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TRUST IN GOVERNMENT

The Relative Importance of Service Satisfaction, Political Factors, and Demography

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ABSTRACT: *This paper focuses on trust in government, meaning the parliament, the cabinet, the civil service, local councils, political parties, and politicians. Trust is measured in terms of specific support—as indicated by people's satisfaction with specific public services—and contrasted with more general support, determined by political culture and demographic factors. The data used in this analysis are taken from a general mass survey of Norwegian citizens conducted in 2001. The main findings are, first, that people's trust in government is of a general character: A high level of trust in one institution tends to extend to other institutions. Second, political-cultural variables have the strongest overall effect on variations in people's trust in government. Here, the single most important factor is general satisfaction with democracy. Third, citizens who are satisfied with specific public services generally have a higher level of trust in public institutions than citizens who are dissatisfied. Finally, trust in government is also influenced by demographic factors, such as age, education, and occupation.*

KEYWORDS: *Norway, performance, trust and demography, trust and political factors, trust and service satisfaction, trust in government*

Trust in government is a multifaceted, complex, and rather ambiguous concept. The relation between democracy and trust is paradoxical. On the one hand, the legitimacy of political and administrative institutions and actors is based largely on trust. In a system of indirect democracy the people delegate their sovereignty to these institutions and actors, trusting that this mandate will be handled in an appropriate way. On the other hand, an inherent part of any democracy is a "healthy

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distrust" in or skepticism toward the interests of powerful actors. Democratic systems also institutionalize distrust by providing many opportunities for citizens to monitor the activities of the people and institutions they supposedly trust (Warren, 1999). Thus the causal links between trust and good government is a contested one (Braithwaite & Levi, 1998; Rothstein & Stolle, 2002).

Trust covers general and systemic factors, such as the legitimacy accorded to the political-administrative system, but also more specific experiences with the government and its services and the dynamic interaction between the two (Bouckaert & Van de Walle, 2001). Public opinion about governmental institutions is quite inconsistent and ambivalent and is characterized more by cognitive complexity than by consistency (Forster & Snyder, 1989; Hill, 1992; Listhaug, 1990; Rainey, 1996). Citizens are often skeptical toward the public sector when asked in general and abstract terms but relatively satisfied with more specific services. Generally speaking, they desire a greater amount of services delivered from the public sector (Bennett & Bennett, 1990; Goodsell, 1994; Huseby, 1995; Ladd, 1983). Frederickson (1997) describes this ambivalence as the "paradox of distance." Whereas people trust government officials who are nearby, they believe that government officials who are far away are lazy, incompetent, and probably dishonest. This paradox may partly be a function of political rhetoric and the lambasting of political and administrative actors and institutions by the media but also of citizens' general disengagement from political life. In view of this paradox, it is appropriate to elaborate on the distinction Easton (1965) made between diffuse and specific support for the political system when discussing trust.

The focus of this article is on trust in government, taken broadly to mean democratic institutions that have strong linkages to the political process. Variations in trust are explained in terms of people's satisfaction with specific public services (i.e., specific support), which is contrasted with the relevance of political-cultural factors and demographic factors for trust—factors more associated with diffuse or general support.

The main research questions covered in the paper are:

- Is people's trust in government of a general character, or is it differentiated between political and administrative institutions and actors?
- What is the connection between people's satisfaction with public services and their trust in government? Does the mere fact of being a consumer of specific public services inspire trust, or is trust linked more to how satisfied people are with those services? Does trust vary according to how universal or specific the public services are (i.e., how many people they cover)?
- What is the significance of political-cultural and demographic factors for levels of trust, and how much variation do they bring?
- What is the relative importance of these factors compared with performance-related factors and people's satisfaction with public services?

These questions will be analyzed by focusing on the case of Norway. Norway has a strong democratic tradition, scores high on per capita income, has an abundance of natural resources, has relatively strong collectivistic and egalitarian values, is consensus-oriented, and has a low level of internal conflict. It also has one of the most comprehensive and universal welfare states in the world. The regime's performance, support for democracy, and level of trust in public institutions are generally higher than in most other countries (Dalton, 1999; Klingemann, 1999; McAllister, 1999; Norris, 1999b), as is the generalized trust in the society (Rothstein & Stolle, 2003). Surveys of political support for the national government and parliament nearly always accord Norway a leading position (Listhaug & Wiberg, 1996; Listhaug, 1995 & 1998).

Nevertheless, the pattern of confidence in political institutions is cyclical, and the level was lower at the end of the 1990s than in the early 1980s (Listhaug, 2000). This special profile of Norway as a positive outlier makes it an interesting case for examining how trust in public institutions varies among different groups of citizens. In Norway there is a growing importance of the people's role as consumers relative to their role as citizens, implying that the levels of trust will be increasingly related to specific rather than diffuse support (Rose & Pettersen, 2000). The reform wave instigated by the New Public Management movement seeks to further such a development, and one important component of the reform program of the Norwegian government was that all public bodies should have a Service Charter by the end of 2001 (Stene, 2001).

Theoretical Elaborations

Easton's (1965) concepts of support for the political system are pretty close to what many authors define as trust in government. Levels of diffuse or general support for a political system, which encompass trust as a central dimension, consist of a number of interrelated elements (Bouckaert & Van de Walle, 2001). First, people can have more general ideological reasons for supporting or trusting the government (i.e., they favor a large public sector, and it therefore is natural to support its central institutions and actors). A more generalized version of this political argument is that people believe in common or collective interests and aims (March & Olsen, 1989). There are also reasons to believe that people in this category will be overrepresented among those who actively participate in political-administrative processes.

Support for, or trust in, the government may also, however, be based on structural legitimacy, meaning long-term positive experience with the formal structure, rules, roles, and working of the government. Trust in the professional competence of the civil service may also be related to this factor. Legitimacy connected with how particular political and administrative leaders act over a period of time may also develop a high level of diffuse support or trust. Macro-

factors, like economic performance and levels of unemployment, may also influence structural legitimacy or have a more general significance for diffuse support (Miller & Listhaug, 1999).

Easton's (1965) concept of specific support encompasses two main elements: process and output. The process part concerns how decision-making processes are organized (i.e., how they are structured in terms of participants, the approach to problems and solutions, which rules are followed, how competent government employees are, the participation of affected actors and parties, etc). Process-based specific trust or support can be high even when the output is unfavorable for the actors, simply because the process is seen as appropriate.

Output-related elements concern the classical "who gets what" in politics. This means that the people's support for or trust in government depends on what they gain, regardless of the process leading up to the result. This mode of thinking is typical of the New Public Management movement, which argues that governments should be much more output-oriented, meaning more efficient (Christensen & Lægreid, 2001). According to this mode of thinking, "doing things the right way" is old-fashioned and undesirable; instead, governments should "do the right things."

If we combine diffuse and specific support, the government accrues the highest level of trust when levels of both diffuse and specific support are high and when these factors reinforce one another. High diffuse support but low specific support may indicate that the general level of legitimacy and trust in the political-administrative system is so strong that even dissatisfaction with bad performance—as expressed in low levels of specific support—does not threaten this basis. This may indicate that the slack in the system—the gap between available resources and demands—is high (Cyert & March, 1963). A low score for diffuse support but a high one for specific support may mean that many people are skeptical toward the governmental system as such, for real or imaginary reasons, but their specific interaction with the government is on the whole not negative (Goodsell, 1994; Kjellberg, Brofass, & Saglie, 1980). Low scores for both types of support and mutual reinforcement of the two factors indicate that the government is experiencing a legitimacy crisis. A decline in general or diffuse support for political institutions is more troublesome for the legitimacy of the political system than dissatisfaction with specific actors or services (Listhaug, 2000).

Trust in government has both institutional and personal aspects.[1] People may trust both the system as such and individual actors they encounter or observe, which may include both central political leaders and actors in the administration and public service sector. Another possible combination is trust in the political-democratic system as such but distrust in current leaders or other political actors. This distrust may be based both on myths or symbols, for example "distrust fashions" furthered by the mass media, or on first-hand negative experiences with

government representatives. A third possibility is that people may trust certain political and administrative leaders because of their achievements or personal charisma but not the institutional features of the political-administrative system. The fourth combination is distrust in both the system as such and specific government representatives. If we relate these elements to the distinction between diffuse and specific support, it is probable that individual elements of trust will be more related to specific support while institutional elements are linked to diffuse support. The higher the level of trust inspired by the current government, the more likely it is that a person will express specific support and trust, whereas long-term experience points more in the direction of diffuse support and trust.

People's satisfaction with public services as related to trust can be seen in a broader or narrower performance perspective (Bouckaert & Van de Walle, 2001). The broad performance perspective presupposes that certain modern public reforms imply better quality of public services and hence high levels of public satisfaction and trust in government. In this paper we concentrate on a narrower performance perspective, addressing the connection between experience of and satisfaction with public services and trust in government (the performance hypothesis), and the importance of satisfaction for trust compared with political and demographic factors. Micro-factors, such as how individual citizens assess the performance of specific public services based on their own experiences, are seen in relation to their integration and involvement in the political-democratic system and to their social position.

Satisfaction with public services may span a large number of different elements, which are of both a process and output nature (Bouckaert & Van de Walle, 2001, pp. 25, 29). When the individual's experiences are largely good, he or she tends to trust the state (Kumlin, 2002; Rothstein & Steinmo, 2002). People may be satisfied with the existence of a particular service or the availability of certain services that meet their needs. At the same time, they may also be satisfied with information concerning services, the accessibility and friendliness of the service providers they meet, the competence of service personnel, the fairness, effectiveness, and efficiency of the services, or other factors. They may, however, be more preoccupied with the output of services than with features of the process. Friendliness, accessibility, and competence mean very little for some people if they do not get what they want, whereas others will accept an unsatisfactory output if they see the process as appropriate. The situation regarding service delivery and satisfaction is, of course, further complicated by the fact that people's needs and perceptions of what services should provide vary (Aberbach & Rockman, 2000). Some will be satisfied with little, and others will be dissatisfied with quite a lot.

A variation of this discussion is whether some services have a greater impact than others and are therefore more significant for creating satisfaction and trust (see Van de Walle et al., this issue). The impact of services varies, however, ac-

cording to people's needs and expectations, and it is therefore difficult to arrive at a consensus on how services should be ranked. Moreover, there will most likely be a large amount of cultural variety among countries concerning this matter. Different countries and groups are concerned with different issues (Pollitt, 2002). For some people in some countries, problems with receiving mail or with the tax authorities may be of greater significance than problems of gaining access to social or employment services.

Another related variable is who is responsible for the provision of public services and at what level. A locally based service could, for example, create more satisfaction and trust, because consumers become better acquainted with the service organization and the service provider than with a service that is located at a greater distance (see del Pino, this issue). However, local provision and use of services is in itself no guarantee of good treatment and relationships. On the contrary, one might even expect the opposite effect on satisfaction and trust, because proximity can create a stigma in a local community characterized by transparency, as a classical study in Norway about social services shows (Løchen & Martinsen, 1962). Moreover, the question arises whether people really know who is responsible for the various public services in a complex public sector in which responsibility for different services is shared between the central, regional, and local levels and changes over time. This is another aspect that varies considerably from one country to another, owing to different cultural traditions. A plausible expectation is that most services are consumed locally and that people can tell whether they are public services. Nevertheless, it is still difficult to make predictions about satisfaction and trust based on the organizational level and institutional responsibility of services.

One major factor determining the influence that service satisfaction has on levels of trust in government is the growing importance of the citizen's role as a consumer, which has been defined by some as a type of neoliberal crusade, emphasizing individual self-interest in dealings with government, whereas others see it as an enhancement of democracy, producing more direct connections between citizens and government (Self, 2000).

Research Design—Independent Variables and Expectations

Our research design covers three sets of independent variables: service satisfaction, political-cultural factors, and demographic factors, which we use to explain variations in the dependent variable, trust in government. If one presupposes that satisfaction with government services is trust-enhancing—implying that the consumer role is important and performance is of significance for trust—one can ask whether people will react equally to all public services. What are the most important variables for characterizing services and differentiating them for users?

One central variable could be how universal the services are, meaning how many people they potentially cover. Public services range from those that are collective or universal, such as health care in most countries, which is potentially consumed by everyone, to those that are more selective and individual and target more specific groups of clients, such as social services. One expectation might be that the more selective and individualized a service is, the more dissatisfied the user is likely to be. The users of such services, such as social benefits, are likely to encounter a greater amount of bureaucratic arbitrariness and social stigma and will probably have access to fewer social and political resources (Kumlin & Rothstein, 2002; Rothstein, 2001; Rothstein & Stolle, 2002). According to this mode of thinking, people with the least experience with services, particularly the most selective ones, are likely to be the most trusting, whereas the least trusting are likely to be those with a large amount of experience of selective benefits.

Selective public services may, however, also mean that people become both better acquainted with government and obtain services they really need, creating both more satisfaction and more trust. A related argument is that a more specific service may indicate that the government is particularly concerned with and cares for designated clients or users and hence promotes trust in them.

Another performance-related variable is whether people have experience of specific services and how this affects trust. Will people engaged in interaction with service producers have more or less trust than those without such experience? And what is the relative significance of experience or not compared to the quality of experiences (i.e., whether people engaged are satisfied)?

The second set of explanations for understanding trust in government is political-cultural factors. In addition to people's experience with public services, their trust in public institutions may also be influenced by political beliefs and party preferences (Huseby, 1995). The assumption is that people who are satisfied with how a democracy works will have greater confidence and trust in governmental institutions than those who are less satisfied with regime performance or who are less positively disposed toward democratic principles. The potential of a tautological argument is obvious here, but we refer to research that argues that it is possible to differentiate the two concepts later on.

Political-cultural factors are primarily connected to diffuse support or general trust. The main argument is that people who over a certain period of time are interested in or participate in political processes will have more trust in government than those who are disengaged, because engagement can further both knowledge about the political-administrative system and the norms and values that integrate people in the system (March & Olsen, 1989). A counter-argument is, of course, that participation in the political process produces frustration or that participation is motivated primarily by a wish to change the system. Nevertheless, overall one can expect engagement to further trust in government.

Involvement in political processes may mean different things, and one can ask whether certain types of engagement are more important than others for trust. One expectation might be that a generally positive attitude toward politics and democracy would be particularly important for trust and also as a basis for other forms of political engagement. Active forms of participation in politics will probably also lead to greater levels of trust than more passive forms (i.e., membership and participation in political parties or other forms of active participation would be more important than simply being interested in politics and following politics in media). Parties are key institutions in political systems, and we would expect citizens who are members of parties to have a greater trust in governmental institutions than those with no party affiliation. Because the political left has a long tradition of support for the public sector and a strong state, one would also expect people at the left end of the political spectrum to trust government more than those on the right (Lægreid, 1993, pp. 96, 112). Party preferences have a major influence on an individual's evaluation of various aspects of the public sector in Norway (Martinussen, 1988; Miller & Listhaug, 1990; Huseby, 1995; Christensen & Lægreid, 2003a). A person's position on the left–right ideological dimension has been proved to be a consistent and important factor in understanding attitudes toward public sector institutions (Aardal & Valen, 1989; Baldersheim et al., 1990). Additionally, those who vote for winning parties generally tend to show a higher level of political support and confidence than those who vote for losing parties (Listhaug, 1998; Norris, 1999a). At the time that our survey was conducted, the Labour Party had just formed a minority government to replace a Center coalition minority government.

A third set of variables potentially related to trust is social position and demographic features (Rose, 1999). Previous studies have revealed a complex relationship between social background and trust in government institutions and that demographic variables are not seen as major determinants of trust in politicians (Bennett & Bennett, 1990; Listhaug, 1998; Rose & Pettersen, 2000, pp. 34–35). The rationale for investigating the relation among individual demographic factors and trust in government is that the results can be used to predict long-term trends in confidence. These variables may also be related to diffuse support and general trust, whether they are knowledge- or value-based. One such variable often mentioned is education, with the expectation that the higher a person's level of education is, the more he or she will trust the government (Bouckaert & Van de Walle, 2001, p. 12). The reason for this is the cognitive factor, meaning that educated people have a greater amount of knowledge about the political-administrative system, can distinguish between its various components, and can understand how public services are organized and function, something that supposedly furthers trust. Counterarguments are that knowledge produces a more critical attitude toward government or that normative attitudes are more important than the cognitive aspect produced by a higher level of education.

Three other demographic variables may be more closely connected with general attitudes toward government. One of these is gender, for some studies have shown that women support the public sector more than men do (Lægreid, 1993, pp. 96, 115). The reason for this seems to be that women's core career basis, some decades after entering the labor market, is the public sector. Women have become more dependent on the public sector for their employment, both directly, in that there is a relatively greater proportion of women employed in the public sector than in the private sector, and indirectly, in that public bodies have taken over part of women's traditional care responsibilities. Growth in public expenditure has resulted in a higher tax burden for men, something that may have induced a more negative attitude to public sector institutions (Huseby, 1995). One can therefore presuppose that women will trust the government more than men will.

Another variable, related to the previous one, is whether people are currently employed by the public sector. Some argue that it is possible to identify a "public sector class," which is generally more positively disposed toward public sector institutions than those who work in the private sector (Lafferty, 1988; Lafferty & Knutsen, 1984; Rose & Pettersen, 2000). Others say it remains unclear whether the division between the public and private sectors has become established as a dominant and permanent line of conflict in Norwegian political life (Valen, Aaardal, & Vogt, 1990). Nevertheless, we would expect trust in public sector institutions to be higher for people employed in the public sector than for those in the private sector (Dunleavy, 1980; Lægreid, 1993, p. 113).

A third demographic variable is age. Generally, one would expect trust in government to increase with age; older people tend to be more collectively oriented. Whereas today's younger generation has experienced a public sector that has had either a decreasing role or is blended with elements from the private sector, older people have experienced the development of the welfare state and will therefore tend to have more trust in government.

Data and Method

The data used in this analysis are taken from a broad mass survey, covering 2,297 respondents, conducted under the auspices of the Norwegian Power and Democracy Study in 2001. The data set was obtained from a mail survey sent to a representative sample of Norwegian citizens between the ages of 18 and 84. A total of 5,000 people received the questionnaire, and the response rate was 46 percent. The respondents are representative for the population between the ages of 18 and 75 in terms of gender and age, but there is some overrepresentation of people with higher education (Norwegian Social Sciences Data Services, 2002).

The dependent variable in this study is trust in government. It is based on a

direct question about trust in various political and administrative actors and institutions.[2] For each of these categories the respondents were asked to evaluate their level of trust on a scale from zero (*no trust at all*) to 10 (*a very high level of trust*). We use trust in six different actors and institutions: the parliament (the Storting), the cabinet, the civil service (in general), local councils (municipal level), political parties (in general), and politicians (in general). A general trust variable is also present, constructed as an additive index based on the six single variables.

The first group of independent variables consists of factors relating to experience of and satisfaction with public services. This group consists of three variables, encompassing different numbers of respondents according to how universal the services are. The first is experience of and satisfaction with public medical treatment for the respondent or someone in his or her immediate family during the previous year. This group contained 991 respondents, of the total 2,252, who rated the medical service on a scale of zero (*not satisfied at all*) to 10 (*very satisfied*). Traditionally in Norway general practitioners were divided into public and private. In 2001, however (before the survey), Norway switched to a family doctor system, whereby each patient is registered with one specific doctor, normally the one they already had. Although, formally speaking, general practitioners are now private, they are in reality public. The reasons for this are many: As family doctors they are part of a mandatory public health program (they receive their patients through the health authorities), they all receive financial support from the government, they are restricted on where they can establish a medical practice, they are obliged to provide certain community health services (such as mother/child care or school health programs), and so on. Specialists, who traditionally have operated the selection and channeling mechanism between general practitioners and hospitals, are partly private, with some or little public support, and are overrepresented in the big cities. Public hospitals (which represent the lion's share of all hospitals) during the past few decades have been run by the county political authorities but in 2002 were taken over by the central government and are now organized as companies at the regional level.

The second variable concerns respondents' satisfaction with the public employment service and encompasses 288 respondents who had had contact with this service during the previous two years (the small share reflecting a low unemployment rate). The efforts of the Labour Market Administration are primarily focused on three sets of activities: allocation of money to unemployed people, training of unemployed people, and placement of unemployed people in a job in the public or private sector. This organization is traditionally run by a central state agency with regional (dissolved in 2002) and local branches.

The third variable concerns satisfaction with public social services and consists of 165 respondents who had had contact with social services units over the previous two years. Public social services are run by the local authorities (mu-

nicipalities) in Norway and are responsible for various kinds of support such as providing housing, food, and clothing benefits. Traditionally this service has been heavily influenced by a locally elected board, something that has increased stigmatization among these users, but it is now more of a local, professional bureaucracy. Satisfaction with employment and social services is rated on a scale from 1 (*not satisfied at all*) to 5 (*very satisfied*).

For the regression analysis we add three dichotomous variables connected to whether respondents have had any experience with the three types of services (1 = *have experience*, 0 = *do not have experience*). When we first present the main results, these variables are covered by giving the average score for trust in each category of service experience.

The second set of independent variables, the political-cultural ones, consists of five variables. The first focuses on how satisfied people are with the functioning of democracy in Norway, on a scale from 1 (*not satisfied at all*) to 4 (*very satisfied*).[3] The second variable covers a question about how important politics is in the life of the respondent, rated on a scale from zero (*not important at all*) to 10 (*very important*). The third measures the respondents' general interest in politics, on a scale from 1 (*not interested at all*) to 4 (*very interested*). The fourth covers membership of political parties (1 = *member*, 0 = *not a member*). The fifth covers the left–right dimension in politics, asking the respondents to place themselves on this dimension, ranging from zero (far right) to 10 (far left).

The third set of independent variables covers the demographic ones, four altogether. The first concerns the educational level attained by the respondents, ranging from 1 (*elementary school)* to 10 (*higher college or university education of 5 years or more*). The second variable is gender (1 = *men*, 2 = *women*). The third variable is whether the respondents work in the public sector or not (1 = *not in the public sector*, 2 = *in the public sector*). The fourth variable is age (high values = high age).

Empirical Results

THE DEPENDENT VARIABLE: TRUST IN GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS

The first question we cover is whether people's trust in government is of a general character or whether they differentiate among various political and administrative actors and institutions. Table 1 shows that respondents do not tend to differentiate their trust very much, even though there are some differences among political and administrative institutions, the core governmental institutions, and political parties and politicians. Even if the level of trust is high in Norway compared to other countries, it has been decreasing somewhat over the years (Listhaug

Table 1. Trust in Government

Parliament	*Cabinet*	*Civil service*	*Local council*	*Political parties*	*Politicians*	*Overall trust index*
5.21	4.93	5.02	4.94	4.11	3.80	4.61

Notes: NSD (2002). Average score. 0 = *no trust at all*. 10 = *very high level of trust*. *N* = 2,252.

& Wiberg, 1995), and an average score of 3.8 for trust in politicians indicates a level of distrust even in Norway—not related to the political institutions as such but to the central actors who are active within them (Strømsnes, 2003).

The data reported in Table 1 support the general finding that trust in general institutions is normally higher than in specific actors such as politicians (Norris, 1999a). Party identification and party membership has declined in Norway over the past years, and the political parties have, to a greater or lesser degree, declined as socially integrated movements (Listhaug, 2000; Strøm & Svåsand, 1997). In addition, media targeting of both individual politicians and the role of the parties in the political system has increased.

Our main finding is rather paradoxical. How is it that people trust certain central political institutions more than the central actors in them? One reason for this could be that the political and administrative institutions have developed their trust over a long period of time and are path-dependent and less vulnerable to social change processes, whereas political parties and politicians encounter greater problems in dealing with modernization and change processes. The modern mass media has probably enhanced this trend, because it is easier to criticize individual parties and politicians than to focus, for example, on the parliament as a whole or the civil service in general.

The next question is whether trust in government indicates some kind of cumulative pattern, as many studies have shown (Bouckaert & Van de Walle, 2001, p. 12), or whether there are certain clusters of trust or a very differentiated trust pattern. Table 2 shows quite clearly a cumulative pattern concerning trust (i.e., if people trust one of the governmental or political institutions or actors, they normally trust the others as well, or if they distrust one, they also distrust the others).[4] Thus, a cluster of trust relationships encompasses the main political institutions and actors (Listhaug, 1998).

A clear distinction between regime institutions and political actors, as claimed by Norris (1999a), is not apparent. Government is approached as one amorphous concept, and citizens have difficulty distinguishing one institution or set of actors from another (Bouckaert & Van de Walle, 2001; Dinsdale & Marson, 1999).

However, some variation is apparent in this picture. Trust in the parliament and cabinet have the highest intercorrelation score, together with trust in political

Table 2. Correlation Between Different Measures of Trust in Government, Pearson's *R*

	Parliament	*Cabinet*	*Civil service*	*Local council*	*Political parties*
Cabinet	.80				
Civil service	.66	.64			
Local political board	.59	.61	.55		
Political parties	.72	.68	.56	.59	
Politicians	.69	.67	.61	.58	.79

Note: All scores are significant at the .000 level.

parties and politicians, and these four trust measures intercorrelate strongly. We find the lowest relative scores between trust in local councils and other trust factors, indicating that attitudes toward the lowest level of the system are somewhat different, although scores are still at a highly significant level.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The next questions on which we focus are (a) whether there are differences in the average trust score across the various institutions for citizens with experiences of different public services, and (b) how the score on each independent variable correlates with trust variables. We first examine the bivariate relations between each set of variables and trust in different government institutions and then do a multivariate analysis of the relative importance of the various independent variables on the trust in government index.

Table 3 shows the average trust scores for respondents with experience of the three different categories of public service. The table shows differences in levels of trust among people with experience of different types of service.

The scores for the health service are highest, whereas the other two services, encompassing a much smaller number of respondents, show lower scores on trust, which may indicate that the more selective a public service, the lower the trust in government on the part of those who experience it. This finding is compatible with studies showing that experience with selective, means-tested welfare programs tends to reduce trust in governmental institutions as well as interpersonal trust (Kumlin & Rothstein, 2002). Experience with universal programs and services, on the other hand, tends to enhance trust. One cannot, however, draw any definite conclusions at this point based only on bivariate correlations.

But are there differences in trust within each service experience group, according to whether the respondents are satisfied with the services? Will people who are satisfied score consistently higher on trust than people who are less

Table 3. Average Score on Trust in Three Public Service Experience Groups

	Parliament	*Cabinet*	*Civil service*	*Local council*	*Political parties*	*Politicians*	*Overall trust index*
Health service	5.29	4.99	5.11	5.07	4.16	3.81	4.68
Employment service	4.91	4.64	4.63	4.48	3.87	3.47	4.31
Social service	4.60	4.29	4.40	4.41	3.54	3.21	4.03

Notes: Average score. 0 = *no trust at all.* 10 = *very high level of trust*. n = 991 for health services. n = 288 for employment services. n = 165 for social services.

satisfied? Table 4 shows that this is the case for all three service groups. We find that respondents who are the most satisfied with the public services they use are also the ones who consistently trust the government the most.

If we look at the overall trust index, little difference is found among the services in this respect, so the overall pattern for all services is the most important one to stress. The correlation between service satisfaction and trust also varies little among the different political institutions and actors within each service experience group and is generally significant.

Table 4 also shows that, as one would expect, trust in government generally increases according to the level of satisfaction with democracy, importance of politics in life, interest in politics, membership of political parties, and affiliation with the left end of the political spectrum. However, marked differences exist concerning the strength of these correlations: Satisfaction with democracy is by far the most important one for trust, whereas party membership and position on the left–right dimension are the least important ones, which indicates that the opinion of general regime performance is relatively more important than political involvement, engagement, and political ideology.

Some variation in trust scores also exists within the various independent variables. Satisfaction with democracy correlates strongest with trust in parliament and the cabinet, which form the backbone of Norway's relatively centralized democracy. The importance of politics in a person's life and his or her interest in politics correlates most with trust in political parties and politicians, something that seems natural with such a broad measure. As for position on the left–right dimension, the correlation with trust in the cabinet is the strongest for this variable, something that may reflect either a greater amount of long-term trust in the cabinet as an institution or else a greater amount of short-term trust in the current

Table 4. Correlations by Experience with Public Service, Political Variables, and Demographic Factors Affecting Trust in Government, Pearson's *R*

	Parliament	*Cabinet*	*Civil service*	*Local council*	*Political parties*	*Politicians*	*Overall trust index*
Service satisfaction							
Health service	.16***	.15***	.14***	.12***	.13***	.18***	.17***
Employment service	.14*	.13*	.18**	.17**	.14*	.20**	.18**
Social service	.18*	.13	.21**	.23**	.13	.15*	.21**
Political variables							
Satisfaction with democracy	.42***	.44***	.37***	.29***	.33***	.36***	.44***
Importance of politics	.14***	.12***	.11***	.22***	.22***	.19***	.17***
Political interest	.18***	.11***	.10***	.18***	.18***	.17***	.17***
Party member	.11***	.09***	.06**	.15***	.15***	.15***	.14***
Left–right position	.10***	.18***	.14***	.06**	.06**	.10***	.13***
Demography							
Education	.11***	.10***	.12***	–.01	.04	.04	.10***
Public/private sector	.08***	.09***	.14***	.06**	.07***	.11***	.11***
Gender	.01	.03	.08***	.05*	.04	.07***	.04*
Age	.07**	.03	.04*	.12***	.05*	.07**	.05*

Notes: n = 991 for health services. n = 288 for employment services. n = 165 for social services. n = 2,231 for political variables. n = 2,252 for demographic variables. *** indicates statistical significance at the .000 level. ** indicates statistical significance at the .01 level. * indicates statistical significance at the .05 level.

cabinet, which was a Labour minority government during the execution of the survey in 2001.

With regard to satisfaction with democracy—the variable showing the strongest correlation with the trust variables—one can ask whether it is possible to distinguish the variables theoretically and empirically. Kaase (1999) stresses that these are indicators of the same, whereas Miller and Listhaug (1999) take satisfaction with democracy as an indicator of the extent to which citizens support political institutions or democratic principles. Although these concepts are obviously close, it is also possible to differentiate between them. Norris (1999a) and Klingemann (1999) regard satisfaction with democracy as an indicator of citi-

zens' evaluation of regime performance, which may or may not be interpreted as satisfaction with the incumbent government. Another difference is that trust may imply more commitment and potential willingness to let institutions and actors act on one's behalf or have autonomy in doing so. Satisfaction is a narrower term, even if it concerns democracy, and it is not obvious that satisfaction always leads to trust. A third argument is that satisfaction with democracy, as it is posed in this survey, relates more to the current working of a democracy, whereas trust may be based on a broader and more long-term perspective.

The third set of independent variables encompasses the four demographic factors. Overall, all the independent variables show correlations as expected. Trust in government is highest among people with a higher education, those who work in the public sector, and women, and it increases with age. However, differences exist among the demographic variables, with the level of education and occupational sector showing the strongest correlation, and the correlations are weaker for the other two variables and in some instances not significant.

Generally, demographic variables correlate strongest with trust in the civil service. Variation in trust scores is found within the various independent variables. The level of education has a significant effect on trust in parliament, the cabinet, and the civil service but not on trust in local councils, political parties, and politicians. Employment in the public sector produces significant correlations with trust in all six institutions but is strongest with regard to trust in the civil service, which is hardly surprising, given that many of the respondents employed in the public sector work in the civil service. Gender produces significant variations in trust in the civil service in accordance with our assumptions. Age has the strongest and most significant effect on trust in local councils.

We now turn to the question of the relative explanatory power of the different independent variables for variations in trust in government by focusing on the additive trust index based on the six single variables. The analysis is done in four steps. In the first step we look at the whole population and then go on to focus on respondents with experience of each of the three categories of service.

The multivariate analyses confirm the strong effect of political variables revealed in the bivariate analyses (Table 5). After controlling for experience of and satisfaction with public services and for demographic factors, political-cultural factors emerge as the strongest predictors of variation in the respondents' trust in public sector institutions. The single most important variable is people's satisfaction with how democracy works in Norway, which can be seen as an indicator of general regime performance as well as of support for political institutions or democratic principles. This finding is consistent through all the various steps of analysis, meaning that it is most important for both the population as a whole and for citizens with experience of the health service, employment service, and social services. The significant effects of the importance of politics, respondents' mem-

Table 5. Summary of Regression Equation by Experience with Public Services, Political Variables, and Demographic Factors Affecting Trust in Government

	Population as a whole	*People with experience of health service*	*People with experience of employment service*	*People with experience of social service*
Experience and satisfaction:				
Experience of health service	.01	–	–	–
Experience of employement service	–.02	–	–	–
Experience of social services	–.04	–	–	–
Satisfaction of health services	–	.12***	–	–
Satisfaction of employment service	–	–	.13*	–
Satisfaction of social services	–	–	–	.16*
Political factors:				
Satisfaction with democracy	.41***	.40***	.46***	.50***
Importance of politics	.09***	.11***	.04	.23*
Political interest	.03	.07	.23**	.11
Member of political party	.09***	.12***	.03	–.05
Position on left–right dimension	.09***	.09**	.08	.07
Demographic factors:				
Level of education	.04*	.01	–.06	.12
Gender	.02	.01	–.02	.01
Age	.06**	.05	–.03	.12
Occupational sector	.06**	.06	.06	.12
Multiple *R*	.498	.512	.585	.605
R^2	.248	.263	.343	.366
Adjusted *R*	.243	.254	.316	.315
F statistics	54,830	31,151	13,039	7,160
Significance of *F*	.000	.000	.000	.000
N	2,252	991	288	165

Notes: Standardized beta coeffients. Linear regressions. *** indicates statistical significance at the .000 level. ** indicates statistical significance at the .01 level. * indicates statistical significance at the .05 level. – indicates that this was not included in the analysis.

bership of political parties and their position on the left–right dimension of politics also strengthen the importance of political-cultural factors, which indicates that citizens' political involvement, their political beliefs, and ideological aspects all have an effect on their trust in public sector institutions. People who are satisfied with how democracy works in Norway, who report that politics is important in their lives, who are members of political parties, and who are on the left end of the political spectrum generally have a higher level of trust in public sector institutions than citizens who are less involved or interested in politics.

A second finding in the multivariate analysis is that satisfaction with public sector services, for those with experience of them, generally enhances citizens' trust in public sector institutions, as expected from the performance hypothesis. However, performance does not appear to be the main criterion for trust. The effect of these variables is not as strong as satisfaction with democracy but is generally on a par with the other political-cultural variables. The analysis also reveals that there are no significant differences in levels of trust between people with and without experience of the health service, the employment service, and the social service, meaning that the relatively weak bivariate correlation disappears in the regression. The important question concerning trust is whether citizens with experience of these institutions are satisfied with the treatment they received.

A third finding is that the effect of demographic factors is weakened when we control for satisfaction and political variables, which is especially the case for gender, as it has no significant effect on variation in citizens' trust in public institutions. Thus, trust in government institutions seems to be unrelated to gender, a result in accordance with other Norwegian studies (Lægreid, 1993; Strømsnes, 2003). The employment sector, however, produces a significant effect. People employed in the public sector have a generally higher level of trust in public sector institutions than other citizens do. Among the population as a whole, both education and age have a weak but significant effect. Other studies reveal even greater effects of the level of education on political trust (Strømsnes, 2003).

Conclusion: Political-Cultural Factors Most Important for Enhancing Trust

In this paper we have shown, first, that people's trust in government is of a general nature, with some differentiating features. Variations in trust among the different institutions are relatively small, but trust is highest in the parliament and lowest in politicians, and there is a strong intercorrelation between trust in the different institutions. People with a high level of trust in one institution also tend to trust the other institutions, whereas distrust in one is related to distrust in others. In other words, trust in government shows a cumulative pattern, and trust relations are more supplementary than alternative.

Second, people's satisfaction with public services is connected to their trust in government. This finding is in accordance with broad Norwegian studies of trust in local government (Rose & Pettersen, 2000). People who are satisfied with the treatment they receive from the public health, employment, and social services generally have a higher level of trust in public institutions than citizens who are not satisfied with their treatment. The finding that people with experience of the employment or social services have less trust in government than people without such experience is, however, not significant when we control for other factors. Simply being a consumer of specific public services is less important for people's level of trust in governmental institutions than their degree of satisfaction with them. Citizens' satisfaction with specific government service delivery thus affects their trust in government (Bouckaert & Van de Walle, 2001). We also find some support for the assumption that experience of and satisfaction with universal benefits generally enhances the level of trust more than experience of and satisfaction with selective benefits (Rothstein, 2003). One can firmly conclude that institutions' function and performance have an effect on people's trust in them.

Third, trust in governmental institutions also varies significantly with political-cultural factors. Citizens who are integrated, involved, and engaged in the political system generally have a significantly higher level of trust in most governmental institutions than people who are less integrated, less involved, and less engaged. Outsiders and people who are politically distant, in an ideological sense, from public institutions, have less trust in those institutions. The same is true for political-cultural factors, when institutions and citizens are loosely integrated.

Fourth, for the population as a whole, social position and demographic factors have an influence on levels of trust in governmental institutions. People employed in the public sector generally have more trust in government than people without such affiliation, and people with higher education have generally more trust than less-educated people. This effect is, however, not significant for people with experience of the three specific public sector services. Age also has an effect, whereby older people generally have more trust in governmental institutions than younger people.

Fifth, and most important, the political-cultural variables have the strongest overall effect on variation in people's trust in government. These findings are in line with other studies revealing that political cynicism has a strong effect on variations in people's trust in government (Christensen & Lægreid, 2003c). The cynical views that elected parliamentary representatives quickly lose contact with ordinary people and that one can never trust any political party to keep its promises are important variables to explain variation in trust, which indicates that integration, involvement, and engagement in the political system and the political-administrative culture are more important for trust in governmental institu-

tions than those institutions' function and their performance and also more important than social or demographic factors. The strong effect of general satisfaction with democracy indicates that passive political integration and satisfaction may be as important for trust as more active political participation, such as party membership. Other studies confirm the importance of satisfaction with democracy for understanding variations in trust in government and indicate that such diffuse support for the political system is more important than specific support for particular aspects of public sector reform such as market competition and privatization (Christensen & Lægreid, 2003b). Variation in levels of trust can be explained more by political factors than by social factors. An alternative regression, removing the dominant political-cultural variable—satisfaction with democracy—shows that this main picture can be modified more in the direction of the increasing importance of satisfaction variables.

Returning to the main picture, variation in people's trust in government institutions can be traced to a somewhat larger degree to factors affecting diffuse support for the political system (such as political-cultural variables) than to factors affecting specific support (such as performance or satisfaction with specific benefits). Long-term general identities appear to be more important than short-term specific experiences. This finding should be seen in the context of the Norwegian public sector, which has a relatively high level of performance. If citizens take good performance more or less for granted, performance might not serve as the main criterion for judgment of or trust in government institutions (Bouckaert & Van de Walle, 2001). In a high-context culture such as Norway, people are more likely to rely on an intuitive understanding of how democracy works and less likely to be influenced by individual experience than in low-context, individualistic societies (Bennett, 1990; Christensen, Lægreid, & Wise, 2001). Thus, it is important to take the starting points into consideration. Countries starting from a low level of trust in government might reveal other and more dramatic variations in trust among different groups in society than countries starting from a high level of trust. Furthermore, if people tend to see government as an amorphous entity, it is difficult to trace trust back to individual experiences of specific services. If citizens do not make a clear distinction among the different institutions, as indicated in Tables 1 and 2, it becomes difficult to determine the effect of specific government services. This argument is compounded by the complexity of causality (Van de Walle & Bouckaert, 2003). Our assumption is that satisfaction leads to trust, but it could also be that more trusting attitudes lead to a better perception of service delivery—a conundrum that cannot be easily be solved by using survey data (Huseby, 2000).

Bearing this in mind, the narrow criterion of performance, as expressed through satisfaction with specific public services, does, nonetheless, have an impact on people's overall trust in public sector institutions, but this effect is significantly

weaker than the effect of political-cultural factors, particularly satisfaction with democracy. Performance and satisfaction are not the only criteria citizens use to evaluate government and enhance their trust in governmental institutions and actors. Regime performance and generally positive attitudes toward how democracy works within the national setting further trust in government, as does engagement. This analysis indicates that political institutions' ability to integrate citizens in political life is relatively more important for understanding variations in trust in government institutions than either the public sector's ability to solve problems and to satisfy people's needs or the differences between democratic groups in society. Citizens' general level of involvement, identity, and belief in politics and democracy enhances their trust in parliament, the cabinet, the civil service, local councils, political parties, and politicians.

Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that there is no one-factor explanation for variations in people's trust in governmental institutions. One implication of this analysis is that the causal relations are contested, complex and multifaceted. Citizens' trust in government institutions is a complex mix of general images, ideology, stereotypes, the actual performance of specific public services, and demographic variables. To gain a better understanding of the variation in citizens' trust in government, one needs to take a more comparative approach, focusing on changes over time, among different institutions, and among different countries.

This paper is mainly a static analysis of the relations between political-cultural features, performance variables, and demographic features and trust in government. A more dynamic interpretation of the results of the paper has to take into consideration the declining trust in government that is occurring in many countries. In Norway this decline is not substantial, has started from a high level of trust, and has also revealed a cyclical pattern (Listhaug, 2000). At the same time, little evidence of a decline in social capital or generalized trust has been noted in Scandinavia (Rothstein & Stolle, 2003).

Our findings challenge the recent government modernization rhetoric that failing government performance is at the basis of citizens' distrust in government. We reveal that such a one-factor explanation is too simplistic. Our findings support the rather optimistic view that as long as people have a general level of satisfaction with how the democracy works in a country, they will also have a high level of trust in government. In 2001 more than 70 percent of the Norwegian citizens were relatively satisfied with how the democracy worked. Compared with 1995 satisfaction with democracy has slowly decreased, but the level is still high in comparison to other countries (Aardal, 1999). In a democracy a "healthy distrust" toward the government is needed. It is difficult to specify to what extent this skepticism should exist, but it is fair to say that in the Norwegian case, a considerable amount of slack exists, allowing for a considerable increase in distrust before it becomes a serious democratic problem.

Notes

1. Added to this is the question of interpersonal, social, or generalized trust and the relation between this kind of trust and trust in government (Kumlim & Rothstein, 2002; Newton, 1999; Rothstein, 2001; Rothstein & Stolle, 2002, 2003).

2. The question was: "Below are the names of various institutions, such as the police, the cabinet, the civil service etc. How much trust do you have in each of these institutions?"

3. Here we use the standard question used in the Eurobarometer and the World Value Survey: "Are you generally very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied with the way democracy functions in Norway?" (Norris, 1999a).

4. A factor analysis confirms this one-dimensionality of the trust variables included in Table 2. Only one component is extracted (Principal Component Analysis), and the factor loading varies between .768 and .872.

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