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## A Step toward Understanding Trust in the Government

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## A Step toward Understanding Trust in the Government

### Abstract

Over the last fifty years, trust in government has declined. This paper seeks to further the understanding of trust in government. Using ordinal level survey data from 1998-2012, a crosstabular analysis is used to test governmental trust with broad and specific policy areas. This research challenges part of Popkin and Dimock's (2000) research, which asserts that citizens use trust as a heuristic for both broad and specific questions about the government. The empirical findings suggest that citizens distrust the government broadly but trust a wide range of programs implemented by the very government they distrust.

## A STEP TOWARD UNDERSTANDING TRUST IN THE GOVERNMENT

Ted Delicath

***Abstract:** Over the last fifty years, trust in government has declined. This paper seeks to further the understanding of trust in government. Using ordinal level survey data from 1998-2012, a crosstabular analysis is used to test governmental trust with broad and specific policy areas. This research challenges part of Popkin and Dimock's (2000) research, which asserts that citizens use trust as a heuristic for both broad and specific questions about the government. The empirical findings suggest that citizens distrust the government broadly but trust a wide range of programs implemented by the very government they distrust.*

### INTRODUCTION

In *Bowling Alone*, author Robert Putnam (2000) found that in the 1960s “three in four (Americans) said you *could* ‘trust the government in Washington to do what is right all or most of the time.’”<sup>1</sup> By 1990 “three in four Americans *didn't* trust the government to do what is right most of the time.”<sup>2</sup> In just thirty years half of Americans surveyed went from trusting the government to not trusting the government.

Governmental trust judgments are riddled with predispositions that frustrate attempts to understand what trust or distrust toward the government means. Previous research investigates how trust functions as a heuristic when individuals are asked to draw upon their predispositions and reason about politics. Posed as a question: When answering different types of governmental questions, how are respondents using governmental trust as a cognitive shortcut? When asked a dichotomous governmental question, logically, those that distrust the government should side against the government and vice-versa. Further research looks at broad and specific questions to assess if specificity affects how trust functions as a heuristic. Using governmental trust and distrust as a cognitive shortcut may be easier with visible and straightforward questions, like desired size of government, which allow for a more simple alignment of trust and distrust sentiments. In comparison, using governmental trust and distrust as a cognitive shortcut may be more difficult with obscure questions, like opinion on ethanol subsidies. This research contends that respondents use governmental trust judgments as a heuristic when reasoning about all types of government questions. The hypothesis challenges Popkin and Dimock's (2000) research, which contends that in areas where they lack knowledge, people advocate for action from the very government they distrust.

Understanding why governmental trust has continued to decline over the last fifty years is a serious matter. As Newton and Norris (2000) stress “an erosion of confidence in the major institutions of society, especially those of representative democracy, is a far more serious threat to

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<sup>1</sup> Putnam 2000, 47.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid 1.

democracy than a loss of trust in other citizens.”<sup>3</sup> In the hopes of reversing the ongoing erosion, this research aims to understand how trust functions as a heuristic.

#### LITERATURE REVIEW

Empirical research on governmental trust began in the early 1960s. Stokes (1962) used the National Election Survey (NES) to gain insight into respondents’ general feelings toward their government. Stokes focuses on ethical judgments of individual political actors, believing that politicians were the main objects of trust. Easton (1965) distinguishes between “diffuse support”—meaning support for institutions or systems—and “specific support”—support for individual political actors or incumbent parties. Since the mid-1960s, trust in the government has declined. While Stokes initially believed that distrust focuses on individual political actors, continual distrust over successive administrations of both parties suggests that diffuse support explains more about trust in government judgments than specific support.<sup>4</sup>

From Easton’s early differentiation, subsequent trust theorists developed two contending conceptualizations of trust: a rational choice approach and a norm-driven approach. Formally “the rational choice conceptualization of trust is based on the logic of consequentiality, while the norm-driven approach sees trust as embedded in the logic of appropriateness.”<sup>5</sup> Put plainly, the rational choice view of trust places trust in those that the truster knows or has knowledge about. Through frequent interaction, personal relations generate “thick trust.”<sup>6</sup> In contrast to rational choice, the norm-driven approach to trust refers to trust in strangers on grounds of morality. Similarly, when the object of trust moves out of the personal relationship realm, thin trust replaces thick trust. “Thin trust is even more useful than thick, because it extends the radius of trust beyond the roster of people whom we can know personally.”<sup>7</sup> Whereas thick trust is “embedded in personal relations”, thin trust places trust in the “generalized other.”<sup>8</sup>

The rational choice approach and the norm-driven approach paint two contrasting conceptions of trust: the former a judgment of conditional calculation and the latter a general relation of trust to all on the basis of morality. Conceptually, these two dichotomous definitions demarcate between opposing understandings of what it means to trust. Often, however, trust does not manifest so dichotomously. Weatherford (1992) views trust as a multilevel concept, which is “useful in organizing research on both individuals and aggregates such as bureaucracies or nations.”<sup>9</sup> Trust in a specific individual forms a relationship of trust different from that of trust relations with society or

<sup>3</sup> Newton & Norris 1999, 2.

<sup>4</sup> Levi & Stoker 2000.

<sup>5</sup> Paraskevopoulos 2010, 477.

<sup>6</sup> Putnam 2000, 136.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid 6.

<sup>8</sup> Putnam 2000.

<sup>9</sup> Levi & Stoker 2000, 477.

institutions. Thus, differentiating what trust in another person means from trust in the government is an essential part of identifying if the latter has an effect on the former.

Researchers dispute whether or not trust in government affects social trust—more commonly referred to as social capital theory—or if any causal relationship actually exists between the two. Social capital theorists contend “there is a virtuous circle of high trust, well-established social institutions, good government and strong popular political support, which then helps to sustain social trust between citizens, foster community and civic participation and encourage collective activity for the common good.”<sup>10</sup> Empirically, Brehm and Rahn (1997) observe that social trust depends upon trust in the institutions governing society.<sup>11</sup> To varying degrees these authors share the belief that the government and political associations play a part in creating and/or sustaining social trust.

Recently, researchers dispute social capital theory’s legitimacy and have set about to disprove the supposed causal relationship. Kenneth Newton (2001 & 2006) continually finds a tenuous or nonexistent relationship between social trust and political trust. Thus, he claims a decline in governmental support does not directly lead to a decline in social trust. Newton does concede that democracies with high levels of governmental trust tend to contain high levels social trust, but Newton does not believe this ostensible correspondence signifies a causal relationship. Whether or not social capital theory is correct remains an unresolved matter that will be empirically examined later. What trust theorists are certain of is that governmental trust has declined over the last fifty years. A 2011 graph from the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press charts trust from the Eisenhower administration through March 2010 of the Obama Administration.<sup>12</sup> Governmental trust rises to its apex in 1965, when it nearly reaches 80 percent. Trust steadily declines over the next fifteen years reaching 25 percent in 1980. From the 1980s to March 2010—besides surveys taken during and for six months after the events of September 11th, 2001—trust in government never rises above the 50 percent mark. In the wake of the financial crisis, during October 2008, governmental trust falls to 17 percent—a historic low.

No single factor sufficiently explains why governmental trust declined over the last fifty years and failed to rebound to its pre-1965 levels. Continued scholarly support suggests that citizen’s political judgments are based heavily on an amalgamation of their various predispositions. As Popkin and Dimock (2000) contend “recognition of these predispositions is essential if we are to understand

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<sup>10</sup> Newton 2006, 848.

<sup>11</sup> Levi & Stoker 2000, 493-494.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.people-press.org/2010/04/18/public-trust-in-government-1958-2010/>

how citizens arrive at political judgments.”<sup>13</sup> Levi and Stoker (2000) enumerate a number of incumbent-specific and short-term biases affecting trust judgments.

Governmental trust judgments, however, are comprised of more than just short-term and incumbent-specific measures. Numerous scholars believe events such as the Vietnam War, civil rights’ tensions and Watergate caused the initial decline of governmental trust.<sup>14</sup> As the administrations tainted by these events left office, trust failed to rebound. Scholars cite the steady decline as “evidence that trust judgments are not merely an amalgam of reactions to current incumbents but reflect deeper, and less readily reversible, dissatisfaction or concerns.”<sup>15</sup>

Trust judgments reflect perceptions predicated on a wide variety of influences. While political trust researchers agree on few aspects of trust, they do agree that “whether citizens express trust or distrust is primarily a reflection of their political lives, not their personalities or even their social characteristics.”<sup>16</sup> Thus, trust judgments about government are based on political perceptions and values, are evaluated through a political prism, and are mostly unaffected by personal and social characteristics.<sup>17</sup>

Scholars argue over what makes for a trustworthy government. Thus far, scholarly consensus finds “the capacities to make credible commitments, to design and implement policies non arbitrarily, and to demonstrate competence” as necessary attributes for a government to be viewed as trustworthy.<sup>18</sup> Hardin (1998) contends that even if governments attain such trustworthy attributes citizens may lack sufficient knowledge to accurately judge a government trustworthy or not. Asymmetrical information partly blinds citizens to the intent driving governmental initiatives. The lack of cohesion in governmental trust research is partly attributable to the difficulty of accurately capturing what it means to trust the government.

Popkin and Dimock (2000) contend that the successive governmental shortfalls over the last fifty years have lead to public misgivings about the government’s role in domestic institutions. Unlike domestic issues, Popkin and Dimock postulate that citizens lack knowledge about foreign issues. The uncertainty people hold about international matters, Popkin and Dimock believe, causes them to advocate for foreign initiatives by the government they distrust. This research will test whether Popkin and Dimock’s assertion is empirically defensible.

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<sup>13</sup> Popkin & Dimock 2000, 215

<sup>14</sup> e.g. Citrin 1974; Weatherford 1984; Hetherington 1998.

<sup>15</sup> Levi & Stoker 2000, 480.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 481.

<sup>17</sup> Certain minority groups hold a minor aversion toward government. Levis and Stoker (2000) find that African Americans distrusted the government at a higher rate than Caucasians from the 1960s into the 1980s, but note that this trend has continued to lessen over the last thirty years.

<sup>18</sup> Levi & Stoker 2000.

## METHOD

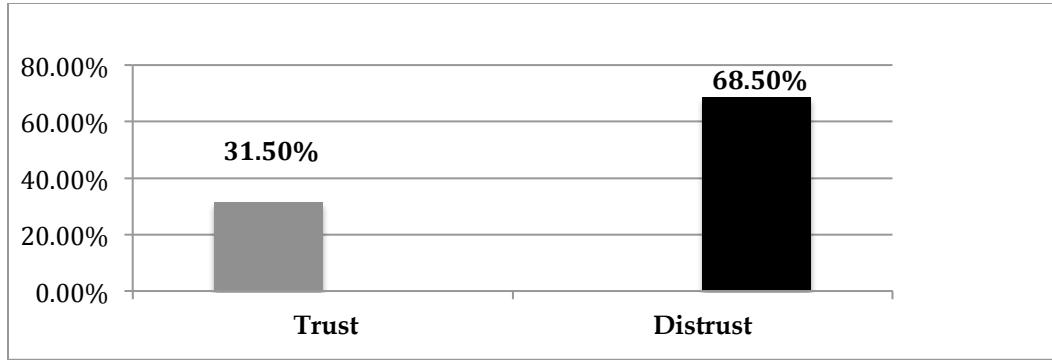
To address these questions, this paper examines public survey data from 1998 to 2012. The surveys contain ordinal level data, so crosstabs were used for the analysis. Survey data were compiled from over 40 news sources such as CNN and *The New York Times* and independent research centers like Pew Center for the People and the Press and the Kaiser Family Foundation. All governmental trust questions used in the surveys ask, “How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Washington to do what is right”?

Previous research suggests that high levels of trust in government accompany high levels of general reciprocity and vice versa. To investigate the relationship between social trust and governmental trust the relationship was tested across five surveys spanning from 2000 to 2010. In those surveys, respondents answered the social trust question “Would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can’t be too careful in dealing with people?” In regards to trust in government, respondents were asked “How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Washington to do what is right?” The possible responses to the question were, “just about always,” “most of the time,” and “only some of the time.” Certain surveys provided a fourth option “never” while others recorded “never” only if respondents voluntarily answered something similar to never. Following the dichotomous trust groupings used by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, options, “just about always” and “most of the time,” are considered to reflect trust in the government and the options, “only some of the time” and “never,” are considered to reflect distrust toward the government.

In order to affirm that the governmental trust levels from the data reflect similar governmental trust levels during 1998-2012, the average of the governmental trust data is compared to a three-survey moving average provided by the Pew Research Center for the people and the Press. To determine how the independent variable of trust in government affects broad attitudes toward government, two broad questions—assessment of government and desired size of government—are analyzed with governmental trust. Next more specific policy areas are analyzed with governmental trust to discover if specific and broad areas yield similar results.

*Affirming the Distrust*

**Figure 1:** Avg. % of Gov. Trust & Distrust from 1998-2012



In order to affirm that the data used contained trust and distrust levels similar to the time period (1998-2012) in which the data was collected, governmental trust questions from the 48 crosstabs used were averaged. The average level of trust in the government from the Pew Research Center’s three-survey moving average from 1998-2012 is about 35 percent. The average percentage of those that trust the government in the 48 crosstabs used is 31.5 percent. Controlling for an unusually high amount of confidence in the government during and after the events of 9/11, the trust levels from the data used are similar to the average level of governmental trust during 1998-2012.<sup>19</sup>

*Social Trust & Governmental Trust*

**Table 1:** Social Trust & Governmental Trust

Social Trust (DV)	Governmental Trust (IV)			Total
	Just About Always	Most of the Time	Only Some of the Time	
Most people can be trusted	43.3%	47.7%	39.5%	41.5%
Can't be too Ccareful	56.7%	52.3%	60.5%	58.5%
<b>Pearson Chi-Square Significance: .001</b>		<b>Range: 3.8</b>		
<b>Gamma: .146</b>				

Pew Research Center Poll September 2010

N = 3,004

Independent Variable: Governmental Trust & Dependent Variable: Social Trust

All five crosstabs analyzing social trust with governmental trust displayed modest positive correlations that are statistically significant according to Chi-Square tests. Table one is a typical representation of the other crosstabs. As table one indicates, the relationship between those that trust the government correlate positively and monotonically with social trust. The crosstab achieves a gamma coefficient of .146, displaying a weak relationship. The strength of this relationship is weaker than what social capital theorists postulate. Of the people who trust government all the time, only 43

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.people-press.org/2011/03/03/section-1-attitudes-about-government/>



percent believe that most people can be trusted. Less than half of those that trust the government believe most people can be trusted. Essentially, the findings do not support the belief that those with trust in the government also possess social trust. These findings lend minimal support to social capital theory's contention that governmental support fosters social trust. Instead, the findings provide greater support for researchers like Newton (2000), who contend that the link between social trust and governmental trust is tenuous to non-existent.

Overall, the relatively weak relationship between social trust and governmental trust undermines scholars like Brehm and Rahn (1997) who view social trust as intertwined with governmental trust. My findings, coupled with the robust findings of Newton (2001), illustrate that, "there are only weak and patchy associations between generalized trust and confidence in political institutions."<sup>20</sup> Trust in government draws upon a different set of predispositions than trust in society. The results suggest that social trust and governmental trust may be related concepts, but evaluations of either social trust or governmental trust are separate and not one and the same.

Based on the results, this research treats governmental trust and social trust as independent from one another. Next, focus shifts from the broad relationship between social and governmental trust to the heuristic effect of trust in government. Governmental trust is correlated first with broad measures and then with more specific measures to affirm or disprove the hypothesis that respondents use governmental trust as a heuristic across a wide range of government questions.

#### *Broad Measures*

As a reminder, governmental trust was combined into two categories, trust and distrust. Two broad measures—assessment of the government and desired size of government—were analyzed with governmental trust.

**Table 2:** Crosstabular Analysis of Governmental Trust and Governmental Assessment

<b>Example: Grouped Dependent Variable (# of ?s averaged) Specific Year</b>	<b>Difference between those with high &amp; low governmental trust: High Trust/Low Trust (Range)</b>
<b>Favorable Assessment of Gov. (10)</b> 2012 2011 2010	<b>65.2% / 25.4% (39.8%)</b> 75.8% / 19.1% 88 %/ 39.2% 67% / 11%
<b>Want Larger Gov. With More Services (11)</b> 2010 2008 2002 2000 1998	<b>67.7% / 32.1% (35.6%)</b> 70.0% / 22.2% 67.4% / 34.6% 67.1% / 37.7% 50.0% / 32.9% 40.9% / 25.8%

N: (867-16,069)

<sup>20</sup> Freitag 2003, 945

*Assessment of Government*

Assessment of government questions are split into favorable and unfavorable categories and analyzed with trust and distrust. Averaging ten crosstabs, the results show a statistically significant and positively correlated relationship between governmental trust and a favorable assessment of the federal government. The crosstabs achieve an average gamma coefficient of .705, displaying a strong relationship between assessment and trust in government. The results indicate that citizens that trust the government will be more likely to view the government in a positive light. On average 65.2 percent of those with trust have a favorable view of the government in comparison to 25.4 percent of those with distrust that have a favorable view of the government. The distribution between those with trust and a favorable view of the government and those with distrust and a favorable view of the government stretches 39.8 percentage points. The stark contrast indicates those with trust view the government much more favorably than those with distrust.

While a positive correlation exists between trust and favorable assessment of the government, those who view the government in a positive light are in the minority. When the ten governmental assessment questions are averaged, 27.5 percent of respondents view the government positively compared to 72.5 percent of respondents that view the government negatively. As the results in table three, four, and five (Appendix A) indicate, regardless of question wording a majority of respondents view the government in a negative light, they are frustrated or angry, and believe the government is negatively impacting the country.

The next section analyzes governmental trust with desired size of government. In comparison to broad favorable or negative assessment of the government, desired size of government more pointedly inquires about the function of government. If respondents are using trust as a heuristic for broad questions, similar to broad assessment of the government, a large range should separate trust and distrust. As table two indicates, the results suggest that this is the case. The next section will further elaborate on these findings.

*Size of Government*

Size of government questions are split into the two categories of large government with more services and small government with fewer services and analyzed with trust and distrust. Averaging eleven crosstabs, the results show a statistically significant and positively correlated relationship between governmental trust and desire for larger government. The results are statistically significant and achieve an average gamma coefficient of negative .546, displaying a strong relationship between desired size and trust in government. On average 67.7 percent of those with trust desire a larger government with more services in comparison only 32.1 percent of those who distrust desire a larger government with more services. The distribution between those with trust and that desire a larger government and those that distrust and that desire a larger government stretches

35.6 percentage points. Similar to the assessment of the government, a strong correlation exists between trust and size: trust correlates with favorability towards a larger federal government.

Only one survey finds that a majority of all respondents desire a larger government providing more services. As table six (Appendix B) indicates, nearly sixty percent of respondents desire a smaller government providing fewer services. The percentage of respondents with trust, 32.3, is similar to those with trust in the assessment of government section.

The results did not vary significantly across administrations. The desire for a smaller government that delivers fewer services was consistent regardless of whether a Democratic or Republican administration was in power. The lack of variation across administrations supports the consensus cited among scholars, most recently by Popkin and Dimock (2000), that trust judgments are comprised of more than just reflections of ideology and partisanship.

Subsequent sections explore whether the stark contrast between trust and distrust is sustained when respondents are presented with more specific and obscure questions. Popkin and Dimock (2000) contend that, “distrust in government does not always lead to opposition to government programs”.<sup>21</sup> Contrary to Popkin and Dimock’s findings, this research predicts that the subsequent sections, distrust in government will lead to opposition to government programs.

#### SPECIFIC MEASURES

Using available survey data, ten policy areas are analyzed in crosstabular analysis with governmental trust to identify which, if in any, of the policy areas trust functions as a heuristic. Two policy areas—government regulation of business and healthcare—offer comparatively rich data. Government regulation of business and healthcare contain nine crosstabs to average in comparison to the other eight areas that have three or less. Comparatively, government regulation of business and healthcare results are interpreted with greater confidence than the other seven areas. The remaining areas should not be disregarded, but should be interpreted with caution.

##### *Economy*

Based on two crosstabs, the results show a statistically significant and positively correlated relationship between governmental trust and desire for government to play a role in the economy. The crosstabs achieve an average gamma coefficient of .577, displaying a strong relationship between governmental trust and government control in the economy.

In table seven (Appendix C), 73 percent of respondents with trust in the government believe a governmental presence in the economy to be a good idea compared to 35.3 percent of those that distrust the government and believe a governmental presence in the economy to be a good idea.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Popkin and Dimock 2000, 229.

<sup>22</sup> Recall that trust is the average of “Just about always” and “Most of the time” and distrust is the average of “Only some of the time” and “Never (Vol.)”.

The distribution between those with trust and distrust and that believe a governmental presence in the economy to be a good idea stretches 36.3 percentage points. In terms of policy area specificity, the question refers directly to the economy, which, in comparison to the previous broad questions, redirects the focus from government generally to its role in a particular policy area. With that being said, the question is similar to previous broad questions in that it provides two dichotomous responses. Such polarized responses should easily enable respondents to align their trust or distrust with the logically appropriate response. As the range between trust and distrust indicates, respondents are in fact latching onto the responses that resemble their attitude toward government's presence in the economy.

The results support the hypothesis, but the question in table twelve is straightforward and does not require a more knowledgeable interpretation in order to align governmental trust judgments to the logically appropriate response. Table eight (Appendix D) contains the latter type of question, testing the relationship between governmental trust and view of government's role in job creation. A statistically significant and positive correlation exists between trust and desire for the government to spend money in order to create jobs. The crosstab achieves a gamma coefficient of .484. Of those that trust the government, 65.4 percent believe the government should spend money to create jobs compared to 37.6 percent of those that distrust the government and share the same sentiment. The distribution between those with trust and distrust and that believe the government should spend money to create jobs stretches 31.2 percentage points. The results suggest that even when provided with more specific questions trust strongly affects attitude toward government's role in the economy broadly and specifically. Again however, nearly 60 percent of respondents in table 12 believe greater governmental control in the economy is a bad idea. Similarly, 57.7 percent of respondents believe the government should focus on reducing the deficit instead of spending money to create jobs. These results suggest that the economy broadly is not an area in which the majority of respondents desire the government to play a role.

#### *Regulation of Business*

The previous two economic questions inquire about attitudes toward direct government influence in the economy. As the results in table nine (Appendix E) indicate, 61.3 percent of respondents believe the government is inefficient. The relationship is statistically significant and achieves a gamma coefficient of negative .719, suggesting a very strong relationship. To test if attitudes change when the government takes on a less direct role in the economy, government regulation of business was used in crosstabular analysis with governmental trust.

Averaging nine crosstabs that inquire about favorable and unfavorable attitudes toward governmental regulation in business, the results display a statistically significant and positively correlated relationship between trust and desire for government to regulate business. The results

achieve an average gamma coefficient of .437. Again, the crosstabs that provided the greater number of possible responses contained the furthest range between trust and distrust.

Of those who trust in the government, 72.9 percent believe the government should regulate business compared to 46.4 percent of those who distrust. What is different about the regulation relationship compared to the broad economic relationship is that nearly half of those that distrust the government believe government regulation in business is a good idea. Economically speaking, the results suggest that respondents are more accepting of governmental regulation in comparison to more direct governmental control like spending money to create jobs. As table ten indicates (Appendix F), a majority, 51.2 percent, of respondents, from the nine crosstabs analyzed, desired more government regulation. Despite a majority of distrustful respondents, most people actually desired greater regulation from the government. Thus, the results suggest government regulation of business is an area where respondents trust the government and do not rely as heavily on governmental trust as a heuristic.

Using Popkin and Dimock's (2000) logic, the results highlight how uncertainty about business matters causes some, "people to support action by the very government they distrust."<sup>23</sup> If Popkin and Dimock are correct uncertainty and lack of knowledge should cause respondents to place trust in the government. When asked obscure questions a potential flaw arises: Popkin and Dimock focus on how uncertainty affects respondent's views on international issues—an area where the majority of people lack robust knowledge. Business and healthcare are policy areas, which affect respondents on a daily basis. Thus, respondents at least believe they have a better understanding of such areas in comparison to international areas. In line with this logic, respondents should use trust as a heuristic when reasoning about domestic issues like healthcare. That is because if a respondent distrusts the government broadly, the same respondent logically would be opposed to greater governmental presence in the healthcare market. The next section assesses which of the above logic applies to the healthcare results.

### *Healthcare*

Following similar logic used in the economy section, healthcare questions are split into pro-government and anti-government attitudes about government in the healthcare market and analyzed with governmental trust and distrust. Averaging nine crosstabs, the results display a statistically significant and positively correlated relationship between trust and desire for a governmental presence in the healthcare market. The results achieved an average gamma coefficient of .434.

Of those that trust the government, 69.4 percent believe the government should play a role in the healthcare market compared to 48.5 percent of those that do not trust government. The

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<sup>23</sup> Popkin and Dimock 2000, 229.

distribution between those with trust and distrust extends 20.9 percentage points. Of the areas analyzed thus far, the healthcare distribution has the smallest range between trust and distrust.

The relationship between governmental trust and governmental presence in the healthcare market is similar to the relationship of governmental regulation of business in that nearly half of distrustful respondents believe governmental presence in the healthcare market is a good idea. As table eleven (Appendix G) indicates, a majority, 57.3 percent, of respondents, from the nine crosstabs analyzed, desire more government in the healthcare market. In the same data set, three quarters of respondents distrust the government. Despite three out of every four respondents reporting distrust of the government, a majority (57.3 percent) of respondents desire greater governmental presence in the healthcare market. The results suggest that the healthcare market is a policy area in which respondents are more accepting of governmental presence.

In the economy section, indirect government control, such as regulation, received greater support than direct control, like spending money to create jobs. To test whether the same trend applies to the healthcare market, the nine crosstabs are split into direct and indirect groups. Six questions make up the direct group and three questions make up the indirect group. The direct and indirect questions were respectively averaged and placed in tables twelve and thirteen (Appendix H). Both table twelve and thirteen are statistically significant and achieve a gamma coefficient over .400. Unlike the economy, the more direct governmental measures received a higher favorability than the indirect. In table eleven, 59.2 percent favored direct governmental control in the healthcare market compared to 53.7 percent that favored indirect control. In both cases, a majority of respondents favored governmental control in the healthcare market with a higher favorability and a stronger gamma coefficient for more direct governmental control.

In both the business and healthcare averages, seven out of every ten respondents distrust the government. A majority of respondents, however, favor action by the distrusted government. It appears those with trust in the government do comparatively trust the government more than those that distrust the government. With that being said, of all the respondents, those that trust the government only make up 30 percent of the total in both averages in which a majority of respondents favor governmental action. Thus, those that distrust the government are not aligning their distrust with an anti-government response and are instead taking a pro-government response.

As the questions continue to gain specificity and obscurity, the gap between trust and distrust decreases. If respondents are using trust as a heuristic when reasoning about broad visible measures, the results suggest that the same respondents may not be using trust as a heuristic when reasoning about more specific and obscure measures. Thus far, the areas analyzed have all been domestic and highly visible. Following Popkin and Dimock's (2000) logic, domestic issues are unlike foreign affairs in which, they contend, citizens lack knowledge. If Popkin and Dimock are correct,

the large gap present in broad measures should sustain in domestic areas, where Popkin and Dimock contend citizens distrust the government. Subsequent sections assess if the decreased range between trust and distrust in specific questions continues; if it does, neither this research's hypothesis nor Popkin and Dimock's logic may accurately capture what is afoot.

#### OTHER AREAS

Table fourteen compares the independent variable, governmental trust, with the averaged eleven dependent variables. In the left column are the eleven dependent variables analyzed with governmental trust. The number next to them is the number of crosstabs averaged to produce the results in the middle column. The middle column is the spread between those that trust the government and provided a positive response to the question and those that distrust the government and provided a positive response to the question. The number in the brackets to the left is the range between those that trust the government and those that distrust the government. The results are ordered in descending range, with those that have the largest space between trust and distrust at the top and those with the smallest at the bottom. The far right column is the dependent variable results. That is, the percentage of those that provided a positive response compare to the percentage of those that responded negatively. The "+" or "-" symbol next to the results represents whether a majority responded positively or negatively. In the next sections, several of the dependent variables are brought into discussion with the intent of assessing the impact individual results have on the research and ultimately what the results mean as a whole.

##### *Trust Federal Government with Domestic Issues*

Of those with trust in the government, 78.9 percent trust the federal government with domestic issues compared to 50.5 percent of those with distrust toward the government. The distribution between those with trust and distrust and that trust the federal government with domestic issues stretches 28.4 percentage points. The distribution suggests that governmental trust affects trust in the federal government to handle domestic issues. With that being said, 50.5 percent of those that distrust the government trust the government with domestic issues.

The results discredit Popkin and Dimock's logic in that 61.7 percent of respondents trust the federal government with domestic issues. In that crosstab, 39 percent have trust in the government in comparison to 61 percent that have distrust in the government. Despite only about 40 percent trusting the government 61.7 percent trust the government with domestic issues. This research's hypothesis and Popkin and Dimock's logic, thus far, fail to explain the discrepancy between a majority distrusting the government broadly and a majority trusting in government to handle issues.

**Table 14:** Crosstabular Analysis of Governmental Trust (IV) and Various Governmental Assessment Questions (DV)

<b>Example: Dependent Variable (# of ?s Averaged)</b>	<b>Difference between those who trust the Gov. and those that distrust the Gov: Trust - Distrust (Range)</b>	<b>Dependent Variable Results Positive – Negative (+ Majority or – Majority)</b>
Favorable Assessment of Gov. (10)	65.2% - 25.4% (39.8%)	27.5% - 72.5% (-)
Desire for Larger Gov w/ More Services (11)	67.7% - 32.1% (35.6%)	41.0% - 59.0% (-)
Trust Fed with Domestic Issues (1)	78.9% - 50.5 % (28.4%)	61.7% - 38.3% (+)
Spend \$ to Create Jobs (1)	65.4% - 37.6% (27.8%)	42.3% - 57.7% (-)
Desire Gov. Regulation in Biz (9)	72.9% - 46.4% (26.5%)	51.2% - 48.8% (+)
Trust Fed with Foreign Issues (1)	89.4% - 64.5% (24.9%)	73.4% - 26.6% (+)
Find Tax Code Fair (2)	63.2% - 45.7% (17.5%)	51.3% - 41.4% (+)
Desire Gov. in Healthcare (9)	57.3% - 42.7% (14.5%)	57.3% - 42.7% (+)
Willing to Pay for Gov. Services (2)	80.1% - 66.3% (13.8%)	58.6% - 41.4% (+)
Increase Border Spending (1)	81.3% - 71.3% (10%)	78.4% - 21.6% (+)
S.S. Worth Taxes (3)	86.6% - 82.8% (8.9%)	84.1% - 15.9% (+)

*Trust Federal Government with Foreign Issues*

Of those with trust in the government 89.4 percent trust the federal government with foreign issues compared to 64.5 percent of those with distrust toward the government. The distribution between those with trust and distrust and that trust the federal government with foreign issues stretches 24.9 percentage points. The distribution suggests that governmental trust affects trust in the federal government to handle foreign issues. With that being said, 64.5 percent of those that distrust the government trust the government with foreign issues.

The results show that 73.4 percent of respondents trust the federal government to handle foreign issues compared to only 61.7 percent of people trust the federal government to handle domestic issues. While a majority trusting the government with domestic issues undermines Popkin and Dimock's (2000) reasoning about people's view toward domestic issues, nearly three out of every four respondents trust the government with foreign issues, which strengthens Popkin and Dimock's contention that citizens rely heavily on the government they distrust for international issues.

*Looking at the Table as a Whole*

The two largest ranges occur in the broadest dependent variables, favorable assessment of government and desire for larger government with more services. Taken as a whole, the results in table thirteen disprove this research's hypothesis. It is apparent that respondents reason differently when asked broad and specific questions. The results suggest respondents do not use trust as a heuristic for both broad and specific questions.



The two foreign measures, “increase border spending” and “trust fed with foreign issues,” support Popkin and Dimock’s (2000) contention that lack of knowledge causes people to advocate for governmental control from a government they distrust. Trust fed with foreign issues and increase border spending are two of the three dependent variables with the most overall pro-government support. The higher rate of pro-government support for foreign issues compared to domestic issues further support Popkin and Dimock’s research.

In terms of domestic issues, however, Popkin and Dimock’s belief that citizens distrust the government for domestic issues is proven false. Of the seven domestic areas analyzed only one finds a majority of respondents don’t desire the government’s presence. In many cases, the government is chosen over a free-market provider. For example, in healthcare a majority of respondents chose the government to provide healthcare instead of a private provider. The results also find a majority of respondents are willing to pay for the services the government provides. In terms of social security, 84.1 percent of respondents—the highest pro-government response rate of all dependent variables—are willing to pay for the services social security provides. The results from questions in business, healthcare, social services, and taxes find that when provided with a pro- or anti-government response a majority of respondents provide a pro-government response.

#### DISCUSSION

This research took aim at further clarifying a complicated issue: what does it mean to trust the government? As is often the case, answers lead to more questions. In terms of the relationship between social trust and governmental trust, the results support researchers like Newton (2000) that contend that a tenuous relationship exists between the two. Without social trust generating governmental trust or vice versa, where then does governmental trust stem from and what is it comprised of? Focusing on the former question, this research identified a statistically significant and positively correlated relationship between governmental trust and all of the dependent variables used in crosstabular analysis. The repeated concurrence between governmental trust and favorability toward the government suggests that if government can foster a trusting relationship with the citizens it serves, citizens are more likely to approve of the way government operates.

This research hypothesized that respondents will use governmental trust as a heuristic for broad as well as specific questions. The reasoning was based on the idea that only 31.5 percent of respondents in the surveys used have trust in the government. Citizens lack the knowledge to provide an informed response across a wide range of issues. Since the data shows citizens provide an opinion anyway, this research reasoned that when provided with dichotomous responses—one pro-government and one anti-government—those with trust would align with the pro-government response and vice-versa, irrespective of broad or specific questions. Early broad measures ostensibly

supported the hypothesis. As questions gained specificity, however, the results disproved the hypothesis.

In certain respects, the results support and do not support Popkin and Dimock's (2000) research. The select international questions available support Popkin and Dimock's contention that international issues cause, "people to support action by the very government they distrust."<sup>24</sup> Of the seven domestic areas analyzed, however, only one finds a majority of respondents do not desire the government's presence. These results are inconsistent with Popkin and Dimock's belief that people have "general misgivings" about governmental presence in domestic institutions.<sup>25</sup>

The two broadest dependent variables—assessment of government and desired size of government—yield the largest range between trust and distrust and also produce the most negative results. As questions gain specificity, the range between trust and distrust decreases. Moreover, as questions begin to gain specificity and inquire about particular programs, with the exception of one dependent variable, a majority of respondents favor the pro-government response. The results reveal the dissonance of many people's opinions on government. A majority of Americans report trust towards specific government programs while simultaneously distrusting government in the abstract. As Ellis and Stimson note, "scholars of American public opinion have noticed a long-standing paradox: the American public is operationally liberal, but ideologically and symbolically conservative."<sup>26</sup> While not directly addressed in this paper, the results suggest that the operational-symbolic paradox may explain more than this research's hypothesis or Popkin and Dimock contend is at play.

Future research should look to see where trust in government stems from, and strive to further clarify what, if any, relationship exists between social trust and governmental trust. In addition, future research should locate datasets that can more confidently identify causal relationships and weed out insignificant variables. Finally, future research should also unpack what trust judgments coded as "just about always" and "some of the time" specifically refers to. Understanding what respondents mean by some of the time provides governments an ability to better understand the source of citizen discontent and distrust and allow for governments to right their perceived wrongs and run more efficiently, effectively, and responsively. Ultimately, this research's hypothesis and Popkin and Dimock's logic fail to fully explain the complexity of what it means to trust the government. The operational-symbolic paradox may better explain the illogical relationship between a majority that distrust the government broadly and a majority that trust the government programmatically.

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<sup>24</sup> Popkin and Dimock 2000, 229.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid 24.

<sup>26</sup> Ellis & Stimson 2007, 1.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

<p>Table 3                  Comparison of Assessment of Gov. (DV) and Level of Trust (IV)                  Source: Public Affairs Poll July 2012 (N: 1,683)                  Question: Is your overall opinion of the federal government in Washington very favorable, somewhat, not too favorable, or not at all favorable?</p>		
<p><i>Gamma:</i> .676</p>	Dependent Variable Comparison	
	Very/Somewhat Favorable	Not too/Not at all Favorable
	39.5%	60.5%
	Independent Variable Comparison	
	Trust	Distrust
	39.5%	60.5%
<p>Table 4                  Source: Pew Research Center Poll "Trust in Government" March 2010 (N: 2,099)                  Question: Some people say they are basically content with the federal government, others say they are frustrated, and others say they are angry. Which of these best describes how you feel?</p>		
<p><i>Gamma:</i> .717</p>	Dependent Variable Comparison	
	Content	Frustrated/Angry
	19.2%	80.8%
	Independent Variable Comparison	
	Trust	Distrust
	24.4%	75.6%

<p>Table 5                  Source: Pew Research Center Poll "Trust in Government" March 2010 (N: 980)                  Question: Is the federal government having a positive or negative effect on the way things are going in the country these days?</p>		
<p><i>Gamma:</i> .832</p>	Dependent Variable Comparison	
	Positive effect on life	Negative effect on life
	29.4%	70.6%
	Independent Variable Comparison	
	Trust	Distrust
	22.7%	77.3%

Appendix B

<p>Table 6                  Average Comparison of Size of Gov. (DV) and Level of Trust (IV)                  Sources: Eleven Polls between 1998-2012 (N: 867-16,069)                  Question: If you had to choose, would you rather have a smaller government providing fewer services, or a bigger government providing more services?</p>		
<p><i>Avg. Gamma:</i> -.546</p>	Dependent Variable Comparison	
	Larger/More	Smaller/Less
	41.0%	59.0%
	Independent Variable Comparison	
	Trust	Distrust
	32.3%	77.7%

## Appendix C

Table 7				
Source: Pew Research Center Poll "Size of Government" April 2010				
Crosstabular Analysis: (N: 902)				
Question: Is it now a good idea or bad idea for the government to exert more control over the economy than it has in recent years?				
Independent Variable: Governmental Trust <i>with Optional Never</i>				
Dependent Variable: Good Idea or Bad Idea				
	Governmental Trust (IV)			
View of Gov Control in Econ (DV)	Just about always	Most of the time	Only some of the time	Total
Good Idea	74.3%	71.6%	35.3%	40.9%
Bad Idea	25.7%	28.4%	64.7%	59.1%
Pearson Chi-Square Significance: .000 Gamma: .670			Range: 36.3%	

## Appendix D

Table 8				
Source: CBS News Poll October 2010				
Crosstabular Analysis: (N: 1,046)				
Question: Which comes closer to your own view? The federal government should spend money to create jobs, even if it means increasing the budget deficit, OR The federal government should NOT spend money to create jobs and should instead focus on reducing the budget deficit.				
Independent Variable: Governmental Trust				
Dependent Variable: Create jobs or Reduce budget deficit				
	Governmental Trust (IV)			
Priority (DV)	Just About Always	Most of the time	Only some of the time	Total
Create jobs	68.8%	63.3%	37.6%	42.3%
Reduce budget deficit	31.3%	36.7%	62.4%	57.7%
Pearson Chi-Square Significance: .000 Gamma: .484			Range: 31.2%	

Appendix E

<p>Table 9</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Source: Pew Research Center Poll August-September 2010                  Crosstabular Analysis: (N: 2,412)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Question: Please tell me whether the 1st or 2nd statement comes closer to your own views—                  Government is almost always wasteful and inefficient [OR] Government often does a better job than                  people give it credit for.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Independent Variable: Governmental Trust                  Dependent Variable: Perceived Efficiency of Gov</p>					
		Governmental Trust (IV)			
	Perceived Efficiency of Gov (DV)	Just About Always	Most of the Time	Only Some of the Time	Total
	Gov Does Good Job	69.7%	71.9%	27.7%	38.7%
	Inefficient	30.3%	28.1%	72.3%	61.3%
Pearson Chi-Square Significance: .000 Gamma: -.719					

Appendix F

<p>Table 10</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Average Comparison of                  Gov. Regulation of Biz. (DV) and Level of Trust (IV)                  Sources: Nine Polls between 2002-2012 (N: 601-16,054)</p>		
<i>Avg. Gamma:</i> <i>.437</i>	Dependent Variable Comparison	
	More Regulation	Less Regulation
	51.2%	48.8%
	Independent Variable Comparison	
	Trust	Distrust
	30.6%	69.4%

Appendix G

<p>Table 11</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Average Comparison of Gov. in Healthcare (DV) and Level of Trust (IV)                  Sources: Nine Polls between 2009-2012 (N: 403-962)</p>		
<i>Avg. Gamma:</i> <i>.434</i>	Dependent Variable Comparison	
	More Gov in H/C	Less Gov in H/C
	57.3%	42.7%
	Independent Variable Comparison	
	Trust	Distrust
	24.4%	75.6%



## Appendix H

Table 12				
Direct vs. Indirect Gov. Presence in H/C Market				
Source: Four Surveys from 2009-2012				
Crosstabular Analysis: (N: 403-962)				
Independent Variable: Governmental Trust				
Dependent Variable: Favor or Oppose <i>Direct</i> Greater Gov. Presence in H/C Market				
	Governmental Trust (IV)			
Direct Control (DV)	Just about always	Most of the time	Only some of the time	Total
Favor	75.7%	72.2%	51.8%	59.2%
Oppose	24.3%	27.8%	48.2%	40.8%
Pearson Chi-Square Significance: .000 Gamma: .468				

Table 13				
Source: Four Surveys from 2009-2012				
Crosstabular Analysis: (N: 728-962)				
Independent Variable: Governmental Trust				
Dependent Variable: Favor or Oppose <i>Indirect</i> Greater Gov. Presence in H/C Market				
	Governmental Trust (IV)			
Indirect Control (DV)	Just About Always	Most of the time	Only some of the time	Total
Favor	69.0%	68.4%	49.1%	53.7%
Oppose	31.0%	31.6%	50.9%	46.3%
Pearson Chi-Square Significance: .000 Gamma: .403				