Trends in Perception of Federal Statistical Agencies Among the U.S. Population: 2012-2017

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Background

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- Trust in the U.S. government has decreased since the mid-1960's (Gallup, 2014)

- Correlational research shows a relationship between distrust in Government and negative government events (Ceron & Memoli, 2015; Cook & Gronke, 2005)
  - Events such as the Snowden/NSA scandal seem to be associated with decreased trust in federal statistics (Childs, 2014)

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Background

- Might perceptions in federal statistics differ between subgroups of key demographics?
  - Younger respondents might be more progressive than older respondents
  - Low-education respondents may know less about the government than high-education respondents

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Research Questions

1. Do perceptions of the Federal Statistical System (FSS) differ by demographic subgroup?

2. Do differences between demographic subgroups in perceptions of the FSS shift during notable, government-related events?

Methodology

Gallup Survey Methodology

- Gallup Nightly Survey
  - 200 responses daily
  - Subsample of National RDD Sample
  - Landline and Cellphone
  - AAPOR Response Rate 3 = 8-11%
- Goal: Understand public trust in federal statistical system and factors that predict trust
- Data collection: Various items collected at different times from 2012 to present (ongoing)
- Not intended for population estimates

Gallup Survey Items

- Privacy
  - Would you say that federal statistical agencies often invade people's privacy, or generally respect people's privacy?
    1. Invade privacy
    2. Respect privacy

- Confidentiality
  - People can trust federal statistical agencies to keep information about them confidential.
    - 5-point agree-disagree scale

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Methodology - Demographics

- Sex
  - Male
  - Female

- Race/ethnicity
  - White
  - Black
  - Asian
  - AIAN
  - Hispanic of any race

- Education
  - Less than HS
  - HS
  - Some College
  - College
  - Post-graduate

- Age
  - 18 - 30
  - 31 - 40
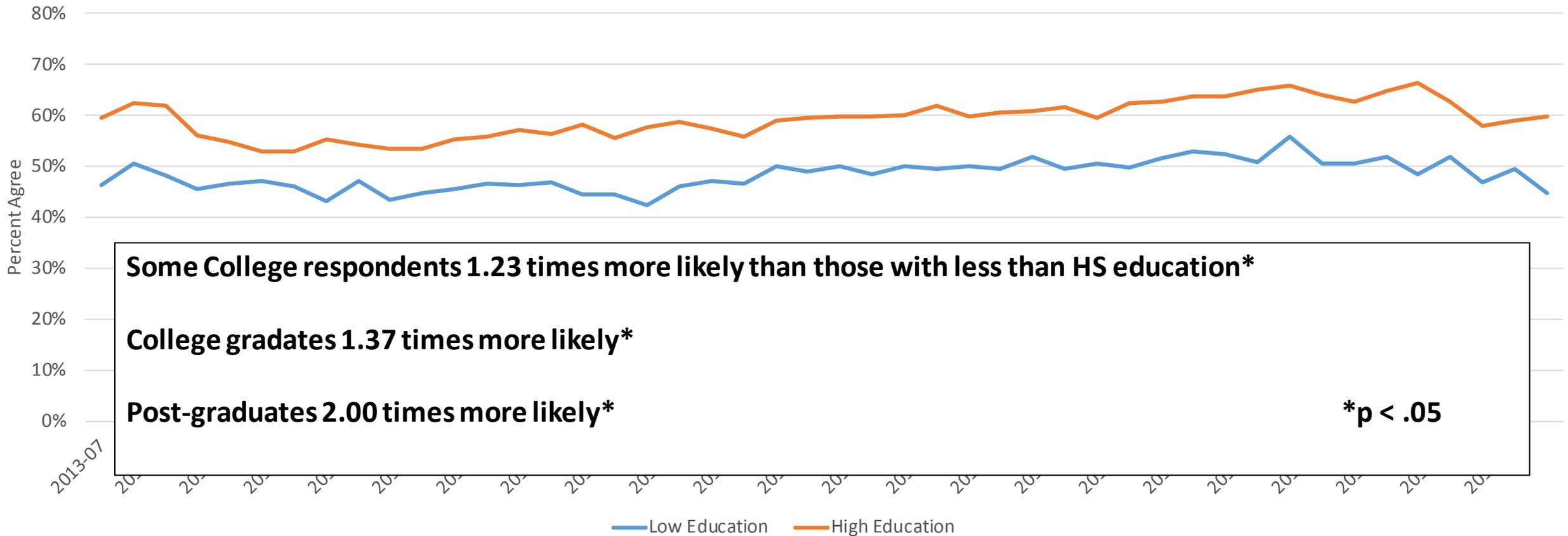 - 41 - 60
  - 61 - 80
  - 80 - over

Methodology

- Government events
    1. 2012 election – November 2012
    2. Snowden NSA Leak – June 2013
    3. Government shutdown – October 2013
    4. OPM data breach announcement – July 2015
    5. 2016 Election – November 2016
    6. Travel Ban – January 2017
- Compared regression results before, during, and after event

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Results

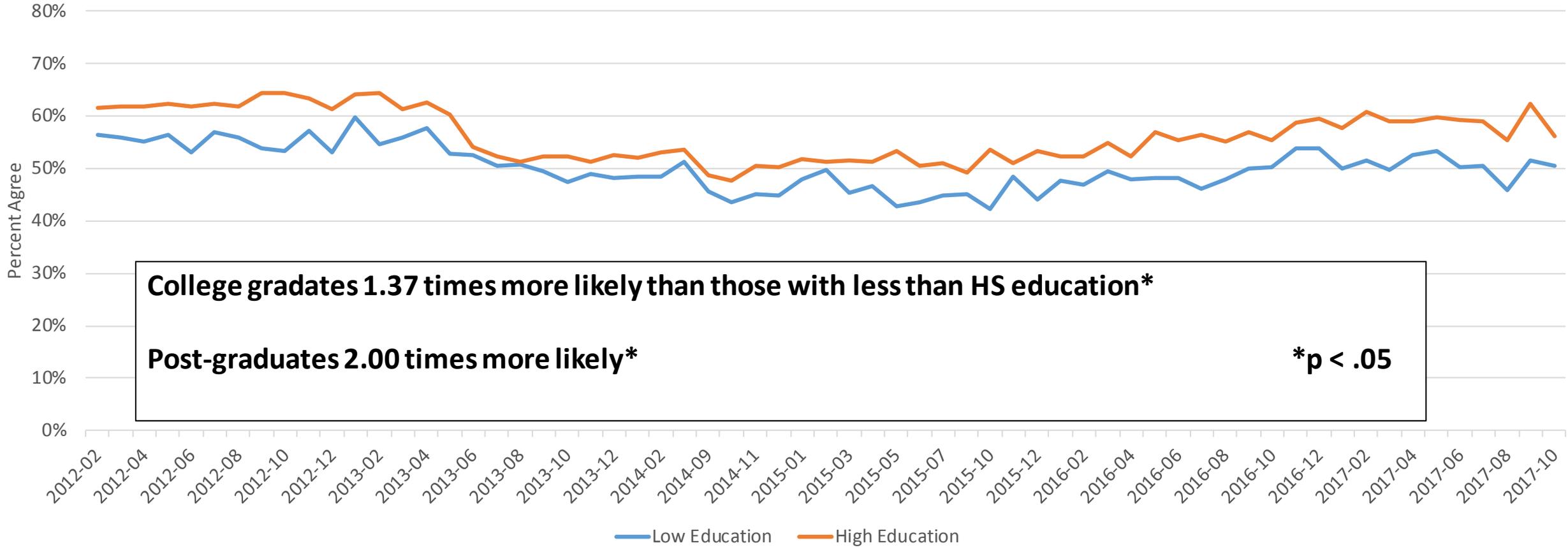# Results by Education Level

Reported Belief that the Federal Statistical System Respects (Rather than Invades) Privacy

Some College respondents 1.23 times more likely than those with less than HS education*

College gradates 1.37 times more likely*

Post-graduates 2.00 times more likely*   ***p < .05**

—— Low Education   —— High Education

Results by Education Level

Reported Belief that Data are Kept Confidential in the Federal Statistical System

College gradates 1.37 times more likely than those with less than HS education*
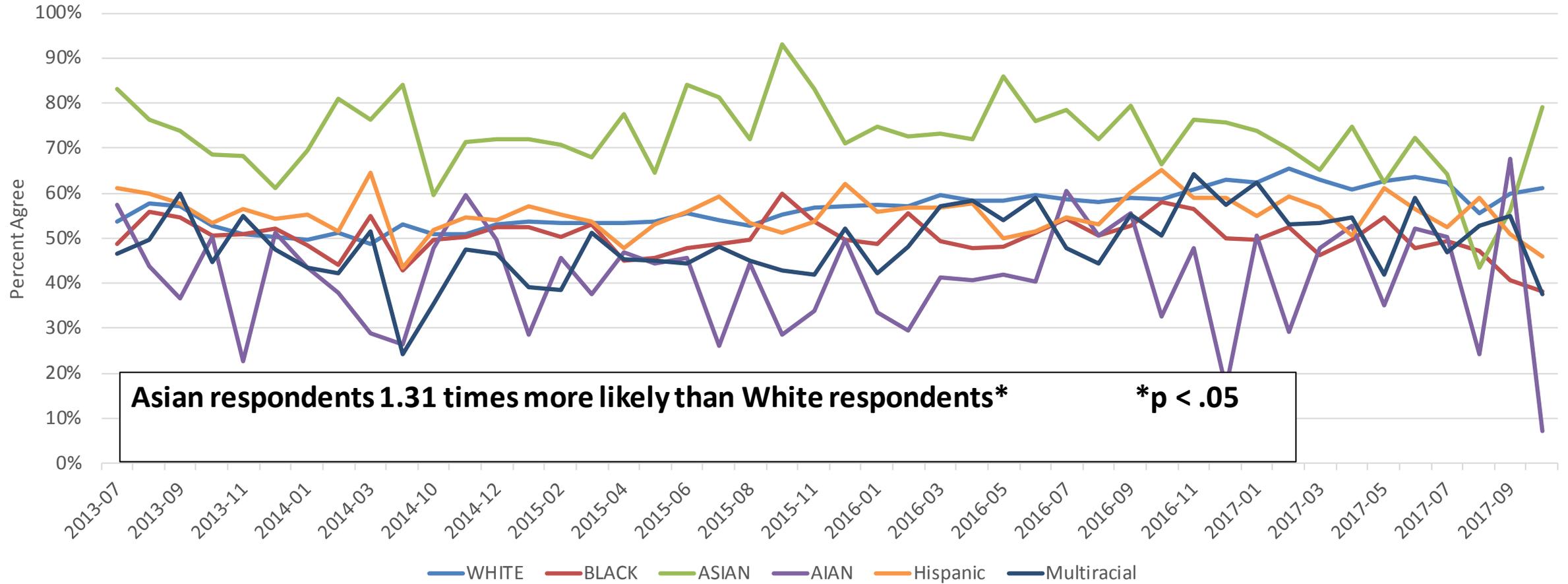
Post-graduates 2.00 times more likely*

*p < .05

Low Education   High Education

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Results by Education Level

- Events when difference in perception changed
  - Government shutdown
    - Before – higher-educated more likely to believe agencies respected privacy
    - During – higher-educated no longer more likely
    - After – higher-educated more likely again
  - Travel Ban and OPM Data Breach
    - Before – higher educated more likely to believe agencies respect privacy and keep data confidential
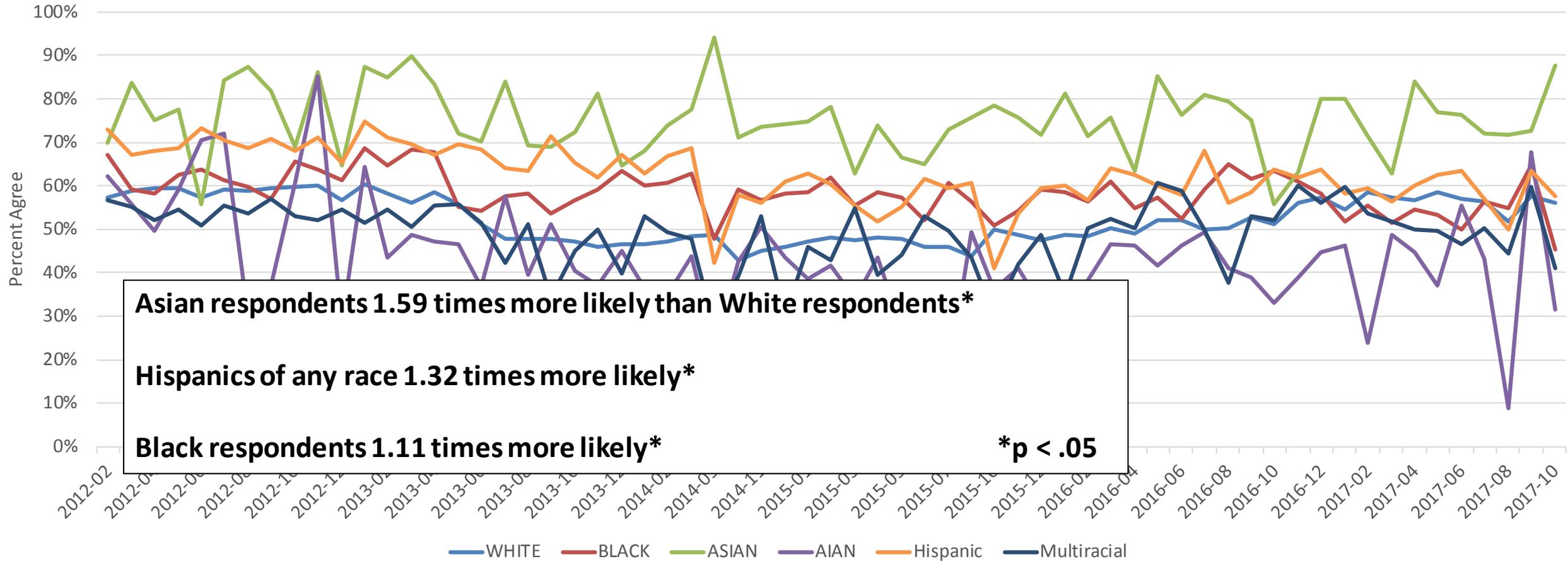   - During and after – higher-educated no longer more likely

Results by Race/Ethnicity

Reported Belief That the Federal Statistical System Respects (Rather than Invades) Privacy

Asian respondents 1.31 times more likely than White respondents*   *p < .05

Results by Race/Ethnicity

Reported Belief that Data are Kept Confidential in the Federal Statistical System

Asian respondents 1.59 times more likely than White respondents*

Hispanics of any race 1.32 times more likely*

Black respondents 1.11 times more likely*   *p < .05

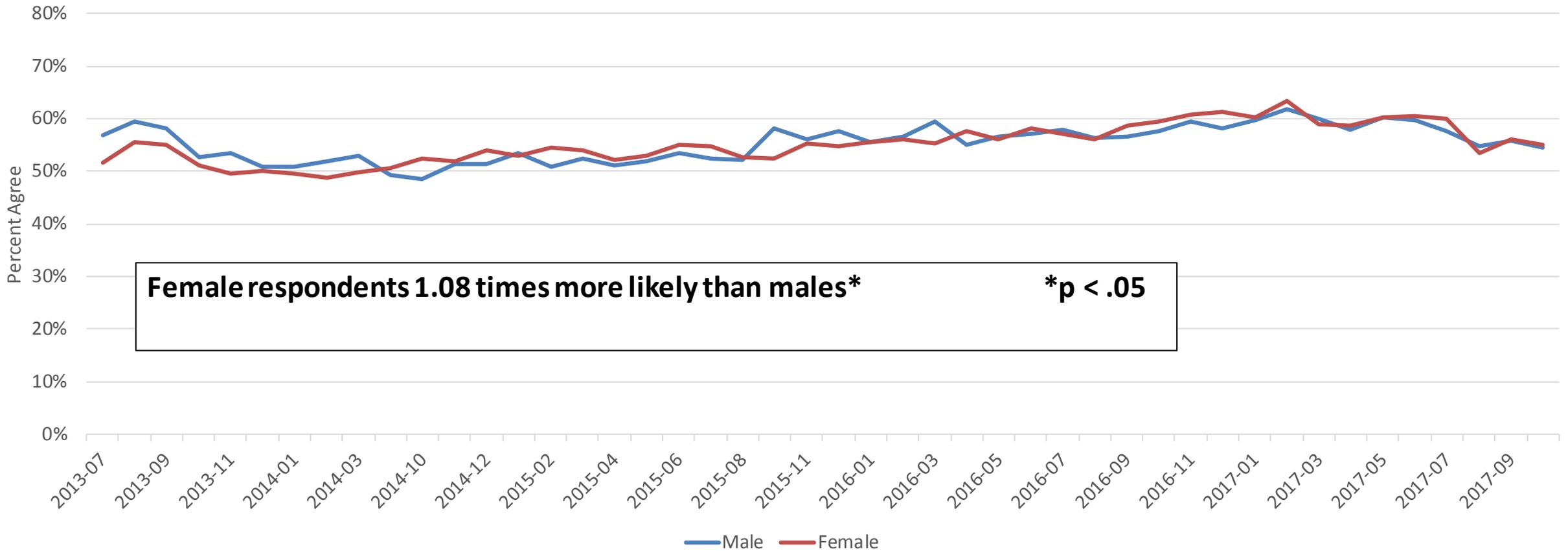WHITE   BLACK   ASIAN   AIAN   Hispanic   Multiracial

Results by Race/Ethnicity

- Events when difference in perception changed
  - Snowden NSA Leak and OPM Data Breach
    - After – Asian respondents became significantly more likely than White respondents to believe data is confidential
  - OPM Data Breach
    - After – Asian respondents became significantly more likely than White respondents to believe agencies respect privacy
  - 2016 Election
    - Before – Black respondents were more likely than White respondents in believing data is confidential
    - During and after – Black respondents were no longer more likely

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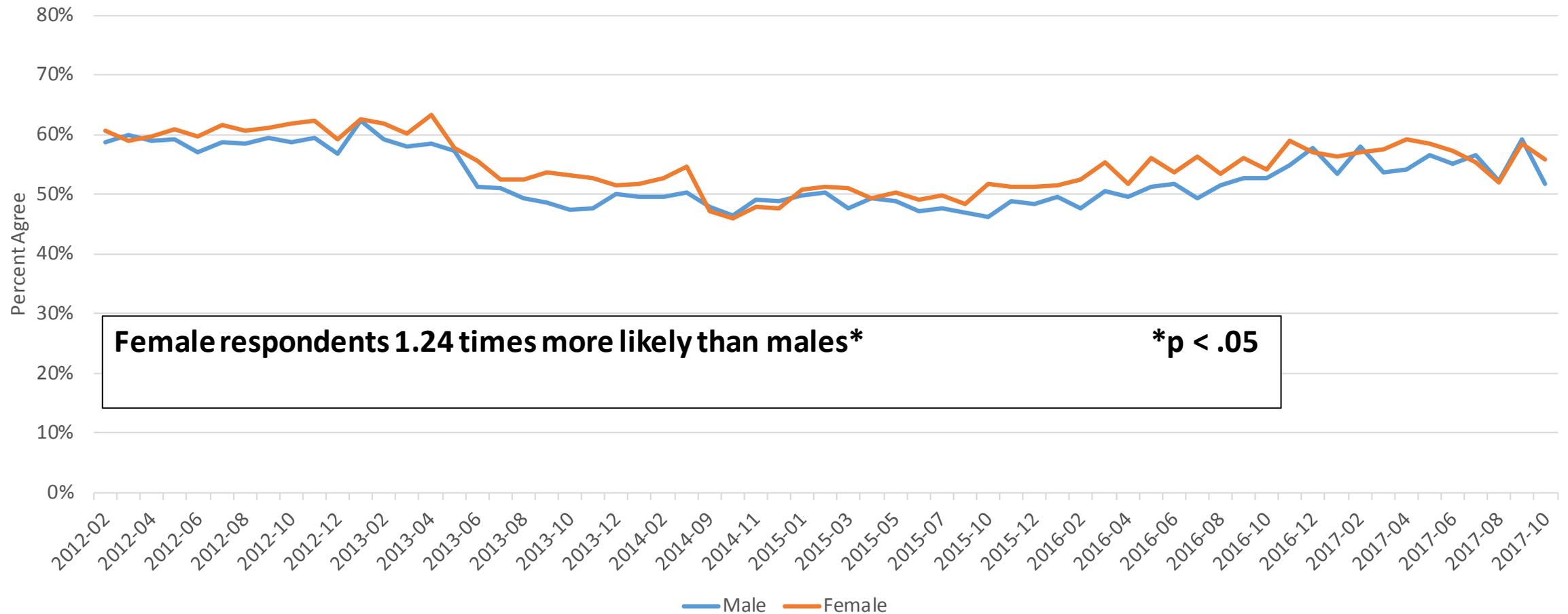Economics and Statistics Administration
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Results by Sex

Reported Belief That the Federal Statistical System Respects (Rather than Invades) Privacy

Female respondents 1.08 times more likely than males*   *p < .05

— Male — Female

Results by Sex

Reported Belief that Data are Kept Confidential in the Federal Statistical System

Female respondents 1.24 times more likely than males*   ***p < .05**

Male   Female

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Results by Sex

- Events when difference in perception changed
  - Snowden NSA Leak and OPM Data Breach
    - During and after events, female respondents became significantly more likely than male respondents to believe data is confidential
  - Government shutdown
    - After event, female respondents became significantly more likely than male respondents to believe agencies respect privacy

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Results by Age

- No results were significant

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Conclusion

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Conclusion

- Summary
  - The highly-educated, some racial minorities, and women found to have relatively positive perceptions of the FSS
  - Perceptions seemed to change around some government-related events
- Implications
  - Agencies should consider communication strategies that target populations with relatively negative perceptions

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Thanks!

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