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## Holding the Public Trust: Forms of Trust in Democratic Countries and Their Determinants

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### Abstract

Across both established and newly established democracies, notions of trust in government appear to be falling. These realities prompt investigations into both the determinations of trust in government and its positive relationship to democracy. A host of literature supports institutional approach theory, posting that the overarching government system predominantly determines trust. Analyzing survey questions at the country-level across 16 countries from the World Values Survey (WVS) Waves 5 - 7, this research affirms differences in trust relating to regulative, impartial institutions, trust in political, governmental institutions, and general social trust between citizens. Further, this study finds that more democratic countries, countries with parliamentary systems of government, and a majoritarian system of elections are associated with higher levels of trust.

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**By: David Werner**

## **Abstract**

Across both established and newly established democracies, notions of trust in government appear to be falling. These realities prompt investigations into both the determinations of trust in government and its positive relationship to democracy. A host of literature supports institutional approach theory, positing that the overarching government system predominantly determines trust. Analyzing survey questions at the country-level across 16 countries from the World Values Survey (WVS) Waves 5 - 7, this research affirms differences in trust relating to regulative, impartial institutions, trust in political, governmental institutions, and general social trust between citizens. Further, this study finds that more democratic countries, countries with parliamentary systems of government, and a majoritarian system of elections are associated with higher levels of trust.

## **Introduction**

Contemporary literature highlights the phenomenon of declining trust in government (Pharr & Putnam, 2000; Dalton, 2004; Van de Walle et al., 2008; Foster & Frieden, 2017). While most of these studies focus on established democracies in North America and Western Europe, there is evidence of declining trust across democracies in different regions as well (Cloete, 2007; Bratton & Gyimah-Boadi,

2016; Lee et al., 2020). Contemporary manifestations of distrust in government include demonstrations against austerity measures, police brutality, and mask-wearing mandates (Lee, 2018; Brooks, 2020; Hapuhennedige, 2020). The rise of populism may be a result of declining trust in government as well (Inglehart & Norris, 2016).

What does the reality of declining trust in democratic governance mean? Many authors highlight the importance of trust in legitimizing democratic government and emphasize the essential role trust plays in the promotion of democracy (Anderson & Tverdova, 2003; Danaee Fard & Anvary Rostamy, 2007; Van der Meer, 2010; Beshi & Kaur, 2020). Without adequate trust in government, the legitimacy of government is at stake, as citizens question whether their government is invested in their well-being (Della Porta, 2012). Therefore, understanding the component parts of trust in government and the reasons underlying its observed decline are essential to improving global democratic performance.

“Trust in Government” is a metric which represents citizens’ evaluation of their government’s willingness to respond to their concerns, and, in turn, government’s reliability and accountability to its constituencies (Van de Meer, 2010). Here, government refers to the current regime and its institutions, not to the state as such. Government, however, is not necessarily thought of as one amorphous being by citizens; rather, a division between trust in partial,

representative institutions of government (i.e. legislatures, political parties) and “impartial”, regulative state institutions (i.e. the armed forces, the legislative system, the civil service) is a necessary distinction. Studies find consistently that citizens have greater trust in the latter institutions of government than the former (Rothstein & Stolle, 2008). Much of the attention on declining levels of trust is concentrated on governmental institutions; regulative institutions appear to be more robust and continue to garner substantial support and confidence. This is often explained using Easton’s idea of specific vs. diffuse support – the former, referring to policies and actions of actors, is applied to governmental institutions while the latter, referring to a generalized attachment to the democratic regime, is applied to regulative institutions (Easton, 1975).

Underlying causes of this decline of trust in government are varied; much of the literature focuses on individual and institution factors (Foster & Frieden, 2017). While there are individual factors that affect one’s trust in government (i.e. proximity to government services, socioeconomic characteristics), it is hypothesized that the actual systems of government impact subsequent trust in government the most (Christensen & Lægreid, 2005; Dunleavy, 1980; Anderson & Tverdova, 2003). This viewpoint is drawn heavily from institutional approach theory, which, according to Foster and Frieden (2017), argues that “the capacity and effectiveness of bureaucracies, the structure and design of constitutional and electoral systems, and/or the level of national policy autonomy, condition citizen

views on government” (p. 9). Good [or sound] governance may act as a rainmaker; *just as the gentle rain from heaven falls on the just and unjust alike*, competent governance impacts all constituencies’ trust (Newton et al., 2018). Alongside competence, cohesion and clarity in government policy is likely to have positive impacts on trust; so too is government and electoral system responsiveness to citizens’ varied demands (Miller & Borrelli, 1991).

Focusing first on the component parts of trust in government, determinants of such trust are considered based on a review of the literature below and findings supporting the institutional approach theory of this paper. Analyzing the difference in trust between regulative and governmental institutions, evidence of contemporary decline in trust in government, and system-wide determinants of trust, this paper attempts to highlight the importance in understanding how trust in government is shaped and what avenues are available for democratic countries to re-establish trust among their citizens.

### **Understanding Trust in Government: Defining its Component Parts**

To better understand “trust in government,” an understanding of the definitions of “trust” and “government” is necessary. Social scientists differentiate trust as “social” and “institutional”. Government, in turn, is understood as either the entire governing apparatus or specific institutions defined along political or non-political lines (Warren, 2018; Newton et al., 2018). Much of the existing literature overlooks the need to define what they mean by “trust in government,” resulting in

some confusion over the measure. For instance, Hardin (2000) asks “is trust in government analogous to trust in another person, or is it a very different notion?” (p. 31). What, then, is trust, and how can it be meaningfully applied to the government?

Of the various definitions of trust proposed across the social sciences, the definition by Rousseau et al. (1998) is favored: “[t]rust is a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another” (p. 395). According to this definition, trust has an inherently positive quality, thus defining away uses of trust in the negative. This definition implies the object of trust (i.e. government, fellow citizens) is intrinsically committed to the subject and predictable in their behavior, evaluated through the consistency of their past behavior – that is, for trust to have any relevance, the object of trust must be *trustworthy* (Van de Meer, 2010; Warren, 2018).

Subjects and objects of trust exist at differing proximities; *social* and *institutional* trust allow for an examination of the distance that exists between them. The former considers attitudes of citizens towards other citizens while the latter involves citizens’ attitudes toward government structures and institutional apparatuses (Newton et al., 2018). Institutional trust is the type of trust involved in our understanding of “trust in government,” though the relationship between social and institutional trust is not discrete. Both forms are mutually reinforcing, though

the literature is divided on which form precedes which (Sønderskov & Dinesen, 2016; Newton & Norris, 2016). However, the *strength* of the relationship between these two forms of trust depends heavily on the system of government considered. In democratic countries, where one's fellow citizens have direct say in the forming of regimes, social trust is likely to have a much bigger impact on institutional trust than in less representative forms of government. It would be difficult to trust a government formed by the people without first trusting in the people. At the same time, certain regimes may intentionally degrade trust between citizens. Nationalist and fascist governments often target marginalized populations within a country to blame for economic or political hardships (Schehr, 2005). Therefore, focusing solely on institutional trust in our understanding of trust in government neglects the importance of relationships between citizens.

Similar to trust, government is a term with varied definitions. Whether notions of trust in government refers to the active government in charge (ruling party), the entirety of the government apparatus, specific institutions of government, or some combination thereof is necessary to consider. The literature reviewed distinguishes primarily between political, governmental institutions and “non-political”, regulative institutions of government in the analysis of trust (Rothstein & Stolle, 2008). Generally, regulative institutions elicit more trust from the general public than do governmental institutions — as Warren (2018) notes, “those who hold positions within these parts of government—civil servants, judges, appointed regulators, and

the like—are said to hold a “public trust”” (p. 79). There are many instances when such non-political institutions become political (i.e. in cases of a military coup, political appointments of judges) and this distinction is complicated. Many ruling regimes are able to appoint ideologues to such “non-political” positions, undermining their legitimacy and stated independence. In comparing bureaucracy under the Washington system and the Westminster system, Moe & Caldwell (1994) find that the former attempts to insulate agencies from ongoing control while the latter is granted discretion and coordinates with the ruling regime (pp. 171–195). The overarching system of government — here, presidential or parliamentary — is seen to have important implications on other government apparatuses and subsequent trust in them.

But differences between governments are not solely based on their differing forms. Indeed, it is important to contextualize government on a country-by-country basis; in considering the United States, King (2000) finds that, “Americans are brought up to idolize, almost literally, both their governmental system, as embodied in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, and the heroes of American political history” (p. 85). Following, it is important to consider in what ways the history of the country is intertwined with its current government apparatuses. In many European countries, pre-existing kingdoms fell and merged to create the modern countries in question; in many African, Asian, and Latin American countries, the government structure is inherited from colonial governments (King, 2000). How

the history of these institutions formed and emerged may carry over into contemporary feelings of trust in them.

Trust in government is also determined by citizens' own views regarding the appropriate positioning of government *vis-a-vis* their lives. But such views are in part shaped by the very governments they are under. If governments normalize a welfare system and their central role in assuring quality of life, citizens likely will accept such a role. Compare this to quotes by varying American presidents: Kennedy's "ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country" and Reagan's "government is not the solution to our problems; government is the problem" lines in their inaugural address reinforce an individualist, do-it-yourself mentality that pervades American politics. In these diverse ways, it seems system-level factors have profound impacts on overall understandings of both trust in, and place of, government.

### **Relationship Between Trust and Liberal Democracy**

Although much of the literature agrees with the centrality of trust to democratic legitimacy, there are some who disagree with its importance. Indeed, the theoretical groundings of liberal democracies encourage – if not outright necessitate – a healthy skepticism in governmental institutions. Della Porta (2012) theorizes "a sort of "critical" (mis)trust... [as] not only proper to democratic citizens, but also as necessary to perform democratic control" (p. 42). Following, other authors claim that democracy and trust have a paradoxical relationship (Christensen &

Lægreid, 2005; Warren, 2018). Indeed, as mentioned above regarding governmental institutions' influence over regulative institutions, citizens who have an implicit trust in institutions *should* have a healthy skepticism about what political officials do with them.

Although skepticism is important to democracies, it would be erroneous to conclude that democracies thrive on distrust; historically, liberals such as Alexis de Tocqueville and John Stuart Mill emphasized the importance of at least *social* trust in order to sustain democracy (Newton & Norris, 2016). While the ideal level of trust in democratic governments is impossible to determine, it is not impossible to determine the *change* in trust across several established democracies. That democratic governments have been experiencing a decline in trust over the past few decades is well established in the literature (Van de Walle et al., 2008; Foster & Frieden, 2017). The theorized reasons for this decline in trust are multifaceted, though predominantly attributable to the overarching systems of government (Katzenstein, 2000). It is important to synthesize some of these proposed reasons for substantial declines in trust experienced.

### **Factors Affecting Trust as Identified in the Literature**

Factors that have been analyzed in reviewed literature are concerned either with the individual or the institution. Individual variables include socioeconomic status, demographic variables, and political leanings (Newton & Norris, 2016).

Institution variables include transparency, levels of corruption, macroeconomic performance, electoral system, system of governance, and existence of a welfare state (Anderson & Tverdoka, 2003; Newton & Norris, 2016; Katzenstein, 2000).

One's own trust in the government is influenced by a myriad of demographic factors. Specifically, the literature has found that higher educated, rich individuals have more trust in government relative to lower educated, poor individuals (Christensen & Lægreid, 2005; Foster & Frieden, 2017). Placement between “winners and losers” of the global neoliberal economic system is one framing of this finding. Winners (high education, high economic status, high health, winning side of party competition) and losers (low education, low economic status, low health, losing side of party competition) are not necessarily discrete groupings, but such crude framing is interesting to consider with notable economic inequality a reality for many liberal democratic countries (Ortiz & Cummins, 2011). Political ideologies appear to have an effect on trust as well, inasmuch as individuals on the right end of the spectrum are relatively less trusting of government than those on the left (Lægreid, 1993). Proximity to the public sector has an effect as well, as public sector employees are found to be more trusting of the government.

The line between individual and institutional factors is blurred when it comes to individual perceptions of said institutions. For instance, the perceptions of bureaucratic efficiency may be more important in considering trust in government than any objective metric of efficiency; the same can be said of transparency. An

individual's own understanding of what services the government ought to provide influences their view on trust (as can be abstracted from political ideologies mentioned above) (Aberbach & Rockman, 2000). Additionally, the contemporary move towards post-material interests by governments appear not to be well received by economically struggling citizens (Inglehart, 1990).

Nevertheless, many institutional determinants of trust supersede these considerations. Investigating the effects of corruption, as measured via the Corruption Perception Index (CPI), Anderson & Tverdova (2003) conclude that "individuals in countries with higher levels of corruption evaluate the performance of the political system more negatively" (p. 99). Security concerns are another important determinant; surveys in America after 9/11 found citizen trust in government significantly higher than pre-9/11 surveys had (Chanley, 2002). A government's established electoral system and the impact of a two- or multi-party system have been found to influence trust. For instance, in a comparative analysis of trust in government between the United States, Sweden, and Norway, Miller & Listhaug (1990) find that "the flexibility of the party system... [is] an explanation for varying degrees of trust in the different countries" (p. 367). As multi-party systems are, theoretically, more flexible than two-party systems, there is evidence to support that the electoral system has an independent influence on trust, apart from ideological viewpoints. In these diverse ways, the institutional realities of

government have the most profound impacts on citizens' subsequent trust in government.

### **Empirical Analysis: Difference in Trust**

Much of the literature supports two claims: regulative institutions are thought of differently than governmental institutions and general levels of trust in government are falling (Schneider, 2017; Van de Walle et al., 2008). In order to empirically test these two claims, survey questions on trust in government organizations from the World Value Survey (WVS) Waves 5 to 7 are compared (see Table A). As the WVS does not distribute surveys to the exact same countries throughout the 3 waves studied, a sample of 16 countries from various regions are selected. This random sampling of countries allows for a glimpse into what appears to be a global reduction in trust in government.

To determine if levels of trust are significantly different across the 3 waves studied, a similar aggregation and comparison is conducted. Responses of "A great deal" and "Quite a lot" are aggregated to represent the proportion of respondents who "trust" in the listed organizations. F-tests are used to see if differences in trust levels are significantly different.

Table A

<b>Trust</b>	<b>Institutional Trust: Regulative</b>	<b>Institutional Trust: Governmental</b>
Survey	<i>I am going to name a number of</i>	<i>I am going to name a number of</i>

Question	<p>organizations. For each one, could you tell me how much confidence you have in them: is it a great deal of confidence, quite a lot of confidence, not very much confidence or none at all?</p> <p>- The Armed Forces    - Justice System/Courts - The Police                - The Civil Services</p>	<p>organizations. For each one, could you tell me how much confidence you have in them: is it a great deal of confidence, quite a lot of confidence, not very much confidence or none at all?</p> <p>- The Government                - The Parliament - The Political Parties                [Legislature]</p>
Answer Choices	<p>1. A great deal                                3. Not very much 2. Quite a lot                                    4. None at all</p>	<p>1. A great deal                                3. Not very much 2. Quite a lot                                    4. None at all</p>

The results of an f-test comparing the proportion of respondents' trust levels between regulative and governmental institutions across the 3 waves and 16 countries studied is found below (Table B). The results indicate that these forms of government institutions are thought of differently and that regulative institutions are trusted more than governmental, as supported in the literature (Cinar & Ugur-Cinar, 2018). In fact, across the 16 countries studied, regulative institutions are trusted nearly 30% more than are governmental institutions.

Table B

	<b>Institutional Trust: Regulative</b>	<b>Institutional Trust: Governmental</b>
Mean	<b>0.52</b>	<b>0.28</b>
Variance	0.03	0.02
Observations	46	47
P(T<=t) t Critical one-tail		8.9867E-12 1.66342017

There are various reasons why trust in regulative institutions are trusted more than governmental institutions. The former typically corresponds to “diffuse support” while the later corresponds with “specific support”; that is, regulative institutions capture deep-seated attitudes towards overarching political institutions while governmental institutions capture satisfaction with the regime in power at a particular moment (Easton, 1975). Thus, evaluations of governmental institutions likely capture more current dissatisfactions than regulative institutions.

To turn now towards evidence of changing trust across time, the proportions of social, governmental institution, and regulative institution trust across the 16 countries are compared between the 3 waves. Social trust is constructed from a WVS survey question similarly to the constructions of institutional trusts; responses of “Most people can be trusted” at the country level represent proportions of social trust (see Table C).

Table C

<b>Trust</b>	<b>Social Trust</b>
Survey Question	<i>Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you need to be very careful in dealing with people?</i>
Answer Choices	1. Most people can be trusted 2. Need to be very careful

Despite evidence to the contrary in the literature, we find that trust levels between waves 5, 6, and 7 of the WVS are stagnant (see Table D). In fact, there may be some evidence that trust levels are rising, although no change is found to be

significantly different when f-tests are run. This is likely due to the small sample size and random countries selected to study.

Table D

Trust Across Time	Institutional Trust: Regulative	Institutional Trust: Governmental	Social Trust
Wave 5	.499	.289	.247
Wave 6	.521	.295	.251
Wave 7	.512	.296	.237

These results are surprising, particularly because the time period these survey waves were conducted (2005-2009, 2010-2014, 2017-2020) corresponds to the rise of populism around the world (Bosetta & Husted, 2017). Populism is theorized to result, at least in part, from dissatisfaction and distrust of political institutions; therefore, populism and government trust is expected to have an inverse relationship (Algan et al, 2017). However, such findings may be the result of a relatively small sample size. The 16 countries chosen are a random assortment of democratic countries that poorly reflect specific regional, political, cultural, and/or economic realities that influence trust differently.

### **Empirical Analysis: Determinants of Trust**

Having established there is a statistically significant difference between governmental and regulative institutional trust, we turn now towards

understanding the determinants underpinning both social and institutional trust.

The inclusion of social trust here is predicated on the assumption that social trust influences, or is influenced by, the two forms of institutional trust outlined (Newton et al., 2018). Therefore, there is reason to believe government systems will have an impact on this form of trust alongside the two forms of institutional trust.

Following institutional theory, the research design for this project consists of analyzing various institutional variables' impacts on trust. To do this, a multivariate OLS regression analysis is conducted to evaluate if relationships between these forms of trust and institutional variables exist. The system of government (presidential vs parliamentary, federal vs. unitary), electoral system (majoritarian vs. proportional), and regime type (as represented by the Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index) are considered (see Table E). All 16 countries across the 3 waves of the EVS are included; where information is missing, countries are dropped.

Table E

Variables	Description
<b>Institutional Trust: Regulative</b> [REGULATIVE]	See Table A
<b>Institutional Trust: Governmental</b> [GOVERNMENTAL]	See Table A
<b>Social Trust</b> [SOCIAL]	See Table B
EIU Score [EIU]	Numeric variable based on how democratic a country is; the higher the score (out of 10), the more democratic the country
Electoral System [ELECTION]	Categorical variable; 0 if proportional, 1 if majoritarian, 2 if mixed
System of Government: Head [EXEC]	Dummy variable; 0 if presidential, 1 if parliamentary

System of Government: Power [POWER]	Dummy variable; 0 if unitary, 1 if federal
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There are many reasons to believe the system of government has an effect on trust. Political scientists have considered the differences between presidential and parliamentary systems for decades, complaining of fragmentation and deadlock under the former and cohesion and effectiveness under the latter (Moe & Caldwell, 1994). As a key component of our notion of trust in government is competence and reliability, parliamentary systems are hypothesized to result in higher levels of trust among the citizenry. In terms of whether a government operating under a unitary or federal system of government leads to higher levels of trust, the effects are similar. Federal systems, more so than unitary systems, are able to both accommodate regional needs and different groups of the electorate (Elazar, 2016). Having both regional and national governments operating in their own spheres of influence likely results in greater trust among the citizens. The electoral system has less obvious effects on trust than these systems of government considered. Majoritarian systems typically involve less political parties than do proportional systems, allowing a smaller range of political opinions through to government. Additionally, trust effects produced by either system will have to do with whether or not the individual citizen voted for the ruling party/coalition or for the losing party/coalition. As Anderson & Guillory (1997) find,

Losers in systems that are more consensual [proportional] display higher levels of satisfaction with the way democracy works than do losers in systems with majoritarian characteristics... conversely, winners tend to be more satisfied with democracy the more a country's political institutions approximate pure majoritarian government (p. 66).

There are thus no hypothesized effects on how electoral systems will impact overall levels of trust. The last variable considered, regime type, is represented by the EIU's Democracy Index. This index is constructed from electoral process and pluralism, civil liberties, the functioning of government, political participation, and political culture. Based on these collective scores, countries are ranked and categorized as either authoritarian (0 - 4), hybrid (4.01 - 6), flawed democracy (6.01 - 8), or full democracy (8.01 - 10). Only countries that are considered either flawed or full democracies are compared in this study, as evaluations of institutional trust are evaluated differently between authoritarian and democratic governments. It is hypothesized that the more democratic a country is (represented by a higher EIU score), the higher levels across different forms of trust will be, as the government is more easily held accountable through the democratic process.

The regression results are found below in Table F. Social trust, regulative institutional trust, and governmental institutional trust are run separating with the same variables throughout. EIU score is found to be positive and significant in determining social and regulative institutional trust; presidential system is found to be negative and significant in determining social and regulative institutional trust;

proportional system is found to be negative and significant in determining all forms of trust.

Interestingly, the adjusted R-squared varies substantially across the three models; the regression model explains 84%, 43% and 12% of the variation in social, regulative institutional, and governmental institutional trust, respectively. That the same regression model explains varied percentages of the variance across these forms of trust indicates that these forms are notably different. It likely indicates the need for the inclusion of more explanatory and control variables as well, though this would have been difficult to do given the relatively small sample size.

Table F (standard errors in parentheses)

	SOCIAL	regulative	GOVERNMENTAL
EIU_SCORE	<b>0.108***</b> (0.012)	<b>0.041*</b> (0.025)	-0.027 (-0.023)
PRESIDENTIAL	<b>-0.062***</b> (-0.022)	<b>-0.095**</b> (-0.044)	-0.037 (-0.04)
UNITARY	-0.005 (-0.02)	0.011 (0.04)	-0.013 (-0.037)
PROPORTIONAL	<b>-0.090***</b> (-0.024)	<b>-0.122***</b> (-0.048)	<b>-0.103**</b> (-0.044)
Constant	<b>-0.500***</b> (-0.098)	0.298 (0.199)	<b>0.554***</b> (0.182)
Observations	44	43	44
Adjusted R2	0.84	0.434	0.115
F Statistic	57.350*** (df = 4; 39)	9.046*** (df = 4; 38)	2.397* (df = 4; 39)

Note: \*Significant at  $\alpha = 0.10$  ; \*\*Significant at  $\alpha = 0.05$  ; \*\*\*Significant at  $\alpha = 0.01$ .

There are a number of interesting takeaways from the results of the regression. First, the fact that over the 3 models, social trust is the best predicted

by the regression supports institutional approach theory from which this research follows. These findings support the notion that the government system promotes social trust (Bratspies, 2009). Such findings are not altogether novel; Oskarsson (2010) finds that government performance measures have a large effect on people with lower social trust (pp. 423-443). Either these findings support that it is the actual *system* of government that promotes social trust or that the specific government systems found to be positive and significant inherently promote sound government performance.

Looking across the models, there are a key number of variables that are statistically significant. As represented by the positive and significant relationship between EIU Score and social and regulative institutional trust, it can be concluded that democracy promotes greater levels of these forms of trust. Indeed, a 1 point increase on the EIU score results in a 10% increase in social trust and a 0.5% increase in regulative institutional trust. It appears that democracy and trust go hand-in-hand; trust, to quote Van der Meer (2010), is considered to “be the cornerstone of modern-day democracy” (p. 517).

That presidential systems are negative and significantly related to both social and regulative institutional trust and that proportional electoral systems relate similarly to all 3 models is interesting. This indicates that some semblance of concession, cohesion, and unity promote trust. Presidential systems often result in gridlock, as opposing parties control the executive and legislative branches (Moe &

Caldwell, 1994). Such realities produce conflicting agendas that make government policy difficult to follow. Parliamentary systems, where the executive and legislature are controlled by the same party, results in clearer policy for both institutions under the government and for the citizenry at large. Similarly, proportional electoral systems allow for many political opinions to be represented in government, making it difficult for citizens to agree definitively on any given platform. Furthermore, policy outcomes (whether positive or negative) under proportional systems are difficult to attribute to a single party (Criado & Herreros, 2007). Majoritarian systems can therefore be less confusing to citizens and easier to trust, owing to clearer divisions between parties and regimes.

## **Conclusions and Synthesis**

In considering the ways citizens relate to their governments, trust is an important metric to understand. This analysis evaluates how different forms of trust relate to each other and if overarching government systems determine their values. Following institutional approach theory, we hypothesize that the overarching systems of government relate directly to different forms of trust. The results of multivariate regression analyses determining social and institutional trust support this hypothesis; how democratic a country is, whether a country is presidential or parliamentary, and whether the election system is majoritarian or proportional all have effects on varying forms of trust. Such findings support the

notion that overarching systems have impacts on levels of trust. Systems which are more democratic and allow for more unity and cohesion – majoritarian and parliamentary – relate positively with trust levels.

Through simple f-tests, we find that there is a marked difference between regulative institutions and governmental institutions. Furthermore, the former captures much higher levels of trust than the latter. This indicates the need for greater competency, reliability, and accountability in governmental institutions to improve levels of trust. Having higher levels of trust in government is important for the implementation of policies and cooperative compliance; as Anderson & Tverdova (2003) explain, “distrust of government may be detrimental to the establishment and survival of democratic life in the long run” (p. 92). Without trust, democratic governments may lose legitimacy and faith in democratic principles are eroded. Therefore, trust is an important element to the survival of democracy around the world.

Although there was no indication that levels of any form of trust were declining across the 16 countries studied, this may be a result of having such a small and heterogenous group of countries in the sample. Future studies should take into account different regional and economic realities of countries studied. For instance, is trust declining more in post-industrial, established democracies than in industrial, newly established democracies? Is there a difference in trust between

former colonizer countries and colonized countries? These investigations will allow a more robust analysis into any actual declines of trust occurring.

Alongside previous research, this paper reaffirms the importance of trust to the legitimacy of governments and to democracy. Understanding the determinants of various forms of trust is necessary to reinvigorate trust in government the world over.

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