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Author(s): Marc J. Hetherington

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# The Political Relevance of Political Trust

MARC J. HETHERINGTON *Bowdoin College*

**S**cholars have debated the importance of declining political trust to the American political system. By primarily treating trust as a dependent variable, however, scholars have systematically underestimated its relevance. This study establishes the importance of trust by demonstrating that it is simultaneously related to measures of both specific and diffuse support. In fact, trust's effect on feelings about the incumbent president, a measure of specific support, is even stronger than the reverse. This provides a fundamentally different understanding of the importance of declining political trust in recent years. Rather than simply a reflection of dissatisfaction with political leaders, declining trust is a powerful cause of this dissatisfaction. Low trust helps create a political environment in which it is more difficult for leaders to succeed.

If they think of the government as affecting their lives at all, these Eastport men think of it as giving benefits and protections (Lane 1962, 474).

**P**ublic sentiment about the government is markedly different today than when Lane made this observation. Rather than providing benefits and protections, the government is viewed more as producing scandal, waste, and unacceptable intrusions on people's personal lives. With the exception of upturns in the early 1980s and mid-1990s, trust in government has declined dramatically over the last thirty years (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). In addition, contemporary presidential approval ratings generally peak 10% to 15% below those achieved at the beginning of the survey era (Brody 1991), and the public views institutions in an increasingly negative light (Craig 1993; Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1995).

While the literature chronicles these trends separately, scholars generally have failed to note that these attitudes likely reinforce each other. Citrin (1974) does show that incumbent disapproval reduces trust in government, and Williams (1985) demonstrates that institutional assessments powerfully affect trust. Since political trust is a well-developed and hence easily accessible orientation toward the entire government (Markus 1979; Weatherford 1984), however, it likely affects assessments of the government's component parts, namely, incumbents and institutions, at the same time.

The implications of such simultaneous relationships are problematic for governance. First, if trust is relatively low, as it is at present, then incumbent approval will also be lower than if trust were moderate or high, others things being equal. This, in turn, will likely undermine the government's ability to solve problems, further diminishing political trust and incumbent ap-

proval. While decisive leadership and economic success may have occasionally increased political trust (Citrin and Green 1986), such increases have proved fleeting. Without some exogenous change that would provide for a durable increase in trust or approval, the simultaneity suggests that both will remain relatively low. Perhaps more important, the simultaneous relationship between trust and institutional support means that, once lost, institutional support is more difficult to recover (Easton 1975, 445; Gamson 1968). We may be witnessing the consequences of this loss in high levels of public support for measures that would radically alter institutional arrangements, such as term limits, a balanced budget amendment, and a presidential line-item veto.

By taking into account the effects of political trust, as well as its causes, I demonstrate its importance. Specifically, decreasing trust leads to substantially more negative evaluations of both the incumbent president and Congress as a political institution, as well as the reverse. This provides us with a fundamentally different understanding of political trust's role in contemporary politics. Rather than simply reflecting dissatisfaction with incumbents and institutions, declining political trust contributes to this dissatisfaction, creating an environment in which it is difficult for those in government to succeed.

## DEFINITION AND IMPLICATIONS OF POLITICAL TRUST

Scholars have profitably defined political trust as a basic evaluative orientation toward the government (see Stokes 1962) founded on how well the government is operating according to people's normative expectations (A. Miller 1974b). Researchers at the University of Michigan developed a set of survey measures to tap such evaluations. "The criteria of judgment implicit in these questions were partly ethical, that is, the 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). Appendix A contains more details about these items and the explanatory variables used in the multivariate models.

Marc J. Hetherington is Assistant Professor of Government, Bowdoin College, Brunswick, ME 04011 (mhetheri@bowdoin.edu).

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Although most scholars agree that political trust is essential to the proper functioning of democracy, many disagree about whether the survey construct is valid. Typically, Easton's (1965, chapters 11–13, 17–21; 1975) work on political support has framed these exchanges. Most relevant to these debates, Easton distinguishes between specific and diffuse support. Specific support refers to satisfaction with government outputs and the performance of political authorities, while diffuse support refers to the public's attitude toward regime-level political objects regardless of performance.

Some scholars suggest the trust measure correlates only with specific support, so trust's decline is of somewhat limited consequence (Citrin 1974; Citrin and Green 1986; Lipset and Schneider 1983). According to this view, an improvement in incumbent job performance should remedy low levels of political trust. In contrast, others provide evidence of a connection between political trust and some measures of diffuse support (A. Miller 1974a, 1974b; A. Miller, Goldenberg, and Erbring 1979; A. Miller and Listhaug 1990), implying that sustained low trust ultimately challenges regime legitimacy.

The distinction between specific and diffuse support is useful, but it may obscure other important considerations. As previous research has consistently suggested, the trust index contains elements of both types of support. Indeed, because the government is largely composed of institutions operated by incumbents, feelings about both should explain trust. Lost in this debate, however, is whether trust, with its attractive theoretical (Dionne 1991; Weatherford 1992) and empirical (Markus 1979; Weatherford 1984) properties, has meaningful effects on other variables. To assess trust's relevance, it may be less important to know whether measures of specific or diffuse support *explain* political trust than whether political trust *affects* measures of specific and diffuse support. Viewed in this light, political trust can have system-level import regardless of which type of support it affects.

The diffuse case is more straightforward. If support for institutions diminishes, then legitimacy is called into question. Governments are hard pressed to remain effective without the leeway provided by diffuse support (Easton 1965, chapter 17, 1975; Gamson 1968; Hirschman 1970). Even if trust affects only specific support, however, it can have long-term implications for the regime. If distrust begets disapproval and disapproval makes it more difficult for leaders to marshal resources to solve problems (Neustadt 1990; Rivers and Rose 1985), then government will solve fewer problems. In this sense, "distrust breeds conditions for the creation of further distrust" (Gamson 1968, 43).<sup>1</sup> As problems go unsolved over a series of

administrations, citizens may begin to question the regime. This pattern seems particularly plausible today; until very recently, trust has continued to erode despite frequent changes in political authorities.

## DECLINE IN POLITICAL TRUST

Figures 1 and 2 present the frequency distributions for the trust index and each of its components in 1996 compared with 1964, the first year the National Election Study (NES) asked these four questions. Although trust in 1996 is higher than at any time this decade, these data still suggest widespread public distrust. All five distributions are heavily skewed toward the negative. Only about 1% of the public believe that the government wastes "not very much" money, and only about 2% think the government can be trusted "just about always." Indeed, a majority of respondents choose the most negative response option for each of the questions except whether people running the government are crooked, and even in this case 43% responded "quite a few." Taking all four items together, only 13% of respondents have a mean score on the trustful side of the midpoint. In contrast, 50% give the most distrustful response on at least three of the four items, with the modal score being most distrustful on all four questions.

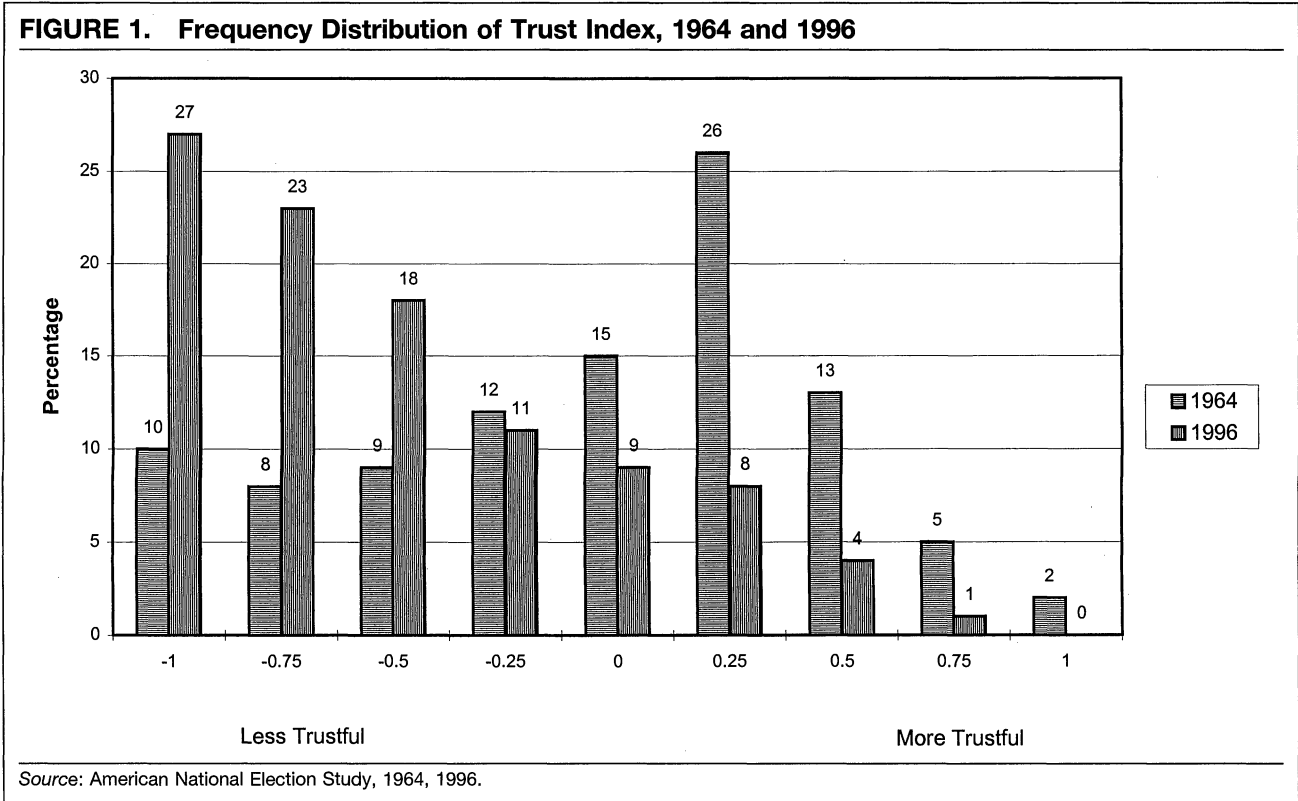
In comparing the frequencies from 1996 with those from 1964, several results are particularly striking. In 1964, on none of the questions does a majority choose the most negative response option. Between 1964 and 1996, the proportion choosing the most negative response to the four questions increased by an average of 28 percentage points. With respect to whether big interests run the government, the distribution of responses is a near mirror image, moving from approximately two-thirds trustful to nearly three-fourths distrustful. In stark contrast to 1996, the modal trust score in 1964 is on the trustful side of the midpoint, and fewer than 20% of those surveyed provide the most negative response on three or more items. These results confirm that the decline in political trust has been dramatic.

## A SIMULTANEOUS EQUATION MODEL INVOLVING POLITICAL TRUST

The variables used to explain political trust fall into several categories. I have already referred to the centrality of incumbent and institutional assessments. In addition, scholars have noted the importance of a range of other considerations, from policy satisfaction to the mass media. In this section I lay out a simultaneous equation model that includes measures for each of these components and also accounts for some effects of political trust.

different meanings for different people. For some, distrusting responses imply hostility, while for others they do not. To avoid these concerns, I use only the one term political distrust to mean the absence of political trust.

<sup>1</sup> Terms to describe the absence of trust have generated some debate. Political distrust is obviously an antonym, but most studies also use political cynicism (for a review, see Abramson 1983). This usage, however, has been somewhat controversial. Citrin (1974) suggests that negative assessments in response to the questions employed by quantitatively oriented researchers do not necessarily require a cynical view of the political system. Lodge and Tursky (1979), moreover, demonstrate that the same negative response options have



Explaining Political Trust

Researchers have employed different scaling techniques to create the trust index. Many collapse responses to each of the questions into two categories (Citrin 1974; Citrin and Green 1986; Erber and Lau 1990; Jennings and Niemi 1968; A. Miller 1974a, 1974b; A. Miller, Goldenberg, and Erbring 1979), although all items except for *Interest* have three ordinarily scaled response options. Rather than discarding any information, I transform the responses to the four items to 1 for trusting responses, 0 for middle responses, and -1 for distrusting responses (see also Abramson and Finifter 1981; Weatherford 1984, 1987). For the interest item, the codes are 1 for trusting and -1 for distrusting. I combine the four items additively and take the mean.<sup>2</sup>

Citrin (1974) and Citrin and Green (1986) find that political trust is most strongly a function of presidential approval and the president’s personal characteristics.<sup>3</sup> Since the president is portrayed by the media and perceived by the public as the government’s central actor (Iyengar and Kinder 1987; Kinder and Fiske 1986), it is not surprising that such assessments inform an overall view of the government. Feelings about the component parts of an organization should, in general, inform feelings about the organization itself.

Institutions are also components of the government, so feelings about them should help explain political

trust as well. Since the objects of the trust items are diffuse, moreover, institutional evaluations are more strongly related to political trust than are incumbent evaluations (Feldman 1983; Williams 1985). Yet, assessments of different institutions vary. For example, support for the Supreme Court has remained relatively high, even as support for other political and nonpolitical institutions has plummeted (Caldeira and Gibson 1992). Since most proposals that would substantially alter existing political arrangements, such as term limits, the balanced budget amendment, and the presidential line item veto, seek to limit the power of Congress, feelings about Congress should most powerfully affect trust.

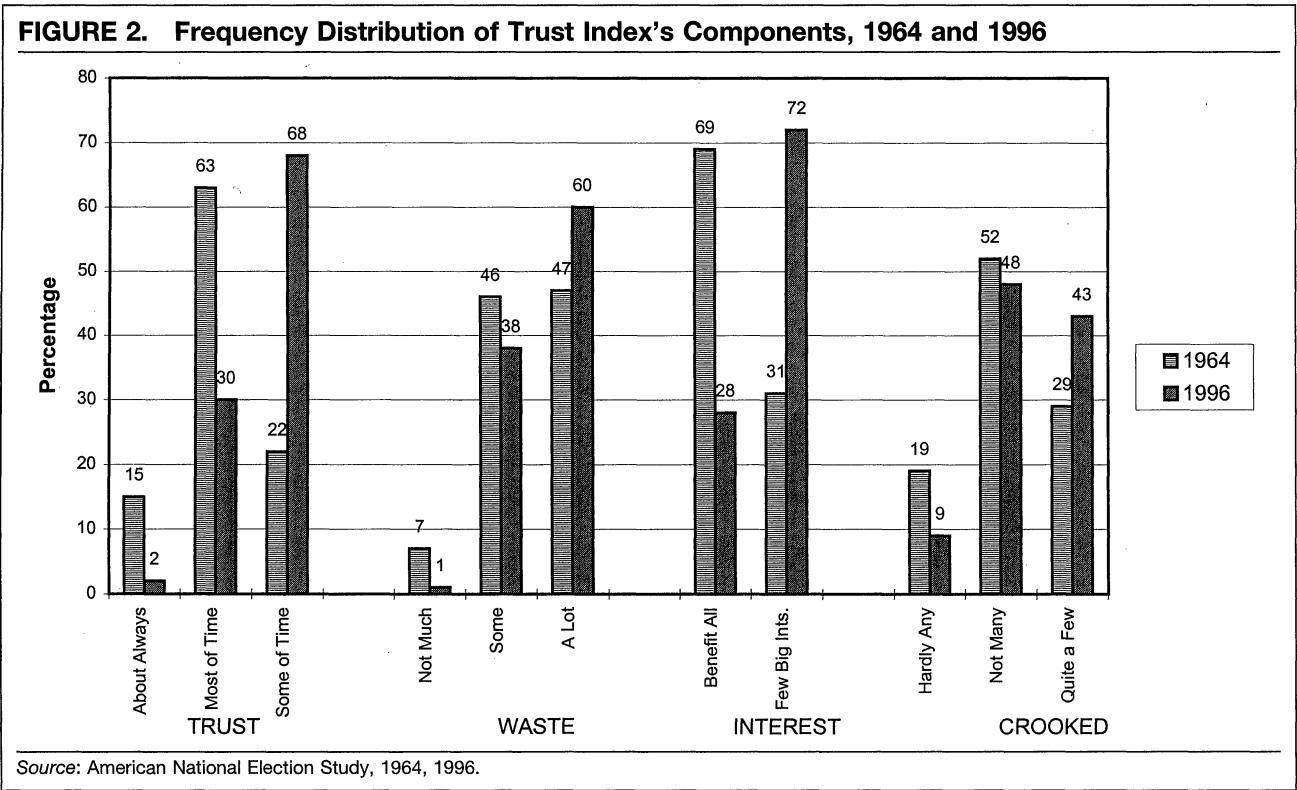
Policy considerations should also explain trust. If people perceive that the government is pursuing policy goals with which they agree, then they should trust the government more. Conservatives, for example, should worry less about the government undermining their interests when they perceive that the government is pursuing conservative ends. Building on A. Miller (1974a), A. Miller and Borrelli (1991) find that the farther respondents’ issue stances are from where they perceive the federal government to be, the less trustful they are. Their results also suggest that different issues may have different effects. Taking this into account, I divide the issues into domestic and foreign policy domains.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Combining the collapsed two-category items produces results consistent with, although somewhat weaker than, those presented here.

<sup>3</sup> I use the president’s feeling thermometer score because it is better able to tap both of these dimensions than any other single variable.

<sup>4</sup> Some work by Miller (1974a, 1974b) also suggests that those who place themselves on either pole of these seven-point issue scales will be less trustful. When I included a variable to tap this “issue extremity” in self-placement, it was wholly insignificant ( $p > .90$ ).





Because people are likely to trust things they perceive to be working effectively, the quality of policy outcomes should also help explain trust. Consistent with this view, the improvement in economic evaluations increased political trust in the early 1980s (Citrin and Green 1986; A. Miller 1983).<sup>5</sup> Policy success, however, should not be limited to the economy. Public perceptions of the government's ability to solve problems that are personally most important should have a strong bearing on political trust (Craig 1996; see also A. Miller, Goldenberg, and Erbring 1979).

Political trust also should depend on the distribution of positive and negative information people receive about the government. Not surprisingly, the media's shift to a more adversarial role and critical style has accompanied the deterioration of political trust (Patterson 1993). Different media, however, may have different effects. Since most people see television as affording more complete and impartial news coverage than newspapers (Bower 1985), television news should have a more strongly negative effect than newspapers.<sup>6</sup>

Because its exclusion has no effect on the other variables in the model, I drop it from the analysis.

<sup>5</sup> Findings have been mixed about whether retrospective or prospective evaluations of either the national economy or personal outcomes are more influential, so I take respondents' mean score of all four perceptions.

<sup>6</sup> Both variables are coded from 0 to 14, corresponding to responses to both consumption and attention measures. I use the original codes (0 to 7 days a week) for the consumption measures and transform the five-point attention measure to a 0–7 scale as well by first inverting the scale to a 0 (no attention) to 4 (close attention) range and then multiplying by 7/4. This formulation follows Hetherington (1996). Since the NES does not ask respondents which news program they watch, I cannot construct a measure of television news negativity that

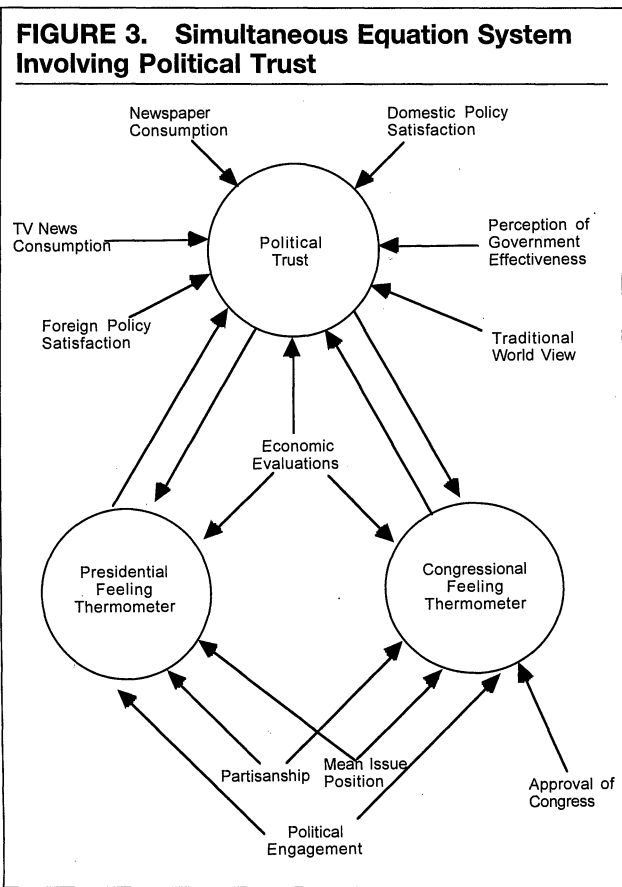
Perceptions about social and cultural change may play an important role (Mansbridge 1997). Conservative leaders have effectively blamed federal policy for either promoting or condoning undesirable change and have made this rhetoric a centerpiece of their campaigns. As a result, people have been primed to connect their views on social and cultural issues with their perceptions of government activity in this area. Reservations about these changes might be manifested in more traditional responses to the NES items about changing morals and lifestyles. Those with more traditional opinions and values should be less satisfied with the government and hence trust it less.

Finally, social characteristics such as age, race, education, income, and sex may have some bearing on levels of trust (see Abramson 1983; Kanter and Mirvis 1989). To make the estimated effects of the variables of greater substantive interest more secure, I control for these demographic factors as well.

**Explaining the Presidential Thermometer**

As previously noted, Citrin (1974) and Citrin and Green (1986) find that feelings about the incumbent president affect trust. Since the president is the focal point of the political system, such a finding makes intuitive sense, but the relationship may be more complex than they suggest. Not only should assess-

would vary meaningfully across respondents. Rather, I must assume that the balance of news coverage is negative. Myriad studies support this assumption (e.g., Kerbel 1995; Patterson 1993; Ranney 1983; Robinson 1976).



ments of specific leaders affect general assessments, but also the reverse should be true.

Research on stereotypes and heuristics suggests that feelings about the sum affect feelings about the parts much more powerfully than the reverse. For instance, general racial stereotypes inform evaluations of particular group members, and heuristics such as party labels affect evaluations of particular candidates much more than vice versa (see Campell et al. 1960; Linville, Salovey, and Fischer 1986). The fact that general orientations are subject to some updating based on new experiences with individual group members, does not negate their ability to affect more specific opinions.

The direction of influence is important because much previous research on political trust suggests that a lack of trust simply *reflects* dissatisfaction with incumbents (Citrin 1974; Citrin and Green 1986). While this is perhaps true to some degree, distrust is also likely a powerful *cause* of the dissatisfaction. To account for the inherent simultaneity, I include the president's feeling thermometer score as an endogenous rather than an exogenous variable. As a more general orientation, trust should have a larger effect on feelings about the president than the reverse.

In addition to the political trust variable, the president's feeling thermometer score can be explained by factors similar to those used in vote choice models, such as partisanship, mean issue position, and economic evaluations. I also control for political engagement, a measure of both interest and knowledge. Those

who follow and know more about politics will have more and better information with which to make evaluations. Finally, I control for a range of demographic factors—income, age, education, race, and sex—that often affect candidate preference.

**Explaining the Congressional Thermometer**

In addition to the simultaneous relationship between trust and presidential evaluations, there is also likely a high degree of simultaneity between trust and feelings about Congress for the same reasons discussed above. Again, the general should guide the specific, as well as vice versa. The literature suggests that feelings about Congress affect trust (Williams 1985), but there is also ample reason to expect the reverse. Trust, for example, is the most important factor in explaining support for term limits (Karp 1995); more generally, it has the most powerful effect on diffuse support for emerging parliaments in central and eastern Europe (Hibbing and Patterson 1994).

To explain respondents' feelings about Congress,<sup>7</sup> I include the same partisanship and issue self-placement measures as in the presidential feeling thermometer equation. Although this variable is designed to measure support for Congress as an institution, partisans and ideologues may be somewhat warmer to the institution when their party controls it. Since the congressional thermometer is primarily an institutional assessment, however, these effects should be far smaller than for the presidential thermometer.

Socialization to existing political norms also should affect feelings about political institutions. As Caldeira and Gibson (1992, 649) observe, "one of the best substantiated sets of hypotheses in research on the origins of diffuse support concerns the effect of political information, elite status, and activism." Those who invest more of themselves by following politics closely should receive more effective socialization and, as a result, provide warmer evaluations of Congress as an institution. Therefore, political engagement is included in this equation as well.

Hibbing and Patterson (1994) find that more optimistic economic perceptions are correlated with sup-

<sup>7</sup> Some may be concerned that the congressional thermometer score is not an appropriate measure of diffuse support, but a number of reasons suggest that it is. In 1988, for example, nearly 85% of respondents provided either neutral (50 degrees) or warmer answers, and fewer than 7% gave responses below 40 degrees. Given the public's distaste for congressional leaders and the job performance of Congress (see Patterson and Caldeira 1990), such an extraordinarily high percentage must be interpreted as an assessment of the institution. In contrast, more than one-quarter of the sample rated Reagan, a political authority, below 50 degrees. In addition, the congressional thermometer has a considerably higher correlation with feeling thermometers for the Supreme Court ( $r = .45$ ) and the federal government ( $r = .51$ ) than with approval ratings of Congress ( $r = .36$ ), another measure of specific support. Finally, the congressional thermometer's correlation with the Reagan thermometer and his job approval ratings, both clear measures of specific support, are insignificant ( $r = .04$  and  $r = -.01$ , respectively), which is consistent with Easton's (1975) hypothesis that measures of specific and diffuse support should be independent in the short run.

TABLE 1. Structural Parameter Estimates of Simultaneous Equation System Involving Political Trust (2SLS), 1988				
Variable	Parameter Estimate (Standard Error)	p value	Total Effect of 1 S.D. Change <sup>a</sup>	Direct Effect of 1 S.D. Change <sup>a</sup>
Equation 1: Political Trust				
Intercept	−0.637 (0.086)	0.0001		
Reagan Thermometer	0.193 (0.058)	0.0010	8.7	5.9
Congressional Thermometer	0.829 (0.117)	0.0001	21.6	14.8
TV News Consumption	−0.093 (0.053)	0.0795	2.1	1.4
Newspaper Consumption	0.058 (0.045)	0.1916	0.0	0.0
Domestic Policy (Dis)Satisfaction	−0.185 (0.074)	0.0118	2.8	1.9
Foreign Policy (Dis)Satisfaction	−0.091 (0.078)	0.2434	0.0	0.0
Perceived Government Effectiveness	0.191 (0.051)	0.0002	4.4	3.0
Traditional World View	−0.206 (0.071)	0.0040	3.1	2.1
Overall Economic Evaluation	0.253 (0.101)	0.0123	4.0	2.1
Education	0.135 (0.055)	0.0141	0.4	1.8
Income	0.091 (0.058)	0.1184	0.0	0.0
Age	−0.077 (0.068)	0.2613	0.4	0.0
Race (African-American)	0.001 (0.049)	0.9747	0.1	0.0
Sex (female)	−0.057 (0.028)	0.0418	3.9	1.4
Number of cases = 1,280; R <sup>2</sup> = .19.				
Equation 2: Reagan Thermometer				
Intercept	−0.395 (0.103)	0.0001		
Political Trust	0.441 (0.073)	0.0001	15.4	10.5
Partisanship	0.779 (0.042)	0.0001	14.4	13.7
Mean Issue Position	0.748 (0.100)	0.0001	5.8	5.2
Overall Economic Evaluation	0.386 (0.098)	0.0001	5.0	3.2
Political Engagement	−0.127 (0.060)	0.0342	0.7	1.6
Education	−0.137 (0.057)	0.0158	1.7	1.8
Income	0.076 (0.059)	0.1950	0.0	0.0
Age	0.118 (0.066)	0.0753	1.4	1.3

TABLE 1. (continued)				
Variable	Parameter Estimate (Standard Error)	p value	Total Effect of 1 S.D. Change <sup>a</sup>	Direct Effect of 1 S.D. Change <sup>a</sup>
Race (African-American)	−0.229 (0.046)	0.0001	3.4	3.4
Sex (female)	−0.031 (0.027)	0.2588	1.7	0.0
Number of cases = 1,280, Adj. R <sup>2</sup> = .44. Equation 3: Congressional Thermometer				
Intercept	0.211 (0.099)	0.0322		
Political Trust	0.280 (0.072)	0.0001	9.8	6.7
Partisanship	−0.110 (0.032)	0.0006	1.5	1.9
Approval of Congress	0.270 (0.039)	0.0001	6.1	4.6
Political Engagement	0.164 (0.042)	0.0001	2.7	2.0
Mean Issue Position	−0.030 (0.070)	0.6672	0.4	0.0
Overall Economic Evaluation	−0.070 (0.073)	0.3384	1.1	0.0
Education	−0.106 (0.040)	0.0080	1.3	1.4
Income	−0.055 (0.041)	0.1820	0.0	0.0
Age	0.048 (0.046)	0.3038	0.1	0.0
Race (African-American)	0.060 (0.032)	0.0596	0.9	0.9
Sex (female)	0.060 (0.019)	0.0019	2.6	1.5
Number of cases = 1,280, Adj. R <sup>2</sup> = .16.				
Source: American National Election Study, 1988. Note: Entries for all three equations are unstandardized regression coefficients. p values are for two-tailed tests. <sup>a</sup> Effects are given as a percentage of the dependent variable's range.				

port for parliaments in central and eastern Europe, so I use the same overall economic evaluation variable as in the previous two equations. In addition, I include respondents' assessments of how well Congress is doing its job. Particularly strong short-term evaluations should significantly affect respondents' evaluations of the institution in general (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1995).<sup>8</sup> Finally, I control for the same demographic factors as in the trust and presidential equations, several of which are correlated with support for another institution, the Supreme Court (Gibson and Caldeira 1992),<sup>9</sup> so they may also affect support for Congress.

<sup>8</sup> Some may suggest that the congressional thermometer and the congressional approval rating tap the same concept. While the two are correlated ( $r = .36$ ), their relationship is far weaker than that between the Reagan feeling thermometer and the rating approval for Reagan ( $r = .82$ ).  
<sup>9</sup> Some might suggest I should include the media consumption variables in the presidential and congressional thermometer equations. The bivariate correlations, however, are all quite small, with the majority under .06.

Figure 3 depicts the simultaneous equation model. I do not expect the presidential and congressional thermometers to affect one another. Because specific support implies support for leaders themselves, whereas diffuse support refers to evaluations of what leaders represent, measures of specific and diffuse support should be independent in the short run (Easton 1975, 444–5). Empirically, Patterson and Caldeira (1990) find that presidential popularity has no effect on public confidence in congressional leaders. In addition, Gibson and Caldeira (1992) find no relationship between specific and diffuse support for the Supreme Court.

DATA

Although trust has tended to decrease since the mid-1960s, making time-series analysis attractive, a number of factors militate against a reliable analysis of change over time. For example, using NES data, the congressional thermometer and questions about perceptions of



government effectiveness are only available for presidential years. In addition, the congressional thermometer and items on traditional views date only from 1988. Moreover, the NES uses a varying number of issue items from year to year, which undermines the comparability of policy satisfaction and mean issue position scores. Therefore, I rely on two cross-sectional data sets, the 1988 and 1996 NES.

The 1988 NES is particularly well suited for studying political trust. The late 1980s were “a relatively quiet period in American social, political, and economic life, in many ways parallel to what has been characterized as the quiescent fifties” (Neuman, Just, and Crigler 1992, 40). By 1988, the Iran-Contra affair had faded, so this scandal was not a central issue during that year’s interviews. The 1988 NES allows for more confident generalizations than surveys during periods of political upheaval. It also offers a particularly useful combination of variables. It asks respondents to place themselves and the federal government on six separate issues, compared to just three in 1992, and so provides a more reliable estimate of respondents’ policy satisfaction.<sup>10</sup>

Although the presence of a strong third-party alternative may alter the relationship between trust and other variables (A. Miller and Listhaug 1990), the fact that trust increased between 1994 and 1996 requires examination. Unfortunately, the NES stopped asking respondents to place the federal government on the seven-point issue scales after 1992 and asked only one seven-point foreign policy item after 1988. Rather than the absolute distance between respondents’ placement of self and the federal government, I take absolute distance between their placement of self and each of the parties. Such a formulation is appealing, given that control of the federal government was divided during this period. All other variables in the model are available in 1996.

RESULTS

Appendix B presents descriptive statistics for each of the variables in the multivariate analyses. I convert all three endogenous variables to a scale of -1 to 1 in order to facilitate comparison of their relative effects. I convert each of the explanatory variables to a scale of 0 to 1 for the same purpose.<sup>11</sup>

Effects of the Endogenous Variables

Table 1 presents the two-stage least-squares estimates from the hypothesized simultaneous equation model us-

ing the 1988 data. I will discuss the 1996 data separately. To provide a sense of relative effect sizes, I present in Table 1 the direct and total effects of a change of one standard deviation in the explanatory variables. Direct effects are simply reflected in the parameter estimate, while the total effects of the endogenous variables are calculated by  $\beta^{-1}-I$ , where  $\beta^{-1}$  is the inverse of the matrix of endogenous direct effects, and  $I$  is the identity matrix. Since the endogenous variables are all two-point scales, the effect that one endogenous variable has as a percentage of another is the effect divided by two.

First, note that the endogenous variables seem to affect one another as hypothesized. All have statistically and substantively significant effects in the appropriate equations. Second, note that trust’s effect on the Reagan thermometer score is substantially larger than the reverse. In terms of direct effects, a change of one standard deviation in political trust causes a roughly 10.5% change in the Reagan score. Conversely, a similar change in the Reagan thermometer causes only a change of about 6% in trust. In moving from most to least trustful, the Reagan thermometer declines by nearly 45% of its range, while moving from warmest to coolest on the Reagan thermometer decreases trust by only 19% of its range.

In addition, the direct effect of trust on the Reagan thermometer relative to other variables in the model is quite large. Viewed in terms of a change of one standard deviation, trust’s effect is far larger than any variable except partisanship. Indeed, the effect of the next most influential variable, mean issue position, is half the size of political trust. If I take into account the range of each of the explanatory variables, trust’s effect is larger than that of all factors, including partisanship.

Focusing entirely on direct effects, however, understates the full effect of political trust. For instance, the total effect of a change of one standard deviation in trust is more than 15% of the Reagan thermometer’s range, and its influence is larger than that of any variable, no matter the change criterion. Using 1964 as a baseline dramatically illustrates trust’s importance. The difference between the median in 1988 and 1964 is .60 points.<sup>12</sup> If, in 1988, political trust were to increase by this amount, the Reagan thermometer would increase by .388 points, or more than 19% of its range. While the presidential thermometer should not be confused with presidential approval ratings, this decrease of roughly 19% in the thermometer score can be used to approximate how much approval declined as a result of decline in political trust. To do so, I estimate the following model, cast in logit form:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Pr}(\text{APP}_i) = & (1 + \exp[-(\beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{PFT}_i) + \beta_2(\text{PID}_i) \\ & + \beta_3(\text{ECON}_i) + \beta_4(\text{ISS}_i) + \beta_5(\text{AA}_i))])^{-1} \quad (1) \end{aligned}$$

where *exp* is the exponentiation to the base *e*, the subscript *i* refers to the *i*th individual, Pr(APP) is the probability that the respondent approves of the president,

<sup>10</sup> When I estimated the model with the 1988 data but used only the three issues available in the 1992 data set, policy satisfaction did not approach statistical significance.

<sup>11</sup> While space does not allow full presentation of the first-stage equations, a discussion of their goodness of fit is in order, since that affects the efficiency of the second-stage estimates. In 1988, the *R*<sup>2</sup> for the political trust, presidential thermometer, and congressional thermometer equations is .22, .47, and .16, respectively. In 1996, it is .14, .60, and .22. These fit measures for the first-stage equations are satisfactory for attitudinal data and compare favorably with other models that employ two-stage least-squares estimation for purposes similar to mine (see Huckfeldt et al. 1995; Kinder and Mendelberg 1995).

<sup>12</sup> Since the 1988 distribution is skewed, it is more appropriate to compare the medians. The precise median is +.054 in 1964, compared with -.546 in 1988.

PFT is the presidential feeling thermometer, PID is the respondent's location on the seven-point partisanship scale, ECON is the respondent's overall economic evaluation, ISS is the respondent's mean self-placement on the issues, and AA is a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent is African-American.

I use the parameter estimates generated from this model to simulate a predicted approval score based on actual responses to these questions. If the respondent's predicted approval score is greater than .50, then the respondent is scored as approving. If it is less than or equal to .50, the respondent is scored as disapproving. This simulation predicts an approval rating of 58.9%, only .9 percentage points greater than the observed approval rating in the sample.

Using the same logistic regression estimates, I calculate a second predicted score, again placing all variables at their observed scores except for the presidential thermometer. To each respondent's observed score, I add the .388 points that the thermometer would increase if trust were at the 1964 level. This simulation predicts an adjusted approval rating of 75.3%, which is 16.4 percentage points greater than the first predicted score. In other words, the model suggests that presidential approval would have been about 16 percentage points higher in the late 1980s had trust not declined since the mid-1960s, *ceteris paribus*. Interestingly, this difference in approval is only slightly larger than the gap in the outgoing approval ratings of Ronald Reagan and Dwight Eisenhower, who was another popular two-term Republican incumbent (Gallup 1972, 1651). In comparing approval ratings in the contemporary period with the beginning of the survey era, moreover, Brody (1991) observes a difference of approximately this amount. This suggests that political trust may be at least partially responsible for the lower presidential approval ratings in recent years compared to those in the late fifties and early sixties. Although largely ignored in the literature on presidential popularity, decreasing political trust can powerfully damage the president's standing.

Turning to the other endogenous variable, the congressional thermometer's direct and total effects on trust are larger than the reverse, but trust's effect on institutional assessments of Congress is substantial. For example, the total effect of a change of one standard deviation in the congressional thermometer on political trust is about 21% of trust's range. This is substantially larger than the nearly 10% change in the congressional thermometer caused by a corresponding change in trust. By far the most influential variable in the congressional equation is trust. The effect of a change of one standard deviation in the next most influential variable, approval of Congress, is 38% smaller than that of trust.<sup>13</sup>

While the implications of cooler feelings about the

president are fairly straightforward, the implications of declining support for Congress as an institution are more speculative. When diffuse support wanes, the public may be more inclined to favor alternatives that bypass institutions, such as direct democracy. The Founding Fathers, however, created representative institutions because they feared this impulse toward direct citizen control. Furthermore, experiments in direct democracy have not proved altogether satisfying in terms of either policy outcomes or increasing political support (Citrin 1996). In addition, declining institutional support increases the possibility of fundamental change to the political system in the face of a serious crisis, even to an institutional structure as stable as that of the United States (Lipset and Schneider 1983). Any significant downward movement in the congressional thermometer must be viewed with concern.

As far as construct validity is concerned, the model suggests that trust is more a function of institutional than incumbent support. The effect of the congressional thermometer on trust is more than four times larger than that of the presidential thermometer, other things being equal. It is interesting to note, however, that trust seems to have a larger causal influence on support for incumbents than for institutions. While trust affects both substantially, its effect on the former is about one-half larger.

In sum, taking into account the simultaneity between political trust and other variables demonstrates trust's system-level relevance. Rather than just reflecting dissatisfaction with political leaders, political distrust is a powerful cause of this dissatisfaction. It affects both specific and diffuse support, as well as being affected by them.

### Effects of Exogenous Variables on Political Trust

The total effects of the exogenous variables are calculated by  $-\beta^{-1}\Gamma$ , where  $-\beta^{-1}$  is the negative of the inverse of the matrix of endogenous direct effects, and  $\Gamma$  is the matrix of exogenous direct effects.<sup>14</sup> An exogenous variable's effect across its range can be easily calculated by multiplying a variable's total effect by 1, since the range of all exogenous variables is one unit. Dividing this number by two yields the total effect of an exogenous variable across its range, as a percentage of the endogenous variable.

This model suggests that political trust does seem to have policy success and policy satisfaction components. Both overall economic evaluations and perceived gov-

<sup>13</sup> In terms of construct validity, the congressional thermometer seems, as hypothesized, to reflect more diffuse than specific support. In dramatic contrast to the Reagan thermometer, it depends only marginally on partisanship, insignificantly on mean issue position, and positively on political engagement.

<sup>14</sup> Based on a one-tailed test, if I am less than 95% confident that a variable's effect differs from 0, I treat the effect as 0 in calculating the total effects. In 1988, these variables are newspaper consumption, foreign policy satisfaction, income, age, and race in the trust equation; income and sex in the Reagan thermometer equation; and mean issue position, overall economic evaluation, income, and age in the congressional thermometer equation. In 1996, these variables are television news consumption, newspaper consumption, policy satisfaction with the Republicans, economic evaluations, and sex in the trust equation, and partisanship, political engagement, economic evaluations, income, and sex in the congressional thermometer equation.

ernment effectiveness significantly affect political trust. A change of one standard deviation in each of these variables can cause a change in trust of 4% and 4.4%, respectively. Across their ranges, they can increase trust by up to 24% and 14%. These results confirm previous findings about the economy's importance in understanding fluctuations in political trust (Citrin and Green 1986; A. Miller 1983). In fact, by allowing economic evaluations to enter the model through a direct effect on trust and indirectly through an effect on the other endogenous variables, the 1988 data suggest that the economy can be even more influential than previous research allows. Not surprisingly, the presidents who presided over the bulk of decline in political trust, Nixon, Carter, and Bush, all faced struggling economies at some point during their presidency.

The respondent's perceived distance from the federal government on domestic policy issues is statistically significant but not on foreign policy issues. This suggests that leaders may be somewhat more effective in raising trust levels by pursuing a domestic policy agenda, provided people are satisfied with its direction. In light of this finding, it is also noteworthy that Nixon, Carter, and Bush were relatively more successful with foreign than domestic policy.

The finding for the traditional world view variable, that is, statistical and substantive significance, represents an advance for research on political trust. Its parameter estimate is larger than all exogenous variables except economic evaluations. This indicates that public dissatisfaction with changes in general societal norms, and implicitly in government's role in promoting or condoning them, affects people's view of government in general. Since "family values" were not part of the political dialogue in the 1960s, a period many consider as a watershed for changing morals, concern about these changes may explain the decrease in political trust in the mid-1960s.

The model also produces some interesting results relating to political communication. As expected, television news consumption lessens political trust. The total effect of maximum television news consumption is -136 points, which represents a drop of nearly 7% of trust's range. While the television news consumption coefficient is negatively signed, that for newspaper consumption is *positively* signed, although neither of these estimates reaches conventional levels of statistical significance. A. Miller, Goldenberg, and Erbring (1979) obtained the same opposing sign and speculated that it was due to demographic differences between television and newspaper consumers. The present analysis, however, controls for education, age, race, income, and sex, which suggests that the nature of the media may explain the difference (see Hart 1994).

## THE 1996 DATA

While the trend in political trust since the mid-1960s has been mostly decreasing, the trust index median increased by 3.6 percentage points between 1994 and 1996. More recent data suggest that the trend has continued (Pew Foundation 1998). By using 1996 data

to replicate the simultaneous equation model, I can explore the causes and effects of this increase. The 1996 results appear in Table 2.

Again, the endogenous variables appear to affect one another as hypothesized. As was the case in 1988, the parameter estimate for trust on feelings about the president is more than two and one-quarter times larger than vice versa, although the magnitude of the effect in both directions is somewhat smaller in 1996. Trust's effect on the congressional thermometer in 1996 is slightly smaller than in 1988 as well, but the reciprocal link is slightly larger. Taken together, these results suggest that trust has become somewhat more closely linked to institutions than to incumbents.

By multiplying trust's total effect on feelings about Clinton by the amount that trust increased between 1994 and 1996, I can estimate its benefit to the president. I find that the increase of 3.6 percentage points in trust yields about a 1.6% increase in the Clinton thermometer. Given that Clinton's thermometer score increased by approximately 5% between 1994 and 1996 (Rosenstone, Miller and Kinder 1997), my model suggests that increasing trust accounts for about one-third of Clinton's jump, other things being equal. There is little doubt that President Clinton had more success in the second half of his first term, and perhaps increasing political trust played a role. By performing much the same calculation for the congressional equation, an increase of 3.6% in trust would increase the congressional thermometer by 1.2%.<sup>15</sup>

Turning to the exogenous variables, each has a direct effect on trust in the same direction in both years, with one exception. In 1988, being African-American carried a positive sign, although its effect was not statistically significant. In 1996, blacks were significantly less trustful. Although bivariate analysis shows that they were slightly more trustful than other races in 1996 (see Abramson, Aldrich, and Rhode 1998, 84), the reverse is true when proper controls are applied. A secondary analysis demonstrates that controlling for feelings about President Clinton, specifically, causes the change. This suggests that, once the expected tendency for blacks to trust a Democratic administration is taken into account, African-Americans are somewhat less trustful of the government in Washington. Perhaps they found the election and reelection of a Republican Congress in 1994 and 1996 particularly troubling.

It is also noteworthy that economic evaluations do not have a direct effect on trust in 1996. Although the economy's estimated effect on the presidential thermometer is 50% larger in 1996 than 1988, thus increasing its indirect effect on trust, its direct effect cannot be confidently discerned from 0. Hence, the economy's total effect in 1996 is less than one-fifth that of 1988.

What has caused the increase in trust? Given the set

<sup>15</sup> Because the 1994 NES did not include the congressional thermometer, I cannot determine the actual percentage of improvement.



TABLE 2. Structural Parameter Estimates of Simultaneous Equation System Involving Political Trust (2SLS), 1996				
Variable	Parameter Estimate (Standard Error)	p value	Total Effect of 1 S.D. Change <sup>a</sup>	Direct Effect of 1 S.D. Change <sup>a</sup>
Equation 1: Political Trust				
Intercept	−0.564 (0.089)	0.0001		
Presidential Thermometer	0.126 (0.072)	0.0795	5.3	3.5
Congressional Thermometer	0.849 (0.115)	0.0001	21.9	14.5
TV News Consumption	−0.025 (0.044)	0.5589	0.0	0.0
Newspaper Consumption	0.011 (0.043)	0.7935	0.0	0.0
Policy (Dis)Satisfaction with Democrats	−0.271 (.035)	0.0215	3.1	2.3
Policy (Dis)Satisfaction with Republicans	−0.035 (0.094)	0.7091	0.0	0.0
Perceived Government Effectiveness	0.140 (0.057)	0.0145	2.3	1.7
Traditional World View	−0.236 (0.074)	0.0013	3.2	2.4
Overall Economic Evaluation	0.108 (0.111)	0.3277	0.7	0.0
Education	0.172 (0.056)	0.0023	0.9	2.3
Income	0.125 (0.051)	0.0145	2.0	1.8
Age	−0.140 (0.070)	0.0448	1.2	1.6
Race (African-American)	−0.156 (0.052)	0.0029	0.3	2.3
Sex (female)	−0.033 (0.026)	0.2046	0.2	0.0
Number of cases = 1,249, Adj. R <sup>2</sup> = .13.				
Equation 2: Presidential Thermometer				
Intercept	0.796 (0.092)	0.0001		
Political Trust	0.328 (0.073)	0.0001	11.2	7.4
Partisanship	−0.697 (0.038)	0.0001	13.0	12.3
Mean Issue Position	−0.769 (0.078)	0.0001	5.8	6.2
Overall Economic Evaluation	0.574 (0.087)	0.0001	4.4	4.2
Political Engagement	−0.105 (0.050)	0.0340	1.3	1.2
Education	−0.143 (0.046)	0.0020	1.6	1.9
Income	−0.144 (0.042)	0.0007	1.4	2.1
Age	−0.171 (0.051)	0.0008	2.3	1.9



TABLE 2. (continued)				
Variable	Parameter Estimate (Standard Error)	p value	Total Effect of 1 S.D. Change <sup>a</sup>	Direct Effect of 1 S.D. Change <sup>a</sup>
Race (African-American)	-0.203 (0.036)	0.0001	3.1	3.0
Sex (female)	-0.055 (0.022)	0.0117	1.4	1.4
Number of cases = 1,249, Adj. R <sup>2</sup> = .57.				
Equation 3: Congressional Thermometer				
Intercept	-0.111 (0.092)	0.2264		
Political Trust	0.244 (0.085)	0.0043	8.3	5.5
Partisanship	0.028 (0.032)	0.3834	0.5	0.0
Approval of Congress	0.255 (0.035)	0.0001	5.9	4.6
Political Engagement	0.030 (0.040)	0.4502	0.0	0.0
Mean Issue Position	0.232 (0.066)	0.0005	2.1	1.9
Overall Economic Evaluation	0.107 (0.075)	0.1514	0.2	0.0
Education	-0.125 (0.037)	0.0007	1.5	1.7
Income	-0.053 (0.034)	0.1226	0.5	0.0
Age	0.232 (0.042)	0.0001	2.9	2.6
Race (African-American)	0.170 (0.029)	0.0001	2.6	2.6
Sex (female)	0.025 (0.017)	0.1518	0.0	0.0
Number of cases = 1,249, Adj. R <sup>2</sup> = .22				
Source: American National Election Study, 1996.				
Note: Entries for all three equations are unstandardized regression coefficients. p values are for two-tailed tests.				
<sup>a</sup> Effects are given as a percentage of the dependent variable's range.				

of reciprocal relationships, all three endogenous variables (trust, feelings about the president, and feelings about Congress) will tend to remain at relatively low levels, barring significant changes in the exogenous variables. That is, the endogenous variables are unlikely to change without reason. For an exogenous variable to be a cause of increased trust, it must meet two conditions. First, it must have a substantial direct or indirect effect on trust in 1996. This eliminates the media consumption variables and policy dissatisfaction with the Republicans, which are not statistically significant, and political engagement, which does not have a substantively large effect. Second, the variables that affect trust must have changed substantially between 1994 and 1996, which eliminates the glacially changing social characteristics. Table 3 presents the differences in means of the substantive exogenous variables that either directly or indirectly affect trust.

To calculate a variable's contribution to increasing

trust, I multiply the amount that it changed during the period by its total effect on trust. While previous scholarship indicates that increased trust may be the result of an improved economy (A. Miller 1983; Citrin and Green 1986), these results suggest otherwise. The 1.5 percentage point change in overall economic evaluations is not statistically significant and fails to cause a substantive change in trust. In addition, the differences in means for traditional world view, policy satisfaction, mean issue position, and partisanship are trivial.

People's perceptions of government effectiveness and their evaluations of congressional job performance improved markedly, however. Although the former item was not asked in 1994, the mean score in 1992 was .206, compared with .394 in 1996. By multiplying this difference by the variable's total effect on trust in 1996, I find that improved perceptions of government effectiveness increased political trust by 1.7%.

TABLE 3. Differences in Means for Exogenous Variables, 1994 and 1996				
Issue	1994 Mean (s.d.) <i>n</i>	1996 Mean (s.d.) <i>n</i>	Difference in Means ( <i>t</i> -statistic)	Resultant Percentage Change in Trust <sup>a</sup>
Perceived Government Effectiveness <sup>b</sup>	0.206 (0.267) 2223	0.394 (0.245) 1490	+0.188*** (10.92)	+1.7
Approval of Congress	0.346 (0.342) 1795	0.459 (0.358) 1714	+0.113*** (4.25)	+1.6
Overall Economic Evaluation	0.545 (0.163) 1781	0.560 (0.148) 1714	+0.015 (1.70)	—
Mean Issue Position	0.486 (0.166) 1382	0.495 (0.163) 1213	+0.009 (1.03)	—
Partisanship	0.486 (0.351) 1772	0.446 (0.350) 1695	−0.040 (−1.23)	—
Traditional World View	0.630 (0.215) 1765	0.622 (0.202) 1529	−0.008 (0.50)	—
Policy (Dis)Satisfaction with Democrats <sup>c</sup>	0.306 (0.262) 1408	0.323 (0.281) 1427	+0.017 (0.93)	—

Source: American National Election Study, 1992, 1994, 1996.

\*\*\**p* < .001, two-tailed tests.

<sup>a</sup>Calculated as (Difference in Means\*Total Effect on Trust)/2.

<sup>b</sup>Variable not available in 1994. Statistics presented are from 1992 NES.

<sup>c</sup>Difference in means reflects only common elements asked in 1994 and 1996.

Improved congressional job approval also seems to have contributed indirectly to an increase in trust through its effect on feelings about Congress as an institution. The contribution can be calculated by multiplying the difference in means by the total effect of approval on trust. I find that the .113-point increase in the mean job approval rating of Congress accounts for an increase of 1.6% in trust, *ceteris paribus*.

These data also allow me to replicate the presidential approval simulation, this time comparing Bill Clinton and Lyndon Johnson. The results from equation 1 for the 1996 data, which I use to generate the predicted and simulated approval ratings, appear in the right-hand column of Appendix C. Between 1964 and 1996, the trust median dropped from +.054 to −.623, or by .677 points. To simulate 1996 feelings about Clinton given 1964 trust, I multiply .677 by the total effect of a one-unit change in trust on the Clinton thermometer. This calculation suggests that, on average, people's feelings about the president would be .295 points higher with trust at 1964 levels. I add this to each person's observed feeling thermometer score. If this adjustment produces a score greater than 1, I assign a score of 1.

In 1996, 67.5% of the sample approved of Bill Clinton. My predicted score, with trust and the other variables at their observed levels, is a somewhat higher 70.4%. When respondents' observed presi-

dential thermometer scores are increased by .295 points, the adjusted approval rating is 78.3%. This is substantially higher than the 71% recorded for Johnson in late 1964, but it is noteworthy that Clinton's NES approval rating is almost 10 points higher than his Gallup rating during the same period. In fact, the gap of 8 percentage points between the predicted and adjusted scores is only one point smaller than the difference in the Gallup second-term preinaugural job approval ratings for Johnson and Clinton (Gallup Organization 1998, 15). Consistent with the 1988 data, these results further suggest that trust may be at least partially responsible for the lower contemporary presidential approval ratings.

CONCLUSION

These findings about political trust have important implications. First, higher levels of trust are of great benefit to both elected officials and political institutions. More trust translates into warmer feelings for both, which in turn provides leaders more leeway to govern effectively and institutions a larger store of support regardless of the performance of those running the government.

This study also adds to our understanding of what can increase political trust. In addition to the economy, improved perceptions of government effectiveness and higher levels of congressional approval can effect sub-

stantial changes. With regard to the former, perhaps Clinton's efforts in the second half of his first administration are instructive. While the public was not willing to embrace sweeping new policies such as health care reform, it seemed satisfied by the "bite-sized" proposals in areas of broad interest. Initiatives such as a minimum wage increase, a large-scale literacy program, strong stands on the environment, and family and medical leave can make a difference.

With regard to congressional approval, the election of the first Republican Congress in 40 years likely provided the public with an increased sense that the political system can respond to citizen discontent. Once in office, the minor but well-publicized institutional changes adopted by Congress in early 1995, such as cutting the number of committees and their staffs and requiring that laws apply equally to members of Congress and ordinary Americans, may have contributed to the improvement in approval as well. That these changes were institutional in nature is noteworthy, given the continued unpopularity of congressional leaders such as Newt Gingrich and certain congressional decisions, such as the government shutdown (see Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1995).

In sum, these results suggest that political leaders can take steps to increase trust. But will the increases be as fleeting as those of the Reagan years? The country continues to face fundamental problems on issues such as race, Social Security, Medicare, and health care that will likely require large-scale solutions. As the health care reform fiasco of 1993–94 suggests, however, a public no longer possessed of a core trust in its political system is easily frightened by negative campaigns against broad new initiatives. On the supply side, leaders concerned about public reprisals will be less likely to support such initiatives. Without public support for solutions, problems will linger, will become more acute, and if not resolved will provide the foundation for renewed discontent.

## APPENDIX A: NES QUESTION WORDING

### Political Trust

People have different ideas about the government in Washington. These ideas don't refer to Democrats or Republicans in particular, but just to the government in general. We want to see how you feel about these ideas. For example:

1. 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? (TRUST)
  1. Just about always
  0. Most of the time
  - 1. Some of the time
2. Do you think that people in government waste a lot of the money we pay in taxes, waste some of it, or don't waste very much of it? (WASTE)
  1. Not very much
  0. Some
  - 1. A lot
3. 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? (INTEREST)

1. For the benefit of all
- 1. Few big interests
4. 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? (CROOKED)
  1. Hardly any
  0. Not many
  - 1. Quite a few

**Missing Data:** To conserve cases, I require that respondents answer only one question. In 1988, 9.1% skipped one of the four questions, 1.7% skipped two, and .6% skipped three. Only .6% were excluded from the analysis. In 1996, the corresponding percentages were 4.2, .5, .1, and .3. If I require that respondents answer all four questions, the results are consistent.

### Mean Issue Position (1988 Data)

1. Some people think the government should provide fewer services, even in areas such as health and education in order to reduce spending (7). Other people feel it is important for the government to provide many more services even if it means an increase in spending (1). Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this?
2. Some people feel the government in Washington should see to it that every person has a job and a good standard of living (1). Others think the government should just let each person get ahead on their own (7).
3. Some people feel that the government in Washington should make every effort to improve the social and economic position of blacks (1). Others feel that the government should not make any special effort to help blacks because they should help themselves (7).
4. Some people feel that the government in Washington should make every effort to improve the social and economic position of blacks and other minorities (1). Others feel that the government should not make any special effort to help minorities because they should help themselves (7).
5. Some people feel it is important for us to try to cooperate more with Russia (1), while others believe we should be much tougher in our dealings with Russia (7).
6. Some people believe that we should spend much less money for defense (1). Others feel that defense spending should be greatly increased (7).
7. There is much concern about the rapid rise in medical and hospital costs. Some people feel there should be a government insurance plan which would cover all medical and hospital expenses for everyone (1). Others feel that all medical expenses should be paid by individuals and through private insurance plans like Blue Cross or some other company-paid plans (7).
8. Recently, there was been a lot of talk about women's rights. Some people feel that women should have an equal role with men in running business, industry, and government (1). Others feel that a woman's place is in the home (7).

### Policy Satisfaction (1988 Data)

Of the eight issue position items, respondents are asked to place themselves and the federal government on six, which I list below. I take the absolute value of the distance between the self-placement and the placement of the federal government.

Domestic

1. Government services
2. Government job
3. Aid to blacks
4. Aid to minorities

Foreign

1. Cooperation with Russia
2. Defense spending

**Missing Data:** To conserve cases, I require that respondents provide only one valid response for issue position and policy satisfaction indexes. It also bears noting that the aid to minorities and aid to blacks questions were asked to separate half-samples in the 1988 NES. For mean issue position, 19.8% of the sample skipped one item, 10% skipped two, 5.3% skipped three, 3.4% skipped four, 2% skipped five, 1.4% skipped six, and 1.2% failed to answer any. For domestic policy satisfaction, 18.9% of the sample missed one question, 10.5% missed two, and 11.5% failed to answer any. For foreign policy satisfaction, 15.2% missed one, and 14.8% answered neither.

Mean Issue Position (1996 Data)

1. Some people think the government should provide fewer services even in areas such as health and education in order to reduce spending (7). Other people feel it is important for the government to provide many more services even if it means an increase in spending (1).
2. Some people believe that we should spend much less money for defense (1). Others feel that defense spending should be greatly increased (7).
3. There is much concern about the rapid rise in medical and hospital costs. Some people feel there should be a government insurance plan which would cover all medical and hospital expenses for everyone (1). Others feel that all medical expenses should be paid by individuals and through private insurance plans like Blue Cross or some other company-paid plans (7).
4. Some people feel the government in Washington should see to it that every person has a job and a good standard of living (1). Others think the government should just let each person get ahead on their own (7).
5. Some people feel that the government in Washington should make every effort to improve the social and economic position of blacks (1). Others feel that the government should not make any special effort to help blacks because they should help themselves (7).
6. Some people say that the best way to reduce crime is to address the social problems that cause crime, like bad schools, poverty, and joblessness (1). Other people say the best way to reduce crime is to make sure that criminals are caught, convicted, and punished (7).
7. Some people think it is important to protect the environment even if it costs some jobs or otherwise reduces our standard of living (1). Other people think that protecting the environment is not as important as maintaining jobs and our standard of living (7).
8. Some people think we need much tougher government regulations on business in order to protect the environment (1). Others think that current regulation to protect the environment are already too much of a burden on business (7).
9. Recently there was been a lot of talk about women's rights. Some people feel that women should have an equal role with men in running business, industry, and govern-

ment (1). Others feel that a woman's place is in the home (7).

Policy Satisfaction (1996 Data)

Of the nine items above, respondents are asked to place themselves and both major parties on the four below. I take the mean absolute difference between the placements of self and the respective parties.

1. Government services
2. Defense spending
3. Environment and jobs
4. Environment regulation

**Missing Data:** To conserve cases, I require that respondents provide only one valid response for issue position and policy satisfaction indexes. For mean issue position, 16.7% of the sample skipped one item, 9.2% skipped two, 5.2% skipped three, 3.2% skipped four, 1.5% skipped five, 1.2% skipped six, 1.1% skipped seven, .4% skipped eight, and .8% failed to answer any. For satisfaction with the Democrats, 16.6% of the sample missed one question, 8.7% missed two, 6.5% missed three, and 6.8% failed to answer any. For satisfaction with the Republicans, 16.4% missed one, 9.6% missed two, 6.3% missed three, and 6.8% failed to answer any.

Traditional World View

Responses to these items range from agree strongly to disagree strongly. I code each item to run from most tolerant to most traditional.

1. The newer lifestyles are contributing to the breakdown of our society.
2. The world is always changing and we should adjust our view of moral behavior to those changes.
3. This country would have many fewer problems if there were more emphasis on traditional family ties.
4. We should be more tolerant of people who choose to live according to their own moral standards, even if they are very different from our own.

**Missing Data:** To conserve cases, I require that respondents provide only one valid response. In 1988, 1.9% skipped one of the four questions, .3% skipped two, and .5% skipped three. Only .6% were excluded from the analysis. In 1996, the corresponding percentages were .8, .2, .1, and .3. If I require that respondents answer all four questions, the results are consistent.

Perception of Government Effectiveness

The item used to tap this concept is the second part of a two-part question. First, respondents are asked what is the single most important problem facing the government. Second, they are asked "how good a job is the government in Washington doing in dealing with this problem: a good job, only fair, or a poor job."

**Missing Data:** To conserve cases, I place those who do not identify a most important problem at the scale's midpoint. In 1988, 1.4% failed to identify a most important problem. Since the most important problem questions were asked to only a half sample in 1996, 51.2% were placed at the midpoint.

Congressional Approval

I use the four-point scale that asks respondents how strongly they approve or disapprove.



**Missing Data:** To conserve cases, I place those who do not provide a response to the approval question at the scale's midpoint. In 1996, 8.8% of cases fall into this category; in 1988, 6.27%.

APPENDIX B. Summary Statistics for Variables Included in Structural Equation Models, 1988 and 1996		
Variable	1988 Mean (S.D.)	1996 Mean (S.D.)
Political Trust	−0.453 (0.476)	−0.512 (0.451)
Presidential Thermometer	0.238 (0.615)	0.194 (0.561)
Congressional Thermometer	0.198 (0.356)	0.118 (0.342)
Television News Consumption	0.638 (0.302)	0.503 (0.325)
Newspaper Consumption	0.458 (0.328)	0.384 (0.326)
Partisanship	0.491 (0.353)	0.453 (0.354)
Approval of Congress	0.517 (0.338)	0.455 (0.362)
Mean Issue Position	0.479 (0.139)	0.481 (0.161)
Political Engagement	0.561 (0.255)	0.615 (0.231)
Domestic Policy (Dis)Satisfaction	0.325 (0.203)	—
Foreign Policy (Dis)Satisfaction	0.282 (0.215)	—
Policy (Dis)Satisfaction with Democrats	—	0.255 (0.171)
Policy (Dis)Satisfaction with Republicans	—	0.280 (0.189)
Perceived Government Effectiveness	0.255 (0.314)	0.392 (0.245)
Traditional World View	0.611 (0.203)	0.624 (0.204)
Overall Economic Evaluation	0.535 (0.167)	0.565 (0.146)
Education	0.490 (0.270)	0.543 (0.269)
Income	0.277 (0.252)	0.320 (0.288)
Age	0.354 (0.216)	0.387 (0.224)
Race (African-American)	0.101 (0.301)	0.100 (0.300)
Sex (female)	0.518 (0.500)	0.542 (0.498)
Number of cases	1,280	1,249

Source: American National Election Study, 1988, 1996.

APPENDIX C. Logistic Regression Estimates Predicting Presidential Approval		
Variable	1988 Parameter Estimate (Standard Error)	1996 Parameter Estimate (Standard Error)
Intercept	−1.595*** (0.339)	0.268 (0.468)
Presidential Thermometer	3.882*** (0.207)	3.922*** (0.273)
Partisanship	1.193*** (0.234)	−1.574*** (0.319)
Economic Evaluation	1.451** (0.116)	2.956*** (0.619)
Mean Issue Position	−0.144 (0.484)	−1.192 (0.658)
Race (African-American)	−0.826*** (0.234)	0.539 (0.338)
Number of cases	1,942	1,502
Beginning −2 X log likelihood	2644.40	1892.58
Ending −2 X log likelihood	1297.13	871.21
Pseudo-R <sup>2</sup>	.50	.49

Source: American National Election Study, 1988, 1996.  
Note: Entries are unstandardized maximum likelihood estimates. \*\*p < .01, \*\*\*p < .001, two-tailed tests.

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