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Dorji Tshoden
tshod100@mail.chapman.edu

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The Public Choice Theory in Public Opinion

Dorji Tshoden

Department of Political Science, Chapman University; Orange, California

Introduction to Research

- This study explores how much self-interest dominates in the field of public opinion in the United States and whether or not it is reflective of the broader perspective of the Public Choice Theory .
- On average people who are financially stable are more likely to have more trust in the government as opposed to those who are not.
- This gap is not something produced in the recent years but previous studies and research indicates a previously existing trend of this type of school of thought.
- Previous research on the topic of corruption and its subsequent relationship reveals two sides to the argument, where while one side agrees that corruption especially that of the government is detrimental to the economy of a state, many others reveal how corruption can in fact have positive impacts on the economy.

Public Opinion:

- The public opinion process holds abundant importance in a democracy especially one that grants constitutional rights to its citizens. Some of its procedures are “formation of individual attitudes and opinions, group opinion processes, ‘personal sampling’ and inter-group communication.” (Davidson, 1958)

Public Choice Theory:

As interpreted by Cropf, this theory contends: “Bureaucrats, voters, and politicians are concerned primarily with advancing their own economic self-interests through the administrative and political processes.” (Cropf 2008) This theory and further studies covers several issues such as: Democratic government: Here it seeks to understand the successes and failures of government defined by the people in terms of a constitution. Voting: The problem of voting is taken up by the Public Choice theory as the simple approaches used have been shown to be defective as they do not always attain the preferred results. Political Maneuverings: Additional researchers have observed the ways in which politicians, their supporters and the voters interact with each other or amongst themselves. Methods like vote-trading, wealth transfers etc. are utilized to reach their self-interested needs. Rent seeking: This is the act of the procurement of special treatment by the government at the expense of everyone else. This concept is taken up by public choice theorists who have much to say about this topic.

Hypotheses:

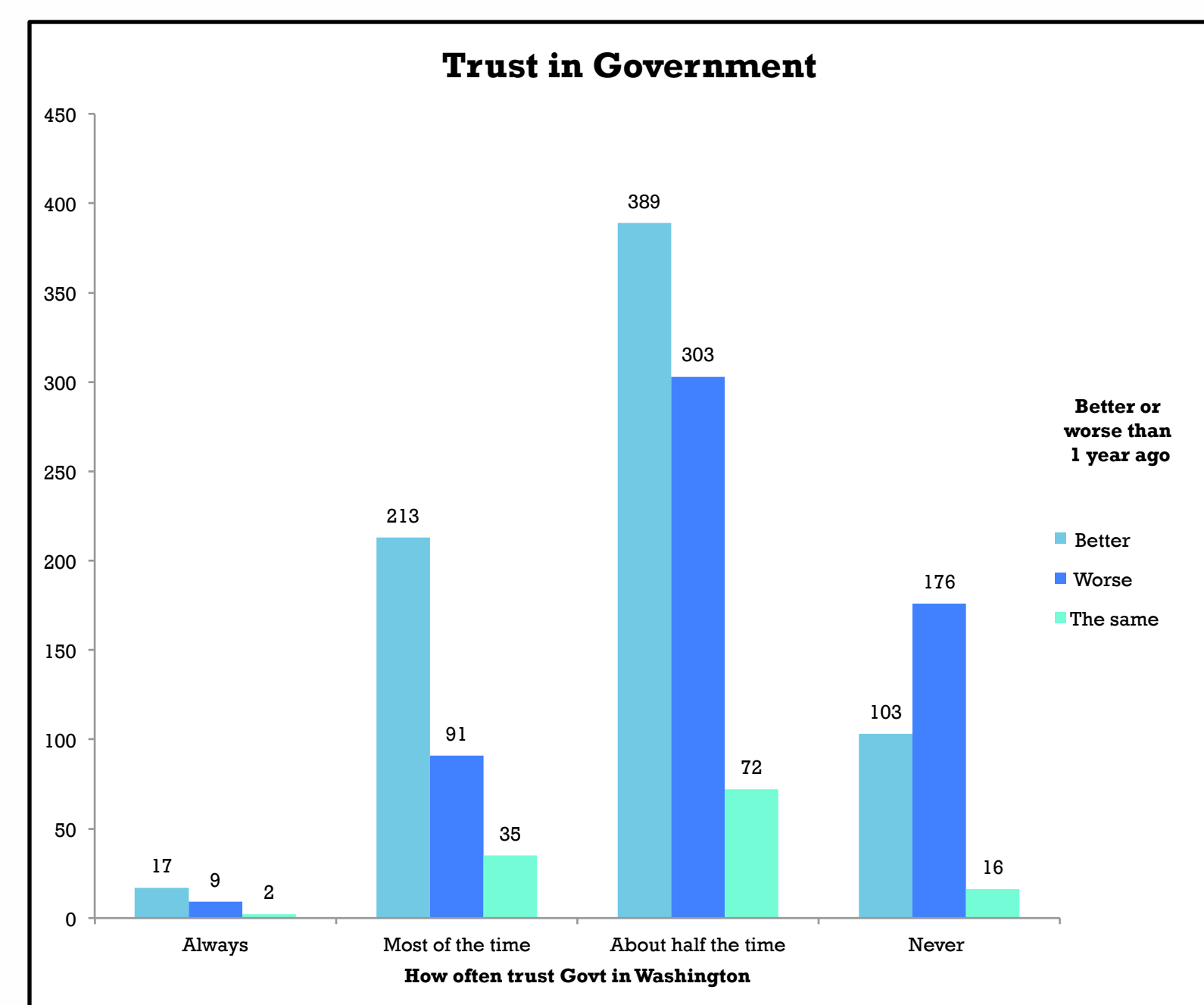
H 1: People who are more optimistic about their financial situations are more likely to have more trust in the government.

H 2: The larger the income gap people perceive to be, the more likely they will favor increasing federal aids for the poor.

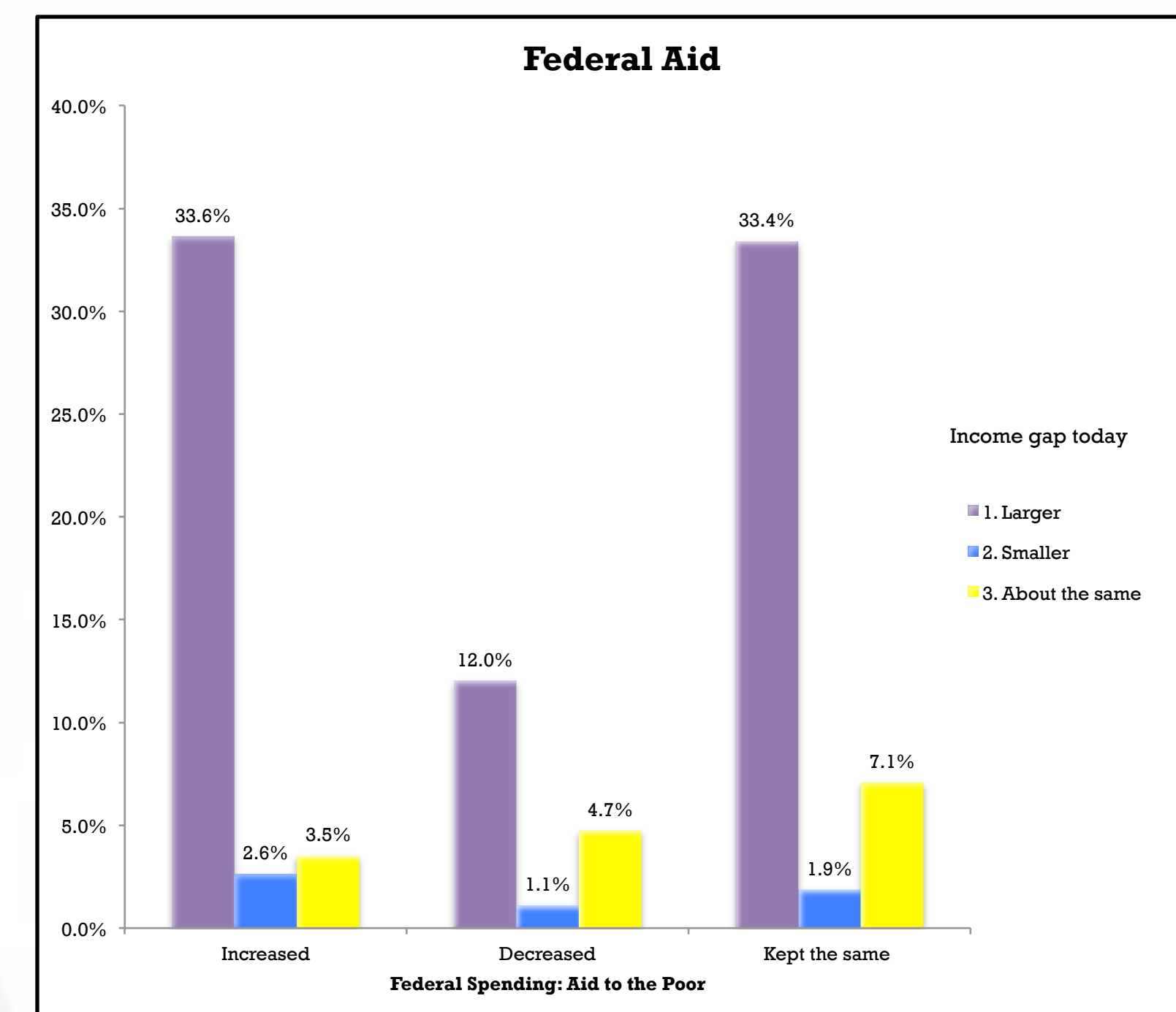
H 3: People who view the government to be corrupt are more likely to think that the state of the economy is bad.

Data

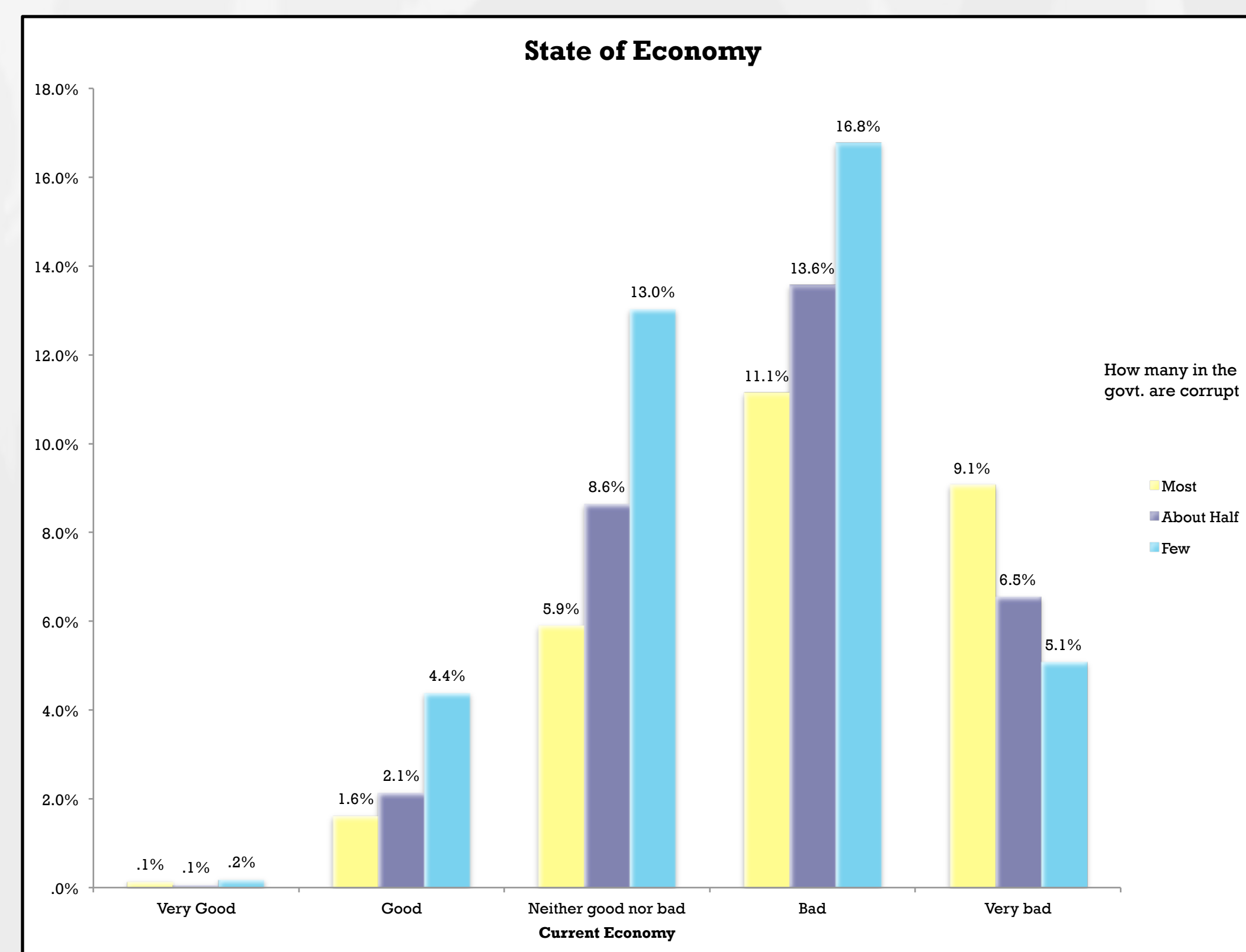
H 1: “Trust in Government”



H 2: “Federal Aid”



H 3: “State of Economy”



Findings

H 1: “Trust in Government ”

The results were in the affirmative of what the hypothesis stipulated. People did in fact have more trust in the government when they considered themselves to be financially better off than the previous year. For the group of people who trusted the government most of the time, there were 122 more people in the group who felt they were better off than those who did not.

H 2: “Federal Aid ”

People who considered the income gap to be larger were more supportive of increasing federal aid for the poor at 33.6% than those who perceived it to be smaller at 2.6%. The results for those who felt that the aid should be kept about the same were similar with a difference of only .2% and 1.2%.

H 3: “State of the Economy”

The difference between people who viewed most government officials to be corrupt and few to be corrupt when considering the state of the economy to be good was only 2.8%. On the other hand the difference was 4% when considering the economy to be very bad between the “Most” and “Few” groups.

Conclusions

- People who are more optimistic about their financial situations (considering themselves to be better off than a year ago have more trust in the government in Washington to do the right thing than those who did not.)
- People’s perception of the income gap did not have as strong an effect on their opinions about federal aid to the poor as expected.
- The opinion of the people regarding corrupt officials did not have as strong a correlation with their view on the state of the economy as expected.

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