

News Sources, Economic Status and Trust in Government: A Bipartisan Divide

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Abstract Statisticians, political scientists, sociologists and economist have studied the relationship between socioeconomic status and political leaning since these professions first began. This paper delves even deeper, and tries to show how socioeconomic status, political leaning and source of political and economic news influence the level of trust in both government and society. The results can be summarized in three sentences. Political party affiliation has little to no bearing in level of trust in government. The source of political news has a strong correlation with level of societal trust in government. And last but not least, the class divide no longer significantly influence political party affiliations.

Introduction

The R language (R Core Team 2021) is used, in addition to a variety of packages and scholarly sources. Please refer to the Bibliography section or the “references.bib” file in the Git repository for more information. The dataset from (Democracy and Assistance 2021) is used. The (Francois 2020) package is used to assist in citing external resources. The relationship in question can be summarized as one between household income, federal political party affiliation, trust in government and society and source of political news. Further stratification based on age is done to observe whether socioeconomic status has changed among different age groups. This post-stratification was collected by (Ruggles et al. 1970).

Data before Stratification

Obtaining the Data

The (Democracy and Assistance 2021) dataset includes multiple compressed folders. All of them have been extract in the data subdirectory of the inputs folder. Within this, exists a folder for the data in the Stata file format, which further contains subdirectories which contain the data and relevant utility files for specific time periods, primarily divided into 3 phases. Each phase has subdirectories for various time periods. However, in the parent folder with the directories for all the phases, a directory which includes all the parallel studies exists. Only the parallel surveys will be used for the purposes of this paper since they were are conducted concurrently, so we can eliminate any speculation that can be attributed to differences regarding time-specific situations. The (Wickham, Chang, et al. 2021) is used for all graphing purposes.

Preparing the Data

The (Wickham and Miller 2021) package is used to read and parse these Stata files. Within the selected directory specified in the previous subsection, we individually select each parallel study, assigning them to a sepearte variable, and then merge them using (Wickham, François, et al. 2021) for cumulative results.

The (Wickham 2021) package is also extensively used for the purposes of data extraction, selection and manipulation.

Selecting the variables

In the interests of both time and readability, we will choose specific variables for the purposes of this paper. Furthermore, we will only take mainstream sources of all news media in account. These variables consist of “household_income” (measures gross household income), “primary_party” (records whether the respondent voter for the Republican Party, the Democratic Party, for neither or is unsure about it), “news_sources_facebook” (determines whether respondent got their news regarding politics from social media), “news_sources_cnn” (determines whether respondent got their news regarding politics from CNN), “news_sources_msnbc”, “news_sources_fox” and “news_sources_newyorktimes” (the last three represent whether a respondent got their political news from MSNBC, Fox or the New York Times respectively.)

What the values in the dataset represent

The “household_income” variable measures gross incomes less than \$14,999, which is represented by 1, all the way to \$250,000, which represented by 24. In between there are twenty-two income brackets, representing increments of \$5000 by integers in ascending order. The following image is taken from the survey’s provided cookbook (Democracy and Assistance 2021):

We will merge multiple ranges for better readability. We define respondents with gross household incomes represented by the identifier 1 as “destitute”, represented by the identifies 2 to 5 as “poor”, 6 to 12 as “working”, 13 to 19 as “middle”, 20 to 23 as “upper” and 24 as “rich.”

Choice	Value
Less than \$14,999	1
\$15,000 to \$19,999	2
\$20,000 to \$24,999	3
\$25,000 to \$29,999	4
\$30,000 to \$34,999	5
\$35,000 to \$39,999	6
\$40,000 to \$44,999	7
\$45,000 to \$49,999	8
\$50,000 to \$54,999	9
\$55,000 to \$59,999	10
\$60,000 to \$64,999	11
\$65,000 to \$69,999	12
\$70,000 to \$74,999	13
\$75,000 to \$79,999	14
\$80,000 to \$84,999	15
\$85,000 to \$89,999	16
\$90,000 to \$94,999	17
\$95,000 to \$99,999	18
\$100,000 to \$124,999	19
\$125,000 to \$149,999	20
\$150,000 to \$174,999	21
\$175,000 to \$199,999	22
\$200,000 to \$249,999	23
\$250,000 and above	24
Respondent Skipped	.

Figure 1: Household Income Ranges and their identifiers

Similarly, the variables representing federal political party affiliation and source of political news and their

Choice	Value
The Democratic Primary/Caucus	1
The Republican Primary/Caucus	2
Neither	3
Not Sure	999
Respondent Skipped	.

identifiers are shown by the following images from the same Cookbook:

news_sources_facebook

Question Prompt: We're interested in where you might have heard news about politics in the past week. Have you seen or heard news about politics on any of the following outlets in the past week? - Social Media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter)

Choice	Value
Yes	1
No	2
Respondent Skipped	.

news_sources_cnn

Question Prompt: We're interested in where you might have heard news about politics in the past week. Have you seen or heard news about politics on any of the following outlets in the past week? - CNN

Choice	Value
Yes	1
No	2
Respondent Skipped	.

news_sources_msnbc

Question Prompt: We're interested in where you might have heard news about politics in the past week. Have you seen or heard news about politics on any of the following outlets in the past week? - MSNBC

Choice	Value
Yes	1
No	2
Respondent Skipped	.

news_sources_fox

Question Prompt: We're interested in where you might have heard news about politics in the past week. Have you seen or heard news about politics on any of the following outlets in the past week? - Fox News (cable)

Choice	Value
Yes	1
No	2
Respondent Skipped	.

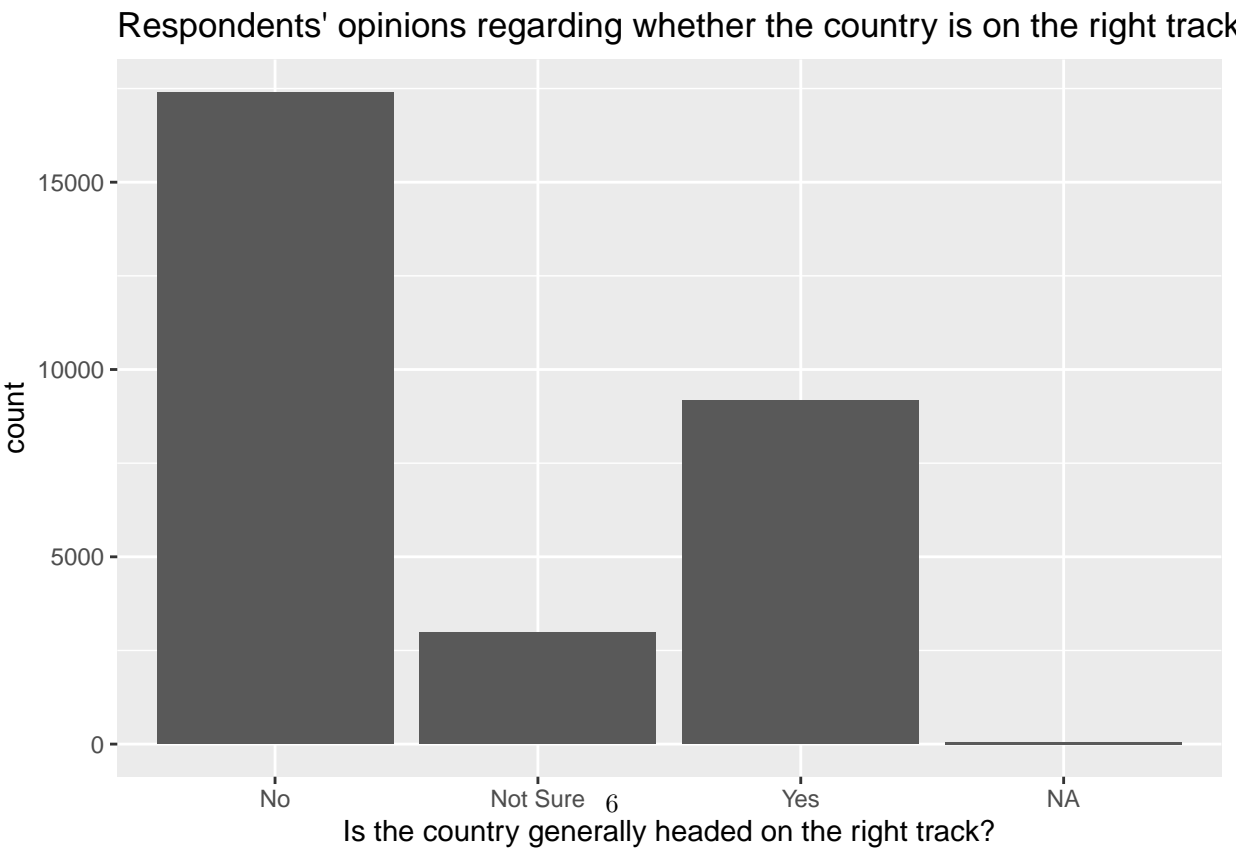
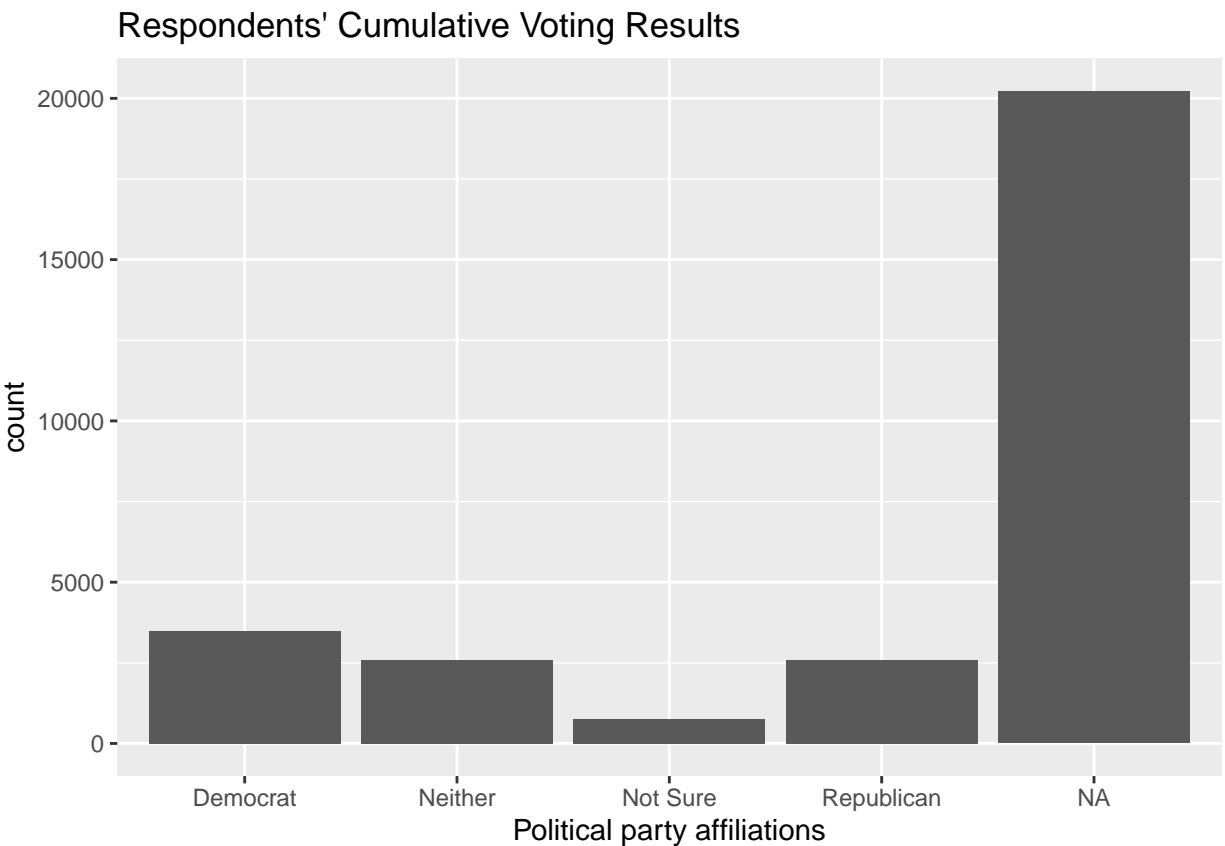
news_sources_new_york_times

Question Prompt: We're interested in where you might have heard news about politics in the past week. Have you seen or heard news about politics on any of the following outlets in the past week? - National Newspaper (e.g. New York Times, Wall Street Journal, USA TODAY, Washington Post)

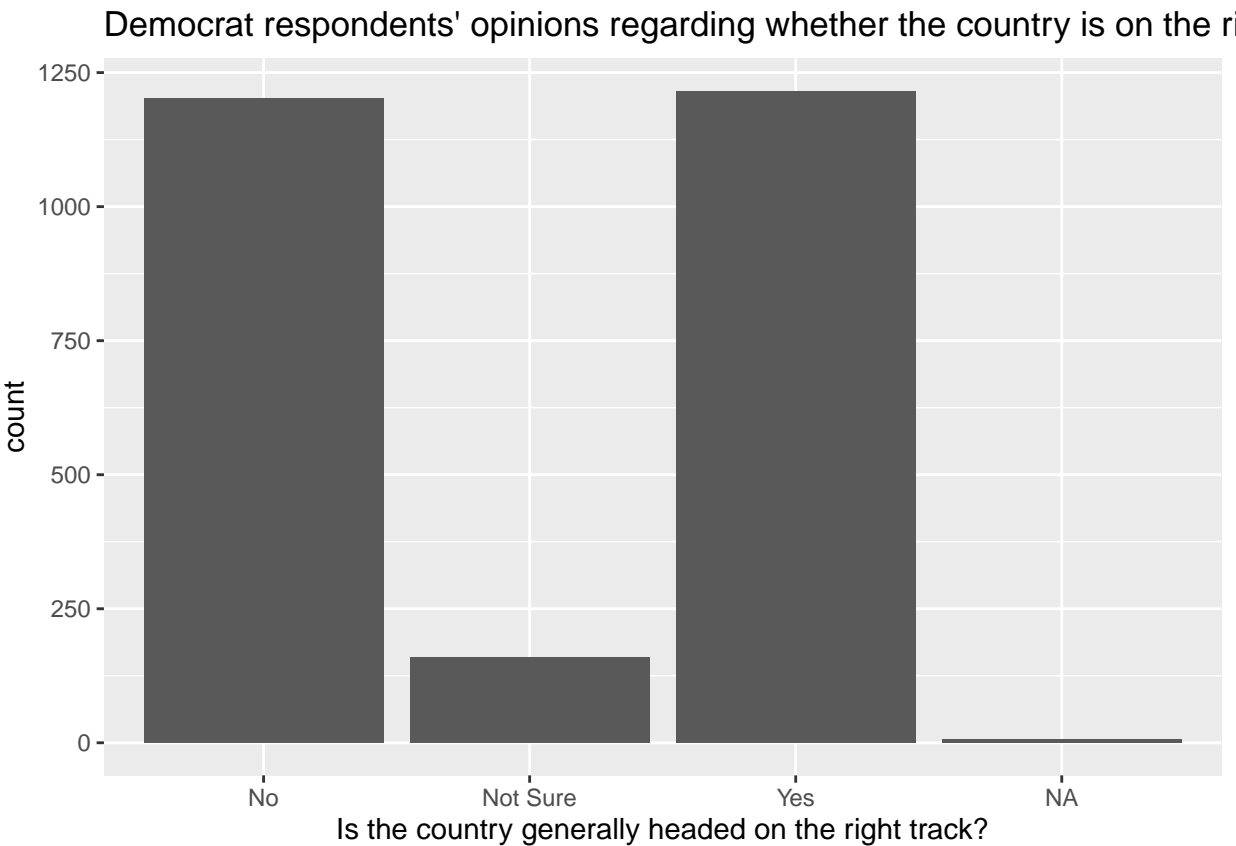
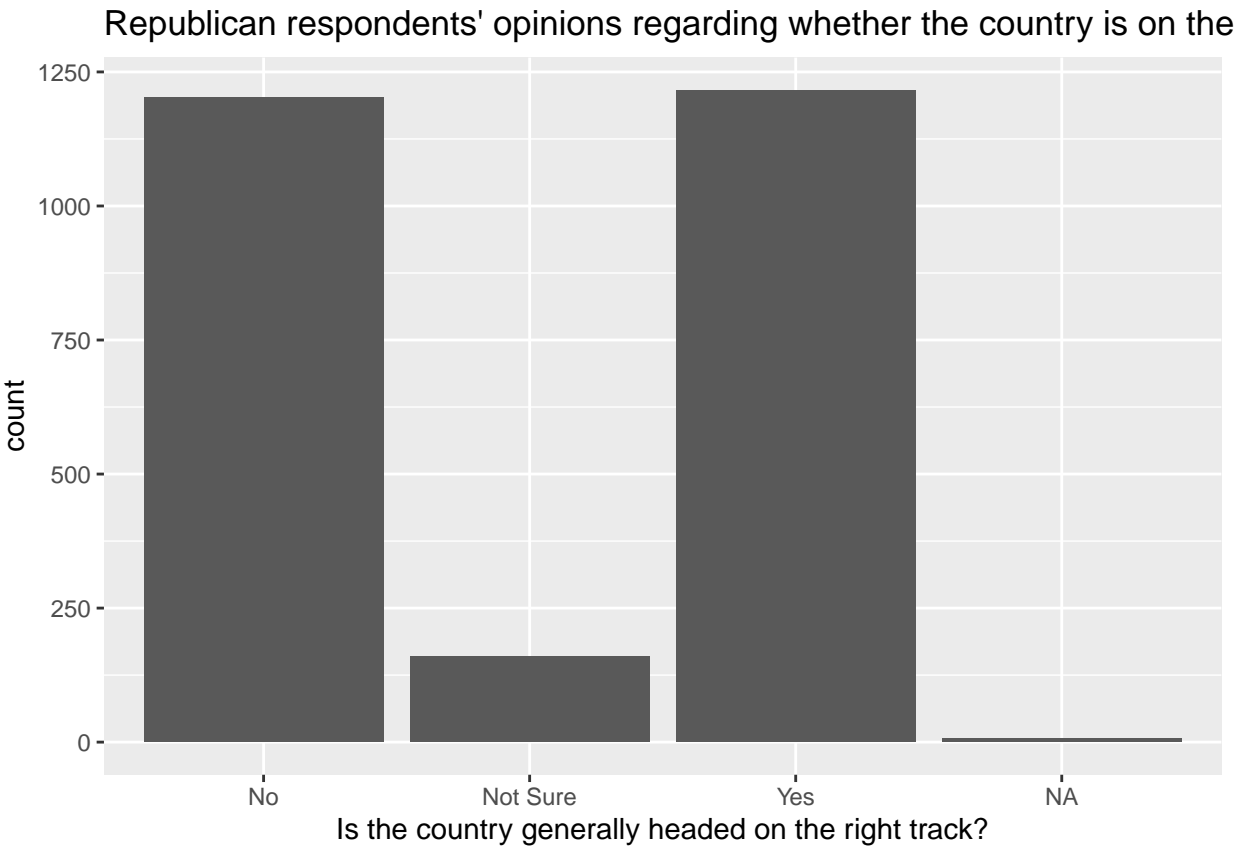
Choice	Value
Yes	1
No	2
Respondent Skipped	.

Exploring the Relationship between Party Affiliation and Source of News

Cumulative Analyses

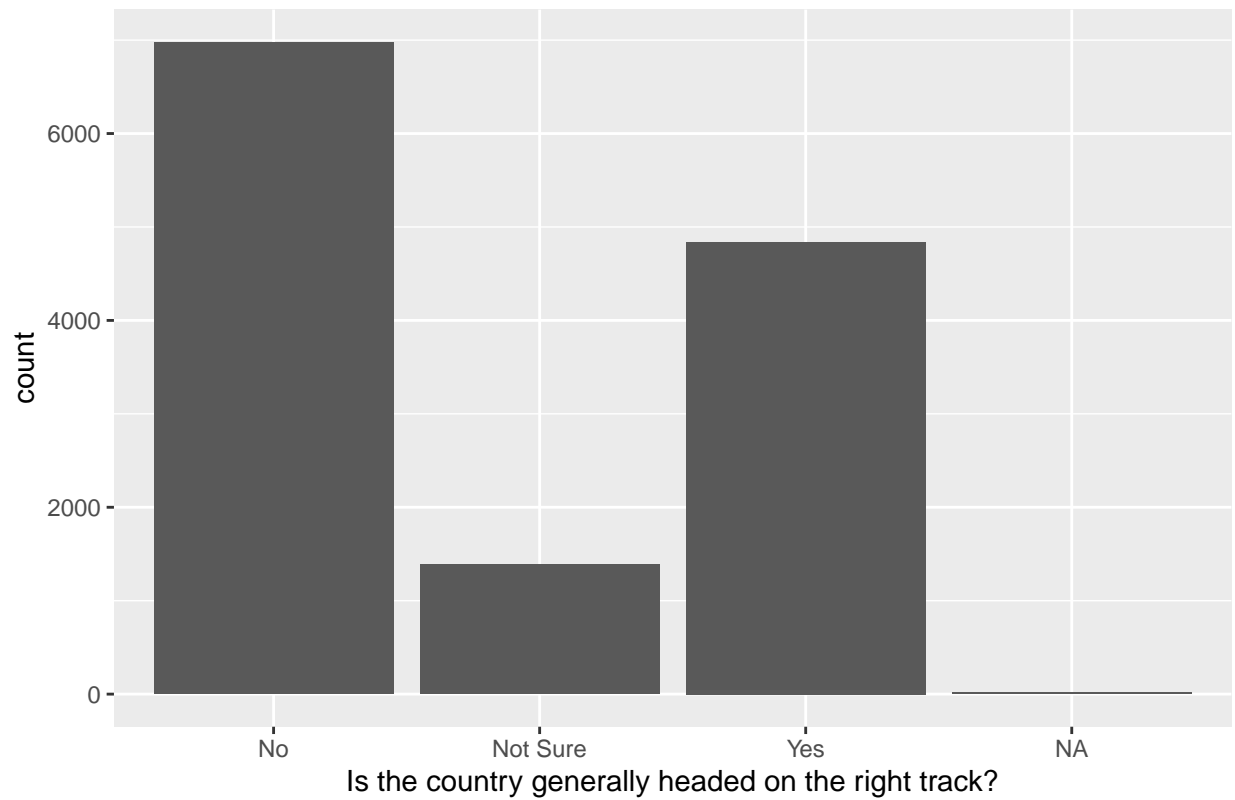


Analyses Based on Party Affiliation

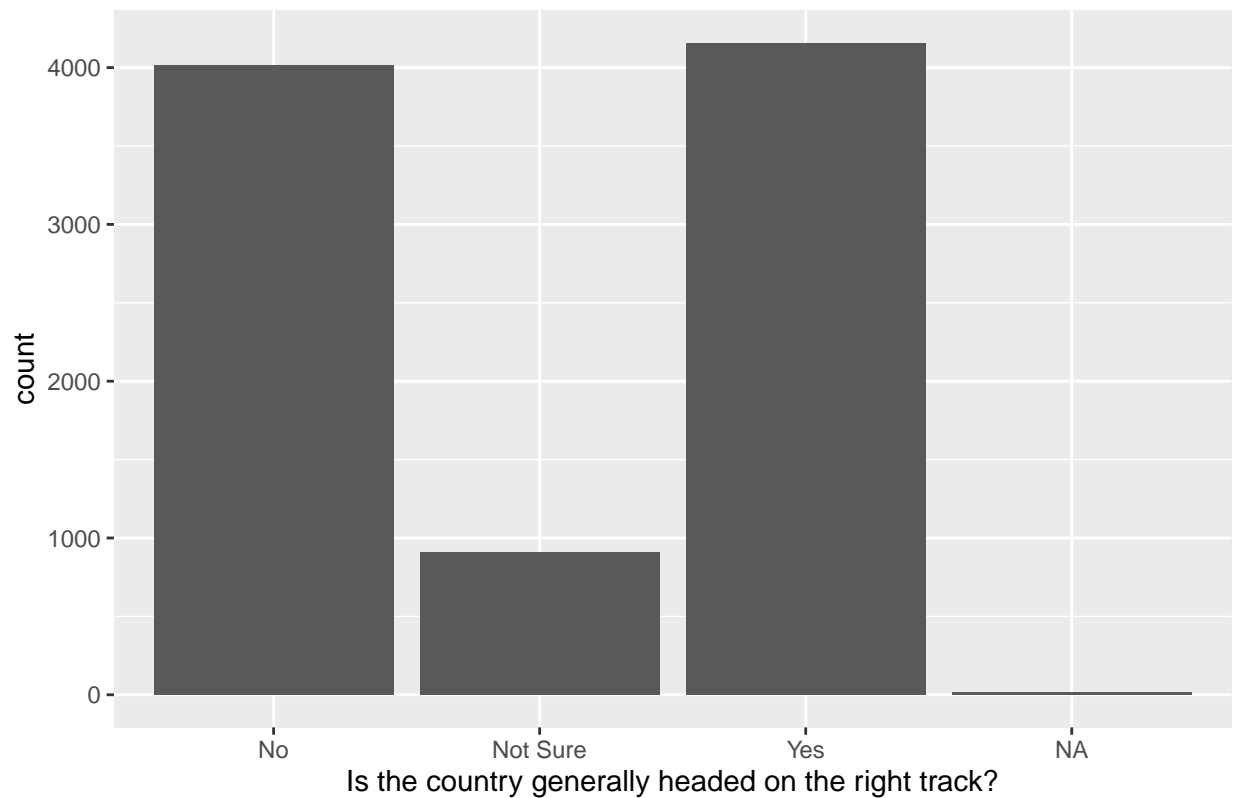


Analyses Based on Source of Political News

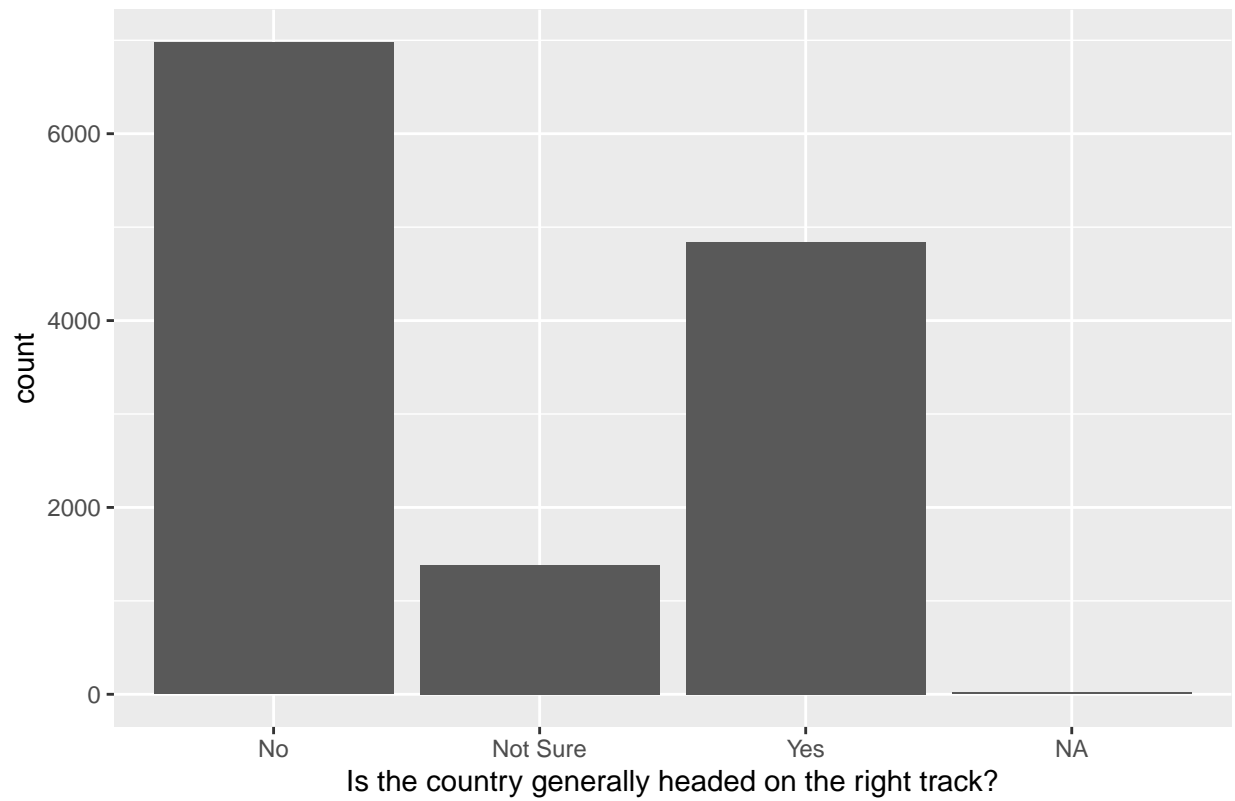
Repondents' that received political news from social media.



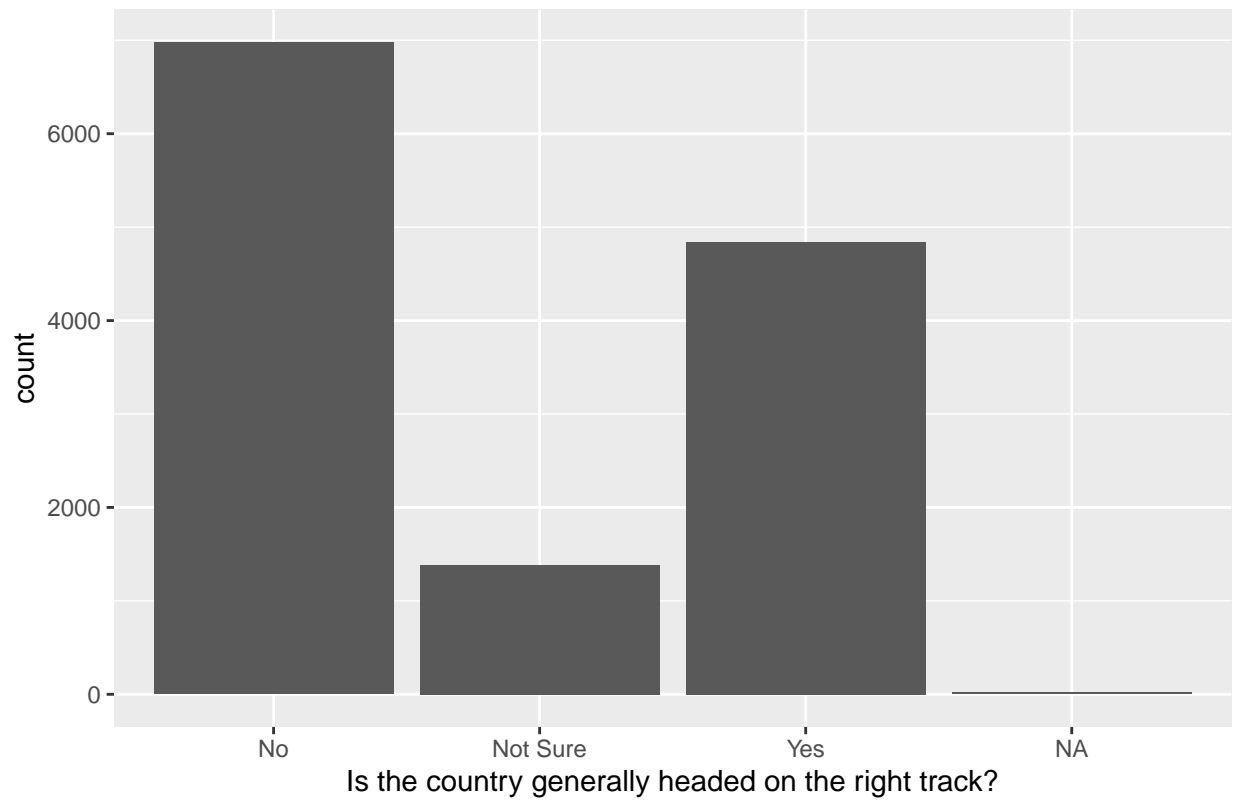
Repondents' that received political news from CNN.



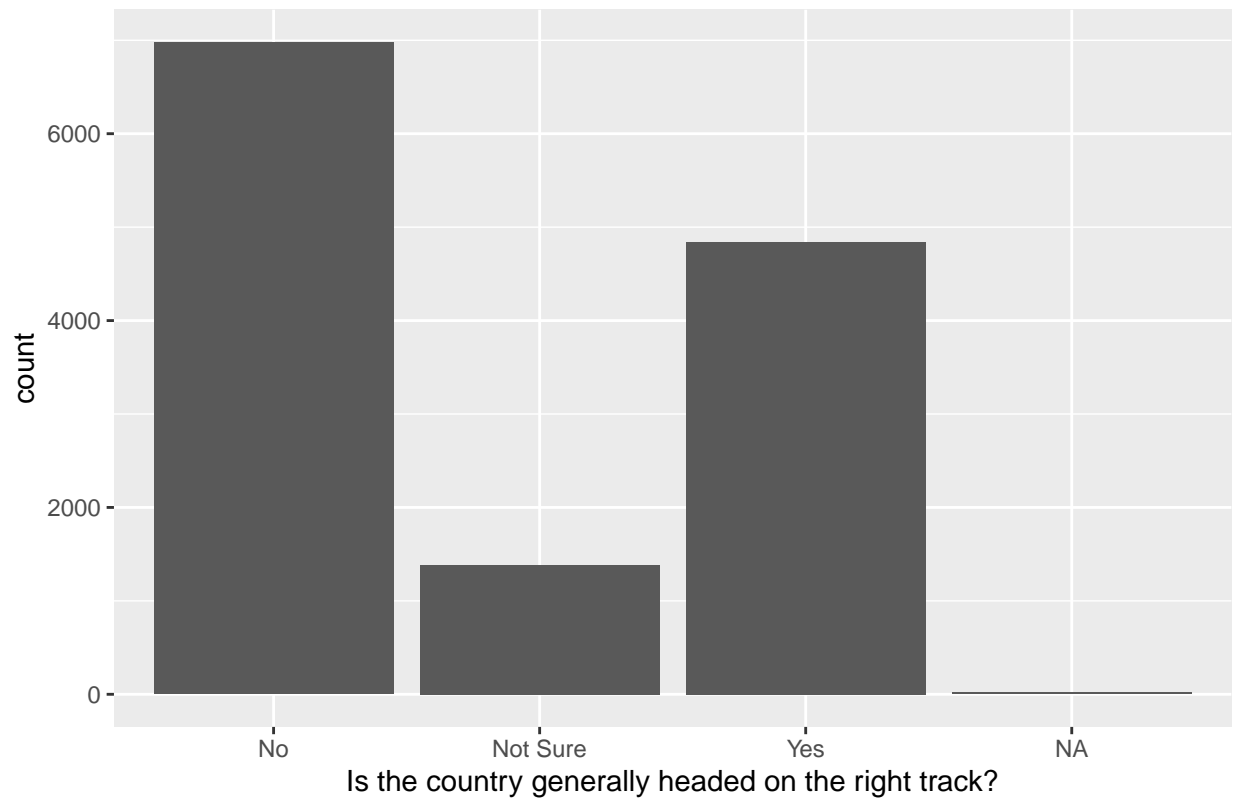
Repondents' that received political news from MSNBC.



Repondents' that received political news from Fox.

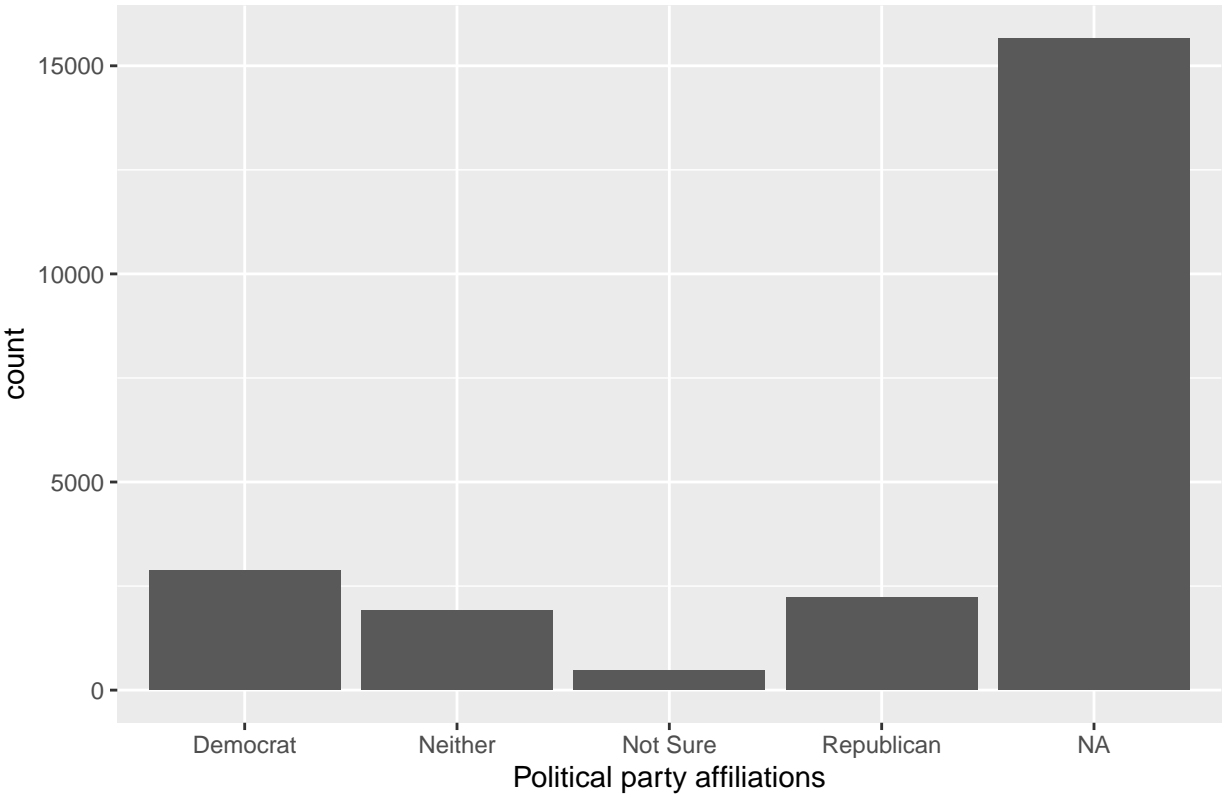


Repondents' that received political news from the New York Times.

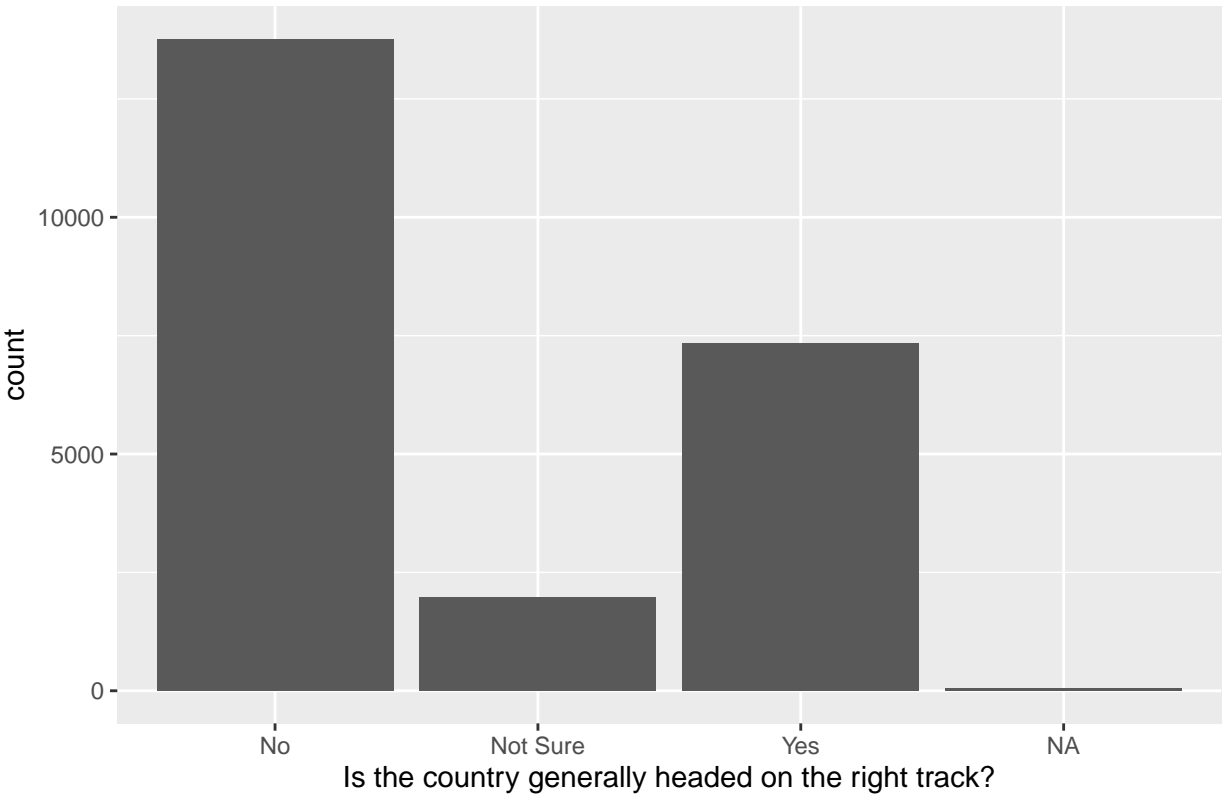


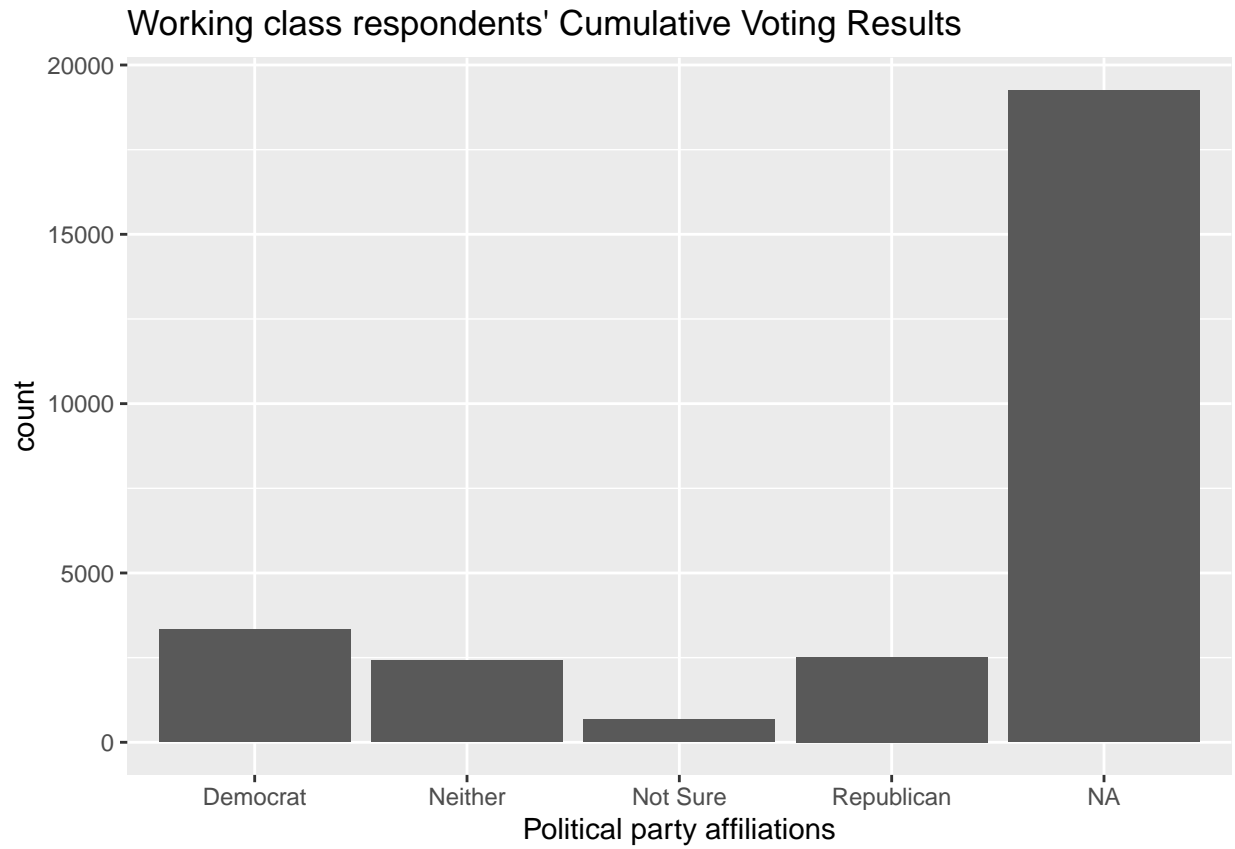
Analyses based on Gross Household Income

Poor respondents' Cumulative Voting Results

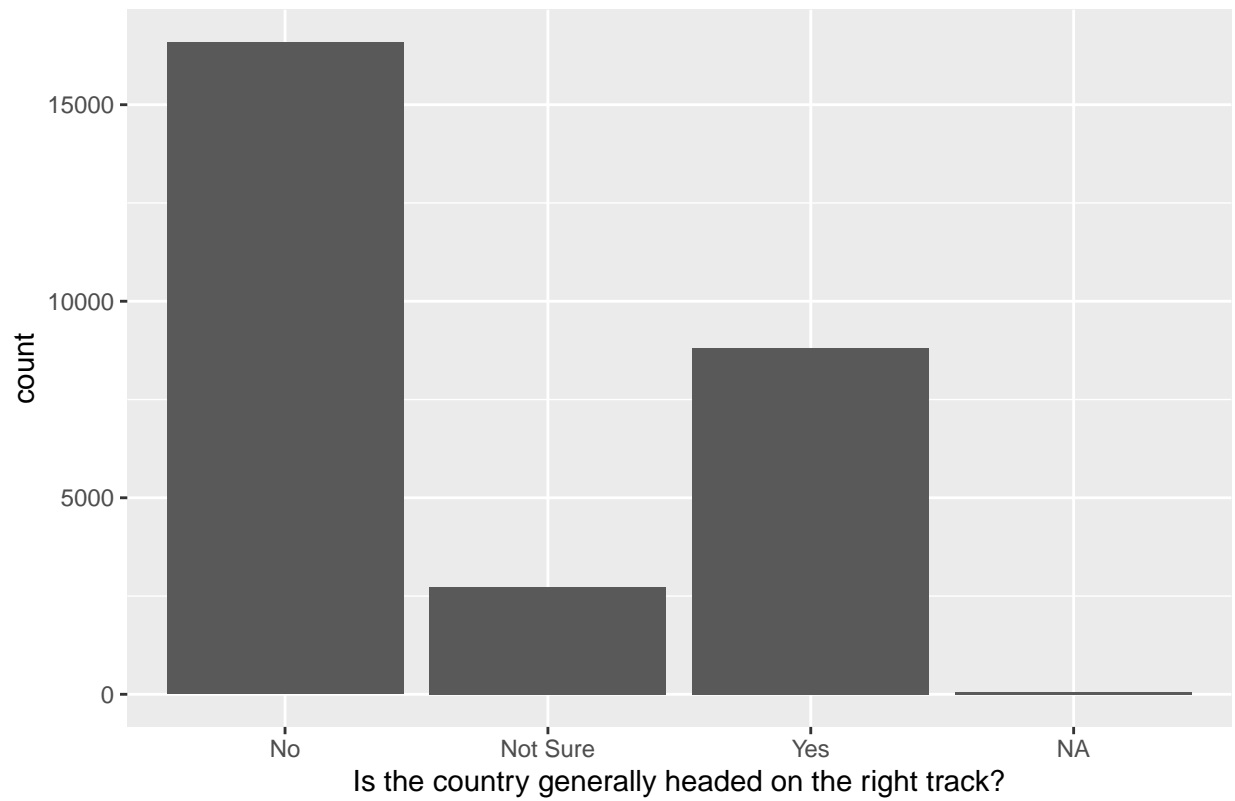


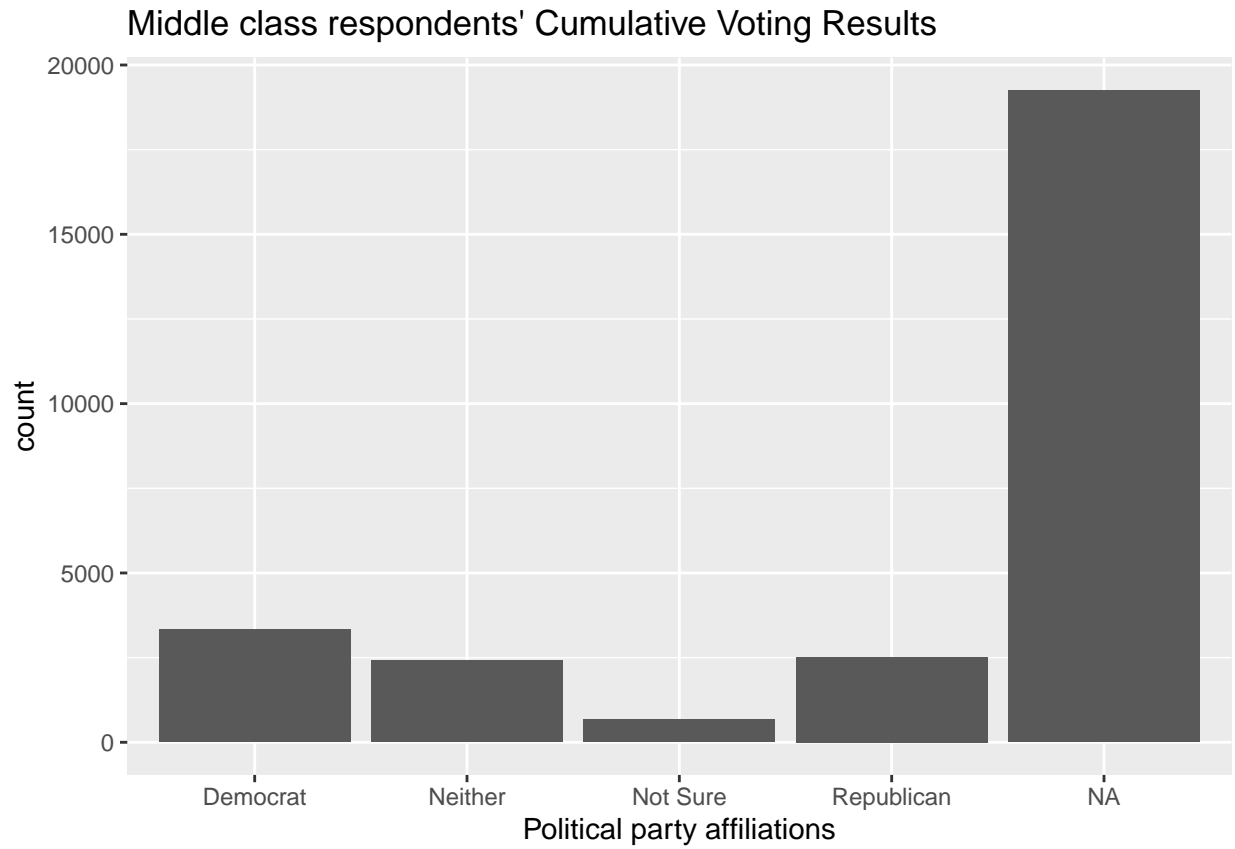
Poor respondents' opinions regarding whether the country is on the right



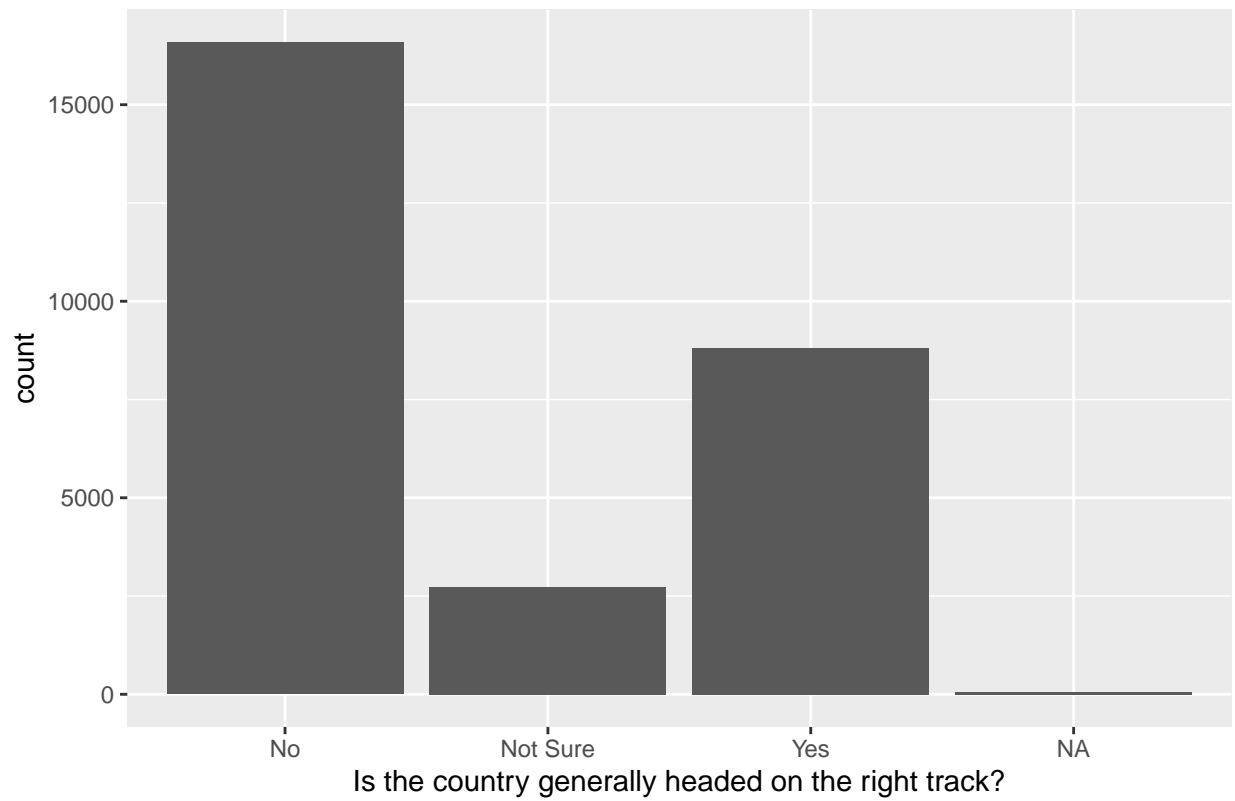


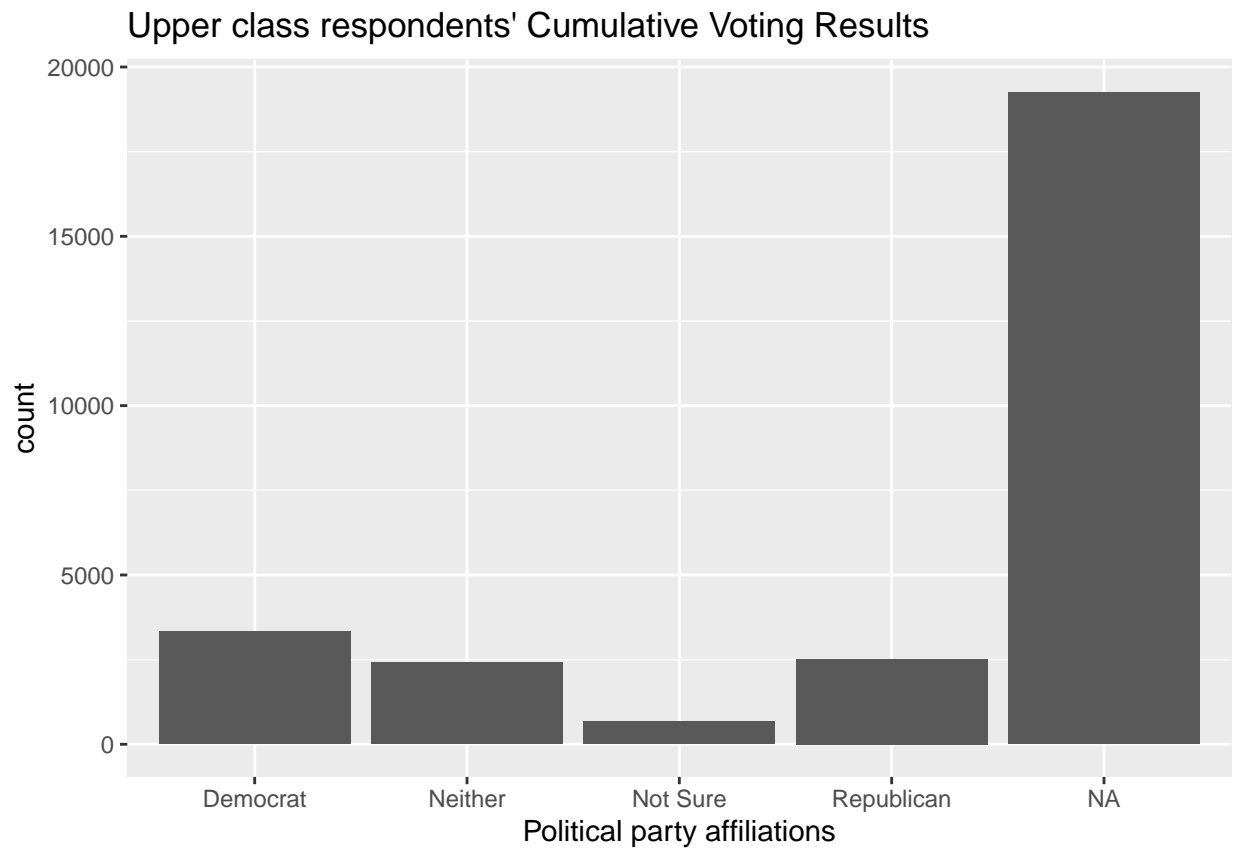
Working class respondents' opinions regarding whether the country is on



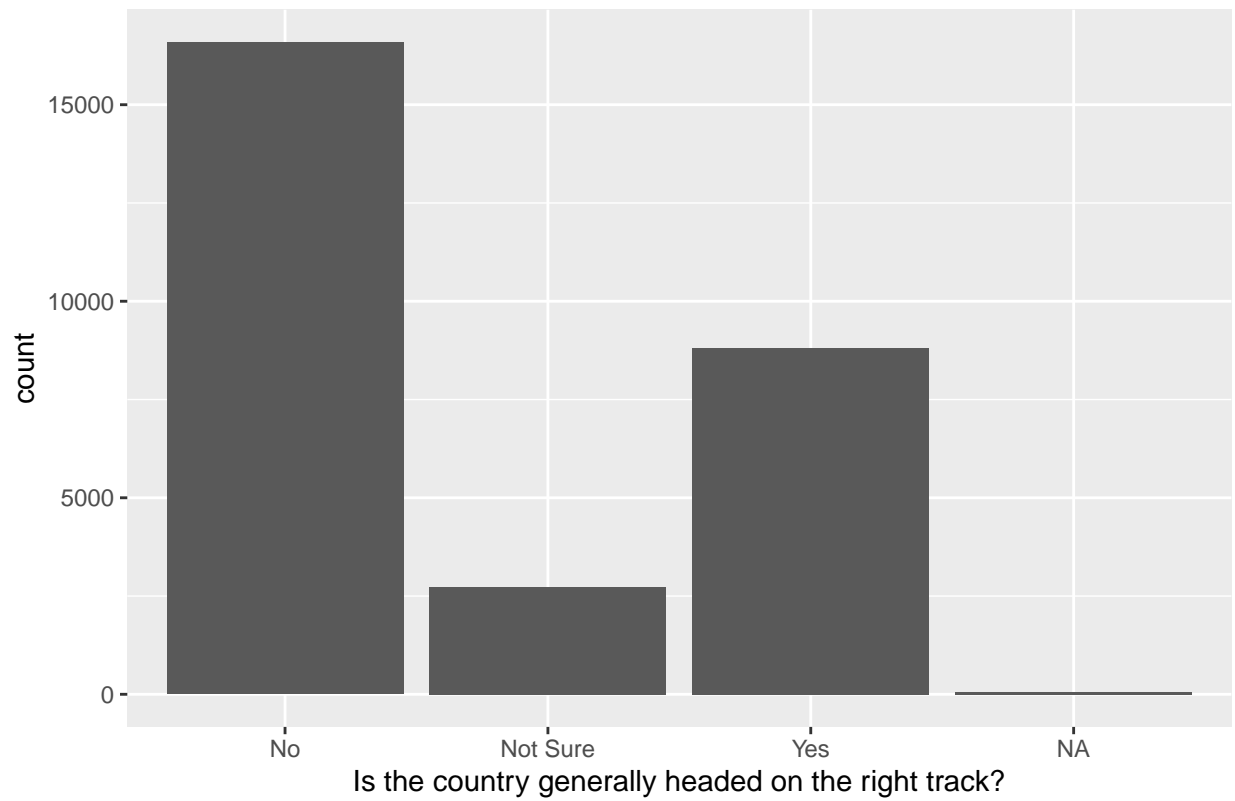


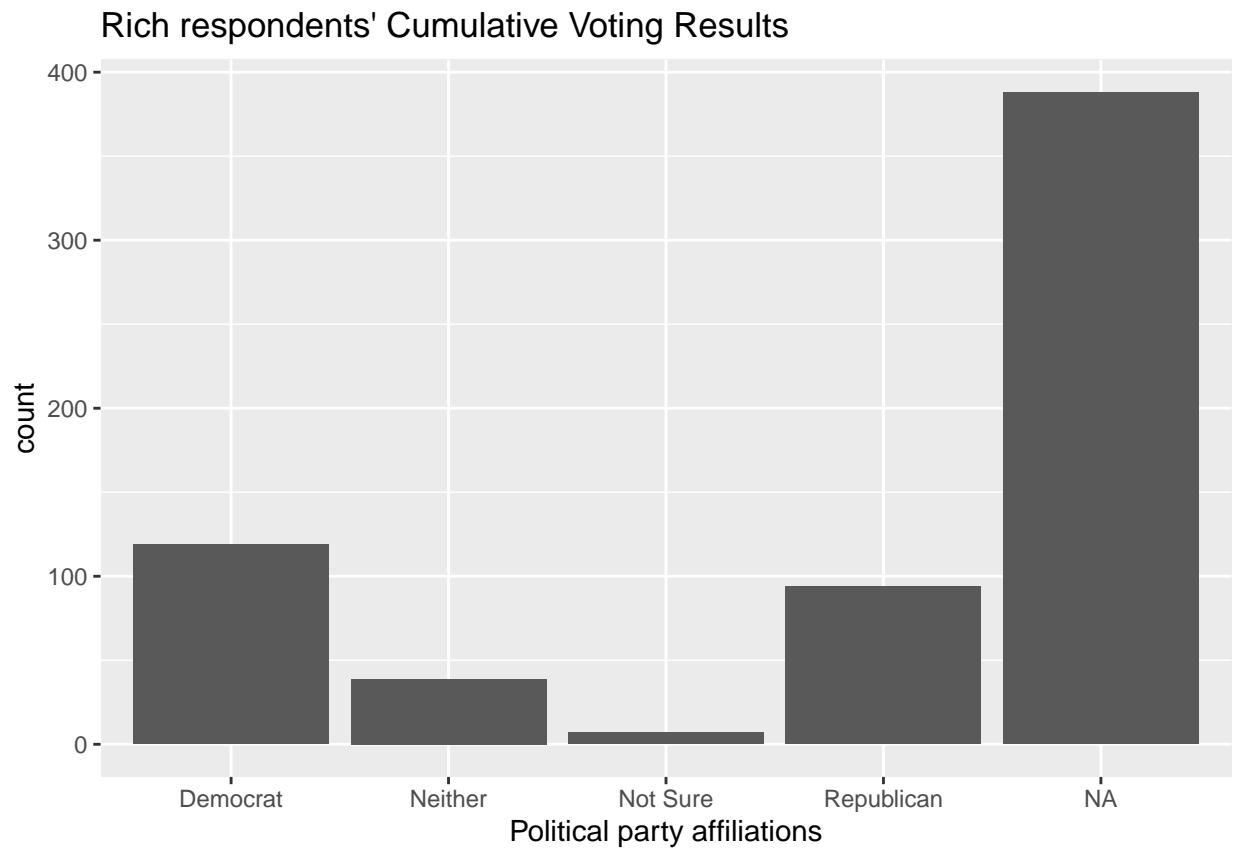
Middle class respondents' opinions regarding whether the country is on the right track

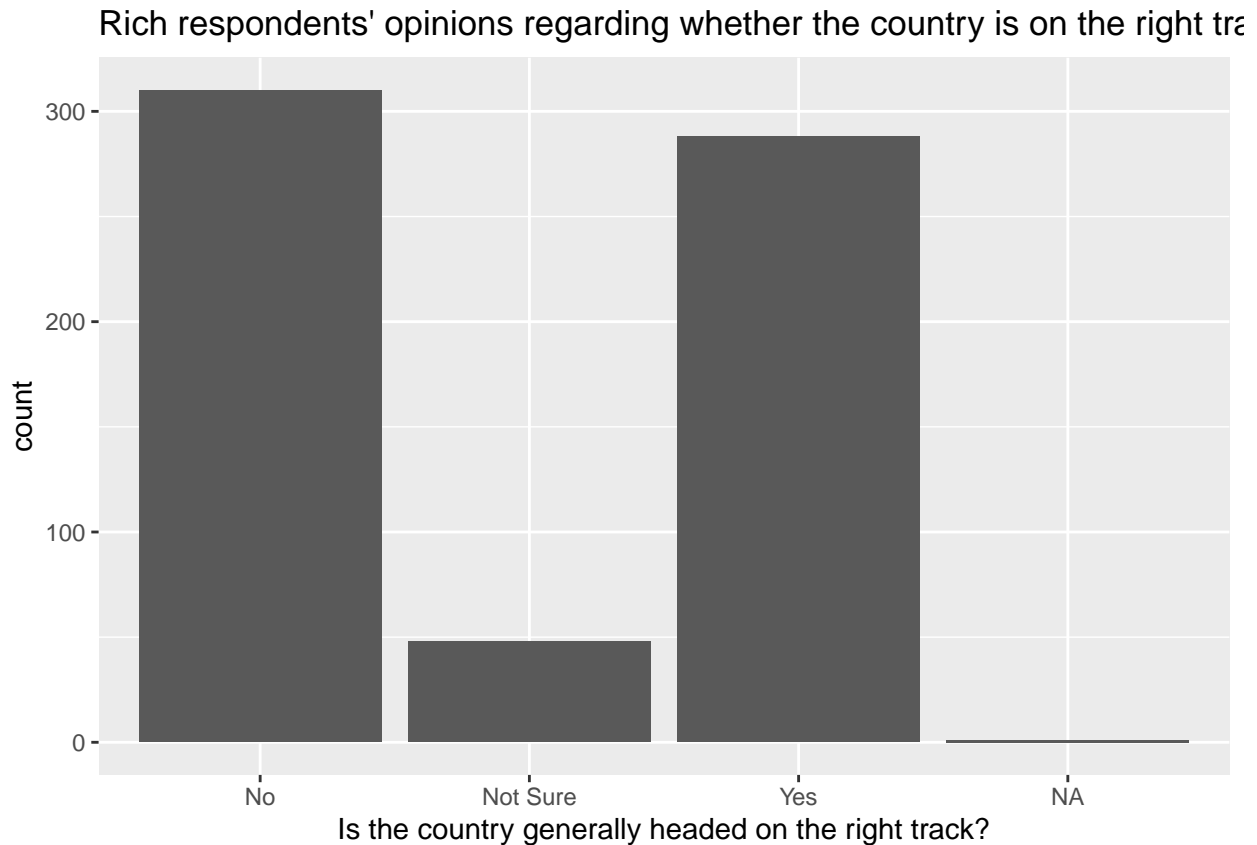




Upper class respondents' opinions regarding whether the country is on th







Discussion

Observable trends

Party Affiliation and Trust in Government

The correlation between trust in government and America's future based on political party affiliation ranges from non-existent to negligible. This is a stark contrast with previous academic literature that has generally been able to establish a strong correlation between these variables (Keele 2005). Further research should be done to explain this change.

Source of Political News and Trust in Government

There is great overall variation in the level of trust in government and source of political news, which is generally in line with academic literature on this topic (Marcinkowski and Starke 2018). A very interesting finding of this paper is how respondents that get their news from news outlets leaning more towards either side of the political spectrum tend to have similar levels of trust in government, a recurring trend in political science literature (Yu and Rodríguez 2021).

Economic Status and Party Affiliation

Another interesting find which contradicts widely-cited studies (Cooper 1959) is the lack of correlation between people belonging to different gross household income ranges and political party affiliation.

Economic Status and Societal Trust in Government

Every single economic class, defined by gross household income, both cumulatively and independently, have demonstrated that they believe that the country is not headed on the right track.

Further Research

Further research on a variety of trends is warranted. The most important among these trends is why every economic class and a majority of respondents overall believe that the country is not on the right track. Other topics that need to be explored is the newly-found lack of correlation between trust in government and political party affiliation, similar levels of trust in government among people listening to right and left-leaning news outlets and the newly-found lack of correlation between political party affiliation and gross household income.

Git Repository

Github: “<https://github.com/yfuoft/p4.git>”

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