

Drinking From The River

Effects of Political Trust, Conspiracy Beliefs, and Leaders' Identity
in Shaping Water Use and Collective Action Intentions during the Basilicata Water Crisis

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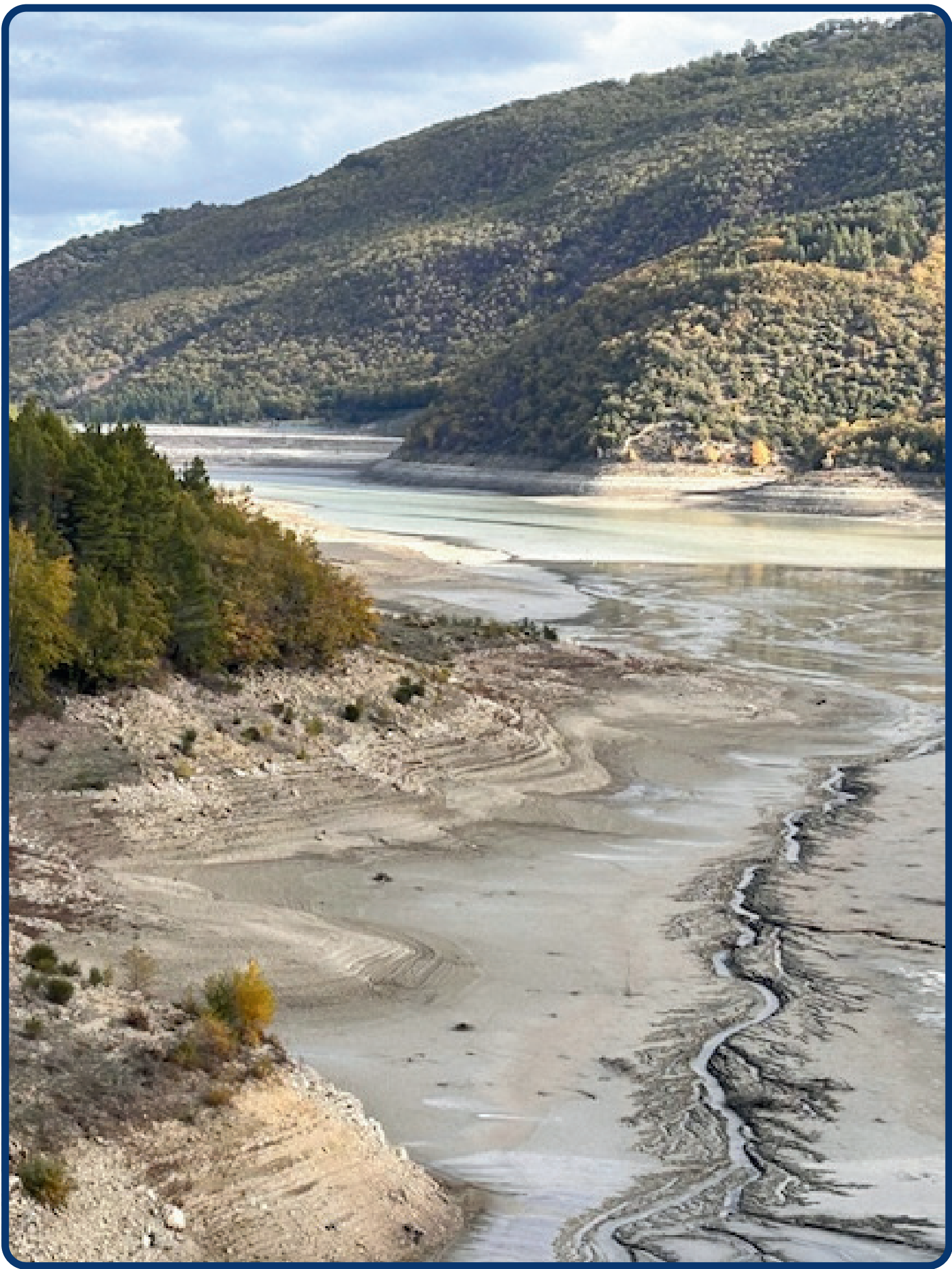


Basilicata Water Crisis

- Severe water crisis in 2024, driven by prolonged drought and infrastructure inefficiencies
- Water rationing affected approximately 140,000 residents in the Potenza province
- Camastra dam (right image), the primary water supply, was replaced with water from a nearby river
- Water was declared safe to drink after treatment by the authorities
- Widely perceived as risky due to pollution concerns, limited transparency, low public trust

"Why doesn't our president pour himself a nice glass in front of everyone and say that the water is good?"

-FB comment by a resident



Participants

- N = 270 residents of the affected areas
- 71.5% women, 25.6% men,
- Mage = 47.08 (SD = 12.82)
- 68.5% employed
- Online survey administered during first week following the switch of water supply (25 Nov – 5 Dec 2024)
- Snowball sampling via social media (FB / Instagram)

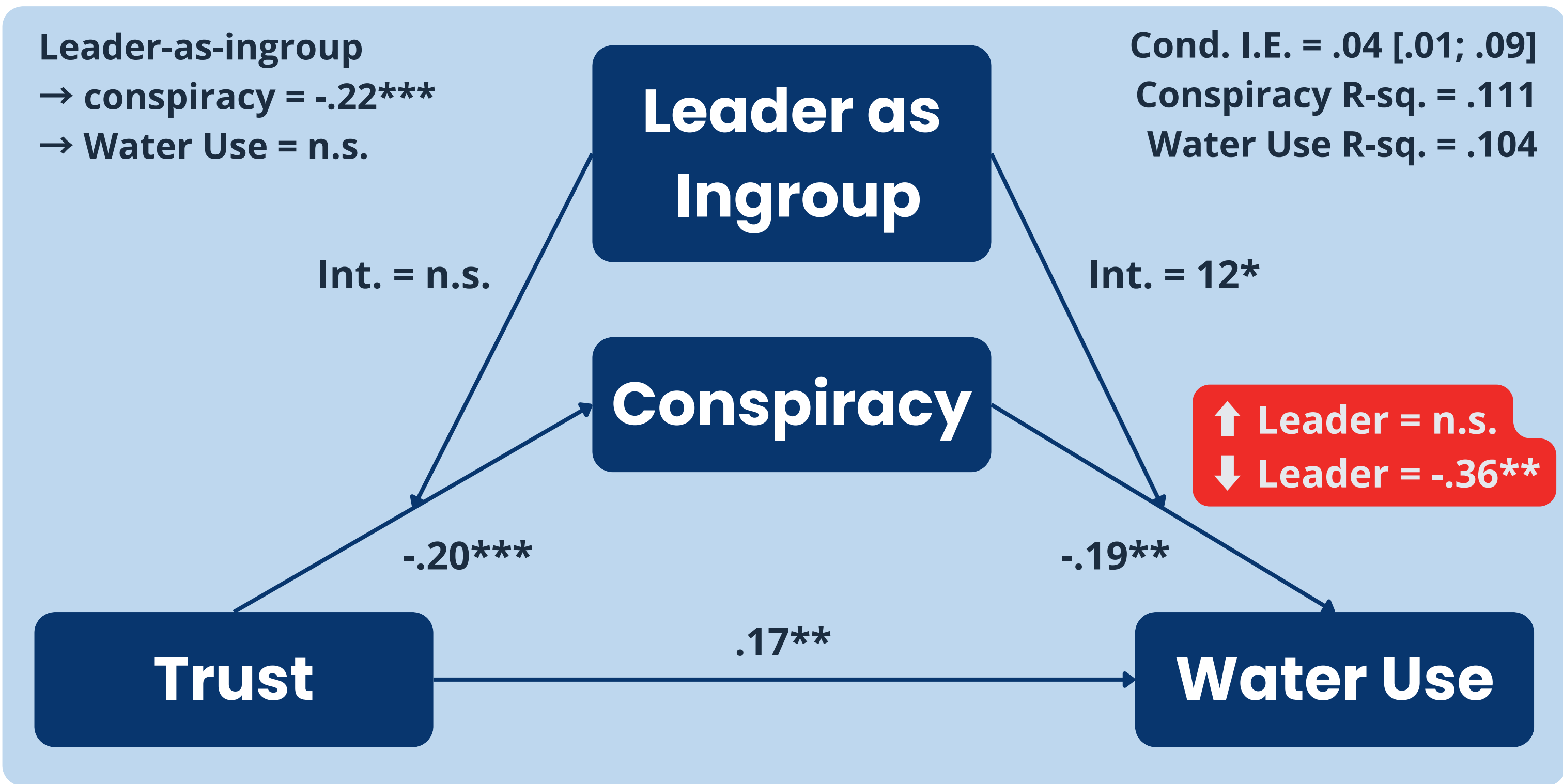
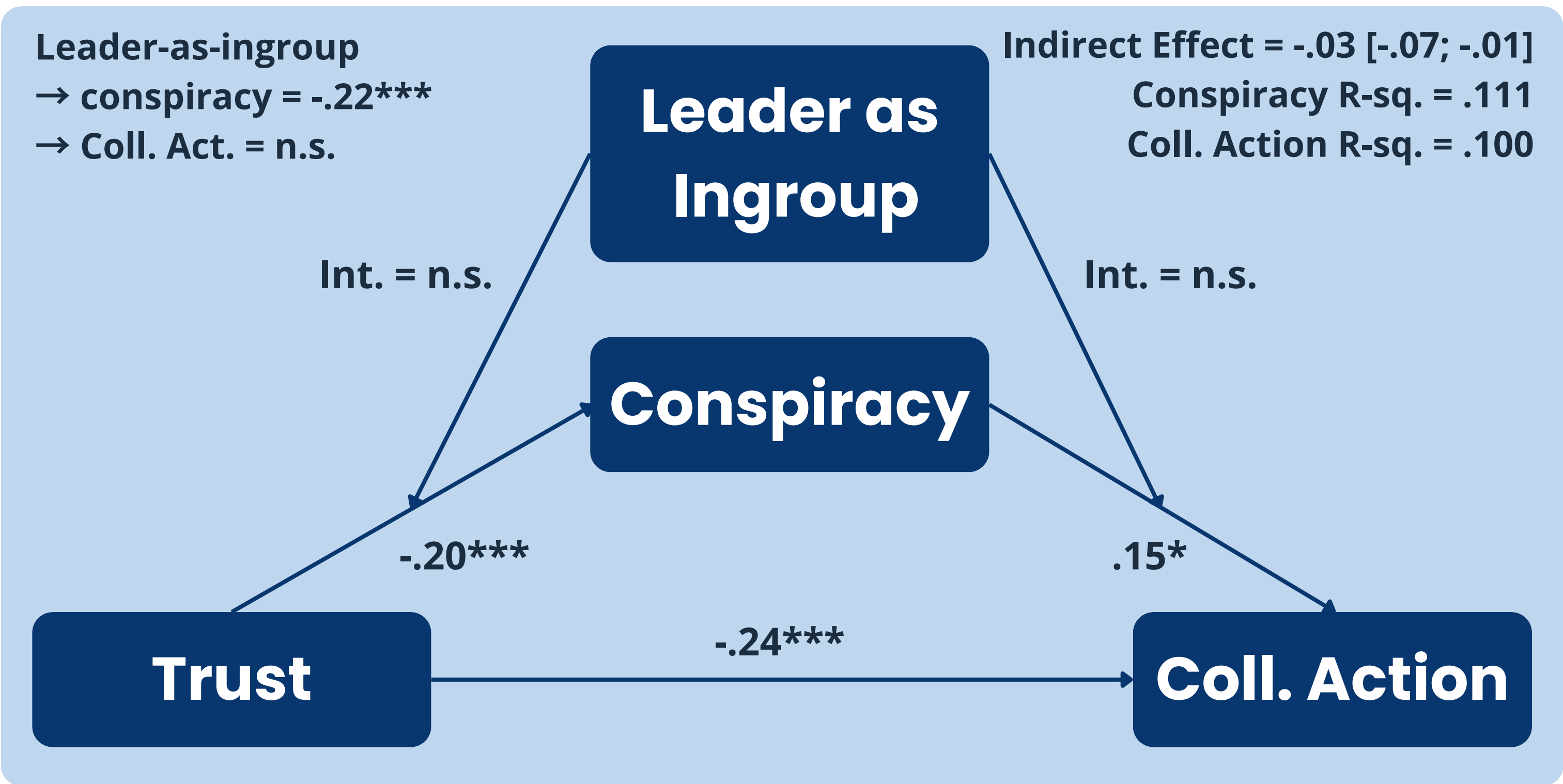
Objective / Hypotheses

To examine if political trust and conspiracy beliefs shape river-sourced water use and collective action intentions, and if perceptions of political leaders as ingroup buffers these effects.

- H1 – Higher political trust → greater water use intentions, lower collective action intentions.
- H2 – Stronger conspiracy beliefs → lower water use intentions, higher collective action intentions.
- H3 – Conspiracy beliefs mediate the effect of trust on both outcomes.
- H4: Leaders-as-ingroup perception buffers these effects.

Measures

- Political trust: 6 items, M = 1.07, SD = 1.04
- Conspiracy about crisis: 3 items, M = 6.06, SD = 1.13
- River water use intentions: drinking, cooking, washing food, hygiene, etc.; M = 4.75, SD = 1.83
- Leaders as ingroup: 3 items, M = 3.22, SD = 1.64
- CA intentions: 6 items, M = 5.01, SD = 1.47
- Likert (1–7), Sum(Water Use)



Discussion

Trust associated with **+ water use / - collective action** directly and through lower conspiracy beliefs

Opposite pattern for conspiracy belief: **-water use / + collective action**

Leaders-as-ingroup **directly affects conspiracy belief** and **buffers effect of conspiracy beliefs on water use**, but has **no effect on collective action**

Practical Implications

Build and maintain institutional trust to limit conspiracy-based explanations

Emphasize shared identity ("we're in this together") to foster cooperation

Reduce perceived distance between leaders and affected communities

Identity-based strategies alone don't curb protest they need to be paired with transparency and accountability

Strenght / Limitations

Real-time data collection during an unfolding crisis, direct relevance for crisis governance and communication

Distinction between compliance (water use) and protest (collective action)

Cross-sectional, self-report design
Snowball sample, limited generalizability

Single, narrow assessment window right after the source switch