

# POLITICAL TRUST AND TRUSTWORTHINESS

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■ **Abstract** After addressing the meaning of “trust” and “trustworthiness,” we review survey-based research on citizens’ judgments of trust in governments and politicians, and historical and comparative case study research on political trust and government trustworthiness. We first provide an overview of research in these two traditions, and then take up four topics in more detail: (a) political trust and political participation; (b) political trust, public opinion, and the vote; (c) political trust, trustworthy government, and citizen compliance; and (d) political trust, social trust, and cooperation. We conclude with a discussion of fruitful directions for future research.

## INTRODUCTION

The social science literature on trust has grown enormously in recent years, partly in response to the perception that political and social trust, deemed essential to a good society, are in decline. There are now decades of responses to the same survey questions, which show diminished political and social trust in a number of advanced industrial democracies. These data have generated efforts to explain, and ultimately to reverse, these trends. Related arguments about the importance of social capital and the claim that it, too, is in decline have also inspired a renewed focus on trust.

In this chapter, we review micro-level research into citizen judgments about the trustworthiness of political officeholders, political organizations, and governments, as well as macro-level research into the attributes of politicians and governments that make them trustworthy. In joining these topics we are recognizing that trust and trustworthiness are what Weatherford (1992) calls multi-level concepts—concepts that are useful in organizing research on both individuals and aggregates such as bureaucracies or nations.

After clarifying what we mean by “trust” and “trustworthiness,” we provide an overview of survey-based research on citizens’ judgments of trust in governments

and politicians, and of historical and comparative case study research on political trust and government trustworthiness. Whereas the survey work tends to focus on the individual-level causes and consequences of political trust judgments, the historical and comparative case study work tends to focus on macro-level determinants and outcomes or on trust relations among elites. We then consider in more detail four topics that concern the consequences of political trust and trustworthiness: (a) political trust and political participation; (b) political trust, public opinion, and the vote; (c) political trust, trustworthy government, and citizen compliance; and (d) political trust, social trust, and cooperation. We conclude with a discussion of fruitful directions for future research.

## DEFINITIONS

Although trust is a contested term, there appears to be some minimal consensus about its meaning. Trust is relational; it involves an individual making herself vulnerable to another individual, group, or institution that has the capacity to do her harm or to betray her. Trust is seldom unconditional; it is given to specific individuals or institutions over specific domains. For instance, citizens may entrust their lives to their government during wartime but not trust the bureaucracies that expend funds during peacetime. Trust is a judgment that can be conceptualized dichotomously (one either trusts or distrusts) or in a more graded fashion (one trusts or distrusts to a degree). Either way, there is the possibility that one neither trusts nor distrusts another. Trust judgments are expected to inspire courses of action. Distrust, for example, may inspire vigilance in and monitoring of a relationship, uncooperative behavior, or the severing of a relationship. The trust judgment reflects beliefs about the trustworthiness of the other person (or group or institution).

Trustworthiness is also relational but in a more limited sense. Even when there is no call for trust, a person or institution can possess the attributes of trustworthiness, which assure potential trusters that the trusted party will not betray a trust. These attributes fall along two dimensions. The first involves a commitment to act in the interests of the truster because of moral values that emphasize promise keeping, caring about the truster, incentive compatibility, or some combination of all three. When we call someone trustworthy, we often mean only this commitment, but there is in fact a second dimension, namely competence in the domain over which trust is being given. The trustworthy will not betray the trust as a consequence of either bad faith or ineptitude.

## OVERVIEW OF SURVEY RESEARCH

### Research on the United States

In 1962, Stokes introduced what later became known as the National Election Studies (NES) trust-in-government questions, which were

designed to tap the basic evaluative orientations towards the national government. The criteria of judgment implicit in these questions were partly ethical, that is honesty and other ethical qualities of public officials were part of what the sample was asked to judge. But the criteria extended to other qualities as well, including the ability and efficiency of government officials and the correctness of their policy decisions. (Stokes 1962:64)

Stokes used these data to categorize survey respondents according to whether they held favorable or unfavorable evaluations of government. The concepts of trust in government or of political trust never figured into his analysis. It was subsequent developments that prompted work on political trust, or at least on political trust as labeled and measured by the NES.

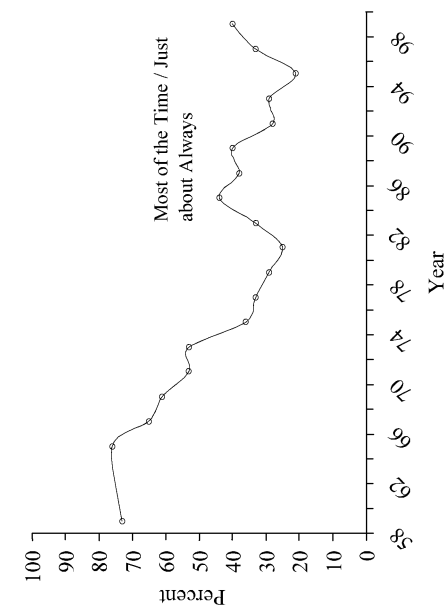
The publication of Easton's (1965) *A Systems Analysis of Political Life* and of Gamson's (1968) *Power and Discontent*—at a time when sociologists were increasingly focusing on the topic of alienation (e.g. Seeman 1959)—catalyzed the analysis of political trust. Easton (1965) introduced the influential distinction between diffuse support (i.e. support for the system or regime) and specific support (i.e. support for the incumbent authorities). Gamson's (1968) theory of political mobilization and activism treated political trust as a central organizing concept.

A second development was the social and political unrest of the 1960s and early 1970s, involving race relations and the civil rights movement as well as the war in Vietnam. A third development was the dramatic decline over time in the percentage of US citizens giving trusting responses to the NES trust-in-government questions, particularly across the 1964–1972 period (Figure 1). Because of these developments, by the early 1970s there was an explosion of work addressing whether system support was in decline in the United States; if not, what was, in fact, declining; and how all of this related to the civil and political disruptions of the period.

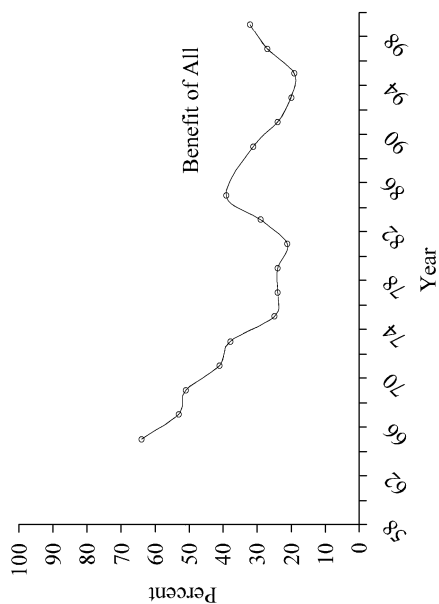
One of the main preoccupations of this literature was measurement. Although scholars had begun to refer to the NES questions as measuring political trust or trust in government, the measurement work did not focus on whether the NES items yielded a reliable and valid index of political trust or trustworthiness per se. Rather, it focused on whether the NES items tapped sentiments about current incumbents as opposed to judgments about the system or regime. Researchers compared the NES trust index to indices of alienation from the political system, debated whether and which incumbent-specific reactions were entering into the NES responses, and evaluated variants of the NES questions intended to direct respondents' attention away from current incumbents and toward the system as a whole (e.g. Miller 1974b; Citrin 1974, 1977; Muller & Jukam 1977; Abramson & Finifter 1981; Muller et al 1982; Feldman 1983; Seligson 1983; Williams 1985;

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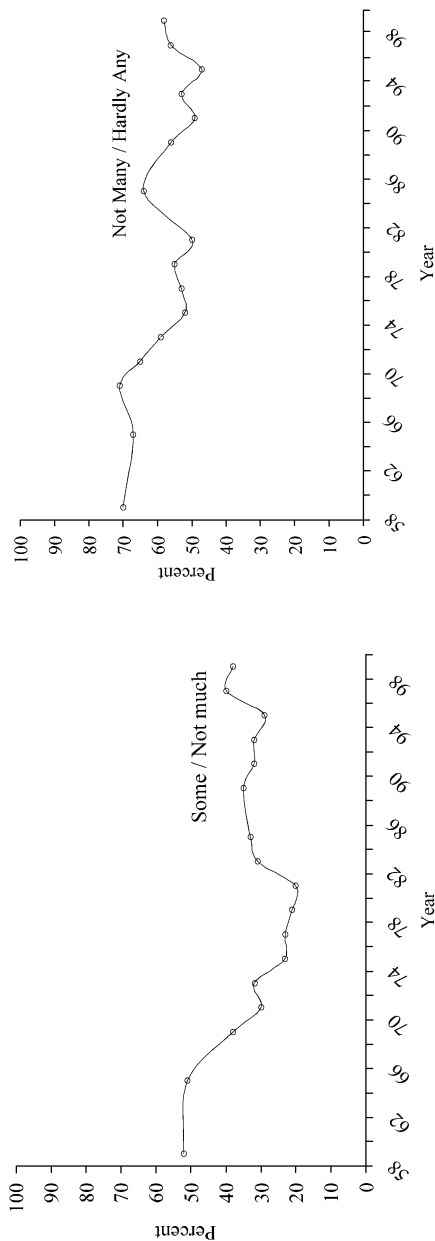
<sup>1</sup>Early studies that treat NES responses as measurements of trust include Aberbach (1969), Aberbach & Walker (1970), Miller (1974a), and Citrin (1974). Over the years, researchers have used other labels to describe what the NES questions were measuring, including political cynicism, disaffection, and alienation. See Citrin & Muste (1999).



(a) How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Washington to do what is right—just about always, most of the time, or only some of the time?



(b) Would you say the government is pretty much run by a few big interests looking out for themselves or that it is run for the benefit of all the people?



(c) Do you think that people in the government waste a lot of money we pay in taxes, waste some of it, or don't waste very much of it?

(d) Do you think that quite a few of the people running the government are crooked, not very many are, or do you think hardly any of them are crooked? (During 1958–1972, this question was worded as follows: Do you think that quite a few of the people running the government are a little crooked, not very many are, or do you think hardly any of them are crooked at all?)

**Figure 1** Percentage of US citizens who gave trusting responses to the National Election Studies trust-in-government questions.

Citrin & Green 1986; Weatherford 1987; Jennings & van Deth 1989:ch. 11; Craig et al 1990. For more thorough reviews, see Craig 1993, Nye et al 1997, and Citrin & Muste 1999).

One way to make sense of this emphasis in the measurement literature is that the system versus non-system focus was important no matter what concept the index was taken to represent. Whether one accepted Easton's arguments about system support or Gamson's arguments about distrust and discontent or sociologists' work on the concept and consequences of political alienation, one could conclude that disaffection was bad for the society and polity only if it was focused on the system or regime. Thus, the critical question about the NES index—and, hence, about what meaning to give to the plummeting levels of trust-so-measured—was whether it was incumbent-oriented or system-focused.

Evidence from all sorts of studies, whether focused on this issue of measurement or on the causes of the over-time dynamics of trust/distrust, found the NES responses to have strong partisan and incumbent-specific components. For example, Democratic identifiers are more trusting if the president is a Democrat and less trusting if the president is a Republican (e.g. Citrin 1974); similar findings, though developed with respect to the parties who dominate governing coalitions, have been found in studies of Western Europe (e.g. Listhaug 1995). Trust judgments are also influenced by evaluations of the performance of the incumbent president or government, particularly in the economic realm; by evaluations of the leaders' personal qualities; and by dissatisfaction with the policies being promoted or implemented by the current government (e.g. Citrin 1974; Abramson & Finifter 1981; Weatherford 1984, 1987; Citrin & Green 1986; Miller & Borrelli 1991; Craig 1993; Orren 1997; Hetherington 1998, 1999). Studies examining related measures (e.g. confidence in political institutions) on US and non-US populations have uncovered evidence of these kinds of incumbent-specific and short-term influences as well (e.g. Lipset & Schneider 1983, Hibbing & Patterson 1994, Listhaug & Wiberg 1995, Mishler & Rose 1997, McAllister 1999, Miller & Listhaug 1999).

Further—and on this the evidence is less clear—those who express distrust in government appear to be more dissatisfied with the political parties or with the policy choices that the parties provide. This was a central argument in Miller's (1974a,b) early and influential articles, which developed the idea that distrust was most common among extremists of the left or right who were dissatisfied with the policy alternatives provided by the centrist American political parties (see also Miller & Listhaug 1990, and for a dissenting view, Citrin 1974). In more recent years, a new version of the argument has emerged; by the 1980s and 1990s, it was because the parties had become so politically polarized that the centrist American population was dissatisfied and hence not trusting (Craig 1996, King 1997).

If distrust reflects dissatisfaction with the positions taken by the political parties, this is evidence that trust judgments are not merely an amalgam of reactions to current incumbents but reflect deeper, and less readily reversible, dissatisfactions or concerns. Indeed, although the decline in trust from the 1960s to the 1970s was fueled by citizens' reactions to the war in Vietnam, Watergate, and

civil rights initiatives (e.g. Abramson 1983, Markus 1979), trust did not rebound as the administrations associated with these events were replaced. Scholars have suggested a number of other forces that may have been at work over the decades to keep trust levels low or push them lower. These include the unrelenting string of political scandals over the years; the growth of television and its critical or cynical messages about politicians and government (Robinson 1976, Miller et al 1979, Patterson 1993, Capella & Jamieson 1997, Chan 1997); the public's perception, if not the reality, that American society was confronting but not solving a host of problems, including crime and family decline (Craig 1993, Mansbridge 1997, Hetherington 1998, PEW 1998; but see Bok 1997); Americans' increasing dissatisfaction with Congress, which fueled their distrust of politicians and government in general (Williams 1985, Feldman 1983, Hibbing & Theiss-Morse 1995, Hetherington 1998, Luks & Citrin 1997); and the fact that, for whatever reason, Americans had increasingly come to judge politicians as selfish and unresponsive to citizens' concerns (Craig 1993, Lawrence 1997). Evidence in support of these ideas comes from studies evaluating differences in trust levels across individuals as well as changes across time. A number of studies have developed these ideas through investigations of trust in local government as well (e.g. Litt 1963, Baldassare 1985, Beck et al 1990, Bobo & Gilliam 1990).

Nearly all of this research, whatever its specific conclusions, agrees on one point. Whether citizens express trust or distrust is primarily a reflection of their political lives, not their personalities nor even their social characteristics. Stokes (1962:65) observed that "one of the most arresting features of our empirical results is the similarity of these evaluations across a very wide range of social groupings in the United States," a point many recent authors have echoed (e.g. Craig 1996, Citrin & Muste 1999). Although blacks, for example, have at times been less trusting of government than have whites, the size and even the direction of the gap have varied with the federal government's efforts to ensure racial equality (Abramson 1983). Although citizens do not all agree about the trustworthiness of politicians and government, their disagreements reflect their varying political perceptions and values and the influence of their local social and political contexts.

## Research Comparing Countries and Governments

Researchers have attempted to capture cross-national variations in citizens' trust in their governments and in citizens' perceptions of government trustworthiness. There seems to be a general belief that levels of political trust are declining across Europe. However, as Newton notes (1999), the sources for data are largely single-country surveys, which are not always or fully comparable. The World Values surveys included questions about trust of government or politicians only in 1990 and only for 12 countries; the Eurobarometer surveys have not included such questions. Authors who have attempted to make comparisons across countries using other survey data have not found support for the "across-the-board-decline" thesis. In his contrast of survey evidence from Norway, Denmark,

Sweden, the Netherlands, Germany, and Britain with evidence from the United States, Newton (1999) finds that not all countries have experienced a decline in political trust. Among those that have (e.g. Britain and Sweden), the timing and degree of decline are distinct from those in the United States (see also Listhaug 1995, Holmberg 1998, Miller & Listhaug 1999).

The World Values surveys do include questions concerning citizen confidence in certain public authorities and institutions, such as the police, the armed forces, and the Parliament. There is considerable variation both across institutions and across the 20 countries surveyed, although there is only one case (Korea in 1981 in regard to the armed forces) in which 50% or more of the respondents express a great deal of confidence. In most of these countries, confidence in political institutions declined between 1981 and 1990, the two years when opinions were asked (Listhaug & Wiberg 1995, Inglehart 1999:225–27). There is considerably more information about confidence in authorities generally, which seems to be declining, and about political participation, which seems to be increasing for activities other than the vote.<sup>2</sup>

Researchers are also beginning to explore what may account for variations in trust or “confidence” levels across countries, asking, for example, whether these differences can be accounted for by differences in the performance of governments or are due to characteristics of party systems and political institutions (e.g. Miller & Listhaug 1990, Mishler & Rose 1997, Norris 1999b). In an early comparative study, Hart (1978) used culture, or more precisely political consciousness, to account for variations in political trust. She attempted to link attitude surveys with historical evidence of popular political thought and behavior to account for variations in distrust of government by the British and Americans both over time and between the two countries. She concluded that distrust of politicians is intermittent in Britain but is the historical norm in the United States (also see Barber 1983), in sharp contrast to the claim of many contemporary analysts that distrust is the aberration.

Nor is the US citizenry unique in its relatively constant distrust of government. Pharr’s (1997) analysis of Japanese data concludes that distrust of government and politics in Japan has been endemic since World War II. However, she finds the disaffection greater at the national level than the local level and more likely to focus on politicians than bureaucrats. Similarly, Jennings’ (1998) analysis of American surveys finds variation in political trust across levels of government in the United States. Like Pharr, he finds greater confidence in government at the local level than at the national level—at least in recent years. He suggests that part of the reason is that the tasks of local governments are easier to perform and to evaluate, and that citizens find local government more responsive to their

<sup>2</sup>Inglehart (1997, 1999) attributes these apparent changes and variations to a shift from materialist to postmaterialist values. However, in the absence of data on the same questions over a long period of time, the World Values surveys cannot be said to document the trends Inglehart attempts to explain. Recognizing this problem, he uses other kinds of data to support his argument.



concerns (see also Craig 1993). Such an interpretation fits with Mansbridge's observations (1997) that increased public distrust of government has much to do with its declining performance due to burgeoning demands, rising expectations, and reduced resources.

**Concluding Comments** The survey tradition in the United States became focused on (a) explaining variation across individuals and across time in the NES trust-in-government responses and on (b) tracing the behavioral consequences of trust so measured (to be described below). Although one important focus of this work concerned issues of measurement, almost none of that measurement work addressed the question of how political trust or trustworthiness should be measured. Researchers did not, for example, evaluate alternative survey indicators of political trust or introduce indicators representing different notions of political trust. This work did, however, emphasize the importance of distinguishing among various objects of trust or support.

In one sense, then, we have yet to question whether all of this research is really about trust or trustworthiness at all, as defined at the outset of this chapter. For now, we assume that this work is about political trust and that the NES questions capture trust judgments. Toward the chapter's end, however, we return to the issue of conceptualization and measurement, revisit the question of what the NES items are measuring, and urge survey researchers to ground their measures in a clearly articulated concept of political trust.

Still, we do know a lot. We know that there is a very strong individual-level connection between how citizens evaluate "government" or judge "politicians" and how they evaluate the performance of Congress, a finding that is demonstrated in comparable ways in research on other countries. We also know that there is a strong over-time correlation between political distrust and the perception that social problems are worsening or remaining unresolved and that politicians are unresponsive to citizens. These and other findings suggest that variations in political trust reflect more than incumbent-specific satisfactions or dissatisfactions. They mean that the behavioral and system-level consequences of distrust must be explored.

Finally, despite all the verbiage decrying the decline in trust, there is little actual evidence of a long-term secular decline, either in the United States or in Western Europe across the board. If it is true that political distrust is the norm for Americans, then surveys that date only since World War II may not be of sufficient duration to sustain the claim of a major and unusual decline. And even then, the time-series evidence available (Figure 1) suggests that trust levels have been moving both up and down since the mid 1970s. The evidence in other countries is generally of even shorter duration and depends on less comparable questions.

## Overview of Historical and Comparative Case Study Research

Work in historical and comparative case study tradition primarily explores the attributes that render a government trustworthy and the extent to which trustworthy government causes or is caused by important economic, social, and political

phenomena. This literature implicitly treats trust as a multilevel concept when it attempts to link institutions and behavior, especially when the behavior has micro foundations in individual perceptions, judgments, or dispositions.

Beginning with Gambetta's edited volume in 1988, there has been an industry of research on trust among comparative political scientists, political sociologists, and economic historians. There are essays on normative questions related to democratic governance; efforts by formal theorists, game theorists, and experimentalists to model relationships under conditions of trust and distrust; and empirical studies linking the levels of trust among citizens or political elites to how political institutions function. In addition, economists have continued to consider the ways in which trust facilitates economic exchange, and sociologists have persisted in researching how trust facilitates social exchange. These issues, though important, are not the focus of this chapter. What interests us here is comparative and historical research that links macro-level outcomes such as efficient government, political legitimacy, and democratization with the micro-level focus on individual choices and behavior.

If the essential tasks of government are to protect citizens from each other by providing justice and property rights and to protect citizens from external threats by providing national security, then the question immediately arises of how to prevent government from abusing the extraordinary power it possesses to carry out these tasks. In liberal political theory, or at least its Lockean variant, trustworthy government officials are a significant part of the answer (Silver 1985, Dunn 1988). From this perspective, government officials hold power and authority in trust to the people. Governors have both a legal and a moral obligation to those they serve, and it is expected that office holders will uphold their responsibilities—that is, prove their trustworthiness—or be removed. At the same time, in a tradition passed from Locke through Madison to many contemporary social scientists, the democratic project is one of “institutionalizing distrust” (Braithwaite 1998). As Barber (1983:166) argues, “a certain amount of rational distrust is necessary for political accountability in a participatory democracy” (also see Warren 1999b, Levi 2000, Tarrow 2000).

One of the most important concerns of the historical and comparative literature on trust is what makes for trustworthy political officials and, more generally, trustworthy government. The crucial attributes that scholars have identified are the capacities to make credible commitments, to design and implement policies nonarbitrarily, and to demonstrate competence. The morality of office holders

<sup>3</sup> Arrow (1974:23) characterizes trust as “an important lubricant of a social system” because it can enhance efficiency. Similarly, North (1981, 1990) considers trust a means for lowering transaction costs, as does Fukuyama (1995). Dasgupta (1988) picks up Hirschman's (1984) argument about trust as a resource and builds a model of trust as a commodity. Williamson (1993) is more skeptical of the role of trust.

<sup>4</sup> Luhmann's (1979) and Coleman's (1990) work is seminal, but there are also contributions by Giddens (1990), Eisenstadt (1995), Seligman (1997), and Misztal (1998).

can be an important source of political trustworthiness (Hardin 1996, Brennan 1998). A cumulative and positive research program has demonstrated that institutional arrangements play a significant role in making the commitments of public officials credible in the ways North & Weingast (1989), Root (1989), and Daunton (1998) stipulate. However, trustworthy government institutions must also be fair, transparent in their policy making, and open to competing views—propositions for which Tyler (1990), Levi (1997), and Daunton (1998) provide evidence in the domains of legal authorities, military service policy, and taxation.

Hardin (1998) argues that although governments may achieve the attributes of trustworthiness, it does not necessarily follow that citizens will possess sufficient knowledge to believe that any particular government actor will act in their interests. Hardin distinguishes between the basis for reliability or confidence, which is grounded in past experience, reputational factors, and regularity, and the basis for trust, which is grounded in a cognitive assessment of encapsulated interest. Other authors (Levi 1998, Whiting 1998) posit a somewhat broader definition in which the truster's knowledge of the institutions and reputation of the trusted may provide sufficient information for the truster to make a judgment about the trustworthiness of the trusted.

One of the biggest puzzles for students of politics is the appropriate basis for citizens' beliefs about when politicians are being trustworthy and acting in their interests or, at least, the public interest. Stokes' fieldwork on post-election policy switches by the leaders of several Latin American leads her to an ambivalent conclusion (Stokes 1999). Policy switches may be indicators of representative trustworthiness and accountability; the change may be intended to promote policies that better serve the citizenry. Alternatively, leaders' actions may reflect a lack of trustworthiness if during elections they provided erroneous information about the effects of policies in order to garner votes. Bianco's (1994, 1998) research on American congressional representatives combines a game theoretic model of trust (or, more accurately, the conditions under which citizens give their representatives leeway) with interviews and fieldwork. He argues that when constituents are uncertain about either policy outcomes or the motives of their representatives, when legislators are believed to possess private information, and when voters base their judgments on retrospective evaluations, legislators attempt to demonstrate their commitments to the common interest and thus to convince constituents of their trustworthiness. The problem, as in Latin American democracies, is normative as well as empirical. Electoral incentives may induce candidates and officials to misinform the public. Accurate assessment of trustworthiness is thus made difficult for the social scientific observer as well as for the voter, and representation may not always meet normative democratic standards.

The comparative and historical literature reveals key attributes of government trustworthiness and suggests reasons for variation in citizen trust of government across countries and over time. It also offers a normative argument for the importance of trustworthy government. But is there empirical evidence that it matters whether citizens trust government or whether government is trustworthy?

## WHY DO TRUST, DISTRUST, AND TRUSTWORTHINESS MATTER?

### Political Trust and Participation

The literature contains two different, and incompatible, claims about how trust influences political participation. One claim is that the trusting should be expected to participate to a greater extent than the distrusting, at least in conventional activities such as voting and campaign involvement. The idea that distrust might discourage political engagement was inspired by early theorizing about disaffection and alienation (Stokes 1962, Almond & Verba 1963, Finifter 1970) and by the fact that the over-time decline in US voting turnout coincided with the over-time decline in trust in government. This conjecture stimulated numerous studies and some very vehement statements of disconfirmation.

[T]he decline in turnout has not taken place as a consequence of declining trust or increased alienation; there is simply no direct causal link between the attitudes of trust in government and the decision to vote. (Miller 1980:24)

[T]rusting citizens are *not* more likely to vote, *not* more likely to engage in campaign activities, and *not* more likely to be interested in political campaigns or governmental affairs. (Rosenstone & Hansen 1993:150, emphasis in original)

The second claim regarding trust and participation is that distrust, not trust, should stimulate political involvement—or, at least, distrust should stimulate political involvement among those who feel politically efficacious. This claim was articulated first by Gamson (1968, 1975), a political sociologist, and in a complementary way by Bandura (1982), a psychologist. In an often-cited passage, Gamson (1968:48) stated that “a combination of high political efficacy and low political trust is the optimum combination for mobilization—a belief that influence is both possible and necessary.”

Over the years, this general claim has been tested, refined, and tested again. Early work looked at the effects of the conjunction of efficacy and distrust on conventional modes of participation, often coming away disappointed (e.g. Fraser 1970, Hawkins et al 1971). These early inquiries tended to examine participation

<sup>5</sup>The typical null finding concerns how the NES trust measure relates to vote turnout. Using survey data gathered in Mexico that carried both the NES questions and the questions comprising Muller's (1977) “Political Alienation-Support” (PAS) index, Seligson (1983) found the standard lack of a relationship between trust and vote turnout when using NES questions but a strong relationship when using PAS questions, where the more “supportive” citizens were more likely to vote. This, argues Seligson (1983), is strong evidence against the validity of the NES trust index as an indicator of diffuse support.

levels of people falling into different trust/efficacy categories without applying controls for other determinants of participation.

Drawing on Gamson's (1968) and Easton's (1965) ideas about the link between discontent and elite- or system-challenging behavior, scholars turned to the possibility that distrust spurred only unconventional participation. Survey research on non-US populations found mixed evidence for the hypothesis that distrust/alienation spurs protest activity (Muller 1977, Muller et al 1982, Pierce & Converse 1989). Authors trying to make sense of the turmoil of the 1960s and 1970s in the United States frequently discovered a link between distrust/alienation and either protest participation or approval of protest behavior (e.g. Jackson 1973, Sears & McConahay 1973, Abravanel & Busch 1975, Citrin 1977), although the relationships were sometimes weak or disappeared after the application of controls. Measurement questions were raised as well; some authors argued that only regime-oriented measures of alienation, and not incumbent-oriented measures of distrust, were strongly related to protest behavior or approval (e.g. Citrin 1974, 1977; Muller et al 1982).

Since many acts considered unconventional three decades ago have now entered conventional repertoires (Kaase & Newton 1995), arguments about the mobilization of discontent have come to rely less on this distinction. Shingles (1981), for example, has argued that the combination of efficacy and distrust should (and does) spur many different forms of participation as long as they are aimed at influencing the policy process. These participatory acts are often "conventional" but typically also require high initiative. Similarly, Inglehart (1997) has emphasized the importance of distinguishing participatory acts that are elite-directed and serve expressive functions (such as voting) from those that are citizen-directed and instrumental.

At the same time, new research has suggested that distrust may have come to inspire campaign-related participation in the United States in recent years. Analyzing NES data over time, Luks (1998) finds that in no election were the distrusting more likely than the trusting to vote, but they were more likely to engage in other forms of electoral participation in the late 1980s and 1990s. Atkeson et al (1996) suggest that the citizens who became involved in Perot's 1992 presidential campaign were much more distrusting than the national norm. Recent research in the "contentious politics" tradition also finds a link between activism and distrust of government. Tarrow (2000), for example, finds that activism is often a response to loss of confidence in government due to a protracted provision of misinformation; the British government's handling of the "mad cow disease" issue is a case in point. Even so, Tarrow suggests that those engaged in contentious politics may actually be building an antagonistic but "working trust" with government officials.

One theme that pervades this entire literature on distrust and political engagement is that the proper model linking the two is likely to involve complex interactions and contingencies. Distrust may, indeed, generate higher levels of

participation but only under some circumstances, for some kinds of people, and with respect to some kinds of political activities. Gamson (1968) hypothesized that the kinds of activities people would engage in would vary depending on whether they were trusting, distrusting, or somewhere in the middle, a hypothesis later evaluated by Paige (1971). Finifter (1970), Schwartz (1973), Muller (1977), and Guterbock & London (1983), among others, developed typologies of political action types based on the combination of individual attributes. For example, Finifter (1970) considered the various high/low combinations of "normlessness" and "powerlessness," two "dimensions of alienation" that later came to be identified with political trust and political efficacy. Muller (1977) distinguished five types based on individuals' (a) level of diffuse support for the regime, (b) beliefs about the efficacy of past political aggression, and (c) beliefs about their own ability to be politically influential. Others have suggested that distrust encourages participation only or especially among those who are politically interested (Luks 1998), among those who lack other motivations to participate (Shingles 1981), among those who are both politically efficacious and dissatisfied with the policies of the current administration (Miller 1974b, Craig & Maggiotto 1981), among those who are highly educated (Citrin 1977, Chan 1997), among those who trust the opposition leaders (Nilson & Nilson 1980), and among those experiencing adverse personal circumstances (Aberbach & Walker 1970).

In short, scholars inspired to consider the consequences of trust/distrust (or alienation/allegiance or level of diffuse support) for political participation have generated a profusion of complex hypotheses. Perhaps because of this bewildering array, trust has not figured prominently in work that focuses directly on explaining participation (e.g. Rosenstone & Hansen 1993, Verba et al 1995).

## Political Trust, Public Opinion, and the Vote

One idea found in the debates over the NES trust-in-government index is that distrust is not consequential if it simply reflects dissatisfaction with current incumbents or their administrations, whether that dissatisfaction concerns the personal characteristics of the leaders, the performance of the government in managing economic affairs or other matters, or the particular policies that the administration is supporting or implementing. Even if trust judgments are correlated with, say, the vote, this correlation would be a spurious reflection of the sentiments on which both trust judgments and vote choices are based.

Although there is strong evidence that people respond to the NES trust items with these kinds of administration-specific considerations in mind (Citrin 1974; Abramson & Finifter 1981; Citrin & Green 1986; Weatherford 1987; Craig 1993; Hetherington 1998, 1999), this cannot explain the long-term trends that are observed for the measure. Trust continued to decline throughout the 1960s and 1970s and, despite short periods of reversal (Citrin & Green 1986, Lipset & Schneider 1987, Miller & Borrelli 1991), into the 1990s. Reflecting on this fact, Miller



(1984:840) argues that the decline in trust reflects the accumulation of grievances across administrations. "People ... lost confidence because time after time political authorities, Democrats and Republicans alike, demonstrated through their decisions and actions that they were not competent, not efficient, not honest, not fair, and certainly not to be trusted to make the right policy decisions."

This thesis raises the possibility that the strong association between trust and evaluations of incumbent administrations, their performance, and their policies arises at least in part because distrust itself—now long-held, generalized, and based on the accumulation of grievances—shapes assessments of each administration.

One way to read this hypothesis focuses on the durability of distrust at the individual level. Only if a given individual has come to distrust many succeeding administrations, or has reached a generalized distrust of government through the accumulation of grievances over a long period of time, will distrust become an important, independent determinant of attitudes toward political candidates or public policies. This reading of the hypothesis has not been evaluated by survey researchers (since it requires long-term panel data), but it is an argument that Craig (1993) advances based on his analysis of in-depth interviews and focus groups.

Several other studies bear directly on this hypothesis. Hetherington (1998) estimated the reciprocal effects of distrust and evaluations of the incumbent president, finding that distrust was more important as a source of negative sentiment about the president than vice versa. He also modeled the relationship between trust judgments and evaluations of Congress as reciprocal, finding that although mutual influence was present, distrust was more a consequence than a cause in that case.

The experimental study of Sigelman et al (1992) also provides evidence that distrust stimulates negative assessments of political candidates or leaders. Their study was directed toward understanding how citizens react to representatives who vote (*a*) in accordance or in opposition to their constituents, (*b*) on the basis of principle or for reasons of expediency. The distrusting evaluated the politicians much more negatively than the trusting in all of the experimental conditions. The work of Sigelman et al supports Easton's (1975:447) contention that distrust of specific authorities can become generalized. "In time, disaffection may occur not because of what each succeeding set of authorities is perceived to have done but simply because they are perceived to be authorities—and authorities are no longer thought worthy of trust."

The arguments and findings reviewed thus far provide two different reasons for expecting trust judgments to be irrelevant to explaining citizens' vote choices. First, if trust judgments are simply a summary of citizens' assessments of current administrations (including their assessments of leadership qualities, performance, and policy directions) or the policy alternatives the parties present to them, then they should contribute nothing to an explanation of the vote once these other assessments are taken into account. Second, even if citizens' trust judgments independently affect their evaluations of politicians, this effect could leave a voter's

relative evaluations of candidates intact, and, hence, render trust irrelevant to the vote. Even if voters who distrust politicians feel that they are choosing between two evils, what influences their vote choice is which of the two is judged to be worse.

Instead, however, the available evidence suggests that trust judgments do independently influence voters' choices. Studies have demonstrated that the distrusting are more likely than the trusting to vote in an anti-incumbent fashion in two-party presidential races and to support third-party or Independent candidates when they emerge as serious contenders, as did Wallace in 1968, Anderson in 1980, and Perot in 1992 and 1996 (Aberbach 1969, Rosenstone et al 1984, Hetherington 1999, Luks & Citrin 1997, Luks 1999). These effects have been observed in analyses that control for other plausible determinants of the vote.

According to Luks & Citrin (1997), whether distrust becomes consequential to the vote depends on whether one of the candidates emphasizes antigovernment themes. In other words, citizens' judgments concerning the trustworthiness of politicians and government are not always relevant to the choices they face. Only in some circumstances do those who judge the government untrustworthy have, or perceive, the option of supporting an "outsider" candidate. When such a choice is available, however, the behavioral consequences of distrust are revealed. This general idea also finds support in research evaluating how distrust shapes opinions on public policy and institutional reforms.

One set of studies focused on the Proposition 13 "tax revolt" in California in the 1970s. Both Sears & Citrin (1985) and Lowery & Sigelman (1981) emphasize the importance of distrust or disaffection as determinants of voter support for the property tax rollback (see also Beck et al 1990). As Lowery & Sigelman put it, "pro-tax limitation sentiments reflect a deeper disillusionment which is directed against government institutions and authorities" (1981:969). More recent work has focused on trust as a determinant of support for legislative term limits, another policy initiative associated with antigovernmental themes. Analyzing NES data and additional surveys carried out in Florida and Wyoming, Karp (1995) found that distrust was by far the most influential predictor of support for term limits, even in models that included evaluations of Congress or of the state legislatures, the very institutions where term limits were being implemented.

Much of the work on trust and public opinion or the vote has focused on citizens' judgments about the trustworthiness of "government" in general or of "most politicians," using the NES index or comparable measures. Yet some research is beginning to focus on the consequences of judgments about the trustworthiness of specific actors and institutions.

One line of work concerns judgments about the trustworthiness of one's own member of Congress, stimulated by Fenno's (1978) arguments about the efforts members of Congress undertake to ensure that they are judged trustworthy by their constituents. Parker's (1989) analysis used open-ended questions tapping what survey respondents like or dislike about their representative to form an index



of how much they trust their representatives. Parker found that this trust variable was a strong predictor of incumbent evaluation and vote choice, even stronger than party identification.

A second line of work focuses on citizens' assessments of environmental hazards and the siting of hazardous waste facilities. Several studies have identified trust as a crucial determinant of citizens' perceptions of risk or hazard, the degree of fear or distress they feel if living in proximity to a potential hazard, and their support or opposition to the siting of a hazardous waste facility in the area where they live (Flynn et al 1992, Goldsteen et al 1992, Flynn & Slovic 1993, Hunter & Leydon 1995; for a general review, see Citrin 1991). In these studies, researchers have focused on whether citizens trust the specific administrative agencies responsible for regulating or administering the hazardous waste facility. Even further, the questions gauging trust usually stipulate the domain of trust, asking respondents if they trust, say, the Department of Energy on the question of hazardous wastes—whether, for example, they will be told the truth, whether potential problems will be closely monitored, and whether public safety will be a priority.

Taken as a whole, research on trust and its relation to public opinion and voting suggests two major conclusions. First, judgments about the trustworthiness of government or of politicians are more than ideological or partisan reactions to specific incumbent administrations. They are generalized judgments that influence whether citizens endorse or reject existing authorities and public policy or institutional reforms. Second, general trust judgments about government or politicians are not the only trust judgments worthy of political study. Indeed, as we suggest toward the end of this essay, judgments about the trustworthiness of particular actors (in particular domains) may be of far greater consequence than the limited research to date would suggest.

## Political Trust, Trustworthiness, and Compliance

One of the findings of the literature on government regulation is that the more trustworthy citizens perceive government to be, the more likely they are to comply with or even consent to its demands and regulations. This is one of the most important findings in Tyler's (1990, 1998) survey- and observation-based research

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<sup>6</sup>Parker's categories were based on the content of the closed-ended NES trust-in-government questions. They referred to the following characteristics, among others: dependable, trustworthy, reliable, no one runs him, honest, sincere, keeps promises, man of integrity, man of high ideals, not just out for self. Roughly 20% of the respondents made at least one like/dislike response falling into these categories (Parker 1989:195). In another study, Parker & Parker (1993) analyzed the determinants of an index of trust in one's member of Congress formed from closed-ended questions that were developed after careful consideration of the concept of trust (a rarity in the literature). Both generalized trust in government and personal contact with the representative emerged as important predictors.

on citizen voluntary acceptance of court and other governmental authorities and of Levi's historical and political economy work on taxation (1988) and on military service (1997). Tyler focuses on the attribution motivations of the citizen and Levi on the actual attributes of government, but both attempt to show a link between the attitudes and decision making of the citizen being asked to comply and her perceptions of the trustworthiness of government. The difference between Tyler and Levi reflects the ongoing debate (see Braithwaite & Levi 1998) between authors who emphasize the social bonds or group identification between the truster and the trusted and those with a more interest-based account.

Although there is strong evidence for a link between perceptions of trustworthy government and citizen compliance, the interpretations of this evidence vary. Some accounts are explicitly based on institutional arrangements that ensure government actors are adequately constrained—that, as Daunton (1998:130) puts it, “Leviathan [is] chained.” Majone (1997), for example, emphasizes the role of credible commitments in ensuring that the member states of the European Union comply with its rules.

Other accounts emphasize the psychological interactions between the governed and their governors. In a series of papers drawing on telephone surveys and a random sample of tax returns provided by the Internal Revenue Service, Scholz and his collaborators (Pinney & Scholz 1995, Scholz 1998, Scholz & Lubell 1998a,b) have investigated trust heuristics as cognitive shortcuts that affect tax compliance. Scholz argues (1998:157):

In everyday situations, a number of attitudes toward potential “trustees” act as on-line processors that produce moving average measures of relevant information.... If the moving average works accurately, individuals learn to trust more trustworthy individuals. Trust then becomes a reliable guide to behavior in trusting situations.

When government is perceived as trustworthy, citizens are more likely to comply with its demands.

Ayres & Braithwaite (1992) also find that trustworthy government increases compliance, but they stress the importance of trust by regulators as a means of evoking compliance from the regulated. If regulators trust the regulated, “trust-responsiveness” (Pettit 1995), in the form of compliance, appears to result. This account of trust views the citizen as someone “who respects norms of trust as an obligation of citizenship in circumstances where it may or may not be rationally self-interested to do so” (Braithwaite & Makkai 1994) and implies that regulation will be most effective if it keeps punishment in the background and uses persuasion and trust to induce compliance (Ayres & Braithwaite 1992). Peel (1995) offers a fine and nuanced case study of the negative effects of government actors withholding trust or actively distrusting citizens in a working-class suburb in Australia, with the result that the citizens distrust government in return and are less likely to consent willingly to its bureaucratic requirements.

Those who study the relationship between trustworthy government and citizen compliance differ as to whether the source of trust is a social bond or some form

of encapsulated interest. However, all agree that government officials who act in a trustworthy manner are more likely to elicit compliance, and virtually all agree that government regulators who trust the people they are regulating are more likely to evoke trustworthy behavior and compliance.

## Government Trustworthiness, Social Trust, and Cooperation

What is the relationship between a trustworthy government and the interpersonal (or social) trust among strangers that is the focus of the social capital literature? It is conceivable that social trust and political trust are unrelated to each other, or related only spuriously. For Gellner (1988), following Ibn Khaldun, trust as social cohesion is possible only within a civil society where there are thick, embedded relationships. He questions the possibility of maintaining trust in a complex and anonymous society (also see Silver 1985, Williams 1988, Seligman 1997). We argue that there is indeed a relationship, as de Tocqueville (1990 [1840]) claimed in the nineteenth century and as Putnam (1993, 1995) claims today. But it is an empirical question whether a trustworthy government helps promote social trust and the cooperative behaviors that support democracy, or whether social trust is a necessary condition for democracy.

A close rereading of de Tocqueville reveals that he believed participation in political associations increases the probability of participation in civic associations and corporations. The reason has to do with the development of the capacity to trust, although he does not label it that way. He argues that individuals will risk joining a political association because they have little to lose from their participation; their money is not at risk. In doing so, however, they learn the advantages of combination. This makes them more willing to risk their possessions by engaging in what de Tocqueville terms civil partnerships, major examples being manufacturing and trading companies. Indeed, he hypothesizes that the existence of a democratic right of association accounts for variation in civil association. "I do not say that there can be no civil association in a country where political association is prohibited, for men can never live in a society without embarking in some common undertakings; but I maintain that in such a country civil associations will always be few in number, feebly planned, unskillfully managed, that they will never form any vast designs, or that they will fail in their execution of them" (de Tocqueville 1990[1840]:118).

A trustworthy government may actually generate the interpersonal trust that promotes a productive economy, a more peaceful and cooperative society, and a democratic government (Fukuyama 1995; Levi 1997, 1998), the reverse of the causal ordering suggested by Putnam (1993, 1996). Indeed, some scholars argue that the major source of social trust is government's credible commitment to uphold property rights and to protect constituents from each other. Weingast (1998:165) summarizes this position prefatory to his formal modeling of ethnic conflict, "Trust results when institutions make it far less likely that one group will be able to capture the state and take advantage of the other. Trust can therefore be constructed and institutionalized."

Others have reached similar conclusions. Without stable institutional arrangements for impartial regulation of the conflict among factions, medieval Genoa could not flourish (Greif 1994, 1999). Among contemporary Chinese townships (Whiting 1998) and among the developing countries more generally (Fukuyama 1995), variation in government capacity to uphold property rights and make fiscal commitments appears to be a major factor in explaining variation in economic development. What distinguishes all these arrangements is that they enable political actors to make credible commitments. Elster (1989:274–75) goes so far as to claim that credibility “captures most arguments about the causes and consequences of trust.”

Other comparative and historical work suggests, however, that more than credibility of commitments is required in a state that engenders societal trust. Pagden (1988) argues that the Spanish rulers of eighteenth-century Naples demolished societal trust by controlling, destroying, and mystifying the information that individuals need if they are to trust each other and by changing customs, e.g. transforming the easy relations between sexes and among the various orders. “The degeneration of the necessary guarantors of the well-ordered community led inevitably to the collapse of the economy” (Pagden 1988:137). The Spanish created an aristocracy that replaced trust with honor, precisely the kind of government that Hawthorn (1988) claims is most likely to generate societal trust by producing a code by which individuals must live. He provides examples from the army and political parties in India and Korea, which also confirm his skepticism about the extent to which the aristocrats themselves can be trusted by those they govern. The disagreement between Pagden and Hawthorn over the role of honor largely reflects a difference in terms. More important is their consensus that the state plays a key role in creating values, which in turn generate and sustain social trust.

Scholars concerned with the growth of democracy as well as the economy in the post-Soviet countries also emphasize the importance of trustworthy government institutions for the development and maintenance of social trust (Rose 1994; Sztompka 1996, 1999; Offe 1999). All emphasize credible commitments, but Sztompka (1998) also emphasizes the creation of a “culture of trust” and Offe (1999) the importance of the values incorporated in the institutions of government.

Findings from survey research also address this question. Although researchers have long noted that survey measures of political and social trust are correlated, only recently have they tried to evaluate alternative explanations of how this connection might arise. Brehm & Rahn (1997) do so by estimating the causal interdependencies among social trust, confidence in government, and civic engagement. They find that the observed association between citizens’ confidence in government and trust in their fellow citizens is largely a product of the influence of the former on the latter. In other words, whether citizens trust each other is strongly influenced by whether they have confidence in the government that they share. Yamagishi & Yamagishi (1994), also relying on survey data, find striking differences between social trust in the United States and Japan. They claim that the difference is at least partly caused by the greater distrust of government among the Japanese, which makes them less confident that the government will provide the institutional protections that facilitate generalized social trust.

All of this is not to deny that social trust may affect participation in and attitudes toward government. A huge literature, recently reviewed by Jackman & Miller (1998), makes precisely this claim. The literature discussed here reveals an important causal link in the other direction: A trustworthy government may facilitate the development of social trust and cooperation.

## FUTURE DIRECTIONS

### Political Trust: It Is Not Just About “Government”

At the outset of this chapter, we described the question of trust as arising when an individual finds herself in a relationship entailing the possibility of risk or vulnerability. If trusting, an individual is freed from worry and from the need to monitor the other's behavior or to extricate herself from the relationship. With that in mind, one way to think about where trust judgments will be most meaningful and influential is to ask such questions as: What relationships do citizens form with political authorities and political elites with each other? In what situations are citizens or elites potentially vulnerable to the actions of political authorities or institutions, so that they must confront the question of trust?

All citizens enter into a relationship with their national government in that they are bound by its laws. Still, the ordinary relationships that citizens have with political authorities are most likely to be local in focus. They involve local problems, if not local authorities, though perhaps usually both. As psychologists have emphasized, proximate judgments direct people's behavior (e.g. Fishbein & Ajzen 1974). Thus, for example, what should matter to whether people attend a local school board meeting is the extent to which they trust the school board with the education or even the safety of their children. What should matter to whether they join a local police watchdog organization is the extent to which they trust the local police to act competently, fairly, and honestly. What did matter to the distress felt by the residents living near Three Mile Island was whether or not they felt they could trust the Three Mile Island authorities (Goldsteen et al 1992), not “the government” or “political officials” in some more general sense. What mattered to the working-class residents in South Australia was whether particular bureaucrats were trustworthy and trusted them (Peel 1995). And what mattered to the meat eaters of Britain were very specific regulatory agencies (Tarrow 2000).

In cases like this, even if what people think about particular authorities is influenced by their perceptions of the trustworthiness of politicians in general, what presumably drives their behavior are their judgments concerning the particular authorities. If this is so, then trust of one's government or its institutions may be the most consequential judgment of trust, in the sense that if it is undermined then more cataclysmic or large-scale changes in a society or polity are possible. But in explaining everyday political behavior, distrust of government may not be as important as distrust of particular authorities. We urge scholars to expand their inquiries beyond the traditional focus on citizens' trust in “government” in

general, by studying the causes and consequences of citizens' trust in specific political actors, organizations, or institutions.

There is the further question of trust among political elites. Larson (1997), for example, uses a psychological approach to trust to investigate the missed opportunities for international security agreements among heads of state. The literature on credible commitments, particularly if attuned to principal-agent problems, is especially sensitive to how political elites—governmental, bureaucratic, and societal—attempt to insulate themselves from harm that other elites may cause them. Distrust, usually mutual, generates the development of institutional arrangements that permit dominant factions to protect themselves from each other and from the state (e.g. Weingast 1998, Greif 1998) and that permit policy makers in democracies to protect programs from changes in government and from bureaucratic manipulation (e.g. Moe 1990). Work is yet to be done that adequately pulls together an emphasis on the qualities of particular actors and the institutional features of government that ensure trustworthiness. Such a research program might provide even greater understanding of when key political actors are likely to trust each other and with what political consequences.

## Concepts and Measurement

In *The Malevolent Leaders: Popular Discontent in America*, Craig wrote:

The subject of this book is political discontent. I want to be very careful with my terminology here so as to avoid getting bogged down in an endless review of the different concepts and measures that have been used to describe citizen attitudes toward politics and government (alienation, estrangement, disaffection, illegitimacy, etc.). Even where the same construct (e.g., alienation, or Easton's diffuse/specific support) is employed, its meaning and operationalization often vary so much from one study to the next that any possible common frame is lost. (Craig 1993:17)

Most researchers who have tried to grapple with the literature on alienation or distrust or discontent, including us, have also struggled with this profusion of concepts and of indicators. A recent volume reviewing survey indicators (Robinson et al 1999) includes separate chapters entitled "Political Alienation and Efficacy" and "Trust in Government," even though there is substantial overlap in the various scales that one encounters in each (as Citrin & Muste, authors of the "Trust in Government" chapter, wryly note).

Scholars have adopted a variety of strategies to cope with this problem. Craig's solution is to concentrate on variation in the objects of political support, "with support defined simply 'as an affective orientation to political objects ... and processes..., which can be positive, neutral, or negative'" (Craig 1993:17, citing Kornberg 1990:710). Citrin & Muste (1999) encourage researchers to distinguish both among the different objects of trust (e.g. particular institutions, politicians in general, the regime as a whole) and among different dimensions of appraisal. They emphasize the distinction between judgments of integrity and judgments of



competence, although they also mention other dimensions, including fairness and responsiveness. When institutions are involved, they recommend distinguishing judgments about outcomes from judgments about processes. The authors contributing to *Critical Citizens* (Norris 1999) adopt a set of distinctions focused primarily on the object of support, distinguishing the political community, regime principles, regime performance, regime institutions, and political actors. The concept of trust is not central to this typology, although one of the authors (Dalton 1999) recommends a further distinction between “affective orientations” toward these objects and “instrumental evaluations” of these objects, and places trust judgments in the latter category.

This is not the place to interject our own recommended set of conceptual, and hence empirical, distinctions for understanding how citizens evaluate government. But we offer several comments on issues that particularly concern political trust. First, whatever differences remain, there is a consensus in the literature about the importance of distinguishing among the objects or targets of trust. This is eminently sensible and desirable. Second, it is clear that not every political object of assessment can be an object of trust. For example, one can have an attitude toward democratic principles, but one cannot be said to trust or distrust such principles. What is necessary for trust to be relevant to some political object is that the object be a political actor. Depending on one’s conceptualization, this actor could be a person (e.g. one’s Congressman), a group of individuals (e.g. the local school board or politicians in general), or even an institution (e.g. Congress or the Supreme Court). Finally, there is no agreement about the most fruitful way to distinguish among different dimensions of appraisal, although this is crucial to progress in thinking about the political consequences of trust.<sup>7</sup> Scholars need to develop a clear sense of how trust differs from other kinds of judgments about political actors or institutions. To accomplish this, they must first decide how to conceptualize and measure judgments of trust and trustworthiness.

This brings us back to definitions and to definitions of trustworthiness in particular. We see two possible approaches to defining trustworthiness, only one of which has been pursued in existing survey research. The first defines trustworthiness in terms of role responsibilities: those characteristics that are (ostensibly) morally entailed by the role that the political actor has assumed (Barber 1983). Miller &

<sup>7</sup> A review of existing literature suggests something approaching a consensus on what Citrin et al (1975) calls political alienation and what others (e.g. Norris 1999), following Easton (1975), describe as attachment to the political community. “[W]hat distinguishes the allegiance/alienation continuum from other attitudes toward the political system is the explicit reference to feelings of *closeness/distance*, *attachment/separation* or *identification/rejection*. To be politically alienated is to feel a relatively enduring sense of estrangement from existing political institutions, values and leaders” (Citrin et al 1975:3, emphasis in original; see also Sniderman 1981). If we recognize such distinctions, we may be able to make more sense of the perplexing features of the research literature on attitudes toward government that has developed over the past 30 years. Perhaps alienation, and not political distrust, discourages turnout; only the allegiant partake in the civic ritual of voting. And perhaps alienation, more than political distrust, is a consequence of social distrust.

Listhaug's (1990:358) definition of trust captures this notion well:

Trust ... reflects evaluations of whether or not political authorities and institutions are performing in accordance with normative expectations held by the public. Citizen expectations of how government should operate include, among other criteria, that it be fair, equitable, honest, efficient, and responsive to society's needs. In brief, an expression of trust in government (or synonymously political confidence and support) is a summary judgment that the system is responsive and will do what is right even in the absence of constant scrutiny.

This is the conception of trustworthiness that underlies the NES trust-in-government questions, questions that ask whether respondents believe politicians are dishonest, do not know what they are doing, waste tax money, serve special interests and not the people, or try to do what is right. It is also the conception of government trustworthiness that underlies much of the work in the Lockean as well as current republican traditions of state theory (e.g. Braithwaite 1998).

The second approach would focus on whether the potential truster believes that the political actor or institution will act in his interests (or at least not against his interests). Although dominant in macro-level and elite-focused work on trust, this conception of trustworthiness has not figured into survey-based, micro-level work. To implement this approach in a survey project, one would first stipulate an objective account of interests, and then design survey questions that asked people whether they believed an actor was serving, or not obstructing, those interests. If, for example, one stipulated that people want (*a*) to be told the truth, (*b*) to be autonomous, (*c*) to be treated fairly, (*d*) to accumulate wealth, and (*e*) to live free from fear, then one would need to gauge whether a given political actor or institution was seen as protecting or harming those interests. Such questions would probe whether people felt the actor was working to protect/harm their own interests, not whether they thought the actor was working to protect/harm the interests of everyone.

In contrast to both of these approaches, which begin with objective definitions of trustworthiness, is a third approach that leaves trustworthiness undefined, open to the interpretation of the potential truster. This is increasingly common in

<sup>8</sup>Several criteria would be common to the two approaches to trustworthiness. If, for example, political actors seek only to advance their own interests, this implies a disregard for the potential truster's interests and violates normative expectations. As well, both approaches are capable of representing the important distinction between process and outcomes, though in different ways. For example, whereas the role-responsibility approach would gauge perceptions concerning whether the political actor has generally treated people, in general, fairly, the interest-based account would focus on perceptions of whether the political actor has treated the truster fairly. Notice also that the interest-based judgments of trustworthiness will inevitably—and rightly—be colored by partisan and ideological sentiments as long as those partisan and ideological sentiments are themselves interest-based.



survey-based work on political trust. For example, in his survey of Russian citizens, Gibson (1999) measured political trust by asking, "What about the political leaders of Russia—can they be trusted, or do you have to be very careful when dealing with Russian political leaders?" In their study of trust in local government, Abney & Hutcheson (1981) asked: "How much of the time would you say you could trust city government?" And in their study of trust in former Communist countries, Mishler & Rose (1997) asked respondents to rate different political institutions on a scale that ranged from 1 maximum distrust to 7 maximum trust. In essence, all of these strategies involve asking respondents: "Do you, or how often do you, trust *X*?" This strategy builds in no assumptions about the kinds of considerations that may enter into judgments of trustworthiness, and hence, trust.

Quite apart from the issue of which conception of trustworthiness (if any) guides research on political trust is a second issue that concerns the domain specificity of trust and trustworthiness judgments. Most work in the survey tradition has gauged whether citizens trust political actors (or judge them trustworthy) in general, rather than whether citizens trust political actors with regard to particular domains or activities. Some exceptions, as we pointed out above, are found in studies of public opinion on the siting of hazardous waste facilities, where questions about trust in regulatory agencies are sometimes focused on particular policy arenas. Yet, as we noted at the outset of this essay, it is reasonable to think of political trust as domain-specific—one trusts a given political actor with respect to some problems, policies, or activities but not others. Thus, for example, one could trust the president on economic matters but not on matters concerning social policy, or one could trust the collective arms and agencies of government to provide an effective system of national defense but not to competently manage a health system.

Historical-comparative and other macro-level researchers have a somewhat different but related task than those doing micro-level work. Macro research requires, first, establishing the attributes of a trustworthy government and of political actors, but it also demands discernment of the domains in which citizens find that government and political actors meet these criteria and of the reasons why specific groups of citizens may vary in their perceptions. The extent to which governance accords to the rule of law and nondiscriminatory practices is a key attribute of trustworthiness, which macro-level researchers can use to evaluate government behavior and likely citizen responses in general and in specific domains. For example, even if an ethnic, religious, or linguistic minority group within the population believes government is generally trustworthy, it may find government lacks even-handedness and thus lacks trustworthiness in particular policy arenas, such as education or abortion. Thus, the group may not contemplate secession, but it will lobby and protest to achieve policy change.

Future work must grapple with these alternative approaches to conceptualizing political trust and trustworthiness, while being attuned to how trust judgments differ from other evaluations of political actors, organizations, and institutions—for example, judgments of "confidence" in institutions as gauged by the General Social Survey in the United States or by the World Values surveys, or feelings

of “alienation.” If researchers fail to do so, we will be left with the problem that has characterized previous research—that many different indicators, of potentially different concepts, have been employed by different researchers, making it difficult to draw conclusions across studies. This failure will also thwart the fruitful integration of micro-level and macro-level work, as we suggest below.

## Micro-Macro Integration

Trust is what Weatherford (1992) calls a “multi-level concept.” The trustworthiness of governments or other political actors can be important to researchers working with macro- and micro-level data and studying macro- and micro-level phenomena. Adopting Weatherford’s argument, which he develops with respect to legitimacy, micro- and macro-level work on political trust can be integrated fruitfully only if scholars in both traditions share a common conceptual framework, in general, and a common conception of trustworthiness, in particular. Micro-level researchers would focus on citizen judgments about how well trustworthiness criteria are being met; macro-level researchers would seek data on governments and politicians gauging how well these criteria are being met. This means that micro-level researchers, rather than leaving open the question of what figures into trust judgments, must stipulate the attributes that, according to their definition, renders an actor trustworthy, and they must tap people’s perceptions of these attributes. Similarly, macro-level researchers, including those doing historical and comparative research, must be clear about the attributes of trustworthy government and government officials but also must specify and measure expected outcomes in terms of both government policy and citizen behavior.

As we sketched out above, two different conceptions of trustworthiness have inhabited the research literature, one dominating the micro-level tradition (the role-responsibility conception), and one dominating the macro-level tradition (the interest-based conception). One consequence of this has been the development of micro- and macro-level literatures with few points of contact. Yet an integration of the two would be enormously helpful to understanding political trust at both levels. It would enable scholars to systematically address such questions as, “Do actual changes in government performance, and in institutional design, influence citizens’ distrust in government? If citizens judge political actors trustworthy, does this affect how political institutions function or the policies that they produce?” To address such questions, scholars must bridge the micro-macro divide that currently characterizes research on political trust.

## Gaining Leverage Through Experimental and Panel Analysis

As this review has described, many questions about the individual-level causes and consequences of political trust judgments, and about their over-time dynamics, still remain. The most persuasive and influential work in recent years has been notable in its attempts to model complex causal relationships. For example, Brehm & Rahn (1997) model the interdependencies between political trust and civic engagement, and Hetherington (1998) models the interdependencies between political trust and

evaluations of the president. In these examples, the researchers gained leverage by working with large data sets and by estimating sophisticated statistical models. Although such studies represent an advance over those that build in dubious assumptions about one-way causality, they, like most of the micro-level research on political trust, are limited by the cross-sectional survey data analyzed.

To date, very few studies of political trust have employed experimental methods or the analysis of panel data, despite the power of such methods for studying questions concerning causal dynamics. One of the rare experimental studies (Sigelman et al 1992), as noted above, provides strong evidence that distrust of government, even if influenced by incumbent-specific evaluations, also encourages more negative evaluations of politicians. Innovative use of laboratory or survey-based experiments would certainly enhance our understanding of the causes and consequences of political trust. In addition, new light could be shed on unresolved issues about the over-time dynamics of political trust through analysis of the short-term 72-74-76 NES panel and the long-term panel found in the 1965–1982 Jennings/Niemi Study of Political Socialization (which includes measures of trust in government at each wave and for both Youth and Parent samples). Without stronger research designs, the indeterminacies left by past studies cannot be overcome.

## CONCLUSION

Warren Miller was fond of describing trust in government as an independent variable in search of a dependent variable. One way to think about the consequences identified in this review is that the search has been successful. Whether citizens judge politicians or government trustworthy influences whether they become politically active, how they vote, whether they favor policy or institutional reforms, whether they comply with political authorities, and whether they trust one another. Still, perhaps because so much of the existing research, especially survey-based research, has focused on trust in government or politicians in general, we have not yet come to appreciate the full behavioral ramifications of political trust or distrust.

This is an interesting moment in scholarship on political trust and trustworthiness. Survey researchers are reevaluating the meaning of their concepts and indexes, and comparative and historical scholars are beginning to realize the need for understanding the role and attributes of trustworthy government. Both types of scholars recognize the need to improve their concepts and measurements. Both recognize the necessity of integrating the micro and macro levels to achieve more satisfactory accounts of the relationships among citizens, elected officials, and government agents, and of the consequences of those relationships for political, social, and economic outcomes.

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