitive. Hard economic times are not conducive to trusting attitudes. If income inequality or the perception that one is not doing as well as others affects political trust, then it should have a negative impact. Similarly, individuals' perceptions of their social class will have a direct relationship with levels of political trust. One's assessment of themselves will likely color their assessment of others and institutions. Therefore, if one has an optimistic situation or perception of himself or herself, then one will trust government. As income or social class increases, trust is expected to rise by fostering the belief that government is doing things right. Therefore, a rising income and increasing social class lead to greater trust in government.

Gender is also included in the analysis. Men are expected to trust government more than women. Men do not face as much discrimination as women. They are better represented in all levels and institutions of government and women blame government to some extent for gender inequality, even perpetuating it.

Marital status is also hypothesized to influence levels of political trust. Studies show that married people are more knowledgeable about, interested in, and participatory in politics than single people (Milbrath and Goel 1977). Those same ingredients are expected to work here in terms of trust. More importantly, married people, more so than single, separated, or divorced people, tend to have greater social networks and have embarked on a path of lifelong trust. They have shown they can trust people and should be more trusting of government than those who are not married. Married people also benefit from marital tax deductions. So, married African Americans should display more trust in government than those not married.

African Americans who live in the South are expected to be more trusting of government than African Americans elsewhere. While the conservative climate of the South, relatively speaking, should contribute to political cynicism, I suggest the opposite. Because of the region's past, they should view the federal government more favorably than African Americans elsewhere. Southern state governments were at the helm of institutionalizing racism. Some African Americans may have lived or known relatives who lived in the South, when the local governments endorsed and sanctioned racial segregation and discrimination, even to resist federal policies that sanctioned equality. Just as older African Americans have witnessed changes in government from de jure discrimination to fuller equality, Southern African Americans have witnessed similar changes. Southern African Americans also may be aware of the historic massive resistance that in the Southern context, wherein local governments fervently challenged African Americans' equality for many years beyond the

desegregation ruling in the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court case. Thus, I speculate that Southern African Americans will be more trusting of government than African Americans elsewhere.

Economic Assessments and Political Trust

Economic perceptions influence Americans' electoral behavior (Kinder and Kiewiet 1979; Markus, 1988). Research also finds that economic perceptions influence political trust among Americans. After all, politicians take credit for good economic times, making the argument that government is central in precipitating economic conditions. So, it is understandable when citizens blame them and government at large for poor economic times. The government's ability to manage the national economy also is a perennial issue, and concerning political trust, it has received a great deal of attention in the literature. People give government credit for a good economy and blame it for a bad economy (Weatherford 1987), making subjective economic conditions an element of political trust. Good economic conditions or outlooks also increase political trust, while poor economic conditions or outlooks reduce political trust (Feldman 1983; Citrin and Green 1986; Weatherford 1987; Miller and Borrelli 1991; Brehm and Rahn 1997; Hetherington 2004).

According to scholars, national and personal economic evaluations are related directly with political trust (Miller and Borrelli 1991). They also influence political trust due to their scope, importance, and effects on partisan outcomes (Eulau and Lewis-Beck 1985). Furthermore, those who believe their own economic fortunes and those of the country worsened over the year were less trusting of government than those who were more fortunate or thought the national economy improved (Miller and Borrelli 1991; Brehm and Rahn 1997). Thus, there is a positive relationship between positive, personalized economic outlooks and trust (Citrin and Green 1986; Chanley, Rudolph, and Rahn 2000).

With respect to African Americans, I also believe that their economic perceptions will influence their political trust. African Americans' economic perceptions are group-centric (Welch and Foster 1992). Their personal economic well-being pales in comparison to their concern for the relative status of African Americans as a social group and for the nation in general (Gurin et al. 1989; Welch and Foster 1992). Still, African Americans distinguish between their personal financial situation and the racial groups, perceiving their own economic situation more positively than the economic status of African Americans in general and the nation as a whole (Welch and Foster 1992). For instance, African Americans assess their personal economic well-being to be more "better off" than "worse off," whereas they believe African Americans as a group and the entire nation are more "worse off" than "better off." Similar perceptions of the economic conditions of African Americans as a group are expected to influence African Americans' political trust.

I contend that among African Americans, it is also the case that the relative assessment of the racial group's economic health compared with white Americans' shapes trust evaluations. Gurin and Epps (1975) argue that people internalize credit and blame for their successes and failures. People transfer guilt and responsibility to others and/or society. Then, they develop a more positive image of themselves and their group, but a more cynical and distrusting view of society and the system. They also argue that African Americans are able to displace blame for failures and place them on an unfair system that perpetuates racial inequality. In other words, in the case of African Americans, society can be discriminatory, placing African Americans at a disadvantage compared with whites. Therefore, African Americans should blame the system, or society, for their relatively unfortunate status.

Such attitudes may be a part of perceiving that the government is a perpetrator of unjust economic practices that affect social mobility. African Americans may believe that the system, or systems (referring to the interconnectedness of the political, social, and economic systems), is to blame for their personal and collective failings and perceive the economic status between African Americans and whites to be widening in favor of whites. If African Americans believe they are doing worse economically as a social group than whites, then they will trust government less. If the opinion is that the race's economic conditions are getting better, then African Americans will trust government more because it is perceived to be working properly. I thus account for the perceptions of the economy in three ways: (1) the national economy's health (2) one's personal financial well-being and (3) one's comparison of African-American group economic well-being compared to whites.

Government Beneficence and Political Trust

Aside from an economic perspective influencing political trust, African Americans' political trust should be enhanced by their self-interest as beneficiaries of government resources. The idea behind self-interest is that people determine their trust in government based on differences between personal costs and benefits. People who depend on the government for some support, such as welfare recipients or military personnel, will trust the government more than people who are not dependent on government. A material stake in the government fosters trust, while the absence of a direct relationship does not. Regular contact with the government of this positive sort is expected to increase one's trust in government.

Typically, because self-interest is an elusive concept to measure, the most common approach by scholars is to infer self-interest from the use of demographic characteristics and learn whether these characteristics influence attitudes and behavior. Such studies rarely focus on the influence of being beneficiaries of redistributive policies and what effect this may have on political trust (Brewer and Sigelman 2002; Hetherington 2004; Rudolph and Evans 2005). Here, I examine the effects of receiving public assistance and military status on levels of trust. Financial stakes are represented by receiving some form of public assistance and personal ties with government are reflected in military status. Inasmuch as frequent or regular interaction makes one familiar with government, it is likely that such arrangements will engender trust. Therefore, African Americans who have a material and direct financial relationship with government should be more trusting of government than those who do not.

Admittedly, the indicators used to measure self-interest are limited. Someone who receives public economic assistance, or lives with someone who does, knows his or her personal financial interests are at stake. Recipients obtain direct benefits. They have a relationship with the government that is beneficial personally, so they may be more trusting than someone who lacks such a relationship with the government. Receiving assistance from the government might make one more trusting of government, but not necessarily. For instance, if the welfare benefits are sufficient and arrive on time, then trust increases. If the welfare benefits are not adequate or are late in arrival, then trust in government suffers. Nonetheless, a positive relationship is expected. Trust in government also varies with perceived risk attached to a policy (Hetherington 2004; Rudolph and Evans 2005), and due to government decisions and actions, some citizens stand to gain while others lose. Therefore, people's trust in government is shaped by the redistribution of goods and services, as they are through welfare benefits.

People who serve in the military, or live with someone who does serve in the military, are expected to have more trust in government than those who do not serve in the military or do not know someone who does. It is likely the case that people who join the military have

positive opinions of the national government, trusting it more than those not in the military. Therefore, citizens employed by government are hypothesized to trust government more than those who are not employed by the government.

Moreover, those who know someone who is in the military will likely have positive opinions of the national government (if those opinions did not predate their or someone they know is joining) because they know someone who is a part of the institution. However, this may not necessarily be the case because military personnel join the armed forces for various reasons. They may or may not have joined due to patriotic reasons. Some become members of the military for financial reasons, not out of love of country. Having few employment options, some African Americans join the military for financial reasons. In these instances, positive opinions of government are less likely to predate service so they may be just as critical of government as African Americans who do not serve in the military. They, like civilians, could easily become disillusioned with government actions and decisions, therefore, lose trust in the government. Nonetheless, these effects of self-interest--(1) receiving or connecting indirectly to government benefits in the household (2) either serving in the military or (3) receiving military benefits in a military household--are tested with the expectation that military service and knowing someone who serves will increase political trust.

Race Orientation and Political Trust

Many studies have attested to the cohesive nature and collective efforts of African Americans. For example, African Americans decide and behave with their group or race in mind, often in place of personal considerations (Dawson 1994; Mangum 2003). When it comes to having faith that government will operate fairly and appropriately, African Americans have a long history from which to draw doubt. African Americans have been victims of a history of exclusion from power, exploitation, and discrimination, leading them to perceive politics through a racial group conscious-oriented perspective (Verba and Nie 1972; Miller et al. 1981; Shingles 1981; Tate 1993; Dawson 1994). African Americans have had a long history of dealing with racism to develop a strong mistrust of government (Aberbach and Walker 1970; Abramson 1972; Abramson 1977; Howell and Fagan 1988). Sharing history, interacting with each other, having a common awareness, and having an African American-centered ideology (see Dawson 2001; Harris-Lacewell 2004), I suggest increases the likelihood of holding the same beliefs and opinions, particularly concerning levels of trust in government. Given these various influences on African Americans' life experiences and perspectives, I maintain that African Americans will view political trust through the lenses of race, as well, principally through the extension of their racial identification with other African Americans, or what Dawson (1994) calls linked fate.

I proffer that African Americans' trust in government varies with social learning about being African American in America. Scholars have explored African Americans' learning from family, friends, school, coworkers, their own experiences and other racial group members and institutions about the harsh realities of being an African American in the United States (Abramson 1972, 1977; Peters 1985; Walton 1985). They are told of slavery, lynching, the Ku Klux Klan, and other forms of mistreatment and enemies of African Americans through their racial socialization experiences. Implicit in these lessons is the U.S. government's complicity or negligence in racially discriminating against African Americans as a racial group. This knowledge feeds African Americans' knowledge base, presupposing the interests of the racial group as a surrogate for their individual interests (Dawson 1994). Based on this premise, African Americans' race consciousness influences their political trust.

Group-centric perceptions of government and policy responsiveness also suggest that people view political trust based on their social group's perspective. Research on white Americans' assessments of government performance, for example, documents a reduction in political trust resulting from dissatisfaction with policy implementation (Hetherington and Globetti 2002; Hetherington 2004). For white Americans, job approval ratings also decrease if one is represented by a African-American member of Congress (MC), and contact with African-Americans MCs also is reduced (Gay 2002), all indicators used to determine trust toward government. For African Americans, political trust in Congress increases with the perception that there are more African American legislators in Congress, and African Americans assign higher job approval ratings to African-American Democratic MCs than to white Democratic or Republican MCs (Tate 2003). Even at the local level, the presence of African-American mayors enhances African-American empowerment (Bobo and Gilliam 1991; Abney and Hutcheson 1981). African Americans are also more trusting in federal government than whites (King 1997).

Race thus can enhance or diminish groups' affinities with the polity. Therefore, I explore the effects of race orientation. Race orientation is the composite of racial identity, race consciousness, and awareness that African Americans are deprived, relatively speaking, compared with white Americans. It is expected that race orientation plays a pivotal role in trust in government among African Americans.

Data and Methods

This investigation analyzes data extracted from the 1996 National Black Election Study (NBES) (Tate 1998). The method I use ordered probit to analyze the data. The 1996 NBES is a telephone survey that focuses on African American political attitudes. It is equipped with a unique battery of questions, and it covers a wide range of topics. It used random-digit dialing to interview African-American households throughout the United States during the 1996 presidential election year. Respondents were eligible for the survey if they were African Americans and would be at least 18 years old come Election Day.

Although the data set is relatively old to some, the 1996 NBES is useful for analyzing political trust among African Americans for two very important reasons. First, it asks questions that are more suited to African Americans than what is found in the American National Election Study or the General Social Survey. The 1996 NBES asks questions regarding racial identity and consciousness, racial discrimination, economic comparisons with white Americans, efforts by the major political parties to represent African Americans substantively, participation in an African-American organization, and African-American group political efficacy.

Second, it does not succumb to the limitations of many other studies, namely a small sample size of African Americans, for it has a large number of African-American respondents. The 1996 NBES is a significant, substantive and methodological solution to combat the small-N problem of African Americans included in the American National Election Study and General Social Survey. The American National Election Study series has a small sample size of African Americans, rendering unreliable empirical analysis if analyzed solely. The sample size of African Americans in the NBES, however, is 1,216 voting-age respondents in the pre-election wave and 854 respondents in the post-election wave (the response rate is 65% in the pre-election phase and 70% in the post-election phase).

Dependent Variable

Political trust is measured by using the standard political trust question found in all analyses that seek to explain political trust. The following question, taken from the 1996 National Black Election Study, is used to operationalize the dependent variable, Trust in Government: “How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Washington to do what is right--just about always, most of the time, or only some of the time?” The question allows respondents to choose one of four different choices (“never,” “only some of the time,” “most of the time,” or “just about always”). Unlike other researchers (Miller 1974; Citrin 1974; Miller et al. 1979; Citrin and Green 1986; Erber and Lau 1990), I do not collapse responses into two categories. Ascertaining true preferences means allowing more choices. So as not to discard information and lose the ability to detect nuances, I use ordered probit.

According to the data set, out of 848 responses, 24 (2%) stated that you can “never” trust government, 601 (49.4%) said you could trust government only “some of the time,” 192 (15.8%) responded that “most of the time” you can trust government, while just 31 (2.5%) believed the government can be trusted “just about always.” In the Appendix is a detailed description of each variable in this paper, including hypothesized direction, question wording, and coding strategy.

Demographics

Demographics comprise of age, Southern residence, education, family income, social class, gender, marital status. Age is measured in number of years old. South is a dummy variable that signifies whether the respondent lives in the South (coded one, zero otherwise). Education is six points measuring years of formal education. Family Income is the combined income of the household. Social Class is a self-identified attachment. Women is a dichotomous variable with one indicating woman and zero denoting man. Married is the variable that measures marital status and is a dichotomous variable (married is given the value one others are zero).

Economic Assessments

Economic assessments consist of personal, comparative racial, and national economic evaluations. Personal Economics is a three-point question on whether the respondent and members in their household are doing better financially than a year ago. Comparative racial economic evaluations are measured using Black-White Economics, which asks respondents whether they believe the economic position is “worsening” to “getting better” when compared with that of whites. National Economics is the perception of whether the Nation’s economy improved over the past year.

Government Beneficence

Government beneficence captures the effects of receiving or living with someone who receives some form of public assistance and serving in the military or living with someone who does. A factor analysis yielded three dimensions. Therefore, three different public assistance variables are in the model. Each dimension incorporates the assistance received in the name. The three dimensions, now independent variables, are ADC/AFDC/Food Stamps, Social Security/SSI, and Unemployment/Worker’s Compensation. Lastly, Military denotes whether the respondent is in the military or lives with someone who is does serve.

Race Orientation

Race orientation measures racial identity, race consciousness, and racial equality, three distinct, but similar concepts. A factor analysis was conducted, and it showed there are three dimensions in this model (see Table 1). Racial Identity is a factor dimension incorporating three beliefs: what happens to African Americans overall will affect them, how often the respondent thinks about being an African American, and whether they are treated based on income or being African American. Race Consciousness is a factor dimension that measures beliefs about whether or not opportunities are affected by how other African Americans are treated and whether people are judged on the content of their character more than their race. Racial Equality is the belief that African Americans will achieve social and economic equality in the United States.

Table 1: Factor Analysis of Government Benefits and Racial Identification Variables

	ADC AFDC	Social Security	Unemployment/ Worker’s Comp.
Food Stamps	.815		
ADC/AFDC	.783		
Social Security		.594	
Supplemental Security Income		.543	
Unemployment Compensation			.700
Worker’s Compensation			.643
	Racial Identity	Racial Consciousness	Racial Equality
Linked fate 2	.756		
Treatment of Black people	.665		
Linked fate	.663		
Commonality with Black people	.544		
Opportunities to get ahead		.657	
Character/Race		.595	
Racial Equality			.767

Results

Table 2 presents the outcomes of the ordered probit analyses. Displayed in the table are the independent variables’ coefficients, denotation of statistical significance, and standard errors in parentheses. Also, reported in the table are the sample size and Pseudo R2. Lastly, in parentheses next to each independent variable is the independent variable’s hypothesized direction.

A number of relationships are detected and they affect political trust in their hypothesized direction. Examining first demographics, as expected, older, Southern, less-educated African Americans and those with perceived higher social class are more trusting of government than their counterparts. Older African Americans are more likely to have intimate knowledge of government’s inability or reluctance to rid society of discrimination. Southern African Americans are also more trusting of government than other African Americans. Southern African Americans trust government more than African Americans

elsewhere because life in the South underwent a dramatic improvement. Additionally, descriptive representation is quite prevalent in the South. African Americans with higher self-identified social classes are of a higher social class than other African Americans, but that this perception is linked with trust in government is in line with the hypothesis that they have an outlook on life that leads to greater trust. Also according to expectations, well-educated African Americans are less trusting of government than less-educated African Americans. Well-educated African Americans are more aware of the country’s past and its treatment of African Americans. They know that government can right social wrongs and they are more aware of and sensitive to differential treatment based on race. Contrary to expectations, female African Americans are more trusting of government and married African Americans are not as trusting of government. It may be the case that, in the African-American community, living arrangements between mates are not formal, but the practical and financial arrangements are the same as in a marriage. Lastly, political trust does not vary with family income.

Table 2: Ordered Probit Analysis of Political Trust

Independent Variables	Coefficients	Standard Error
Age (+)	0.0184***	.0052
South (+)	0.2481**	.1062
Education (-)	-0.1603***	.0572
Family Income (+)	0.0142	.0301
Social Class (+)	0.1864***	.0763
Women (-)	0.1861*	.1232
Married (+)	-0.4524***	.1514
Personal Economics (+)	-0.0032	.0763
Black-White Econ (+)	0.2471***	.0941
National Economics (+)	0.1652**	.0834
ADC/AFDC/Stamps (+)	0.0452	.0661
Social Security/SSI (+)	0.0072	.0643
Unem/Work Comp (+)	0.0211	.0593
Military (+)	0.1371	.1403
Racial Identity (-)	-0.0632	.0624
Race Consciousness (+)	0.1314**	.0601
Racial Equality (+)	0.1724***	.0593
_Cut 1	-0.6183	
_Cut 2	2.2222	
_Cut 3	3.4542	
N	481	
χ^2	78.3631	
Pseudo R2	.10	

Source: 1996 National Black Election Study

Note: *** = $p < .01$, ** = $p < .05$, * = $p < .10$, one-tailed test.

Table 2 reports the results of the ordered probit analysis for economic assessments. Here we find that pocketbook evaluations do not matter, but the relative economic perceptions between African Americans and white Americans and the nation’s economic health do matter. The significance and positive direction of the Black-White Economics and National

Economics variables suggest that positive economic evaluations do encourage African Americans to increase their trust in government. As African Americans perceive the economic conditions of the race improving compared with whites, they develop greater trust in government. The Personal Economics variable is not significant perhaps because African Americans use race as a cue, typically not their own individual circumstances.

Group-centrism leads African Americans to focus on the economic health of the group/race and not their own pocketbooks. So, if they perceive that their race is doing well, then they become more trusting. They are also likely to trust government when the nation's economic condition has improved. Like studies of political trust by white Americans, African Americans trust government more when the national economy is getting better. It appears African Americans can decipher differences between their own financial situation from that of their race and the country when casting judgments of the government.

Based on the ordered probit findings, self-interest does not receive any support. Self-interest does not impinge on political trust among African Americans. African Americans receiving or living with someone who receives ADC/AFDC, food stamps, Social Security, and SSI are no more or less trusting in government than African Americans who do not. In addition, African Americans receiving or living with someone who receives unemployment compensation or worker's compensation and African Americans serving in the military or living with someone who does serve in the military are no more or less likely to trust or distrust government.

In addition to demographic characteristics, political trust by African Americans is influenced by race consciousness and racial equality. The more African believe their fate is determined by factors other than their race, the more they trust government. Furthermore, awareness of the group or race's lack of resources influences trust. The more African Americans are pessimistic of their chances to achieve full social and economic equality on par with whites, the less they trust government. It is from socialization and social learning that they distrust government. By African Americans placing blame on the government and society for their race's relatively deprived state, it leads to lower levels of trust in government.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to address a major limitation in our understanding of trust in government, namely, the lack of attention toward explaining trust in government among African Americans. Toward that end, this analysis developed and tested hypotheses better suited for African Americans, besides borrowing from and revising theories in the extant literature. This political trust literature also tended to explain trust in government among African Americans with a narrow focus on racial discrimination alone. This investigation broadened the lens of examination by accounting for demographics, economic assessments, government beneficence, and race consciousness. Using ordered probit to analyze the 1996 National Black Election Study, I accounted more fully for African Americans' trust in government.

The model constructed yield many findings. First, the demographics variables show that social location and life circumstances help in shaping African Americans' trust in government. Second, economic assessments indicate that African Americans do not base their trust in government according to pocketbook evaluations, but according to sociotropic and comparative racial evaluations. Third, government beneficence does not matter. Fourth political trust by African Americans depends on racial consciousness and awareness.

African American political trust does not vary with government beneficence, an indicator of self-interest. It depends on demographic characteristics, economic assessments,

and racial consciousness. More broadly, these factors point to the relevance of group-centric perspectives in African Americans' political trust, as perceptions of economic advancements compared to whites, linkages to other African Americans, and socioeconomic parity with whites influence how much African Americans trust the government. These group-centric trust orientations are rooted in African Americans' racial experiences, and they are integral in their trust in government to do what is right, despite government's advances toward becoming more democratic, equitable, and inclusive of African Americans. Results herein support future studies of the multi-faceted role of race in African Americans' trust in government.

This scholarship yields several directions for future research. First, scholars should investigate further the impact of one's tangible relationship with the government on trust. More research should consider explaining political trust from a perspective of how much and how effective are the economic benefits bestowed by government. Second, research should take into account the policy satisfaction of African Americans based on policies, particularly, racial policies. Third, analyses should ascertain whether interaction with other races bolster or hinder political trust among African Americans. We do not know the effects of interracial or interminority conflict or cooperation on political trust. Lastly, an investigation of how President Barack Obama's election may have influenced African-American political trust is warranted.

Undoubtedly, the election of President Barack Obama boosted political trust among African Americans. The racial animosity by many white and conservative citizens directed toward President Obama must also be taken into account. In addition, in the absence of improved conditions for African Americans, President Obama's reluctance to have a national conversation on race or racism, and his unwillingness to develop policies that target African Americans as beneficiaries could have reversed increases in African-American political trust. An empirical analysis is called for to determine what occurred.

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Appendix. Description of Variables Used in Analysis of Political Trust

Dependent Variable

Trust in Government "How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Washington to do what is right--just about always, most of the time, or only some of the time?" 1 = never, 2 = only some of the time, 3 = most of the time, 4 = just about always.

Independent Variables

Age (+) Age in years, ranging from 17-90.
 South (+) 1 = South. 0 = Non-South. Southern states include Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia. Education (-) 1 = grade school (grades 1-8), 2 = some high school, no degree (grades 9-12), 3 = high school degree, 4 = some college, no degree, 5 = Associate's/ 2-year degree, Bachelor's/4-year degree, 6 = some graduate school, Master's degree, doctorate/law degree.

Family Income (+) Combined income of all members of your family living with respondent, for 1995 before taxes. Range: 1 (up to \$10,000) to 11 (\$105,000 and more).

Social Class (+) "People talk about social classes such as the poor, the working class, the middle class, the upper-middle class, and the upper class. Which of these classes would you say you belong to?" 1 = poor, 2 = working class, 3 = middle class, 4 = upper-middle class, 5 = upper class.

Women (-) 1 = woman, 0 = man.

Married (+) 1 = married, 0 = not married.

Personal Economics (+) "We are interested in how people are getting along financially these days. Would you say that you (and others in your household) are better off or worse off financially than you were a year ago?" -1 = worse off, 0 = same, 1 = better off.

Black-White Economics (+) "On the whole, would you say that the economic position of Blacks is better, about the same, or worse than whites?" -1 = worse, 0 = about the same, 1 = better.

National Economics (+) How about the economy? Would you say that over the past year the Nation's economy has gotten better, stayed about the same, or gotten

	worse?" -1 = gotten worse, 0 = stayed the same, 1 = gotten better.
ADC/AFDC/Food Stamps (+)	"Did you or anyone in your household receive any other income in 1995 from. . ." ADC or AFDC and food stamps? 1 = yes, 0 = no.
Social Security/SSI (+)	"Did you or anyone in your household receive any other income in 1995 from. . ." Social Security and Supplemental Security Income. 1 = yes, 0 = no.
Unem/Worker's Compensation (+)	"Did you or anyone in your household receive any other income in 1995 from. . ." Unemployment compensation and worker's compensation. 1 = yes, 0 = no.
Military (+)	"Do you or a family member currently serve in the military?" 1 = yes, 0 = no.
Racial Identity (-)	"Do you think what happens generally to Black people in this country will have something to do with what happens in your life?" 1 = yes, 0 = no. "People differ in whether they think about being Black--what they have in common with Blacks. What about you--do you think about this a lot, fairly often, once in a while, or hardly ever?" 1 = hardly ever, 2 = once in a while, 3 = fairly often, 4 = a lot. "What happens to Black people in this country has a lot to do with what happens to me." 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = somewhat disagree, 3 = somewhat agree, 4 = strongly agree. "Being Black determines a lot how you are treated in this country, more than how much money a person earns." 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = somewhat disagree, 3 = somewhat agree, 4 = strongly agree.
Race Consciousness (+)	"Your opportunities to get ahead aren't affected much by how other Blacks are generally treated in this country." 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = somewhat disagree, 3 = somewhat agree, 4 = strongly agree. "In this country, people judge you more on the content of your character than on your race." 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = somewhat disagree, 3 = somewhat agree, 4 = strongly agree.
Racial Equality (+)	"Will Blacks in this country ever achieve full social and economic equality?" 1 = yes, 0 = no.
