Trust, Distrust, Confidence, Lack of Confidence: New Evidence of Public Opinion toward Government and Institutions from 2002

Timothy E. Cook
Professor of Mass Communication and Political Science
Manship School of Mass Communication
Louisiana State University
tec@lsu.edu

Paul Gronke
Associate Professor of Political Science
Reed College
paul.gronke@reed.edu

Paper prepared for delivery at the annual meeting of the Southern Political Science Association, Savannah, Georgia, November 2002. We would like to thank the Reilly Center for Media and Politics and the Corbett-Goldhammer Fund at Reed College for partial support of this this research.

Introduction

One of the most famous findings of political science in recent years has been the seemingly inexorable decline in the trust and confidence that Americans have accorded to their political institutions. Whether measured by the trust-in-government measures of the National Election Studies (NES) or the confidence measures in individual institutions of the General Social Survey (GSS), the results were just about the same: high levels of trust and confidence in the late fifties and early sixties with a drop-off to low levels by the end of the seventies, a momentary resurgence in the mid-eighties under the Reagan presidency, and then a further drop to new lows in the nineties (although the GSS data show some recovery in 1998 and 2000)--see Figures 1 and 2.

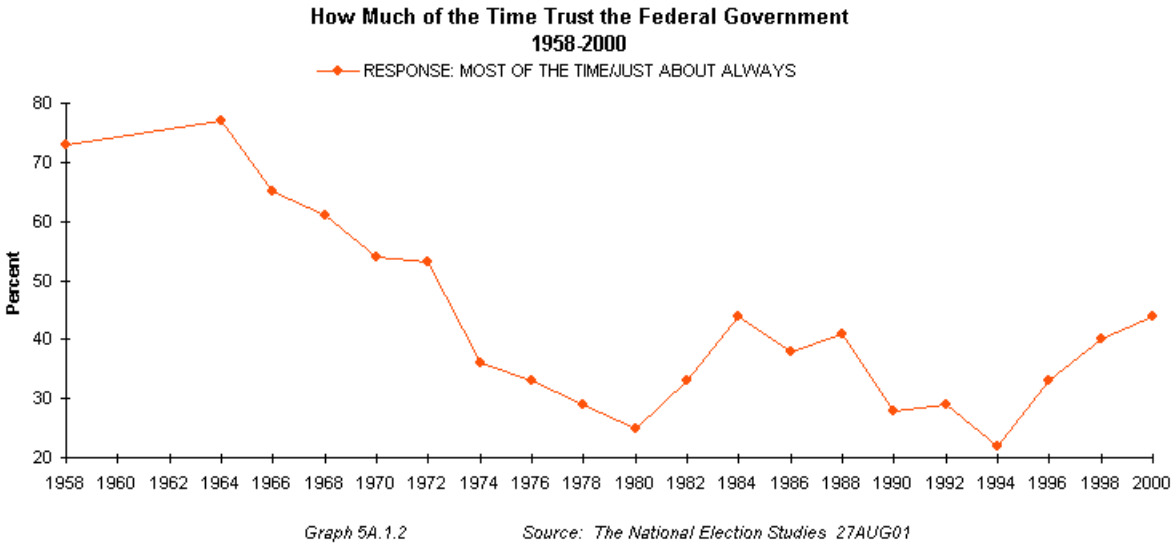
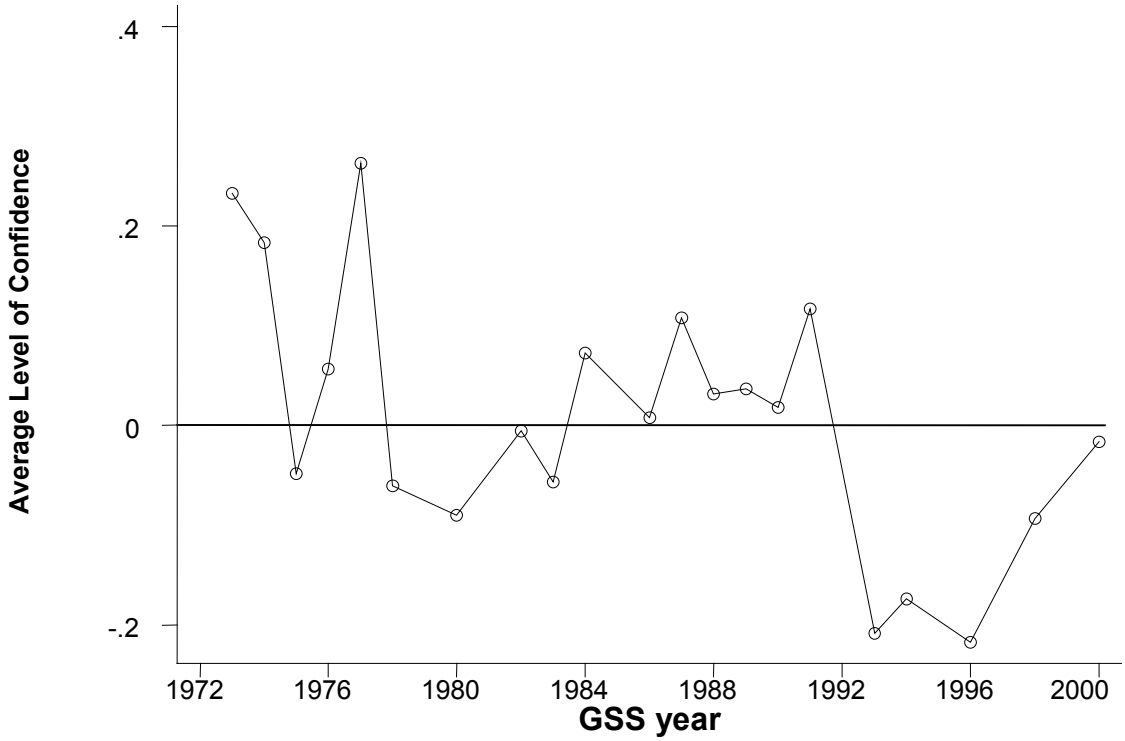


Figure 1 -- Trust-in-government through 2000

Figure Two: Average Level of Generalized Confidence, By Year (GSS Data)



This pattern has produced a great deal of attention over the years. In part, scholars have been attracted to an unusually strong shift in public opinion that renders it a puzzle worthy of solving[1]. In part, trust has been understood as a theoretically crucial way to assess Americans' relationship and satisfaction with their government. More recently, trust in government has gained new life by being shown to be influential, not merely as being caused but as causing a variety of key political behaviors. For instance, lower trust is associated with compliance with the law (Scholz and Lubell 1998), anti-incumbent voting (Hetherington 1999), support for domestic policy liberalism (Chanley, Rudolph and Rahn 2001; although see Hetherington 2002 for the opposite contention), and responses to governmental reforms such as term limits for elected officials (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1995). Similarly, confidence in government affects civic participation

and interpersonal trust, both key elements in the array of attitudes that comprise social capital (Brehm and Rahn 1997), currently a strong research interest in political science.

The conventional wisdom has been that Americans have partaken of a general and severe decline in confidence and trust in governmental and social institutions. Books by political scientists with titles such as *The Malevolent Leaders* (Craig 1993), *Congress as Public Enemy* (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1995), or *Why Americans Hate Politics* (Dionne 1991) suggested the perceived degree of the disaffection. Such dramatic conclusions were not limited to book jackets. Confidence declined across social and political categories, yet social scientists had a hard time finding strong predictors of trust or confidence. This suggested a widely shared Zeitgeist of suspicion and cynicism. Consider the consistent interpretation over three decades:

> *A situation of widespread, basic discontent and political alienation exists in the U.S. today... These data [on political trust] reveal a strong trend of increasing political cynicism for the general population between 1964 and 1970 (Miller 1974a: 952).*
>
> *...the level of political alienation in the United States has increased sharply in the last decade (Wright 1976: 196).*
>
> *Even if there is little behavioral evidence of continuing discontent, opinion polls taken regularly... report that the era of alienation did not end with the close of the Vietnam War. Survey after survey reveals that the sharp increase in negative feelings about the performance of the major institutions ... which first became evident in during the late 1960s, did not reverse during the 1970s and early 1980s... Social scientists analyzing these surveys continue to perceive in them alienation, distrust, lack of confidence, and the attribution of low levels of legitimacy to social and political institutions... If the prolonged loss of confidence in American institutions since 1965 has in fact produced a significant loss of legitimacy, the chances that the country can withstand a future crisis of effectiveness may be much reduced (Lipset and Schneider 1987: 3-5).*
>
> *The evidence to be reviewed in this book... suggests that our traditional* ambivalence *toward politics gave way in the 1960s and 1970s to a deeper and more pervasive* negativism *(Craig 1993: 2; emphasis in original).*
>
> *There is one finding that is seemingly impervious to measurement choices. Regardless of the precise wording of the survey questions, results indicate that between 1965 and 1975 Americans became much less favorable toward*

> *government... The most common public attitude toward government is clearly discontent (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2001: 5).*

Indeed, the high trust from the late fifties and early sixties were then re-interpreted as an upward aberration from an otherwise long history in the United States of mistrust of political authority (e.g., Bennett 2001). Under such circumstances, many scholars concluded, the longstanding -- and continuing -- decline in trust and confidence was unlikely to be reversed.

The conventional wisdom was challenged in the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks. As is now well documented, the inexorable decline in trust in government, and trust in political and social institutions dramatically shifted. Americans appeared to be more trusting of government and more approving of a whole variety of institutions--not just the military and the executive branch, but even traditionally less popular institutions such as Congress and the news media as well.[2]

These results were striking enough that even national newspapers began to pay attention to political science (e.g. Stille 2001). But, as one analysis in the *New York Times* suggested in early November of 2001, while numerous surveys reported that trust in government had increased, nobody knew what it *meant,* let alone whether the trend would continue. Was this a momentary emotional reaction that was bound to subside, as September 11 became further back in people's memories? Would the bounce in trust and confidence in institutions remain for some and erode for others? Or was this a fundamental shift back to the greater connectedness that Americans felt to their government, as some suggest had been the case in the fifties and sixties?

The research we are reporting today was inspired by these questions. In particular, as part of our ongoing project on confidence in political institutions beyond the three branches of government (Cook, Gronke and Rattliff 2000; Cook and Gronke 2001, Gronke and Cook 2002), we had already been struck by how little was fully understood about trust in government and

confidence in political institutions. We were dissatisfied with the almost tautological conclusion--which we ourselves ended up reinforcing in some of our earlier papers--that trust in government and confidence in political and social institutions had fallen over time due to period effects, without being able to specify why those period effects occurred. Although there are many post hoc explanations available, we agree that political scientists should "stop asserting that we all know why trust in government declined in the sixties and seventies when in fact we have no explanation that is compatible with the details of what we know about the decline itself." (Alford 2001: 43).

Trust and confidence have occasioned much confusion for two principal reasons. The first reason is conceptual. As we review below, investigators have not been clear about what exactly they are studying. "Trust" and "confidence" are often used interchangeably. The NES and GSS measures were used to answer the fashionable topics of the time–"cynicism" in the early sixties, "support" and "alienation" in the late sixties through the seventies, more recently a preoccupation with "social capital." Scholars examined diverse concepts that had unclear connections to the measures being used. Above all, the NES and GSS questions embed an implicit assumption about what constitutes trust or confidence, an assumption which we believe is inadequate.

Specifically, we wonder whether a lack of trust should necessarily be equated with distrust, cynicism, or alienation, or reflects simply an unwillingness to prejudge in a way that would give political authorities the benefit of the doubt. We are not convinced that low scores on either the NES trust-in-government measures or the GSS confidence in leaders questions necessarily capture either mistrust or cynicism or alienation or disaffection or estrangement, even though the vast majority of studies of either one are willing to use such terms freely.[3]

Consider the GSS question: “I am going to name some institutions in this country. As far as the people running these institutions are concerned, would you say that you have a great deal of confidence, quite a lot of confidence, only some confidence, or very little in them?” What “very little” measures is open to challenge. Instead of overt cynicism, it could simply reflect a lack of confidence, i.e., a willingness not to give these institutions the benefit of the doubt rather than a strong, abiding suspicion that these institutions are going to treat you badly. As for the trust-in-government measures, we should remember Jack Citrin’s (1974: 975) incisive point from almost three decades ago:

> *...the cynical responses to the CPS political trust items are hardly extreme. To believe that the government wastes "a lot" of money, can be trusted to "do what is right only some of the time," and includes "quite a few" people who are "crooked" or "don't know what they're doing" need not bespeak a deep-seated hostility toward the political system....*

In short, whether or not the decline in trust and confidence is a crisis for American democracy cannot be well answered by either the NES or the GSS measures that are most commonly analyzed. A "low" response ("very little confidence" or "never trust the government do what is right") could mix together one person who is deeply cynical and expecting malicious response with another who is simply skeptical and withholding prejudgment.

The second reason for confusion is methodological. The measures that span the longest time period -- the “trust-in-government” question from the NES which goes back to 1958, and the “confidence in the leaders of institutions” question from the GSS which goes back to 1973, may or may not be asking about the same phenomenon. The five “trust-in-government” questions in the NES have been criticized for their referents to an unclear object (“the government in Washington” is mixed together with “the people running government”) and for focusing on performance (“doing what is right”). In some ways, the “confidence in the leaders of institutions” may be preferable for

being asked about a cornucopia of a variety of institutions (political, social and economic), which shows that the decline in confidence has not been shared equally by all institutions (Cook and Gronke 2001). But in turn, the confidence measure has been faulted in turn for its confusion between leaders and institutions. Moreover, given Lipset and Schneider's (1987) evidence pointing to a more general underlying dimension of confidence in a variety of institutions, one has to wonder just how distinct these measures of different institutions are. Nonetheless, despite these problems, the measures continue to be used--and asked in later surveys--for the simple reason that using them enables us to solve the puzzle of the striking patterns we noted above and allows the investigator to look over the longest span of time.

Disparate investigations have thus used entirely distinct measures. To take a recent overview of the state of the art, the edited volume, *What is it About Government that Americans Dislike?* (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2001), contains a number of articles that try to make sense of these attitudes of trust and confidence. Each is a secondary analysis of previously gathered data. Almost each one measures its variable of interest in a distinct way.[4] It is, of course, productive to see how distinct measures and methods come up with varying or reinforcing results. But how do we assess the situation when different measures taken from different surveys produce different results? Discrepancies can be and have been wished away by claiming that one's chosen measure is in fact peerless, with little evidence beyond assertion for why we should prefer it over another. For instance, right after the first appearance of Lipset and Schneider's *The Confidence Gap* (1983/1987), Arthur Miller (1983) published, in the pages of American Enterprise Institute's bimonthly *Public Opinion*, an analysis of the NES that showed a rebound in political trust in 1982 that Lipset and Schneider's analyses from the GSS had not found. Lipset and Schneider (1983) thundered back that they had found no such result in the GSS. They maintained the superiority of

the confidence measures they borrowed from the GSS by saying that the latter presented an analysis of the quality of leadership in political, social and economic institutions versus the activity of the federal government they claimed was tapped by the NES trust-in-government index. Such claims have an air of disingenuousness about them when delivered after the fact.

To our astonishment, we found that although there are a number of problems with both the NES and the GSS measures, nobody, as far as we can tell, has ever put the measures together in the same survey asking the same respondents and seen how similar the distributions are. Although there are many comparisons of the NES measures among themselves or different ways to look at the GSS questions, the consequences, in other words, of choosing the NES approach over the GSS approach (or vice versa) are murky.

Our research was designed to answer several questions. First of all, we wished to examine trust in government and confidence in political and social institutions six months after the September 11 attacks. We report here on a survey specially designed to answer these questions. Second, in order to deal with the inability of either the NES measures or the GSS measures to distinguish between a lack of trust or a lack of confidence and more overt cynicism, we devised a new measure designed to capture more than high trust to low trust. Our measure of *active distrust* captures more than an unwillingness to trust government to do what is right, but allows respondents to express the expectation that government will *do what is wrong.* Third, ours is the first survey to be able to compare, side by side, NES trust-in-government measures and GSS confidence-in-leaders-of-institutions measures, assess whether or not they are similar or not, and see whether they have different causes and meanings. As a result, we should have a clearer picture of the extent and implications of Americans' willingness to place faith in powerful institutions.

The Study

Our questionnaire was developed in order to reflect both our desire to track public reactions to 9/11, especially public expectations about media performance, and the larger question of trust and confidence in social and political institutions. In order to probe the nuances of confidence and trust, we began with sets of questions from the NES and GSS, including questions about interpersonal trust from the NES (also used in the GSS), institutional confidence from the GSS,[5] and trust in government from the NES. We adapted one of the trust in government questions to reflect opinions about the military, business, and the news media (e.g. "Do you think the MEDIA is run by a few big interests?") as one way to see whether government was seen as no more of less positively than these other institutions. A related battery of items recognized the multidimensional nature of institutional confidence and approval (Cook and Gronke 2001, Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 199x). Thus, we queried about approval of institutions as institutions as well as the current crop of institutional actors.[6]

Finally, we included a large set of measures which concerned the media. These are not the focus of this paper, and are analyzed in separate essays (Gronke and Cook 2002; Cook and Gronke 2001). We added political indicators (partisanship, ideology, assessments of national and personal financial situation) and demographics (education, income, race, etc). The questionnaire is reported in the Appendix.

Our survey was administered by Louisiana State University Public Policy Research Lab. The sample was drawn using RDD sampling. We interviewed 1059 adults between March 11 and April 30 of 2002. The survey was conducted in a way to maximize the number of completed interviews in a given period of time -- in this case from March 11 to April 30 -- with the

understanding that no further calls would be made thereafter. As a result, we did contact many individuals who agreed to be interviewed if they could be contacted at a later time, but then did not re-telephone them as we had surpassed the target number of respondents. This approach tends to make the response rate artificially low if we include those people as outside of the sample. Moreover, following AAPOR guidelines, we assumed that a similar proportion of the numbers dialed that were busy or did not answer were ineligible (e.g, business numbers, disconnected numbers, fax machines) as in the remainder of the sample, and estimated the number of eligible numbers that we did not reach by that proportion.

By that formula, our response rate was 16%. Of those we did reach on the phone, the cooperation rate was 42%. Although ideally, we would have had higher cooperation and response rates, we are confident that the data are of sufficiently high quality that we can proceed with the analysis. The levels we found of approval of President Bush and of Congress, and evaluations of whether the country is on the "right track", were very similar in our survey and in other surveys taken at the same time. Moreover, our ability to replicate findings for predictions of such widely-studied variables as the NES trust-in-government measure also provides further evidence of the utility of the survey.

In order to account for differential response rates, all univariate statistics are weighted by gender, educational attainment, and age.[7] In addition, regression and probit analyses reported below were reestimated using the "survey data" procedures included in Stata 7, but no substantive differences were found.

Levels of Trust and Distrust in the Spring of 2002

First of all: were trust and confidence high in the spring of 2002? In some ways, we have to say, well, compared to what? Our sample of the public is actually quite chipper about humanity: 56% said others would try to be fair versus 44% choosing that most people would try to take advantage of you; 65% responded that people most of the time try to be helpful versus 35% saying that they are just looking out for themselves; although only half the sample thought that most people can be trusted. Over two-thirds of the sample (71%) responded that the country is heading in the right direction rather than going on the wrong track.

In addition, approval of the current policy-makers and officials was high. 91% of the respondents approved or strongly approved of the job that military leaders of the armed forces have been doing, while 80% approved how the nine justices of the Supreme Court have been doing their job. As far as the presidency and the Congress, 78% approved George W. Bush's handling of the presidency, comparable to other survey estimates at that time, while 75% approved the job their *own representative* in Congress is doing, 67% approved the job of both members of Congress, and 66% approved of the leaders of Congress. Even 67% approved the job that journalists do.

And the numbers were even higher when we asked questions, modeled on Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, with a similar preface about what an institution is, about "the institutions themselves," no matter who is working in them, including the executive branch, Congress, the press/the news media and the military. Again, looking at institutional approval, going from high to low, 92% approve "the armed forces of the United States, no matter who is serving," 82% approve "the Supreme Court, no matter who the justices are," 80% approve "Congress, no matter who is in office," and again even 70% approve "the news media, no matter who the journalists are."

So then it is somewhat surprising to find that there was not *more* trust of government. When asked, "do you trust government to do what is right," most of those (54%) responding said only some of the time or almost never. Asked whether "government is run by a few big interests looking out for themselves or if it is run for the benefit of the people," 63% of those responding said run for the benefit of "a few big interests." These are similar to levels that were measured by other survey organizations prior to September 11. We find similar doubts about the possibility that public officials care much what people like me think, about those we elect to Congress losing touch with people quickly, although these respondents were somewhat more upbeat about internal efficacy as opposed to these markers of external efficacy. In short, in the spring of 2002, public opinion regarding trust in government was pretty much back to where it had been prior to the attacks.

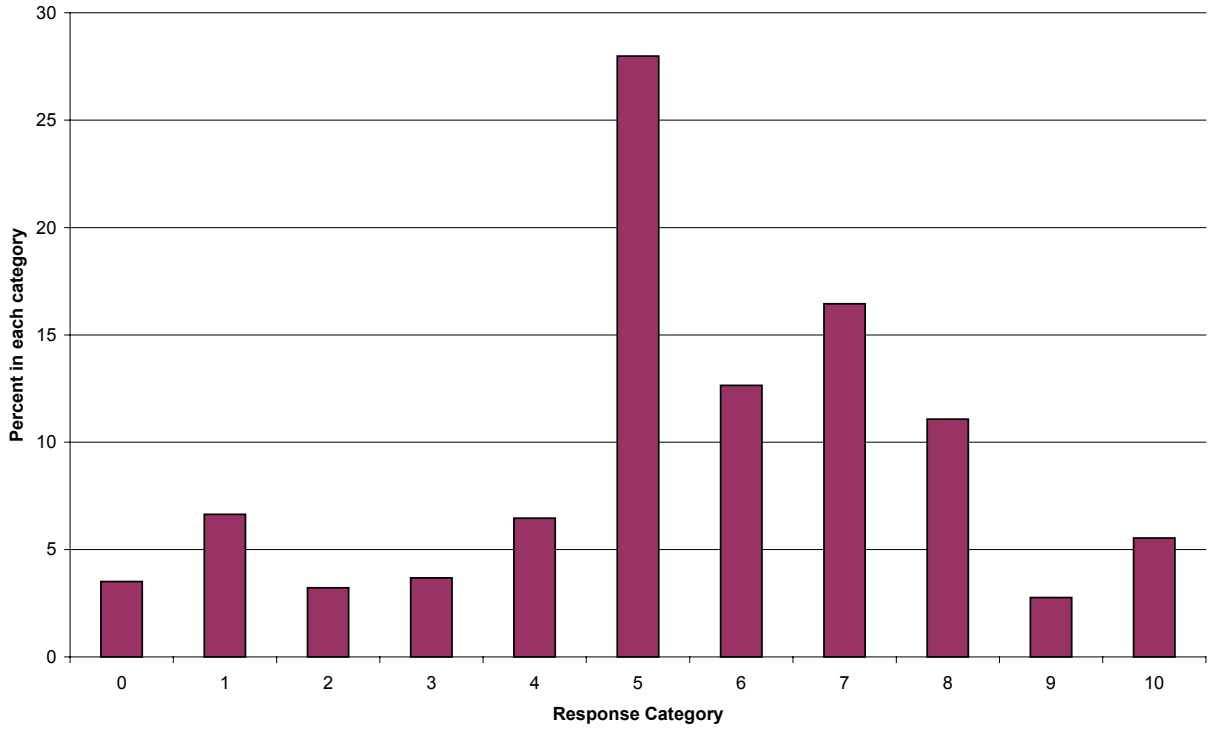
What does this lack of trust mean? Again, maybe we need to ask, compared to what? For one thing, is this a lack of trust or is it active distrust? You may ask, well what is the difference? We think the distinction is important. Lack of trust (or lack of confidence) might simply mean that one doesn't assume that government will do bad things, it's just that one is not convinced that government will do good things. Most people talk about the decline of trust as if it were an increase in distrust. To tap the full extent of the scale from active trust to active distrust, we would require a variable similar to one that Mishler and Rose (1997: 421) report from the New Democracies Barometer conducted in nine formerly Communist Eastern European countries:

> *There are many different institutions in this country, for example, the government, courts, police, civil servants. Please show me on this seven-point scale, where 1 represents great distrust and 7 represents great trust, how much is your personal trust in each of the following.*

Importantly, Mishler and Rose report that while "there is very little positive trust in any civil or political institution in any of the post-Communist societies...the levels of distrust are generally moderate" (422). In fact, by recoding the values so that 6 or 7 signifies active trust, 1 or 2 refer to active distrust, and 3, 4, or 5 are measures of skepticism, Mishler and Rose conclude, "Skepticism, rather than positive trust or active distrust, dominated evaluations." (424)

To our knowledge, an equivalent question has not been asked in surveys in the United States. To provide closer comparison to the "trust-in-government" measure of the NES, and to ensure that the only differences we would see were due to the explicit lengthening of the scale to encompass active distrust, we devised a different approach than Mishler and Rose (1997). We asked the respondents to put themselves on a scale from zero to ten. (see the Appendix for the complete item). Zero meant "very strong distrust of government to do what's wrong,", ten meant "very strong trust of government to do what's right," five meant that you "neither trust nor distrust government." Figure 3 shows the distribution of our sample across the ten responses.

Figure 3: Active Trust / Distrust



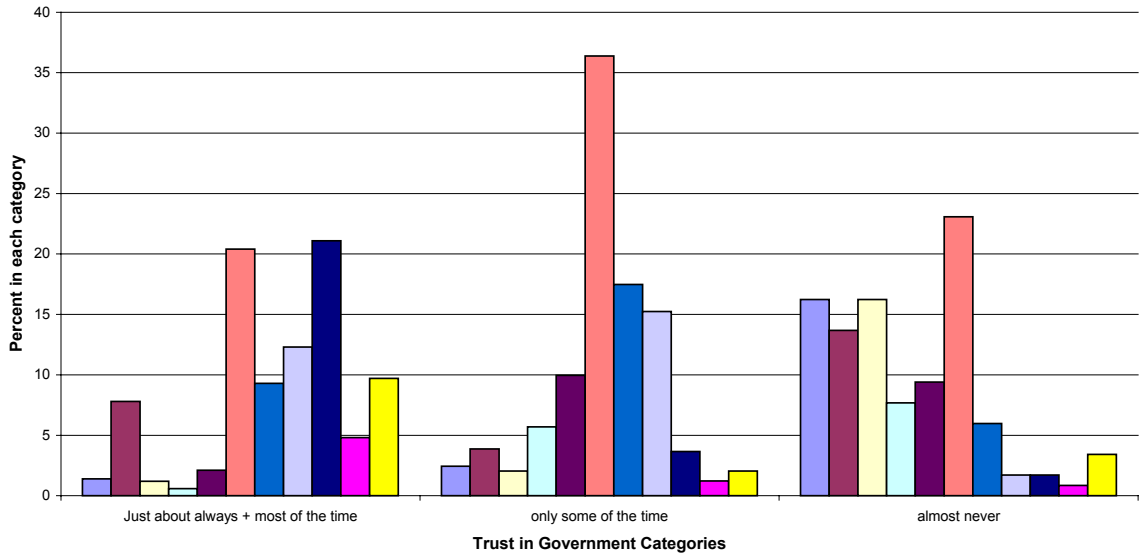
Similar to Mishler and Rose, few respondents were actively distrustful. Only around one in four put themselves at the lowest end of the scale below five (a looser criterion than what Mishler and Rose used), another 27% put themselves at the midpoint, leaving the rest at the high end of the scale clustered around a value of 7 out of 10. In other words, a majority of our sample was disaffected from government only if one included those at the midpoint who neither trust nor distrust government. Stated differently, the vast majority of our sample reported no expectation that government is to be suspected that it will do something wrong.

How does this "active distrust" measure correspond to the trust-in-government measures most commonly used from the NES? Here, we focus our attention on the question "How much of the time do you think that the government in Washington can be trusted to do what is right?" We

did also ask the question "Would you say the government is pretty much run by a few big interests looking out for themselves or that it is run for the benefit of all the people?"[8] However, since some scholarship defines the latter not as an indicator of trust so much as responsiveness (Chanley, Rudolph and Rahn 2001), and since others have defended using simply the single "trust-to-do-what-is-right" question (Alford 2001) as the measure that is most commonly repeated over a longer period of time, we have chosen to focus our analysis here on that question.

There is a correlation, fairly substantial (r=.34), between our measure of active trust-distrust and the NES trust-in-government measure, but not enough to suggest that the two variables are measuring essentially the same concept. And consider Figure 4, which shows separate histograms for each response of the trust-in-government measure.[9] There is a clear association whereby the more trustful by each measure do correspond. But the least trustful response to the trust-in-government measure includes a heavy representation of those who run all the way from active distrust to the midpoint of neither-trust-nor-distrust. In other words, lack of trust in government does not mean active distrust in government. In particular, the trust-in-government measure used by the NES is problematic in that it is truncated. Most troubling, it combines together both convinced cynics and more open-minded skeptics in the same category of the least trustful. Stated most directly, the trust-in-government question is a poor measure of cynicism, if we are to distinguish that from skepticism.

Figure 4: Active Trust/Distrust Compared to Traditional Government Trust



Comparing Trust in Government and Confidence in Institutions

How then does the trust-in-government measure perform when set against the confidence in institutions taken from the GSS? We replicated the GSS questions for the exact same set of institutions: banks and financial services; major companies; organized religion; education; executive branch of the federal government; organized labor; press; medicine; TV news,[10]; U.S. Supreme Court; scientific community; Congress; and the military. Fearing that the intercorrelations of these variables were artifactually increased by response-set, we broke these thirteen questions into two sections separated by other questions (many of which had nothing to do with trust or confidence) and then randomly ordered them within each bloc. We also opted for the four-point scale that the Gallup organization has used with these questions (PAUL: list these) rather than the more constricted -- and not terribly varying -- three-point scale that the GSS has utilized.

We expected that there would be an underlying measure which we call "generalized confidence," following Lipset and Schneider (1987). They found that most of the institutions would load on a single factor. If we find similar results, we will have greater assurance in this not merely being a methodological artifact unlike the GSS, since, as outlined above, we took steps to reduce response-set to a series of repetitive questions.

In past work, we have found, through confirmatory factor analysis, that a two-factor solution fits the data well: one representing institutions of order, another representing institutions of opposition, most notably the press, television, and labor unions (Cook and Gronke 2001). A varimax factor analysis found similar results on the new data we gathered in 2002. The first factor was defined primarily by confidence in the executive branch, the Supreme Court, the military, Congress, and, at somewhat lower levels, organized religion and companies, and a second factor defined (negatively) by press, television news, labor unions and, in an illustration of the precarious situation of the institution, Congress. We created factor scales based on the loading of the thirteen institutions on the first factor to generate our generalized confidence variable. To deal with a potential problem with this generalized confidence measure--that it brings together so many incommensurate institutions that it cannot represent trust in political institutions--John Brehm and Wendy Rahn (1997) have recently proposed, as a counter to the trust-in-government a confidence measure drawn from the GSS questions on Congress, the executive branch, and the Supreme Court. We therefore generated factor scores from a separate factor analysis to replicate their measure, which we call "confidence in the three branches."

The correlations between trust-in-government, active trust-mistrust, generalized confidence in political and social institutions, and confidence in the three branches are presented in Table 1.

With the exception of the unsurprisingly higher correlation between the two confidence scales (which after all contain some of the same variables and are based on similar wording), the correlations are, once again, substantial but not large enough to suggest that the different variables are measuring the same underlying phenomenon. Strikingly, the correlation between generalized confidence and trust-in-government is somewhat higher (r=.36) than those between trust-in-government and active trust-distrust (r=.28) or between generalized confidence and active trust-distrust (r =.22). *Both* the trust-in-government and generalized confidence measures thus are similar in being truncated and inadequately representing the distribution of respondents toward the less trustful or less confident end of the scale.

Table 1: Intercorrelations of Confidence Measures

	Govt	Active	General
Confidence in Government			
Active Trust	0.2882		
Generalized Confidence	0.7940	0.2236	
Trust in Government	0.4461	0.3484	0.3588

Thus, the choice of whether to examine trust in government or confidence in institutions is far from inconsequential. The moderate correlations between them suggest that each is in fact measuring something distinct. At least as important, the NES and GSS measures commonly used serve as poor surrogates for any interest in cynicism, alienation and distrust.

Predicting Trust-in-Government, Active Trust-Distrust and Confidence

Another way to judge the distinctions between our various measures of trust and confidence is to construct different equations predicting responses in each case but with the same independent variables. This may also help us make sense of inconsistencies in the literature between those who suggest that these measures tap deep convictions based on longstanding attitudes versus shallower

responses to contemporary political and economic conditions. In particular, if a variable predicts in one equation but does not predict in another, it may also give us a sense of the different meaning of the dependent variable in each case. We thus take up a challenge Miller (1974b: 990) presented years ago: "Questions of validity and focus can only be answered through an examination of the relationship between the trust scale and other political indicators."

We surveyed the literature on trust and confidence to bring together the largest possible group of "usual suspects," and indicate here those who have found relationships in the past between these predictor variables and either trust in government or confidence in institutions. These include:

- **Gender** (Mishler and Rose 1997; Norris 1999; Newton and Norris 2000), coded so that "female" is high.
- **Race** (Abramson 1983; Citrin and Green 1986; King 1997), a dummy variable for African-American respondents, coded so that "black" is high.
- **Education** (King 1997; Norris 1999; Newton and Norris 2000; Uslaner 2001)
- **Approval of president** (Abramson and Finifter 1981; Citrin and Green 1986)
- **Approval of Congress** (Abramson and Finifter 1981; Feldman 1983)
- Perceived **economic situation**, both individually and nationally (Lipset and Schneider 1987; Citrin and Green 1986; Brehm and Rahn 1997)
- **Interpersonal trust** (Lipset and Schneider 1987; Brehm and Rahn 1997), composed of an additive scale of three questions: Q11, Q12, and Q13 (see Appendix for wording), alpha=.7213.
- **Party identification** (Citrin and Green 1986; Alford 2001), the standard seven-point scale going from strong Democrat to strong Republican
- **Strength of partisanship** (Miller 1974a; Lipset and Schneider 1987), thus going from "pure" independent to independent leaner to weak partisan to strong partisan
- Self-placement of **ideology** (Citrin and Green 1986; Newton and Norris 2000), with "conservative" high

- **Extremism** of ideology (Miller 1974a), going from moderate to slightly liberal/conservative to liberal/conservative
- **Religiosity** (Lipset and Schneider 1987; Mishler and Rose 1997), measured by reported frequency of attendance of religious services.

In addition, we added a question that asked our respondents to assess current conditions: "Do you think things in this country are generally going in the right direction or are they seriously off on the wrong track?"[11] We also assumed that, following on the logic of "social capital," that the politically engaged would be more trusting of government and confident in institutions, so we included standard measures of political interest and whether the respondent reported having talked about politics within the last day or so.

We report, in Table 2, our four equations using these dependent variables to predict our active trust-distrust measure, the NES trust-in-government question, the index of generalized confidence in leaders of institutions, and the Brehm-Rahn measure of confidence in the leaders of the three branches of government. What first strikes the reader must be how much the statistically significant predictors change from one equation to the next. Indeed, there are only two variables that consistently predict all four measures of trust or confidence. Importantly, they both refer to short-term evaluations -- of the state of the United States (the right direction/wrong track question) and of Congress (evaluation of the members of Congress). As this latter variable has consistently been shown to be among the top predictors of trust or confidence, this gives us an indication of the validity of our new measure of trust-distrust as well as the others.

Table 2: The Determinants of Trust in Government

Variable	Active Trust-Distrust		Trust in Government		General Confidence		Confidence in Three Branches	
	B	(SE)	B	(SE)	B	(SE)	B	(SE)
Female (1=Female)	**0.39**	(.19)	0.07	(.09)	0.01	(.05)	0.02	(.15)
Black (1=Black)	-0.07	(.33)	-0.02	(.16)	-0.03	(.07)	-0.10	(.27)
Education	-0.01	(.03)	-0.04	(.02)	**-0.03**	(.01)	**-0.08**	(.04)
Right/Wrong Track	**0.72**	(.24)	**0.44**	(.12)	**0.27**	(.05)	**0.80**	(.04)
Bush Approval	0.31	(.26)	**0.29**	(.13)	**0.24**	(.06)	**0.69**	(.21)
Congress Approval	**0.57**	(.13)	**0.54**	(.06)	**0.25**	(.03)	**1.19**	(.10)
Personal Financial Situation	0.14	(.14)	**0.25**	(.07)	0.06	(.03)	0.08	(.11)
National Financial Situation	-0.18	(.13)	0.10	(.06)	0.02	(.03)	0.10	(.10)
Interpersonal Trust	**0.20**	(.08)	0.07	(.04)	0.02	(.02)	**0.13**	(.07)
Partisanship (Republican=High)	0.09	(.05)	0.00	(.02)	**0.03**	(.01)	**0.12**	(.04)
Strength of Partisanship	0.14	(.09)	**0.12**	(.04)	0.02	(.02)	**0.14**	(.07)
Ideology (Conservative=high)	0.11	(.07)	**-0.06**	(.03)	**0.03**	(.02)	0.04	(.06)
Extremism	-0.04	(.12)	0.07	(.06)	0.03	(.03)	0.06	(.1)
Interested in politics?	**0.27**	(.11)	-0.05	(.06)	0.02	(.02)	-0.05	(.09)
Discuss Politics?	-0.21	(.21)	-0.16	(.10)	-0.02	(.05)	-0.29	(.17)
Attend Relig. Services	**0.14**	(.04)	**0.04**	(.02)	-0.01	(.01)	-0.01	(.03)
Ancillary Parameters	0.35	(-.68)	0.48	(.33)	-1.30	(.16)	3.23	(.56)
			2.13	(.34)				
			3.73	(.36)				
N of Cases	639		639		639		639	
Adjusted R-squared	0.13		0.13		0.26		0.30	
Goodness of Fit			LL=192.04 (d.f.=16)					

Notes: Reilly Center Poll, March-April 2002. Boldface entries are significant, p<.05. Entries are OLS regression estimates obtained in Stata 7, except for trust in government, which was estimated as an ordered probit. Ancillary parameters are constant terms, except for trust in government, where entries are probit cutpoints. Variable coding is discussed in the text.

Let us take each column in turn. Beginning with our active trust-distrust measure, we see that while there are short-term political influences upon it (the assessment of current conditions and of members of Congress), this equation differs from the rest in exhibiting a stronger connection to what appears to be longer-lasting predispositions. For instance, gender, political interest and interpersonal trust significantly predict active trust-distrust whereas these variables are either insignificant or, in the case of interpersonal trust, only marginally significantly related to any of the other three measures. Similarly, self-reported frequency of attendance at religious services is a substantially stronger predictor of our active trust-distrust measure than of the NES trust-in-

government measure, let alone the two confidence measures. Likewise, the active trust-distrust measure is distinguished from the other three in what does *not* influence it: the assessment of George W. Bush, or any indication of the respondent's partisanship or ideology (including the strength thereof in each case). In short, what this pattern suggests is that active trust-distrust apparently reflects a more stable approach to government that is less influenced by transient political and economic circumstances.

The NES trust-in-government scale, as has been shown elsewhere (Citrin and Luks 2001), is not significantly related to any of the respondent's demographics and more closely related to assessments of economic circumstances, though in our data, the strong effect was from the respondent's characterization of his/her personal financial situation rather than the national economy as a whole.[12] By contrast, the variables of economic circumstances had no influence upon the other three. It appears that the trust-in-government variable, perhaps because of its emphasis on what the government is "doing," is uniquely shaped by evaluations of the economy. By comparison, what sets the generalized confidence and confidence in the three branches apart is the respondent's partisanship, which is not a significant predictor for either active trust-distrust or trust-in-government. In other words, generalized confidence is shaped by more longstanding considerations of one's partisan preferences, whereas neither of our two measures of trust and distrust in government are. And in a remarkable indication of how different the results can be with different measures, our measure of conservatism was *negatively* related to trust-in-government and *positively* to generalized confidence. This, of course, makes sense, given that conservatives are presumably less favorably inclined to "government" but may be more so toward institutions of order in public and private, but the finding reinforces our concern that the choice of measurement of trust and/or confidence is far from inconsequential.

All four of our measures, to some extent, then reflect evaluations of contemporary social and political conditions, and in that sense, each represents something of a "running tally" of how things are in the country. This again raises the question of whether it is possible, theoretically (Craig 1993) or empirically (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1995), to distinguish between Easton's famous "diffuse support" and "specific support." *Confidence* in institutions, in particular, seems to be very closely related to *approval* of institutions, as the strong effect of the respondent's approval of Congress upon all four of our trust-distrust measures (though it is especially strong with the Brehm-Rahn measure of confidence in the three branches).

Nonetheless, this does not mean that trust and confidence are simply reactions to the politics, economics and society of the day. As Mishler and Rose (1997: 435) point out, we need not distinguish between a socialization explanation and a performance explanation, since, as they model it, current trust is "a legacy of past political trust...as modified by evaluations of more recent experiences." Nonetheless, these measures differ considerably in the extent to which they reflect the results of early socialization versus the assessment of contemporary conditions. For instance, of the four, the active trust-distrust measure captures most strongly aspects of early socialization (gender, interpersonal trust, political interest and religiosity); at the other extreme, the NES trust-in-government question much more heavily reflects contemporary political and especially economic circumstances. The two confidence measures are somewhere in between, indicating some socialization effects from the impact of education and interpersonal trust. We can then not conclude that "the foundations of trust in government, then, are largely political in nature" (Citrin and Luks 2001) <u>if</u> we use a measure other than the NES trust-in-government measure that seems unusually sensitive to current conditions.

Conclusion: Not Distrust But Skepticism

The Reilly Center poll conducted in the spring of 2002 fills out our knowledge considerably. First of all, we see clear evidence that "trust in government," at least as measured by the NES questions, and "confidence in the leaders of institutions," from the GSS questions, have snapped back to levels seen prior to the September 11 attacks. This short-term sensitivity of these measures to contemporary circumstances are underscored by the ways in which all of our measures of trust and confidence are linked to assessments of the United States being on the right track or not, and to evaluations of Congress. We do not have evidence of what caused the upward blip in trust-in-government, but one hint is provided by an enterprising ABC News poll conducted in January of 2002, which used a split-half sample technique. Half of the sample was asked "do you trust the government to do what's right when it comes to handling national security and the war on terrorism." 68% answered "yes." The other half was asked "do you trust the government to do what's right when it comes to handling social issues like the economy, health care, social security and education." For these issues, only 38% said yes. If September 11 fades and if people turn back to domestic political issues, we should expect as we have already seen--the trust in government to fall back to levels similar to those prior to September 11.

The return to previous levels suggests that the hopes of some social scientists that the post-September 11 era would be a new one for trust in government, such as Putnam (quoted in Stille 2001: A13): "This is a big jump, and if it should persist, it would change the whole political climate." Moreover, it underscores an insight of Citrin and Green (1986: 452) that a "sharp reversal in the downward trend in political trust in and of itself takes the dispute over what is being measured a long step toward settlement. Legitimacy crises, as usually conceptualized, do not appear and then suddenly vanish."

But while we agree with Citrin and his co-authors that the threatening consequences of the decline in trust in government, particularly as measured by the NES, have been grossly exaggerated, we do not see this as the end of the story. We have seen in the analysis above that the NES trust-in-government question is unusually sensitive to contemporary political and economic circumstances, considerably more so than is the case with a generalized confidence measure drawn from the GSS or especially with a new variable we have devised to measure a fuller spectrum of reactions ranging from active trust in government to do what is right all the way to an active distrust that government will do what is wrong. This is not to say that the NES measure is therefore pretty meaningless. Instead, we take it to be a commendable summary measure, or "running tally," of citizens' evaluations of how well government is acting on their behalf and producing worthy outcomes--far closer to approval of the incumbents than the original understanding of trust in government as a form of "diffuse support."

This finding would be of importance for methodological reasons alone. But substantively, too, we have a new understanding of Americans' attitudes to their government. We must revise the standard tendency to equate a low score on trust in government or in confidence in institutions with cynicism (not to mention distrust, mistrust, alienation, disaffection and estrangement, to cite but a few that are commonly used). Much of the problem could be based to how one defines these terms. If one selects a dictionary, a cynic is "one who who believes that human conduct is motivated wholly by self-interest" and being cynical as "being contemptuously distrustful of human nature and motives... implies having a sneering disbelief in sincerity or nobility." As we have seen, the NES trust-in-government measure and the GSS confidence-in-institutions questions all run from high trust or confidence to a lack of trust or a lack of confidence. But a lack of trust or a lack of confidence bundles together a range of responses. It is not simply, as Citrin (1974) long ago

pointed out, that different sorts of cynics are to be found there, but that there are cynics as well as skeptics therein. The results from our new question -- asking the respondent to place himself/herself on a continuum ranging from high distrust that government will do what is wrong to high trust that government will do what is right, with the midpoint being neither trust nor distrust -- clearly suggest that the active distrust of the American population has been greatly exaggerated. The fact that a strong majority of our sample placed itself at the midpoint or toward the more trustful end of the continuum, even while the same sample voiced low responses to the NES trust-in-government measure is strong testimony.

The distinction between cynicism and skepticism is one that is made in theory but rarely ventured in empirical studies (the signal exception being Mishler and Rose 1997). But the separation to us seems key. To return to the dictionary, skepticism differs from cynicism, by being a "doctrine that true knowledge or knowledge in a particular area is uncertain; the method of suspended judgment, systematic doubt, or criticism characteristic of skeptics." In fact, the dictionary distinctly distinguishes skepticism from suspicion and mistrust by noting that while "skepticism implies unwillingness to believe without conclusive evidence; suspicion stresses lack of faith in the truth, reality, fairness or reliability of something or someone; mistrust implies a genuine doubt based upon suspicion." Does the American public actually suspect the government and political authorities? We see no evidence that the NES and GSS measures conclude that to be the case.

We might say this means is that Americans are now a nation of Missourians -- that is to say, that Americans all come from a "show-me state." Americans do not expect that the government will do the right thing, but neither do they anticipate that government will do the wrong thing

either. Instead, they are willing to suspend their presumptions and to watch the workings of politics and judge institutions and political actors accordingly. In this light, the decline over the past thirty to forty years of trust in government and of confidence in institutions is not such bad news. It represents the rise of a public that is -- and perhaps as they should be -- skeptical of many forms of power.

APPENDIX: Reilly Center Questionnaire

HELLO Hello, my name is _____ and I'm with the Public Policy Research Lab at Louisiana State University. We are conducting a survey asking people how they feel about things in America for the six month anniversary of September 11.
I wonder whether you would be willing to help us with this research.

==========

Q1 We'd like to start by asking you a few questions about how things are going in America. Do you think things in this country are generally going in the right direction or are they seriously off on the wrong track?

Q2 Do you approve or disapprove of the way George W. Bush is handling his job as president?

Q3 Do you approve or disapprove of the way George W. Bush is handling the economy?

Q4 Do you approve or disapprove of the way George W. Bush is handling the war on terrorism?

MTerror Do you approve or disapprove of the way the media have been covering the war on terrorism?

Conf I am going to name some institutions in this country. As far as the people running these institutions are concerned,would you say you have a great deal CONFIDENCE, quite a lot of CONFIDENCE,only some CONFIDENCE, or very little CONFIDENCE in them?

BANKS
COMPANIES
Organized Religion
Education
The executive branch of the federal government.
Labor Unions

Q5 We're also interested in how people feel about government in general, not Democrats, Republicans or any particular leader. How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Washington to do what is right- just about always, most of the time, only some of the time, or almost never?

Q6 How about people in power in the United States OUTSIDE of the government. How often do you trust people in power outside the government to do what's right - just about always, most of the time, only some of the time, or almost never?

Q7 Would you say the government is pretty much run by a few big interests looking out for themselves or that it is run for the benefit of all the people?

Trust2 I'd like to ask you a different question about trust and distrust. On a scale from zero to ten, where ten means VERY STRONG TRUST IN GOVERNMENT TO DO WHAT IS RIGHT, zero means VERY STRONG DISTRUST IN GOVERNMENT to do what's WRONG,and five means that you NEITHER TRUST NOT DISTRUST GOVERNMENT, where would you place yourself?

Q8 Now we'd like you to think about other institutions.
How about the MEDIA Do you think that the MEDIA
  looks out for a few big interests, or do you think
that they looks out for the benefit of all the people?

Q9 How about BUSINESS?
Do you think that BUSINESS looks out for
a few big interests, or do you think
that business looks out for the benefit of all the people?

Q10 How about the MILITARY?
Do you think that the MILITARY looks out for
a few big interests, or do you think
that the military looks out for the benefit of all the people?

Q11 On another topic, generally speaking,
would you say that most people can be trusted,
or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?

Q12 Would you say that most of the time
people try to be helpful,
or that they are just looking out for themselves?

Q13 Do you think most people would
try to take advantage of you if
they got the chance or would they try to be fair?

Q21 We are interested in how people are getting along
financially these days. Would you say that you (and your
family) are better off, worse off, or just about the same
financially as you were a year ago?

Q22 Thinking about the economy in the COUNTRY AS A WHOLE,
would you say that OVER THE PAST YEAR the nation's economy
has gotten better, stayed about the same, or gotten worse?

Q14 Now I am going to read to you some general statements
about public officials.After I read each statement,
please tell me whether you STRONGLY AGREE, AGREE SOMEWHAT,
NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE,DISAGREE SOMEWHAT, or STRONGLY
DISAGREE. Public officials don't care much what people like
me think. Do you agree strongly, agree somewhat, neither
agree nor disagree, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly
with this statement?

Q15 Generally speaking, those we elect to Congress in
Washington lose touch with the people pretty quickly. Do
you agree strongly, agree somewhat, neither agree nor disagree,
disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly with this statement?

Q16 People like me don't have any say about what the
government does. Do you agree strongly, agree somewhat,
neither agree nor disagree, disagree somewhat, or disagree
strongly with this statement?

Q17 Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated

that a person like me can't really understand what's going
on. Do you agree strongly, agree somewhat, neither agree nor
disagree, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly with this
statement?

Q18 On another topic, some people don't pay much attention to

national affairs. How about you? How interested are you
in politics and national affairs? Are you very interested,
somewhat interested, slightly interested, or not at all
interested?

Q19 Q. Did you talk about politics with your friends or family

in the past day or so?

Pairs I'm going to read you a pair of opposite phrases.
After I read each pair, tell me which one you feel better
describes the generally.If you think that neither phrase
applies, please say so.

---

1. The news media helps society to solve its problems
2. The news media gets in the way of society solving its problems
5. Neither

---

1. The news media are politically biased in their reporting
2. The news media are careful that their reporting is not politically biased
5. Neither phrase applies

---

1. Stories and reports in the news media get the facts straight
2. Stories and reports in the news media are often inaccurate
5. Neither phrase applies

---

1. The press helps society to solve its problems
2. The press gets in the way of society solving its problems
5. Neither phrase applies

---

1. The press are politically biased in their reporting
2. The press are careful that their reporting is not politically biased
5. Neither phrase applies

---

1. Stories and reports in the press get the facts straight
2. Stories and reports in the press are often inaccurate
5. Neither phrase applies

Afghan Has the news coverage of the war in Afghanistan been
accurate for the most part, or have too many mistakes been made?

Mistake Do you think these mistakes are the result of poor
reporting on the part of journalists, or are these mistakes
the result of the government giving out misleading information?

Dig When covering events in the war on terrorism, should
journalists be DIGGING HARD to get all the information they
can for their reports, or should they TRUST GOVERNMENT AND
MILITARY OFFICIALS,even if they refuse to release some
information?

Members I'd like to get your feelings towards some important
leaders in society. Thinking about these leaders,
please tell me if you: strongly approve, approve,
disapprove, or strongly disapprove of the way these
people are handling their jobs.

MCourt How do you feel about the way the nine justices

on the Supreme Court have been handling their jobs?

MCong What about the 535 members of Congress?

LCong What about the leaders of Congress?

REP What about your own representative in the
U.S. House of Representatives?

LMil What about the military leaders of the armed forces?

Mjour What about journalists?

Inst I've asked you to rate some important leaders in
government and society. But sometimes, when we talk about
the parts of the Supreme Court, the Congress, the armed
forces,and the news media, we mean the INSTITUTIONS
themselves, no matter who is working in them. These
institutions have their own historical traditions and purposes
laid out in the Constitution. I'd like to know if you
strongly approve, approve, disapprove, or strongly disapprove
of these institutions in American society and government.

ICourt In general do you strongly approve, approve, disapprove,
or strongly disapprove of the Supreme Court,
no matter who the justices are?

ICONG What about the U.S. Congress, no matter who is in office?

IMil What about the armed forces of the United States,
no matter who is serving?

IMedia What about the news media,
no matter who the journalists are?

Party Generally speaking do you usually think of yourself as a
Democrat, a Republican, an Independent, or what?

Q20A Would you call yourself
a STRONG Republican or NOT A VERY STRONG Republican?

Q20B Would you call yourself
a STRONG Democrat or NOT A VERY STRONG Democrat?

Q20C Do you think of yourself as CLOSER to the Democratic Party
or to the Republican Party?

More I would now like to return to your opinion of institutions
in this country. As far as the people running these institutions
are concerned,would you say you have a great deal CONFIDENCE,
quite a lot of CONFIDENCE, only some CONFIDENCE, or very little
CONFIDENCE in them?

PRESS
Medicine
Television News
The Supreme Court
The Scientific Community
Congress
The Military

Liberal We hear a lot of talk these days about

liberals and conservatives. Do you consider
yourself liberal, slightly liberal,
moderate, slightly conservative, or conservative?

Denom What is your religious preference?

Is it Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, some other religion, or
no religion?
---
bible I am going to read you a short list of statements.

Please tell me which of these statements comes closest
to describing your feelings about the Bible.
You can just give me the number of the statement you choose.

1. THE BIBLE IS THE ACTUAL WORD
OF GOD AND IS TO BE TAKEN
LITERALLY, WORD FOR WORD.
2. THE BIBLE IS THE WORD OF GOD
BUT NOT EVERYTHING IN IT SHOULD BE
TAKEN LITERALLY, WORD FOR WORD.
3. THE BIBLE IS A BOOK WRITTEN BY
MEN AND IS NOT THE WORD OF GOD.

Attend How often do you attend religious services?

EDU What is the highest level of education you have completed?

INCOME I am going to mention a number of income categories.

When I come to category that describes your total household
income before taxes in 2001, please, stop me,

Work Last week were you working full time,

part time, going to school, keeping house, or what?

WSat On the whole, how satisfied are you with the work you do-
would you say you are very satisfied, moderately satisfied,
a little dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied?

Race What race do you consider yourself?

Born What year were you born?

REFERENCES

Abramson, Paul R. 1983. *Political Attitudes in America: Formation and Change.* San Francisco: W.H. Freeman.

Abramson, Paul R., and Ada W. Finifter. 1981. On the meaning of political trust: new evidence from items introduced in 1978. *American Journal of Political Science* 25: 297-307.

Alford, John R. 2001. We're all in this together: the decline of trust in government, 1958-1996. In John R. Hibbing and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse, ed., *What is it About Government that Americans Dislike?* New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 28-46.

Bennett, Stephen Earl. 2001. Were the halcyon days really golden? an analysis of Americans' attitudes toward the political system, 1945-1965. In John R. Hibbing and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse, ed., *What is it About Government that Americans Dislike?*. New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 47-58.

Bernstein, Jeffrey L. 2001. Linking presidential and congressional approval during unified and divided governments. In John R. Hibbing and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse, ed., *What is it About Government that Americans Dislike?* New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 98-117.

Brehm, John, and Wendy Rahn. 1997. Individual-level evidence for the causes and consequences of social capital. *American Journal of Political Science* 41: 999-1023.

Cater, Douglass. 1959. *The Fourth Branch of Government*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Chanley, Virginia A., Thomas J. Rudolph, and Wendy M. Rahn. 2001. Public trust in government in the Reagan years and beyond. In John R. Hibbing and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse, ed., *What is it About Government that Americans Dislike?* New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 59-81.

Citrin, Jack. 1974. Comment: The political relevance of trust in government. *American Political Science Review* 68: 973-988.

Citrin, Jack and Donald Philip Green. 1986. Presidential leadership and the resurgence of trust in government. *British Journal of Political Science* 16: 431-453.

Citrin, Jack, Herbert McClosky, J. Merrill Shanks and Paul M. Sniderman. 1975. Personal and political sources of political alienation. *British Journal of Political Science* 5: 1- 31.

Citrin, Jack, and Samantha Luks. 2001. Political trust revisited: déjà vu all over again? In John R. Hibbing and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse, ed., *What is it About Government that Americans Dislike?* New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 9-27.

Cook, Timothy E. and Paul Gronke. 2001. The dimensions of institutional trust: how distinct is public confidence in the media? Paper prepared for delivery at the annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago.

Cook, Timothy E., Paul Gronke and John Rattliff. 2000. Disdaining the media: Americans' changing attitudes towards the news. Paper prepared for delivery at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, D.C.

Cooper, Joseph. 1999. The puzzle of distrust. In Joseph Cooper, ed., *Congress and the Decline of Public Trust*, pp. 1-26. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Craig, Stephen C. 1993. *The Malevolent Leaders: Popular Discontent in America.* Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Dalton, Russell J. 2000. Value change and democracy. In Susan J. Pharr and Robert D. Putnam, eds., *Disaffected Democracies: What's Troubling the Trilateral Countries?*, pp. 252-269. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Dionne, E.J., Jr. 1991. *Why Americans Hate Politics*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Döring, Herbert. 1992. Higher education and confidence in institutions: a secondary analysis of the "European Values Survey," 1981-83. *West European Politics* 15: 126-146.

Durr, Robert H., John B. Gilmour, and Christina Wolbrecht. 1997. Explaining congressional Approval. *American Journal of Political Science* 41: 175-207.

Erber, Ralph, and Richard R. Lau. 1990. Political cynicism revisited: an information-processing reconciliation of policy-based and incumbency-based interpretations of changes in trust in government. *American Journal of Political Science* 34: 236-253.

Feldman, Stanley. 1983. The measurement and meaning of trust in government. *Political Methodology* 9: 341-354.

Gronke, Paul and Timothy Cook. 2002. "Disdaining the Media in the Post 9/11 World." Paper prepared for delivery at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Boston MA.

Hetherington, Marc J. 1998. The political relevance of political trust. *American Political Science Review* 92: 791-808.

--------. 1999. The effect of political trust on the presidential vote, 1968-96. *American Political Science Review* 93: 311-326.

-------. 2002. "Why Trust Matters: Declining Political Trust and the Demise of American Liberalism." Unpublished manuscript, Center for the Study of Democratic Politics, Princeton University.

Hetherington, Marc J., and John D. Nugent. 2001. Explaining public support for devolution: the role of political trust. In John R. Hibbing and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse, ed., *What is it About Government that Americans Dislike?* New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 134-155.

Hibbing, John, and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse. 1995. *Congress as Public Enemy*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

--------.. 2001. *What Is It About Government that Americans Dislike?* New York: Cambridge University Press.

King, David C. 1997. The polarization of American parties and mistrust of government. In Joseph S. Nye, Jr., Philip D. Zelikow and David C. King, eds., *Why People Don't Trust Government*, pp. 155-178. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Lipset, Seymour Martin, and William Schneider. 1983. Confidence in confidence measures. *Public Opinion* 6, 4 (August/September): 42-44.

--------. 1987 [1983]. *The Confidence Gap: Business, Labor, and Government in the Public Mind*. rev. ed. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Listhaug, Ola. 1984. Confidence in institutions: findings from the Norwegian Values Study. *Acta Sociologica* 27: 111-122.

Listhaug, Ola and Matti Wiberg. 1995. Confidence in political and private institutions. In Hans-Dieter Klingemann and Dieter Fuchs, eds., *Citizens and the State*, pp. 298-322. New York: Oxford University Press.

Miller, Arthur H. 1974a. Political issues and trust in government: 1964-1970. *American Political Science Review* 68: 951-972.

--------. 1974b. Rejoinder: political discontent or ritualism? *American Political Science Review* 68: 989-1001.

--------. 1983. Is confidence rebounding? *Public Opinion* 6, (August-September): 16-20.

Miller, Arthur H., and Ola Listhaug. 1990. Political parties and confidence in government: a comparison of Norway, Sweden and the United States. *British Journal of Political Science* 20: 357-386.

Mishler, William, and Richard Rose. 1997. Trust, distrust and skepticism: popular evaluations of civil and political institutions in post-Communist societies. *Journal of Politics* 59: 418-451.

Muller, Edward N., Thomas O. Jukam, and Mitchell A. Seligson. 1982. Diffuse political support and antisystem political behavior: a comparative analysis. *American Journal of Political Science* 26: 240-264.

Newton, Kenneth. 1999. Social and political trust in established democracies. In Pippa Norris, ed., *Critical Citizens: Global Support for Democratic Governance*, pp. 169-187. New York: Oxford University Press.

Newton, Kenneth and Pippa Norris. 2000. Confidence in public institutions: faith, culture, or performance? In Susan J. Pharr and Robert D. Putnam, eds., *Disaffected Democracies: What's Troubling the Trilateral Countries?*, pp. 52-73. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Norris, Pippa. 1999. Institutional explanations for political support. In Pippa Norris, ed., *Critical Citizens: Global Support for Democratic Governance*, pp. 217-235. New York: Oxford University Press.

Richardson, Lilliard E., Jr., David J. Houston, and Chris Sissie Hadjiharalambous. 2001. Public confiden ce in the leaders of American governmental institutions. In John R. Hibbing and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse, ed., *What is it About Government that Americans Dislike?* New York, Cambridge University Press, pp. 83-97.

Scholz, John T., and Mark Lubell. 1998. Trust and taxpaying: testing the heuristic approach to collective action. *American Journal of Political Science* 41: 398-417.

Smith, Tom W., Kenneth A. Rasinski, and Marianna Toce. October 2001. "American Rebounds: A National Study of Public Response to the September 11 Terrorist Attacks." Unpublished working paper, National Opinion Research Center, University of Chicago. URL: http://www.norc.uchicago.edu/projects/reaction/pubresp.pdf.

Stille, Alexander. 2001. Suddenly, Americans trust Uncle Sam. *New York Times* (November 3, 2001): A 11, A13.

Uslaner, Eric M. 2001. Is Washington really the problem? In John R. Hibbing and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse, ed., *What is it About Government that Americans Dislike?* New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 118-133.

Wright, James D. 1976. *The Dissent of the Governed: Alienation and Democracy in America*. New York: Academic Press.

ENDNOTES

[1]. Alford puts it best, saying the "decline represents stochastic variation on a grand scale. Even if the subject matters of these shifts had been relatively trivial, the impulse to analyze the resulting variation would have been powerful." (2001: 28)

[2] See for example Smith, Rasinski, and Toce, October 2001 and Stille 2001.

[3]. The citations are too enormous to indicate in detail. Some scholars, interested in looking at alienation (Miller 1974; Wright 1976) or cynicism (Erber and Lau 1990) turned immediately to the NES battery of questions about trust in government. Even those who doubt the depth of the responses received from the trust-in-government questions, such as Citrin (1974), tended to characterize those at the low end of the scale as "cynics," but then complained that the NES study did a poor job of distinguishing between different kinds of cynics: "`alienated' cynics, who truly reject the political system, and `performance' or `partisan' cynics, who merely dislike the party in power, the incumbent president, or current government policies" (Citrin and Luks 2001: 11; see also Citrin 1974: 978). The possibility that these are not necessarily cynics at all seems not to enter into Citrin's account.

But most observers have not been much worried, as best expressed by Abramson's (1983, 195n.3) footnote, "In almost all the studies in which these and similar items are used, cynicism is merely used as an antonym of trust. Sometimes the same researcher uses the same measure and calls it cynicism in one study, trust in another. Such inconsistencies of usage are confusing, but present no serious obstacle. High trust simply equates with low cynicism; high cynicism with low trust." (emphasis in original)

[4]. For instance, there is a scale of "How much of the time do you think that the government in Washington can be trusted to do what is right" and "would you say that the government is pretty much run by a few big interests looking out for themselves" from the NES (Citrin and Luks 2001); the NES trust-in-government question alone (Alford 2001; Chanley, Rudolph and Rahn 2001); an NES three-item battery adding on whether tax moneys were wasted (Bennett 2001); an NES four-item scale taking that and using the question about "crooked administrators" (Hetherington and Nugent 2001); separate measures from the GSS on confidence in leaders of the executive branch, Congress, and the Supreme Court (Richardson, Houston and Hadjiharalambous 2001); approval of Congress and approval of president from NES (Bernstein 2001) and a Kaiser Family Foundation survey that adapted the trust-in-government question for federal and state governments (Uslaner 2001).

[5] We were concerned about the possibility of response set bias in the GSS confidence battery. Typically, the GSS asks about 16 institutions in rapid succession. We broke this series into two groups, and hope to eventually compare the intercorrelations within and across these two sets. However, we do not report on these results here.

[6] While initially we worried that asking about confidence and trust in three different ways might tax our respondents, reports from our early interviews indicated that few indicated that they'd already answered the question or complained about repetitiveness.

[7] In order to weight the data, we obtained Census crosstabulations of age, gender, and educational attainment (that is, we obtained data on the percentage of 18-24 year old males with less than a 9th grade, 9-12th grade, etc). These data come from the Census 2000 supplementary survey, based on 12 monthly surveys conducted during 2000. We collapsed our own data to match the Census categories. We then calculated a weight based on the proportion expected (Census) / proportion observed (Reilly data). Categories with cell sizes less than 5 were collapsed into the next category.

[8]. We did not ask any of the remaining three questions that the NES has posed off and on over the years. Part of the reason these other variables have fallen by the wayside is the simple explanation that they have been asked less frequently in successive NES surveys. One -- "Do you feel that almost all of the people running the government are smart people who usually know what they are doing, or do you think that quite a few of them don't seem to know what they are doing?" -- may or may not be a good indication of trust, since you could assume that people are smart and are working against your best interests (Wright 1976). The other two -- "Do you think that people in the government waste a lot of the money we pay in taxes, waste some of it or don't waste very much of it?" and "Do you think that quite a few of the people running the government are a little crooked, not very many are, or do you think that hardly any of them are crooked at all?" -- have been omitted given evidence that they are less correlated with the other items and are more affected by ideology and race. However, studies have shown that results using a scale composed of the answers to the two questions we have asked are very similar to those that use fuller three-, four- or five-question scales used in the past (see Citrin and Green 1986: 435n.11; Citrin and Luks 2001: 14n.3).

[9] We have collapsed the first two categories in the traditional government trust measure for the purposes of this display because some cell sizes were too small among those who reported both high levels of "active trust."

[10]. This is our one break from the GSS which calls the variable simply "TV," which we thought respondents might interpret as either news or entertainment.

[11]. Cf. Craig (1993, Table 2.5) for the strong bivariate relationship between the NES question of "how things are going for the nation" (very well, fairly well, not too well and not well at all) with his scale of political trust/cynicism.

[12]. This might surprise those students of voting who have found much more evidence of "sociotropic" rather than "pocketbook" voting. But in fact, the particular variable which has been most influential between the two assessments on trust in government has varied considerably from one election year to the next (Citrin and Luks 2001, Table 1.4).