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Campaign Donations and Political Efficacy

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Introduction to Research

▪ This study explores the relationship between Political Efficacy and donating to a political organization based on questions asked by National Election Survey both before and after the 2008 election.

▪ In an era of big money elections, one has to wonder why more Americans do not use their income to try and influence electoral outcomes.

- The decline of political efficacy in the United States has been linked to the increase of Super PAC donations in recent elections.
- There is a belief that politics is dominated by a small number of big donors, and this has led to a decline in individual contributions. This is in fact false. The percentage of individual incomes that goes to political organizations has in fact remained constant over the years. But has not increased with the cost of elections. (Primo & Milyo, 2006)

▪ It seems the system would be more fair, and representative if more citizens contributed money to candidates they favored.

▪ If the belief about Super PAC donations are true, then it would stand to reason that those who still trust the government despite these donations would donate their own money in an effort to influence elections.

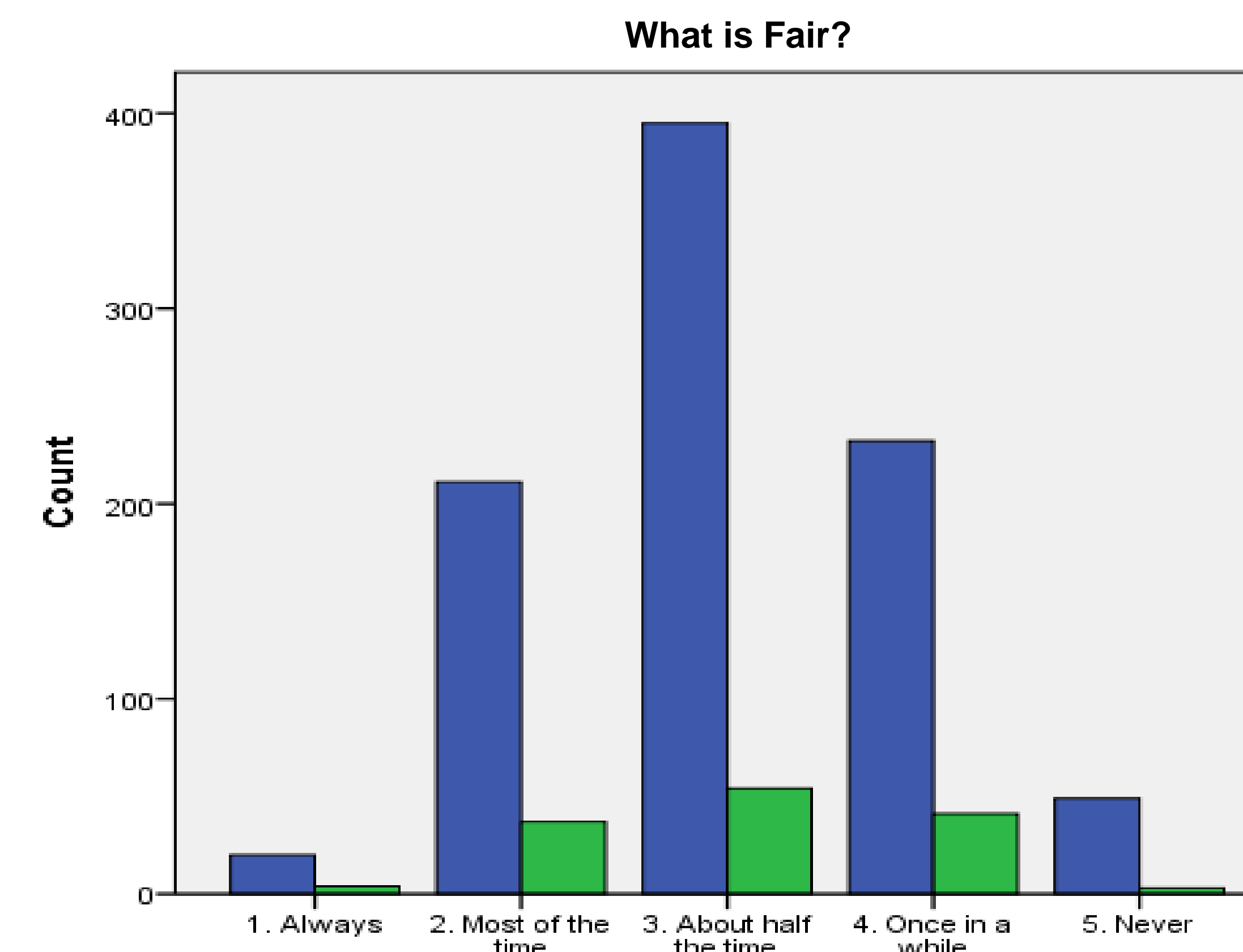
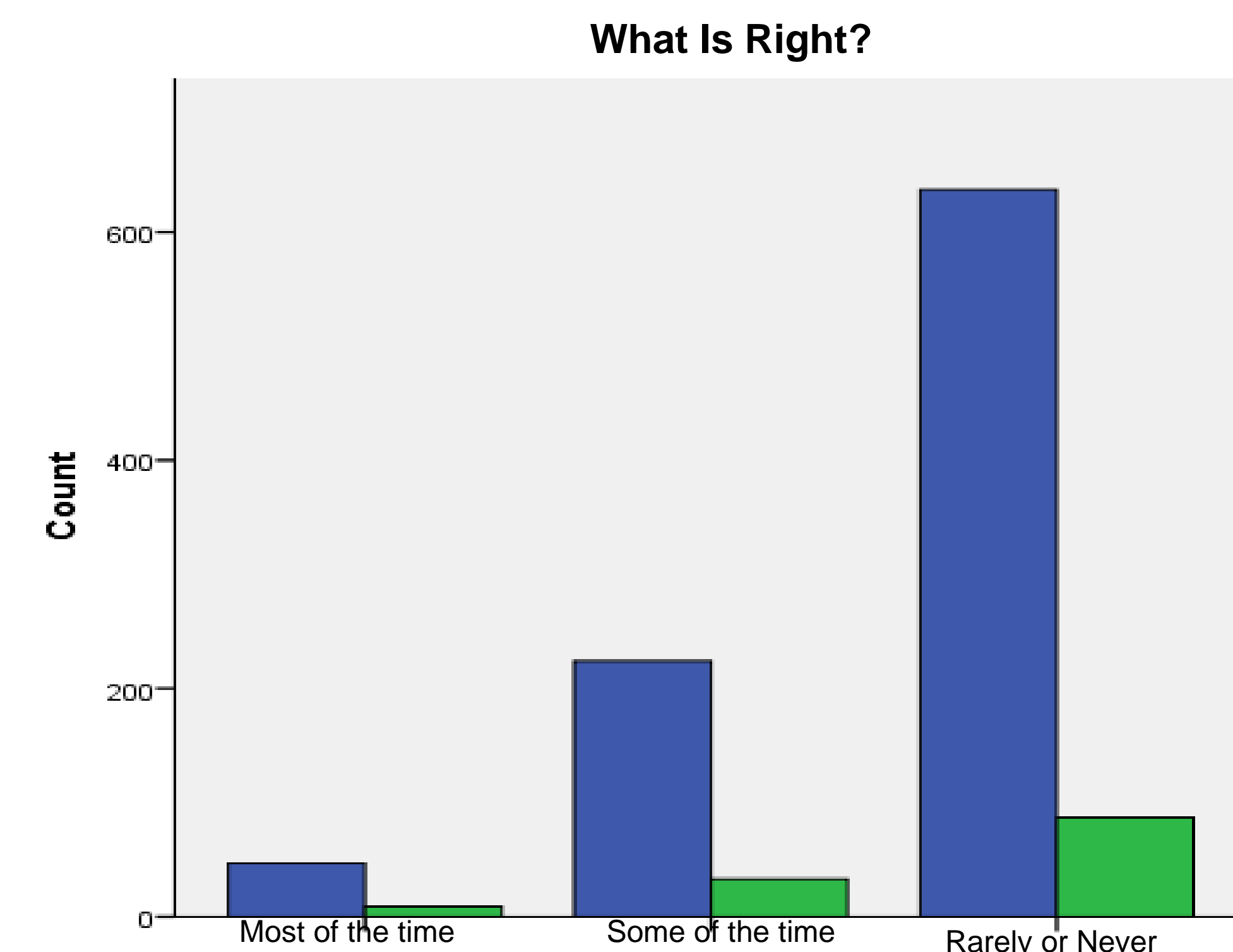
▪ Literature on this topic has turned up mixed results. Some have found that trust in government is not influenced by campaign fundraising or spending, while others who are proponents of campaign finance reform argue that in fact, citizens voices are dwarfed by Super PAC donations and therefore they opt out of donating.



Hypotheses:

H 1: Those who are found to trust the government to do what is right or fair the greatest amount of the time will also be those who gave to a political party, campaign, or organization.

Data



Green = Donation
Blue = No Donation

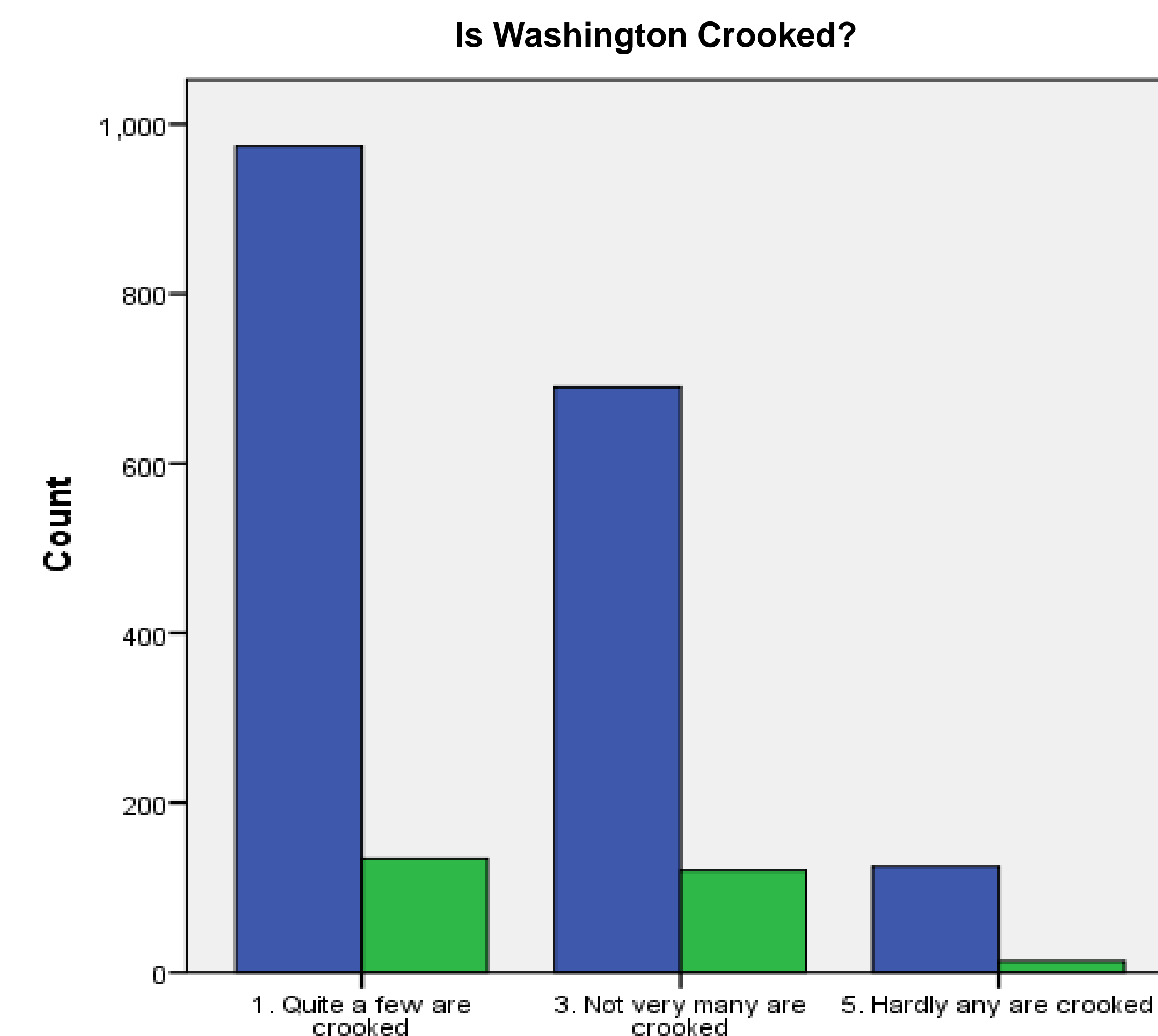


Table Interpretation

• The graphs show each time that having trust in the government is not essential to donating to a political organization.

Chart 1

• When asked if respondents trusted the government to do the right thing (1) most of the time, (2) some of the time, or (3) rarely/never, the majority responded that they trusted the government to do what is right rarely or never, yet out of all the categories, this one held the most donors. Out of 1,037 respondents, 129 donated to a political organization. Of those 129, 87 responded that they trusted the government to do what is right rarely or never.

Chart 2

• Similar to Chart 1, the other half of the respondents were asked "How often do you trust the government in Washington to make a fair decision?" Answering on a scale of 1-5; 1 being always, 5 being never. Out of the 1046 respondents asked, 139 gave to a political organization, of those 139, 54 of them (the largest group) indicated they only trusted the government about half the time (3).

Chart 3

• This time respondents were asked "how many in the government they believed to be crooked?" Out of the 2056 respondents, 267 gave to a political organization. Out of the 267 who gave 134 (the largest group) responded by choosing quite a few are crooked.

Findings

H 1: I found that my theory was incorrect. In fact trust in the government was found to have no relationship to whether or not one decides to give to a campaign.

In a separate test, I found that when accounting for income, as expected wealthier respondents gave more than below average income respondents. It also showed that those of below average income were twice as likely to donate if they trusted the government.

Conclusions

It appears that trust and campaign donations do not correlate with each other. Seemingly the reasoning or patterns behind donations are still a mystery. Perhaps those that trust the government the least are willing to give to an organization in hopes the organization will affect change to create a government that is more worthy of their trust. Either way it is clear that citizens do not need to trust their government to donate money to a political organization. But as the numbers show the amount of people who donate is very small. In fact studies show Americans spend more on beer, lottery tickets, porn, potato chips, and Taco Bell than they do on election donations. (Samples, 2006) Americans simply don't care enough about politics to spend their money on it, whether they trust the government or not.

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