

# **Why do(n't) we trust in Government?**

An empirical investigation of four origins

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## Abstract

Multiple scholars highlighted the importance of trust in politics as a key indicator of political legitimacy and stability. Political trust rests upon individual expectations on the performance of the government and its ability and willingness to solve relevant political issues (Barber 1983). Based on this definition we argue that trust in politics is engendered by four main causes: (1) personal experiences with regard to political expectations that were fulfilled and/or disappointed in the past, (2) individual evaluations of politicians; according to the personalization thesis of politics, individual political actors are increasingly put above political parties, programs, and policies (van Aelst, Sheaffer, & Stanyer, 2012). An assessment of the personal aptitude of politicians based on traits such as intelligence, leadership, honesty, integrity, and technical competence is likely to influence people's trust in government (Hellweg et al., 1989; Miller et al., 1986). (3) Individual evaluations of political processes; Perceiving political processes to be fair, effective, transparent and/or responsive will most probably also shape people's expectations regarding the ability of the government to solve important political issues. (4) External factors that limit the capability of the government to make political decisions; if citizens believe that the government's political power is limited due the influences of external entities such as other countries, economic actors (e.g. companies, lobbying) or supra-national institutions (e.g. European Union, International Monetary Fund), we assume that they will adjust their expectations towards the government accordingly. This paper investigates how these different trust reasons impact people's trust in government. In order to test our research question, we conducted an online survey in Germany (N=1000) and analyzed the data using OLS regression models. Results confirm that all four input factors affect political trust, but to different degrees and in different directions. We find strong support for the personalization hypothesis, since the evaluation of politician exerts the strongest influence trust in government. Remarkably, perceived embeddedness of political institutions and constraints for decision making strengthen political trust instead of having a negative impact.

## **Introduction**

Although some scholars appreciate the ongoing decline in political trust as an indication of healthy skepticism and a vigilant citizenry (Marien & Hooghe, 2011), the vast majority of authors from political science and public opinion research highlight the detrimental effects of the eroding levels of political trust. The dominant view in the debate claims that political distrust leads to decreasing voter turnout (Grönlund & Setälä, 2007) and growing support for populist parties (Billiet & De Witte, 1995; Pauwels, 2011). Consequently, the decrease of political trust in the U.S. as well as in most western democracies (Hetherington, 2005; Torcal, 2014) is a matter of serious concern among both scholars and political elites. Against this background the following question arises: How can trust in politics be build up, strengthened or at least maintained on the current level?

The literature dealing with this question is dominated by two different approaches, which Mishler and Rose (2001) label as ‘cultural‘ and ‘institutional‘ theories. On the one hand trust appears to be a result of daily experiences in the early stages of life. During the socialization process people internalize those norms and values that are viewed as effective and legitimate in their respective peer groups. Personality structure as well as deeply-rooted long-lasting social attitudes evolve from this process. Experiences with (more or less) cooperative behavior and social responsibility of other people are of special importance. Ideally, those experiences will lead to social trust, which is the belief that most other people are essentially well-meaning and can be relied upon. Political trust, then, is nothing else than a transfer of this generalized disposition to political institutions and elites. In other words, political trust originates outside the political system. Rather it is a result of what is called the ‘civic culture‘ of a society (Almond & Verba, 1963; Inglehart, 1997; Putnam, 1993; Schoon & Scheng, 2011; Hooghe, Dassonneville, & Marien, 2015). On the other hand, institutional theories argue that political trust rests upon evidence-based evaluations about the performance

of political institutions. The notion of institutional performance basically refers to the outcome of political decision making. Accordingly, if ordinary citizens come to know that politics has a positive impact on their personal lives (e.g. by resolving urgent problems), it will strengthen their trust in politics. On the contrary, if people feel that they themselves do not benefit from government policies at all, this perception will result in frustration and distrust (Coleman, 1994; Dasgupta, 1988; Hetherington, 1998; Hardin, 2006). Political communication research has pointed at the role of the media (both, traditional news media and online media) in the process of building trust and distrust in politics. Here again two approaches dominate the field (Avery, 2009), which fit quite nicely into the dichotomy of cultural and institutional theories of trust building. On the one hand, it is argued that the news media tend to negative coverage about politics portraying political elites as being driven by hidden agendas and governmental policies as mostly failing to solve societal problems. This should lead to political cynicism and distrust, especially among less politically sophisticated parts of the population (Robinson 1976; Capella & Jamieson, 1997; Mutz & Reeves 2005). The so-called media-malaise hypothesis might be seen as an institutional theory of trust-building in which the media serve as the main source of evaluative beliefs about the performance of political institutions. The counter-argument put forth by Pippa Norris (2000) states that those who - based on a minimum amount of political interest - follow the news will further strengthen their interest in politics, which will lead them to use even more media sources for political information. Ultimately, this will make them politically more knowledgeable, strengthen their internal political efficiency, which in turn results in more political participation and finally – as result of a so-called ‘virtuous circle’ – an increase in political trust. In this model trust is not influenced by specific media content, but by other democratic attitudes and dispositions that come with media use. It can therefore be seen as a cultural theory of trust-building.

The present paper will contribute to the reasoning on the origins of political trust in modern democracies. Building on an expectation-based and output-oriented concept of political trust, we aim at identifying four influential determinants of political trust, some of which are neglected in the above mentioned literature. Our main argument states that all kinds of cognitions, information, perceptions and experiences, that might be used by ordinary people to develop and maintain outcome expectations of politics, are by definition origins of political trust.

### **What is trust?**

We start with a brief review of the sociological literature on trust. Despite different conceptualizations, most scholars agree on five basic elements which constitute a trust relation between a trustor and a trustee. First, trust enables social action in the face of uncertainty. It allows people to make decisions even though they lack information about the effective consequences of their actions (Coleman, 1994). In this sense, even basic everyday actions such as taking a taxi require a minimum amount of trust because one can never be sure in advance whether the taxi driver will reach the destination (Barber, 1983). Accordingly, Luhmann (1979) argues that trust reduces complexity within social systems (e.g. the political system, the economic system) because it increases the ability for social action by eliminating options. Second, following from this reasoning, ‘trust is only demanded where there is ignorance’ (Giddens, 1990), since ignorance is the basis of uncertainty. More precisely, Simmel (1950, p. 318) describes trust as “intermediate between knowledge and ignorance”. If one is in possession of full knowledge, one would not need to trust (but rather to calculate); in the absence of any knowledge, one would not be able to trust (see also Möllering, 2001). Third, trust is always concerned with the future. A person who trusts acts as if a particular future could be taken for granted by building up expectations (Luhmann, 1979). Barber (1983, p. 8) refers to “expectations that social actors have of one another” as the core element of any

trust relationship. Due to the "time lag" (Coleman, 1994, p. 98), trust alludes to future actions and is based on knowledge about past actions (Luhmann, 1979). Fourth, trust always entails risk because the trustee can disappoint the trustor's expectations (Coleman, 1994). Consequently, Luhmann (1979) refers to trust as a risky investment under conditions of uncertainty. Fifth, authors such as Giddens (1990), Luhmann (1979) and Seligman (1997) distinguish between trust in people and trust in abstract systems. Trust in people "is built upon mutuality of response and involvement [...]. Trust in abstract systems provides for the security of day-to-day reliability, but by its very nature cannot supply either the mutuality or intimacy which personal trust relations offer" (Giddens, 1990, p. 114).

### **What is trust in politics?**

The virtue of this approach is that it suggests drawing a clear-cut distinction between the reference of trust (In what do I trust?) and the reasons for having trust (Why do I trust?). This differentiation might help to disentangle some conceptual confusion in the literature and - by doing so - stipulate new ideas about relevant determinants of trust. Trust essentially refers to the expected results of future action from a trustee, e.g. pain relief or even healing from a doctor. Qualities of the doctor such as his/her competence or outer appearance, might serve as a reasons to trust. Saying that one trusts the doctor is only a linguistic simplification for a more complex interrelation between the reference of trust and the reasons to trust. This applies even though not all expectations might always be fully clear in the trustor's mind. Regarding politics it is reasonable to assume that most political expectations of an uncertain future remain implicit and only come to mind if one feels that trust has been betrayed. Nevertheless, political trust is - just like any form of trust - based on assumptions about the future which allow to behave in a certain way at present, namely making risky investments and - by doing so - being vulnerable. More precisely, political trust enables citizens to delegate political power to individual political actors whom they do not know personally

(‘sovereignty of the people’). By actively supporting or at least accepting an incumbent government, citizens entrust authority over state affairs and even parts of their income (tax money) to a rather small group of politicians without being able to effectively assess their job capability in advance (Levi & Stoker, 2000). In order for citizens to do so, not only legal compulsion but also political trust is paramount. This social mechanism enables them to make this risky investment in an uncertain future because citizens cannot be sure that the entrusted resources, such as political power and money, will be used responsibly. Citizens are aware that democratic decision-making is highly contingent upon various conditions and that political promises are often broken after elections. Consequently, citizens base their political actions on “evaluations of whether or not political authorities and institutions are performing in accordance with normative expectations held by the public” (Miller & Listhaug, 1990, p. 358). When people trust in politics they expect to benefit from specific political outcomes such as a life lived in freedom, peace, economic wealth, social welfare or a healthy natural environment. Based on this argument we propose a conceptualization that regards individual expectations of the outcomes of political decision making as the core of political trust (Citrin & Muste, 1999; Listhaug, 1995). We define trust in government therefore as general expectations that the national government will produce favorable outcomes.

### **On the origins of expectations in government policies**

The argument introduced in the previous section calls for translating the fundamental question of how political trust is generated into the question of how people form expectations about future government actions. Four answers immediately come into mind.

We start with the obvious: If expectations of future government policies (and their outcomes) constitute the core of political trust, it is plausible to assume that settled memories of the satisfaction or disappointment of previously held expectations are one major origin of political trust. For instance, if one has expected that the incumbent government will reduce

income taxes (e.g. because a party or candidate has promised to do so during the election campaign) but later witnesses a rise in income taxes or no changes in tax policies at all, this experience will have consequences for his or her further expectations of government policies; probably not only for tax policies. As Luhmann puts it, trust overstates available information on the past to imagine a future and act as if this imagination is the only possible option. Accordingly, such information on the past that might either stem from direct experiences or from other information sources (e.g. the news media), will be generalized and therefore presumably affect the confidence in one's own political expectations, regardless of which policy fields or political institutions might be involved. Thus, the first assumption states:

H1: Available experience with disappointed or satisfied expectations of government policies are associated with trust in government.

If trust conceptionally refers to the output-side of politics one might argue that perceived characteristics of the input-structure of politics might be a reason for having trust. Institutional theories on trust-building have emphasized that not only output-performance but also the "political character" of institutions, e.g. the absence of corruption and their openness to the demands of ordinary citizens, might matter, especially in new democracies (Mishler & Rose, 2001, p 36). The literature on political process preferences has convincingly demonstrated that people in established democracies do also care about process qualities of political institutions and develop preferences accordingly. Moreover, those process preferences are a relevant predictor of citizens' confidence in political institutions (Weatherford, 1992; Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2001, 2002). Preferences are conceptualized as comparative evaluations of objects that may be observable or unobservable in their nature (Druckman & Lupia, 2000). Thus, political process preferences refer to the comparative evaluation of different aspects of political decision making, such as the efficiency of political processes or the procedural fairness. Political support stems from the perception that



institutions function according to preferred norms and values. The second hypothesis expands this general idea to the building of political trust by stating that expectations in future policy outcomes are shaped by evaluative beliefs about the 'political quality' of political institutions:

H2: Advantageous evaluations of the political quality of institutions and the political process have a positive impact on trust in government.

The third assumption is derived from the so called personalization hypothesis. The literature on personalization states that besides policies and institutions beliefs about the political personnel are increasingly influential for political attitudes and behavior of ordinary citizens (Wattenberg 1991; Poguntke & Webb 2005; Karvonen 2010). Several causes are identified in the literature, most prominently the widespread individualization of social life, the erosion of traditional cleavage politics, decreasing partisan alignment within the electorate, and last but not least the dominant structure of mediated political communication (Garzia 2011). Whatever the most crucial cause for personalization might be, the consequence of personalized politics is described quite similar by most authors: "individual political actors have become more prominent at the expense of parties and collective identities" (Karvonen, 2010, p. 4). Accordingly, the process of impression formation by which voters develop and maintain the image of an individual political actor (or ,the leading politicians') has become a main object of investigation in personalization research. The literature on this topic has shown that (a) voters refer to personality traits when evaluating the image of politicians and (b) only a limited number of rather broad categories are used when assessing candidates or elected officials (Pancer, Brown, & Barr, 1999). Among the most frequently mentioned traits are 'competence', 'leadership appeal', 'integrity', 'reliability', and 'trustworthiness' (integrity & honesty) (Miller & Miller 1976; Miller et al. 1986; Kinder 1986). When it comes to the consequences of this personalization trend, the implications for voting behavior are the most prominent field of research. But here again the argument can be expanded. If voters evaluate

parties and programmes by simply referring to the images of candidates and political leaders, one can also assume that those images work as a general political prime and bears consequences beyond the electoral process. In line with this argument our third assumption states that citizens will refer to the image of leading politicians when building expectations of future policies:

H3: Advantageous evaluations of the qualities of politicians have a positive impact on trust in government.

Finally, we make a fairly straight-forward argument about the role of perceived political autonomy. We assume that all expectations of beneficial outcomes will rest upon the perception that the government is able to act freely according to its own plans and strategies. In other words, if people think that the government's ability to act on urgent problems is constrained by exogenous circumstances, they will lower their expectations. Thus, the presumed existence of external factors that limit the capability of the government to make political decisions will result in a decrease of political trust. If citizens believe that the government's political power is limited due the influences of external entities such as other countries, economic actors (e.g. companies, lobbying) or supra-national institutions (e.g. European Union, International Monetary Fund), we assume that they will adjust their expectations towards the government accordingly.

H4: Perceived constraints on government autonomy have a negative impact on trust in government.

## **Method & Data**

### *Survey*

To examine the aforementioned relationships, we used cross-sectional data which were collected in an online survey among German adults. The participants of this survey were recruited via the market research company respondi AG. Using a multi-channel method recruiting on- and offline their ISO certified access-panel contains about 100.000 potential participants (Respondi, 2016). An invitation to take part in the survey was sent out via e-mail. The average interview length was 14 minutes.

### *Fieldwork & Sample*

Within a time period of 9 days in August of 2016 we gathered 1329 completed questionnaires. First, we cleaned the data set with respect to the time respondents needed to complete the questionnaire. Those who answered all questions in fewer than five minutes were excluded from the analyses, as extensive pretesting suggested that it is highly unlikely that they answered the questions truthfully. Second, we identified those respondents who simply clicked through the item-batteries. Applying these filtering processes a total of 1115 respondents were used for the statistical analyses. According to the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) standards, our study had a fairly good response rate of 0.604 (Response Rate 2, AAPOR, 2016). Since we conducted an online survey, a quota system was applied so that our sample matches the German Internet population in terms of age ( $M = 44.9$  compared to  $M = 43.7$ ), gender (47.1% women compared to 47.6 %), and education (37.9% A-levels compared to 37.1%) (Frees & Koch, 2015; GLES, 2015).

### *Measures*

For the purpose of this study we constructed four independent variables, one dependent variable, and several control variables.

*Trust in Government (Dependent Variable).* As argued above, trust in government is a function of one's expectations of the ability of the national government to provide favourable outcomes. Accordingly, we measured trust in government using a two-step procedure. First,

we asked respondents to rate eleven different policy outcomes in terms of their favourability on a 7 point Likert scale: (1) preserve peace in Europe and the world (M = 6.57, SD = 1.00), (2) protect jobs and economic wealth (M = 6.21, SD = 1.09), (3) ensure internal security and public order (M = 6.40, SD = 1.01), (4) protect environment and nature (M = 6.04, SD = 1.22), (5) ensure individual freedom (M = 5.94, SD = 1.19), (6) reduce social inequalities (M = 5.99, SD = 1.25), (7) provide sufficient pensions (M = 6.24, SD = 1.13), (8) integrate migrants in the German society (M = 4.79, SD = 1.96), (9) accomplish the energy transition (M = 5.32, SD = 1.54), (10) provide a well-functioning educational system (M = 6.22, SD = 1.06), (11) foster European cohesion (M = 5.07, SD = 1.84). The four items that received an average score lower than 6.0 were not included in the second step of measuring trust in government as they were not commonly considered as ‘highly favourable’. In the second step, we asked respondents about their confidence in their own expectations that the German national government is able to provide the aforementioned policy outcomes (for exact wording see appendix B). Answers were given on a seven-point scale ranging from 1 = ‘not sure at all’ to 7 = ‘very sure’. We used the remaining seven items from the first step to form a mean index reflecting our target variable “trust in the incumbent government” ( $\alpha = .94$ , M = 3.65, SD = 1.46).

*Evaluations of Politicians (Predictor).* To measure respondent’s perceptions of national politicians we formed a consistent mean index with 16 items ( $\alpha = .91$ ) which are commonly used to in the German Longitudinal Election Study (GLES) consisting of seven sub-dimensions: autonomy (two items), non-partisanship (two items), leadership abilities (three items), integrity (three items), benevolence (two items), responsiveness (two items), likeability (two items) (for exact wording see appendix B). Answers were given on a seven-point scale from 1 = ‘totally disagree’ to 7 = ‘totally agree’ (M = 2.91, SD = 1.06).

*Evaluations of the Political Process (Predictor).* The literature identifies four main criteria to evaluate political processes: (1) transparency (Klingemann & Fuchs, 1995), (2) responsiveness (Lane, 1988); (3) efficiency (Floss, 2008); and (4) procedural justice (Lind & Tyler, 1988). We measured evaluations of the political process based on those four sub-dimensions. To gauge transparency we used three items. Responsiveness was measured with the three-item measure suggested by (Esaiasson, Kölln, & Turper, 2015). For efficiency we constructed three items. To gauge procedural justice we used Besley's (2010) two-item measure which we slightly adapted to the research topic (for exact wording see table 1 in the appendix). Respondents were asked to either agree or disagree with each statement on a seven-point scale ranging from 1 = 'strongly disagree' to 7 = 'strongly agree' (M = 2.79, SD = 1.03). After reversing some items, we constructed a consistent mean index with all eleven items ( $\alpha = .84$ ).

*Previous Experiences (Predictor).* We used two simple questions to construct a straight-forward measure of prior experience with one's own expectations towards the government. The first one reflects perceived gratifications by the national government in recent years: "If you try to remember what happened in former years, how often did you experience that your demands for specific government policies were fulfilled? Please, do not only refer to the present government but also to previous governments". A similar question was used to measure the perceived disappointment about government policies: "If you try to remember what happened in former years, how often did you experience that your demands for specific government policies were disappointed? Please, do not only refer to the present government but although to previous governments". Answers were given on a 7-point Likert scale running from 1 = 'very seldom' to 7 = 'very often'. We subtracted perceived gratifications from perceived disappointment to build a single indicator of previous

experiences with government policies running from  $-6 =$  'fully satisfying' to  $+6 =$  'fully disappointing' ( $M = 2.45$ ;  $SD = 2.62$ ).

*Constraints for Government (Predictor).* To measure the perceived dependency of government policies on different institutions and circumstances we constructed a reasonably reliable 'constraint scale' ( $\alpha = .73$ ) consisting of seven items. The measurement reflects the respondent's perceptions of how strongly government action is restricted by the state of the national economy and the international markets (two items), the current state of science and technology (two items), other countries and international regimes, e.g. the EU (two items), the jurisdiction (single item). All items were formulated as statements (e.g. "In Germany, lawyers and courts determine what the government can do") and participants were asked to agree or disagree on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 = 'strongly disagree' to 7 = 'strongly agree' (for exact wording of all items see appendix B). Accordingly, the constraint scale runs from 1 (=full autonomy) to 7 (=fully constrained). The higher respondents score, the more they perceive the government as being limited by exogenous forces ( $M = 4.2$ ;  $SD = 1.1$ ).

*Control variables.* According to the literature trust in government is affected by political and social predispositions such as political interests, satisfaction with democracy, perception of the economy, support for the governing parties, and social trust (Hetherington & Rudolph, 2008; Marien, 2011; Meer & Dekker, 2011; Zmerli & Newton, 2008). Three items addressed the respondents' interest in German, European and non-European international political affairs ( $\alpha = 0.92$ ,  $M = 4.61$ ,  $SD = 1.62$ ), measured on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 'no interest at all' to 7 'strong interest'. People's satisfaction with democracy ( $M = 4.06$ ,  $SD = 1.80$ , Likert scale ranging from 1 'very unsatisfied' to 7 'very satisfied'), their perception of the current state of the economy ( $M = 4.63$ ,  $SD = 1.58$ , Likert scale ranging from 1 'very bad' to 7 'very good'), and their support for one of two coalition parties currently building the national government in Germany (42% 'voted for one of the governing

parties’) were all assessed with single-item questions. Three items which were previously used in other studies addressed social trust ( $\alpha = 0.73$ ,  $M = 4.15$ ,  $SD = 1.29$ ), measured on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = ‘totally disagree’ to 7 = ‘totally agree’. We further assessed sociodemographic variables (gender, age, education, income) with single-item questions.

## Results

To test our assumptions about the presumed origins of (not) trusting politics we ran several multivariate OLS-Regression models using trust in government as the dependent variable. The first hierarchical regression includes all covariates to establish a baseline model for predicting trust in government (see Model 1, Table 1).

[Table 1 about here]

The baseline model explains roughly 28% of the variance in our target variable. Two predictors exert a particularly strong influence on trust, namely satisfaction with democracy and the perceived well-being of the national economy. Both effects have been repeatedly found in survey studies on political trust. The more people are satisfied with the functioning of their political system, the more they will trust in the incumbent government. The better people perceive the national economic performance, the stronger their trust the government will be. In contrast to the popular media-malaise hypothesis, our data reveal a positive effect of news-consumption of German TV on trust in government. As might be expected, supporting a governing party is positively related to trust in the incumbent government, although the effect is rather small. Remarkably, – and in contrast to the ‘virtuous circle’-hypothesis - political interest and trust are negatively correlated. What might come as a surprise in the first instance, can be explained when referring to the societal function of trust. As argued above, trust is a social resource that enables a trustor to behave in a way that would

not be probable without having trust. In the case of politics, trust in government allows for political ignorance, in the first place. Assuming people behave rational they will rather trust or control (engage in politics). Why should people take the risk of trusting politics if it does not save them from taking care or even taking part? Seen from this perspective, being trustful and engaged at the same time might appear as a waste of resources, at least for some. According to our data, to substitute interest by trust – and vice versa – seems to be quite widespread within the German population.

In a second step, we included the four main reasons for having trust in government which were derived from our reasoning about the nature of political trust. All four variables exert a moderate and significant effect on the target variable. The adjusted  $R^2$  rises from .28 to .53 with a highly significant change of 25% additionally explained variance, making for a fairly good overall model fit (see model 2, Table 1). Evaluative beliefs about the skills and personality traits of leading politicians are the single most important predictor in the model. This result indicates, that the better the popular image of the political class is, the stronger trust in government will be. Almost as important as the evaluations of politicians are the personal experiences with the government's responses to the demands and expectations previously held by the population. Given the fact that most people more often feel disappointed than satisfied with government actions, previous experiences have a substantial negative effect on trust in government. Evaluative beliefs about the functioning and qualities of political institutions are also predictive for higher levels of political trust. Since the model controls for 'satisfaction with democracy', this finding points to the importance of specific attributes (such as procedural fairness, responsiveness) for the building and diminishment of trust in politics. Finally, in contrast to our assumption, the perception of the incumbent government as being dependent on other forces and institutions is positively related to trust in



government. In other words, perceived government autonomy brings about a decrease in trust, while perceived embeddedness results in higher levels of trust.

To advance the analysis one step further we calculated another group of OLS regression models. The models use specific measures for each sub-dimension of our four complex predictors. Again, all covariates were entered as controls in each of the four models.

[Table 2 about here]

Regarding evaluative beliefs about the leading politicians, perceived independency from powerful elites is the most important predictor of trust in government. In addition, perceived responsiveness of politicians and their ability to lead also exert a moderate positive influence on trust. All three indicators refer to the role-performance of politicians, whereas the 'human factor' (e.g. likeability, humanity) seems to be of minor importance for trust. Overall, evaluative beliefs about politicians account for nearly 20% of the variance in the dependent variable.

The same applies for the 'institutional model', in which 20% of the variance in the target variable is explained by only four institutional qualities. In line with the aforementioned finding, the perceived responsiveness of political institutions to the demands and preferences of people is the most important predictor for having trust in government. Furthermore, the procedural fairness of political institutions is positively correlated to political trust, although the effect is substantially smaller. Remarkably, transparency and efficiency of institutions are not significantly related to political trust according to our data.

Coming to personal experiences with political expectations, results are as much clear-cut as striking. Both components, previous gratifications and previous disappointments, exert a significant effect on political trust in a way that disappointed demands reduce trust while

satisfied expectations strengthen trust. Notably, the positive effect of perceived gratification is four times as strong as the negative influence of disappointment on political trust.

Finally, the overall effect of four different sub-dimensions of our ‘constraint-scale’ is weak (4,5% additional variance explained compared to the baseline model) but nonetheless instructive. In contrast to our hypothesis, a perceived lack of political autonomy (the belief that politics is determined by exogenous forces) does not decrease the level of trust, but rather strengthen it. The detailed analysis of sub-dimensions reveals, that this is mainly due to the dependency of politics on the legal system and (to a lesser degree) on the state of the national economy. In other words, knowing or believing that the government is monitored by independent courts and the rule of law, leads to higher expectations in the outcome-quality of politics - and thus to higher levels of trust. The same applies to the belief that government actions are oriented towards the actual economic conditions instead of overstressing the economy.

### **Preliminary Conclusions**

In this study, political trust is conceptualized as the confidence in one’s own expectations about the future performance of the incumbent government. Accordingly, we measured political trust as the perceived ability of the government to deliver favorable outcomes. Starting from this assumption we argue that all kinds of cognitions, information, perceptions and experiences that citizens might use to develop and maintain outcome expectations are by definition origins of political trust. We introduced four such origins (without claiming that this list is by any means exhaustive), namely previous experiences with government policies, evaluative beliefs about the leading politicians, evaluative beliefs about procedures and institutions, and perceived constraints to government action. The following findings are particularly important:

- Trust in government is mainly mediated by the image of the ‘classe politique’; this finding makes a strong argument for the personalization hypothesis. If we presume that the popular views of political elites are still strongly shaped by the media, it although points to the ongoing importance of mediated political communication. Media portrayals of independent, responsive and strong political leaders with strengthen trust in government – and vice versa.
- Perceived responsiveness – of individual politicians and political institutions – is a particularly strong driver of political trust. This finding is underpinned by the influence of ‘procedural fairness’ perceptions in the institutional model, because procedural fairness essentially refers to the belief that individuals have a reasonable voice in a decision-making process, making it quite similar to concepts like external efficacy and perceived responsiveness.
- The effect of previous experiences with outcome expectations raises the question of how citizens do actually evaluate whether or not their expectancy was justified? Obviously this is not an easy thing to do. For example, one might rely on the output of the political process (say a special bill) without estimating – or even without being able to estimate – the outcome, that is, whether or not the act does really affect the original problem. One might also think that a problem is solved, simply because the media don’t report on it anymore. In any event, further research is needed to entangle how individuals make this kind of judgements.

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## Appendix A: Regression Analysis

Table 1: Summary of OLS-Regression Analyses for Variables Predicting Trust in Government

Variable	Model 1			Model 2		
	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β
Nationality (German)	-,290	,194	-,039	-,226	,156	-,031
Sex (Male)	,163	,078	,057*	,201	,063	,070**
Education	,153	,082	,053	,099	,066	,034
Age	-,003	,003	-,036	,004	,002	,039
Income	-,015	,014	-,030	-,006	,011	-,012
Political Interest	-,109	,028	-,119***	-,076	,022	-,083**
TV-News Use	,109	,023	,138***	,070	,019	,088***
Satisfaction with Democracy	,261	,025	,331	,060	,022	,076**
State of Economy	,181	,029	,195***	,110	,024	,119***
Support Governing Party	,274	,082	,096**	,087	,066	,030
Social Trust	,043	,032	,039	-,037	,026	-,033
Previous Experience				-,123	,016	-,227***
Politicians				,371	,047	,279***
Institutions				,211	,045	,152***
Constraints				,186	,029	,139***
N		1.067			1.067	
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>		.277 ***			.533 ***	
F for change in R <sup>2</sup>		38,18 ***			145,78 ***	

Note: Dependent variable (trust in government) measures the confidence in one's own expectations of government performance in seven policy domains (1 = *not at all confident to get what I want*; 7 = *very much confident to get what I want*);

\*p < 0.05; \*\* p < 0.01; \*\*\* p < 0.001



Table 2: Importance of Subdimensions

Variable	Politicians			Constraints			Institutions			Experience		
	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β
Independency	,137	,030	,128***									
Responsivness	,120	,037	,122**									
Leadership Appeal	,120	,039	,118**									
Likeability	,117	,040	,116**									
Benevolence	,081	,029	,085**									
Integrity	,096	,042	,082*									
Nonpartisanship	,014	,031	,012									
Jurisdiction				,152	,025	,182***						
Economy & Markets				,055	,024	,065*						
Science & Technology				,025	,024	,031						
International Relations				-,010	,023	-,012						
Responsivness							,445	,029	,443***			
Procedural Justice							,136	,026	,144***			
Transparancy							,016	,033	,014			
Efficiency							,026	,030	,023			
Satisfaction/Fulfillment										,368	,025	,417***
Disappointment										-,097	,028	-,097***
N		1.111			1.015			1.106			1.087	
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>		.453***			.312***			.464***			.443***	
R <sup>2</sup> – Change		.199***			.045***			.203***			.161***	
F for change in R <sup>2</sup>		57,63***			16,74***			104,48***			156,54***	

Method: enter; all controls included

\* p < 0.05; \*\* p < 0.01; \*\*\* p < 0.001

## Appendix B: Question Wording

Wording of the questions and items	
<b>Evaluations of Politicians</b>	<i>'If you think of our leading politicians in Berlin, how much do you agree with the following statements?'</i>
Independency1	'Politicians are puppets to big business' (reverse)
Independency2	'Politicians dare to fight people in power'
Nonpartisanship1	'Politicians are able to overcome partisan bias'
Nonpartisanship2	'Politicians only represent the opinion of their party' (reverse)
Leadership appeal1	'Politicians have leadership personalities'
Leadership appeal2	'Politicians to follow up their words with actions'
Leadership appeal3	'Politicians are able to decide quickly and with confidence'
Integrity1	'Politicians are sincere people'
Integrity2	'Politicians are reliable people'
Integrity3	'Politicians only pursue their self-interest' (reverse)
Benevolence1	'Politicians fight for social justice'
Benevolence2	'Politicians are people like you and me'
Responsiveness1	'Politicians are aware of the problems regular citizens are facing'
Responsiveness2	'Politicians consider the opinions of citizens'
Likeability1	'Politicians are likable people'
Likeability2	'Politicians have a positive charisma'
<b>Evaluations of the political Process</b>	<i>'Now we have some questions about your impression of the political system in Germany. How much do you agree with the following statements?'</i>
Transparency1	'Citizens do not know which direction Germany is going because nobody tells them.'
Transparency2	'Citizens do not participate in politics because they lack necessary information.'
Transparency3	'German politics try to keep citizens informed.'
Responsiveness1	'Government and parliament inform themselves about the citizen's wishes.'
Responsiveness2	'Government and parliament try to satisfy the citizen's wishes.'
Responsiveness3	'Government and parliament explain their policies to the citizens.'
Efficiency1	'In politics urgent problems are often procrastinated'
Efficiency2	'Too much time passes between political decisions and their implementation.'
Efficiency3	'Government actions are more expensive than originally calculated.'
Procedural justice1	'The citizen's opinions are represented in political decision-making.'
Procedural justice2	'Before political decisions are made every citizen has a fair chance to voice complaints.'