TRUST IN THE MEDIA

AND PARTISANSHIP

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OVERALL THEORY

Partisan identity operates as a primary social and political lens through which individuals interpret information, including their evaluations of institutional legitimacy such as the news media. Drawing on theories of motivated reasoning and affective polarization, this theory posits that **Republicans, relative to Democrats, will exhibit systematically lower levels of trust in the media**, even after accounting for education. Education is often theorized to enhance cognitive engagement and critical thinking, which can moderate institutional skepticism. However, **when partisan identity is salient and reinforced by elite cues—particularly within conservative epistemic communities—distrust in the media becomes an affectively charged and identity-consistent stance**. Therefore, the persistence of low trust in media among Republicans across educational strata supports the claim that **partisan socialization and elite-driven narratives outweigh individual-level cognitive moderators** like education in shaping attitudes toward the press.

HYPOTHESIS

There is a negative relationship between Republican partisanship and media trust: identifying as a Republican is associated with lower levels of trust in the media.

SOURCE OF DATA

AMERICAN NATIONAL ELECTION STUDIES (ANES) 2024 TIME SERIES STUDY PRELIMINARY RELEASE: COMBINED PRE-ELECTION AND POST-ELECTION DATA

OPERATIONALIZATION: Binary categories delegated to each party, 1 being Democrat or "D," and 2 being Republican or "R." Independents are excluded due to categorical fuzziness.

Source Variable: V241221 from the ANES 2024 dataset.

Question Asked: "Does R think of self as Democrat, Republican, or Independent?"

IV – PARTY IDENTIFICATION

OPERATIONALIZATION: A continuous variable for trust in the media where lower values reflect less trust in the media; 1 = None, 2 = A little, 3 = A moderate amount, 4 = A lot, 5 = A great deal.

Source Variable: V241335 from the ANES 2024 dataset.

Question Asked: "How much trust [do you have] in news media[?]"

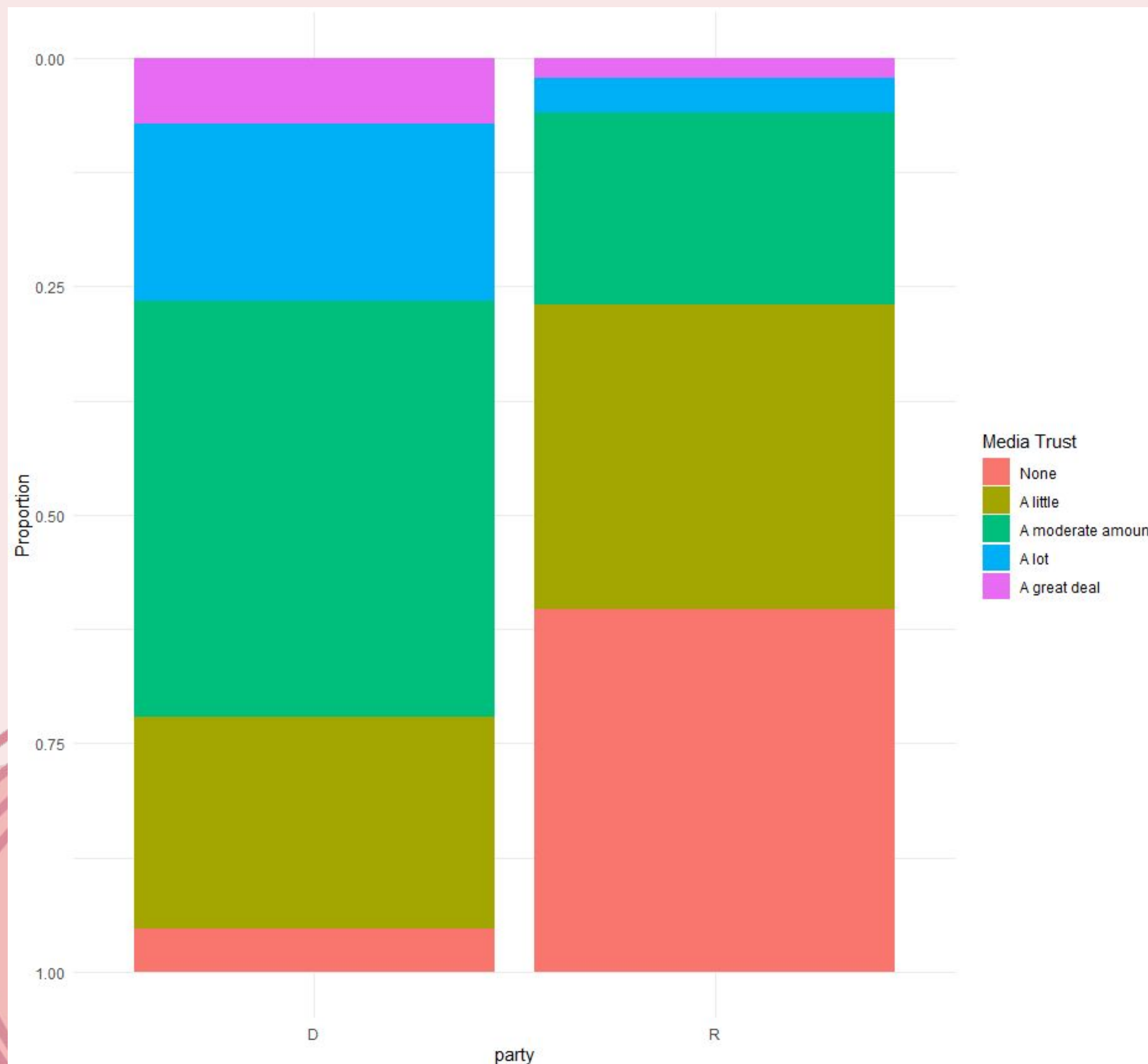# DV – MEDIA TRUST

Pearson's Chi-squared test

data: table.data
X-squared = 899.82*, df = 5**,
p-value < 2.2e-16***

how much the observed counts in the contingency table deviate from the counts expected if there were no association between the IV and the DV.

**degrees of freedom reflect the number of independent values that can vary when estimating parameters.*

***the probability of observing a chi-squared statistic as extreme as, or more extreme than, the one calculated assuming the null hypothesis is true. the data provides a p-value smaller than alpha level .05, meaning that the association between the two variables is statistically significant.*

I ran a chi-squared test to examine whether there is a statistically significant association between political party affiliation and levels of media trust in the dataset. This test is appropriate because both variables are categorical, allowing me to assess if the distribution of media trust differs across party groups beyond what might be expected by chance.

This stacked bar chart shows the proportion of media trust levels within each political party group (Democrat = D, Republican = R). The x-axis represents political parties, and the y-axis displays the relative proportion of respondents in each trust category, with the y-axis inverted to emphasize higher trust levels at the top. Different colors indicate the varying degrees of media trust, allowing for easy comparison of how trust in media varies between party ID.

This is a preliminary graph that does not account for confounding variables such as education or race; it shows that there is a negative relationship between identifying as a Republican and trust in the media.

FORESEEABLE ISSUES

➢ Media Trust: The question "How much trust in news media" may not fully encapsulate all dimensions of trust in the media, including, but not limited to: trust in specific outlets, biases, or fake news concerns/allegations.

➢ Party ID: Self-reported party ID can be fluid and not fully representative of how someone votes in elections. Excluding independents could potentially omit important nuances in the data.

FORESEEABLE ISSUES

➢ Unable to claim causality between the IV and DV as the design of this research is observational.

➢ There are other factors that influence both party ID and media distrust besides education, including, but not limited to: race, financial status, religion, or age.

OPERATIONALIZATION: A categorical variable that represents different levels of education obtained by respondents. The data from ANES 2024 is recoded into meaningful education level labels for easier interpretation.*

Source Variable: V241463

Question Asked: "Highest level of education"

* Respondents who refused to answer the question or provided responses that fell outside the valid categorical levels for education were omitted from the analysis in order to maintain the validity and meaningfulness of the data.

CONTROL VARIABLE – EDUCATION

Media Trust by Party ID, Controlling for Education
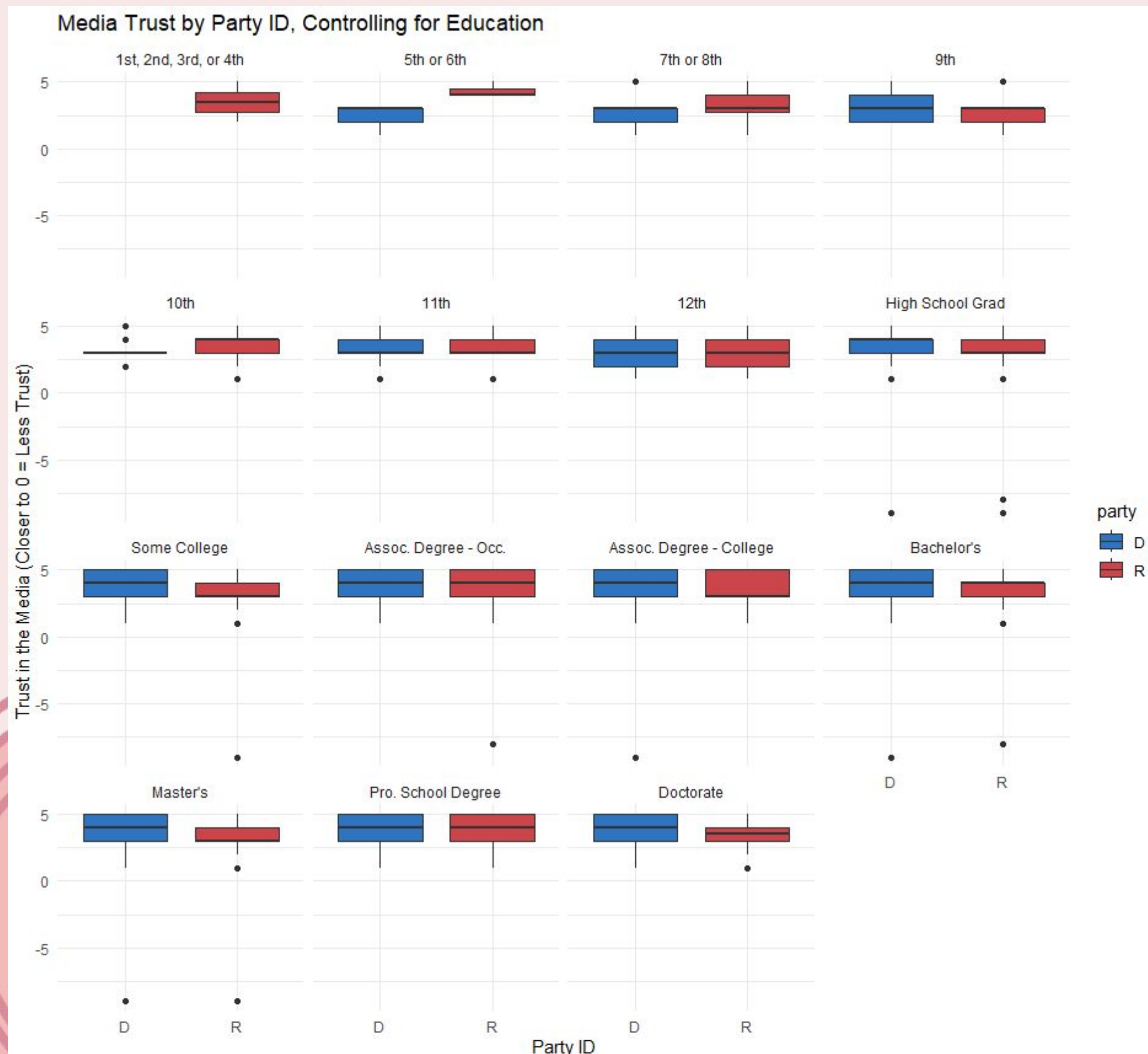
This graph shows that across all levels of education, Republicans are consistently more likely than Democrats to have lower levels of trust in the media, suggesting that party ID has a strong and consistent relationship with media trust independent of educational attainment.*

Dots across the graph represent outliers in the dataset.