



Determinants of Government Trust

Rylee Parker^{1,3}, Judge J. Christian Becerra²

¹Thurgood Marshall High School, Missouri City, Tx

²434th District Court, Fort Bend County Justice Center

³Gifted and Talented Mentorship Program, Fort Bend ISD



Methodology

This study used surveys and interviews in Fort Bend County to measure how voters form trust in local officials. The survey asked participants to identify their political party and then respond to a series of Likert-scale questions about corruption, personal benefit, and whether reactions changed depending on the official's party. Participants could also volunteer for follow-up interviews. The interviews mirrored the survey topics but allowed respondents to explain how they judge trust, corruption, and political identity in greater depth.

Results

Figure 1:

Do you believe corruption exists in government?
265 responses

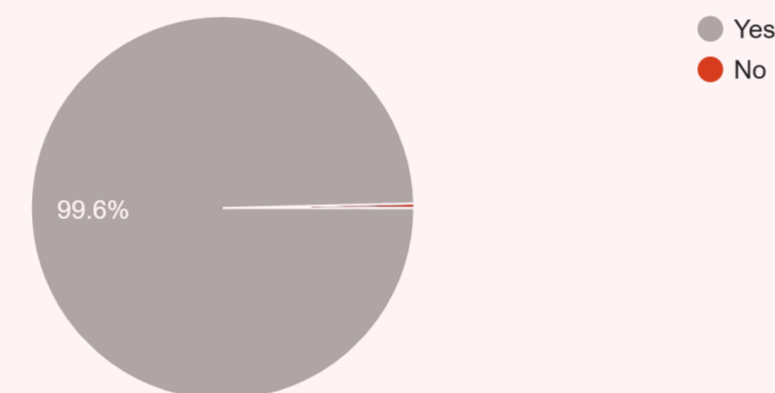


Figure 2:

What political party do you identify with?
251 responses

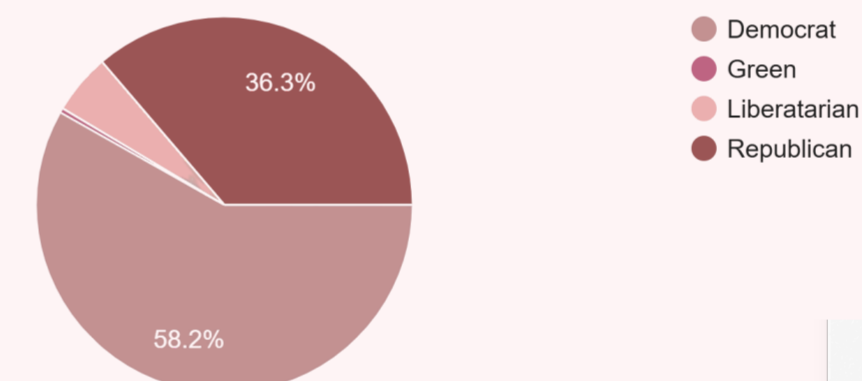


Figure 3:

Would you excuse or support a corrupt action by an official from your political party, if it benefits you?
264 responses

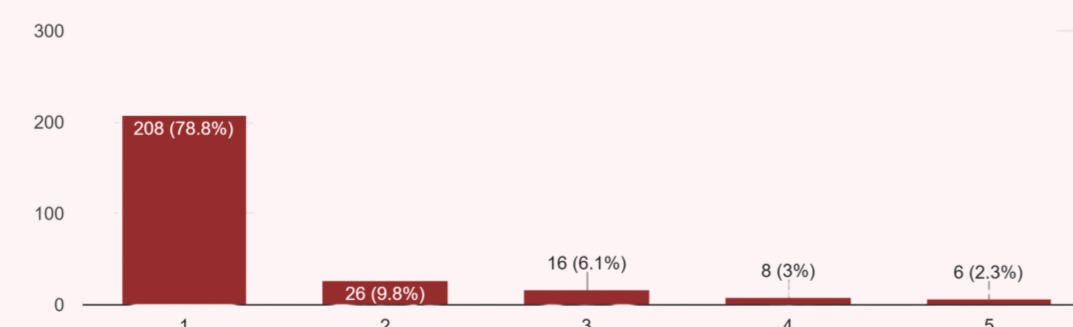
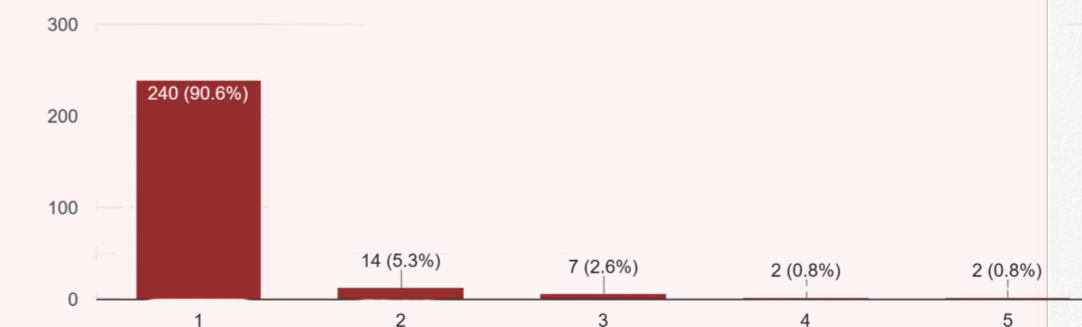


Figure 4:

Would you excuse or support a corrupt action by an official from your political party, if it does not benefit you?
265 responses



References

Iyengar, Shanto, and Sean J. Westwood. "Fear and Loathing Across Party Lines: New Evidence on Group Polarization." *American Journal of Political Science*, vol. 59, no. 3, 2015, pp. 690–707.
Pew Research Center. "Public Trust in Government: 1958–2023." Pew Research Center, 2023, www.pewresearch.org/politics/2023/09/19/public-trust-in-government-1958-2023.

This study examines whether trust in local officials is driven more by political identity than by their actions. Using surveys and interviews in Fort Bend County, the research measured reactions to corruption across party lines. Results show strong overall rejection of corruption, but a small group is more willing to excuse it when it benefits them or comes from their own party. These findings indicate that political identity plays a limited but noticeable role in shaping trust in local government.

Abstract

Trust in American democracy has weakened as partisanship has grown, raising questions about whether voters trust officials for their actions or simply because they share a political identity. Research shows declining trust and increasing partisan loyalty, but little of it focuses on local government, where citizens interact most directly with elected officials. This study addresses that gap by examining whether voters judge local officials based on performance or party alignment. It proposes that political identity may lead some voters to trust or support local officials from their own party even when those officials act against the voter's stated preferences.

Introduction/ Summary

Survey responses showed broad agreement that corruption exists in government and strong overall rejection of corrupt behavior. However, a small portion of respondents were more willing to excuse corruption when it benefited them or came from their own party. Reactions were harshest toward corruption by opposing-party officials with no personal benefit. Interviews supported these patterns: participants from both parties emphasized honesty, qualifications, and accountability, and all said they would not excuse corruption.

Findings

The results show that while most voters strongly reject corruption, political identity still shapes how a small portion evaluate local officials. This suggests that partisanship influences trust even at the local level, though not as strongly as national research might imply. The consistency between survey and interview responses indicates that voters value honesty and accountability across party lines, but personal benefit and shared identity can still create exceptions. These findings highlight the need to better understand how partisan loyalty interacts with expectations for ethical behavior in local government.

Discussion