

Methodology of “Trust Among Americans Isn’t Over Yet”

By Josh Morgan, July 2024

Introduction

This is a summary of the methodology I used for the article “Trust Among Americans Isn’t Over Yet”, which was posted on pluralofyou.org in July 2024. My goal in writing the article was to analyze trust among Americans and its variation between the most significant groups. I determined the significance in my previous article on trust and excluded groups where correlations were not as significant.

I needed to recode specific data from the General Social Survey (GSS) to achieve this. The remainder of this document describes my recodes. The data is linked in the article in .xlsx format.

About the Data

The data presented in this article was collected in the GSS, a longitudinal study of sociological trends in the United States. Data was extracted from the cumulative file ending with the year 2022, filename GSS7218_R3.sav. For more information on the sampling methods and survey instruments used, consult the GSS Data Explorer website at <https://gssdataexplorer.norc.org/>.

About the Charts Used in the Article

The charts found in the article were constructed using five survey items. Data from SPSS output files were used to construct the charts in Microsoft Excel 365 (2024). Images of these charts were then exported to Photopea.com for formatting and optimization.

Note that data for years with missing values, i.e., years in which the GSS was not administered, were extrapolated with Excel’s “Connect data points with line” function.

Indicators and Measures

Data was analyzed using Version 26 of SPSS. The variables analyzed were recoded in SPSS as described below. Dummy variables were computed for each factor to analyze Pearson's correlation scores. Ordinal-level variables were also computed for each factor to calculate the percentages of respondents who expressed trust by year. Note that "Missing," "Don't Know," and "No Answer" values were removed from all recoded variables with the (*ELSE=SYSMIS*) syntax in SPSS.

Responses to the question of trust (below) by value were cross-tabulated in SPSS. The following is an example of the syntax used for each variable and value in this analysis.

```
TEMPORARY.  
SELECT IF (race=1).  
CROSSTABS  
  /TABLES=year BY trustr  
  /FORMAT=AVALUE TABLES  
  /CELLS=COUNT  
  /COUNT ROUND CELL.
```

Trust

The GSS item *trust* asked, "Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?" *Trust* had three values: 1 – Can trust, 2 – Cannot trust (or "Can't be too careful"), 3 – Depends. The variable was recoded into a dummy variable, *trustr*, with two values: 0 – Cannot be trusted, or Depends, and 1 – Can be trusted. The values for Cannot trust and Depends were collapsed into one value to isolate doubts in trust among respondents, and to create a value with larger sample sizes by year.

Trustr was recoded using the following syntax in SPSS:

```
RECODE trust (1=1) (2 thru 3=0) (ELSE=SYSMIS) INTO trustr.  
VARIABLE LABELS trustr 'Recode of trust, 1 = Can trust'.  
VALUE LABELS trustr  
  0 'Cannot trust, or Depends'  
  1 'Can trust'.  
EXECUTE.
```

Education

The variable *degree* was an ordinal-level variable that recorded respondents' highest completed degree of education. The values were: 0 – Less than high school, 1 – High school, 2 – Associate/Junior college, 3 – Bachelor's, and 4 – Graduate.

Geographic Region

The GSS item for *region* asked respondents what geographic region of the United States that they lived in. *Region* had nine values, which were set by the US Census Bureau and the NORC. More specific analyses based on smaller regions were not possible due to value constraints and the small sample sizes of the regions by year.

Race

The variable *race* had three values: 1 – White, 2 – Black, 3 – Other. These values were recoded into a dummy variable, *racer*, with two values, 0 – Non-white, and 1 – White. In the variable *racer*, Black and Other were merged into Non-white to create a value with more cases, as the number of respondents who identified as Other were relatively low in most years.

Racer was recoded using the following syntax in SPSS:

```
RECODE race (1=1) (2 thru 3=0) (ELSE=SYSMIS) INTO racer.  
VARIABLE LABELS racer 'Race: White'.  
VALUE LABELS racer  
0 'Non-white'  
1 'White'.  
EXECUTE.
```