INTRODUCTION

Political trust is one of a family of terms referring to citizens' feelings about their government. It overlaps with confidence, system support, and legitimacy on the positive side and with cynicism, political disaffection, and alienation on the negative. Trust—political or otherwise—is relational and domain specific. That is, A trusts B to do X. Trust always has an object or target (B), which could be a person, group, or institution, and a domain of action (X) where trust is given or withheld. The foundation of trust is that A judges B to be trustworthy, that he or she will act with integrity and competence and with A's interests paramount. In politics, those interests may include the "goals of good policy, peace and sound economic stewardship" (Keele 2007, p. 243), in addition to the citizen's own welfare. When one trusts, one is accepting vulnerability; there is always a risk of betrayal or failure. The absence of trust can take two forms, mistrust and distrust. Mistrust reflects doubt or skepticism about the trustworthiness of the other, while distrust reflects a settled belief that the other is untrustworthy. Pytlik Zillig & Kimbrough (2016) provide an excellent overview of the areas of consensus and disagreement on the conceptualization of trust in the social sciences.

Scholars usually treat trust and confidence in institutions as synonymous, and although some argue that one can have trust in people but not in institutions (e.g., Hardin 2013), common survey measures ask respondents about either their trust or their confidence in institutions. Per Easton (1975), system support can refer to support for current authorities (specific) or support for the regime's institutions and principles (diffuse). Political trust fits into neither category but is closer to the former than the latter. Trust in government can be thought of as an aspect of legitimacy (Tyler & Jackson 2013) or as influential to the conferral of legitimacy (Hough et al. 2010), which, in Max Weber's definition, endows authorities with the moral foundation for obedience. Political cynicism is an orientation toward politicians that attributes their actions to self-serving motives. Disaffection and alienation differ from distrust in emphasizing a diffuse loss of emotional attachment from the polity writ large rather than dissatisfaction with the performance of a putatively trustworthy actor (Offe 2009).

The burgeoning literature on trust and related attitudes reflects the scholarly conviction that these attitudes matter for the effectiveness and durability of democratic governments, regimes that many today view as increasingly fragile. The longstanding puzzle of whether and when distrust of authorities begins to erode the legitimacy of democratic regimes has taken on new urgency in the wake of five decades of steady decline in political trust in representative institutions in the United States and Europe. By necessity, our review will be selective. We concentrate on survey research, focusing on work published since the last *Annual Review of Political Science* article on the topic (Levi & Stoker 2000). We confine the bulk of our review to research about the United States, with occasional comparisons to European studies. Regrettably, we set aside game-theoretic as well as comparative and historical research that offers important insights into the role of incentives, institutions, and social networks. Fortunately, readers can consult the recently published *Handbook on Political Trust* (Zmerli & van der Meer 2017) for coverage of many topics that get short shrift here. We begin by addressing measurement issues and illustrating some of the major empirical developments that have drawn scholars' attention. We next consider the recent literature about the causes and consequences of political trust and mistrust. We close by reflecting on the importance of bringing trust into the new work on anti-elitism and commenting on the prospects for restoring trust in government.

MEASUREMENT

The most common measure of political trust (hereafter often just called trust) is the American National Election Studies (ANES) item, "How much of the time do you think you can trust the

government in Washington to do what is right?" US media polls use this question, as do the surveys of Gallup, Pew, and many scholars. The ANES measure is commonly criticized for the vagueness of the "do what is right" phrasing and the imprecision of the "government in Washington" object, which allows people to focus at will on the presidency, Congress, or other institutions and practices. A second common indicator, used by the General Social Survey (GSS), Gallup, and in a slightly different format by the World and European Values Surveys (WVS/EVS), asks people how much confidence they have in "the people running the institutions in the country." These ratings have the virtue of being flexible enough to be applied to national institutions, specific government agencies, and different levels of government.

Critics point out that these measures offer only three or four response options (Gershtenson & Plane 2015). The trend in newer work is toward more granular measures, as exemplified by the scale used in the European Social Survey (ESS).[1] Another, more fundamental recent criticism of these measures is that they simply indicate the presence or absence of trust and thus fail to represent a continuum ranging from trust at one end to distrust at the other, with mistrust or skepticism in the middle (Cook & Gronke 2005, Van de Walle & Six 2014; see also Mishler & Rose 1997). The mistrusting will question another's trustworthiness, but the distrusting believe that the other is untrustworthy. The literature on trust in organizations identifies important differences between those who mistrust and those who distrust others (see, e.g., Kramer 1999, Lewicki et al. 1998). It is plausible that active distrust and not just mistrust (skepticism), in government is growing in the United States. However, whether this is so and how it matters are unclear given the paucity of research incorporating this distinction.

The ANES also includes measures of the perceived trustworthiness of government and politicians, such as whether "the government is run by a few big interests" and whether "the politicians running the government know what they are doing." Despite the criticism these questions have long received, scholars have yet to develop a more comprehensive and useful set, although some have made efforts in that direction (e.g., Murphy 2004, Rose 2014) and others have tried to make do by combining one or more of these with questions from the ANES external efficacy collection.

There has also been little progress in developing new measures that better discriminate between trust in authorities and support for the political regime (Citrin & Muste 1999, Citrin et al. 1975, Muller & Jukam 1977). Scholars frequently build system support measures by combining confidence in different institutions such as the police, civil service, judiciary, and parliament, although many also use a single question about one's "satisfaction with democracy" (Norris 2011, Torcal & Montero 2006). Although the confidence measures correlate with each other, they vary in their over-time dynamics and their sensitivity to changes in the party holding power (Citrin & Muste 1999), as we illustrate below. This is bound to muddle the conclusions one can draw from analyses of multi-institution indices.

DOWN AND DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE

It is beyond dispute that Americans' trust in their national government has declined over the past 50 years. **Figure 1** tracks responses to the core ANES question. With several upticks during the 1980–1986 and 1996–2000 economic recoveries and the brief post-9/11 rally,[2] the trend has been

[1]The ESS uses a scale where "0 means you do not trust an institution at all, and 10 means you have complete trust."

[2]The ANES series masks short-term changes, but Chanley (2002) shows that trusting responses increased by a whopping 35% between March and late September of 2011.

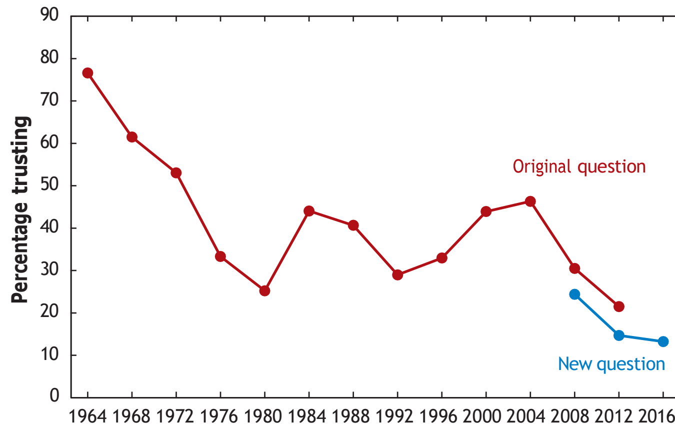

Figure 1

Percentage of US citizens trusting the US government over time. Entries are the weighted percentage of ANES face-to-face respondents saying that they trust the government most or all of the time. In 2008 and 2012, the ANES split sampled a new version of the question along with the original (red line), and in 2016, they carried the new question (blue line) only. The results show that the new question yields about 6–7% fewer trusting respondents than the old question. The original question is: 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, or only some of the time (with "never" coded if volunteered)? The new question is: How much of the time do you think you can trust the federal government in Washington to make decisions in a fair way—always, most of the time, about half of the time, some of the time (in 2012–2016; once in a while in 2008), or never?

one of steady decline. One anomaly is the failure of trust to rebound as the economy improved in recent years. The Pew Research Center (Pew Res. Cent. 2017) provides a more detailed portrait of the over-time dynamics, showing a trend line very similar to that in **Figure 1** while also reaching past the 2016 election. The Pew report concluded that trust in government reached a "historical low" after President Trump's election and inauguration and that this electoral outcome also brought about significant partisan shifts in outlook.

Figure 1 also demonstrates that tinkering with question wording and response options can alter the expressed levels of trust. In 2016, the ANES replaced the core trust question with a new one after split sampling the two questions in 2008 and 2012. The new question asks people whether they trust the government "to make decisions in a fair way," instead of whether they trust the government "to do what is right." This shifts the domain of trust to decision-making procedures at the expense of outcomes, arguably the more visible and subjectively important fact to most citizens. The new response options are always (instead of almost always), most of the time (unchanged), about half of the time (new), some of the time (unchanged), and never (now an explicit option rather than accepted as a volunteered response.) As shown in **Figure 1**, the result is a lower observed level of trust in both 2008 and 2012 than that registered by the original measure. This is probably a function of adding a fixed "never" response and the familiar tendency of people to gravitate to the middle response, though the shift in the domain of trust could matter too. In terms of the need to compare apples to apples over time, the ANES decision is clearly a mistake and, unless corrected, will make the analysis of trends more difficult and more dependent on data collected by other polling organizations.

Figure 2 turns to the GSS questions about confidence in the "people running the U.S. Supreme Court, Congress and the Executive Branch of the Federal Government." The trends for the executive branch and Congress closely parallel each other and the trend seen in **Figure 1**, although

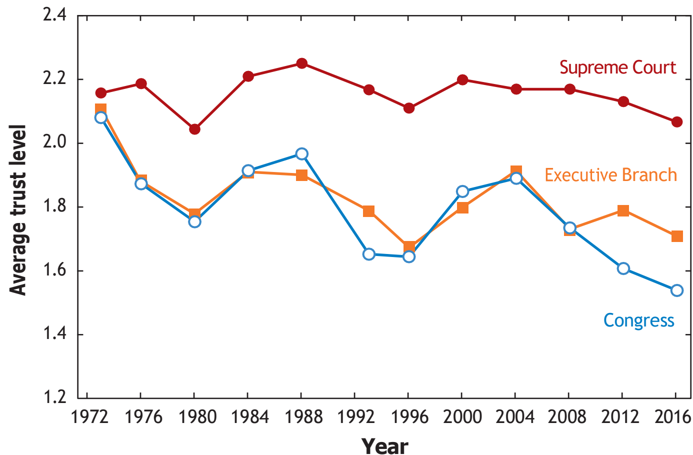

Figure 2

Confidence in US institutions over time. Results are based on General Social Survey data collected during election years, when available, or during the following spring, when not. The confidence questions came in a battery introduced as follows: "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 of confidence, only some confidence, or hardly any confidence at all in them?" Respondents were asked to indicate their confidence in the "U.S. Supreme Court" (*red*), "Congress" (*blue*), and the "Executive Branch of the Federal Government" (*orange*). Entries are weighted means for confidence variables scored to range from 1 (hardly any confidence) to 3 (a great deal of confidence).

Congress experienced an even greater decline in confidence than the executive branch from 2008 to 2016, the Obama years of intense polarization and gridlock. The Supreme Court, ostensibly a less partisan institution, generally enjoys greater trust, with, nonetheless, a gradual secular decline in confidence between 2000 and 2016.

Data from the WVS/EVS show that the slide of trust is not confined to the United States. The entries in **Figure 3** show the average confidence in the national legislature from the earliest to the most recent survey waves of the WVS/EVS, updating an analysis from Dalton & Shin (2014) to include more countries and the most recent data. The majority, if not all countries, exhibit a loss of confidence in their legislature, with the United States experiencing the most negative shift but other advanced industrial societies, including Australia, the United Kingdom, and even the Nordic countries of Finland and Norway witnessing sharp declines as well.[3]

Figure 4 documents the well-known relationship between party identification and trust in government. When the Democrats control the White House, their identifiers are more trusting than are Republican identifiers; when Republicans are in charge, the opposite is true (Citrin 1974, Keele 2005). Comparable gaps and swings in trust between electoral winners and losers are evident outside the United States (see, e.g., Anderson et al. 2005, Lelkes 2016). Yet, as is evident in **Figure 4**, the partisan gap has been growing (Pew Res. Cent. 2017, Sances 2011, Theiss-Morse et al. 2015). There is now almost no trust in government among partisans of the out-party—an atmosphere that Hetherington (2015, p. 447) describes as "poisonous" for governing. This was true of Republicans under the Obama presidency and seems certain to be the case for Democrats during Trump's reign. The situation looks even bleaker when Independents are considered

[3]Torcal (2017), Norris (2011), Marien (2011), and Catterberg & Moreno (2006) conclude that there has been no general pattern of decline of trust in parliament among European democracies, but they focus on shorter periods.

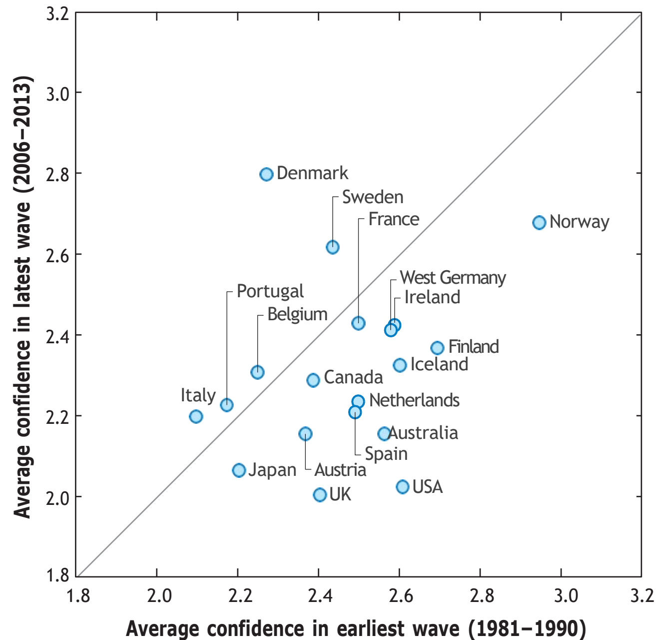

Figure 3

Trust in national legislature in industrial democracies over time. Entries show the (weighted) average confidence in the legislature from the earliest (x axis) and most recent (y axis) waves of the World/European Values Surveys. Confidence in the legislature ranged from 1 to 4 (1 = none, 2 = not very much, 3 = quite a lot, and 4 = a great deal). The earliest and most recent survey waves for the 19 countries are: Australia, 1981 and 2012; Austria, 1990 and 2008; Belgium, 1981 and 2009; Canada, 1982 and 2006; Denmark, 1981 and 2008; Finland, 1981 and 2009; France, 1981 and 2008; Iceland, 1984 and 2009; Ireland, 1981 and 2008; Italy, 1981 and 2009; Japan, 1981 and 2010; Netherlands, 1990 and 2012; Norway, 1982 and 2008; Portugal, 1990 and 2008; Spain, 1981 and 2011; Sweden, 1982 and 2011; United Kingdom, 1981 and 2009; United States, 1982 and 2011; West Germany, 1981 and 2013.

(**Figure 5**), in that the trust levels of Independents (leaners included) closely mirror those of out-party followers at each point in the ANES time series. Mistrust is even more pronounced among pure Independents (Keele 2005).

Figure 6 shows that the large and growing partisan gap in trust is also evident in GSS data when the focus is on the executive branch. Partisan gaps in trust of Congress and the Supreme Court appear more muted, though researchers have found identifiable partisan swings when control of the House or Senate changes party hands (Gershtenson et al. 2006, Jones 2015, Keele 2005). Party identification is not central to the scholarship on trust in the Supreme Court, but researchers have found that support for the Court responds to major decisions and Court appointments according to partisan perceptions of their ideological hue. Debates about the size, duration, and significance of these fluctuations continue (Bartels & Johnston 2013; Christenson & Glick 2015; Gibson & Nelson 2015, 2016; Nicholson & Howard 2003; Semet et al. 2014).

In democratic societies, the mass media are assumed to have a significant role in educating citizens and holding accountable those in office. Nevertheless, GSS (Assoc. Press-NORC Cent. Public Aff. Res. 2014) and Gallup data (Swift 2016) show a significant loss in confidence in the media over time, with the decline especially steep among Republicans since 2000, producing a widening partisan gap in recent years. The post-2000 period has seen growth in partisan media

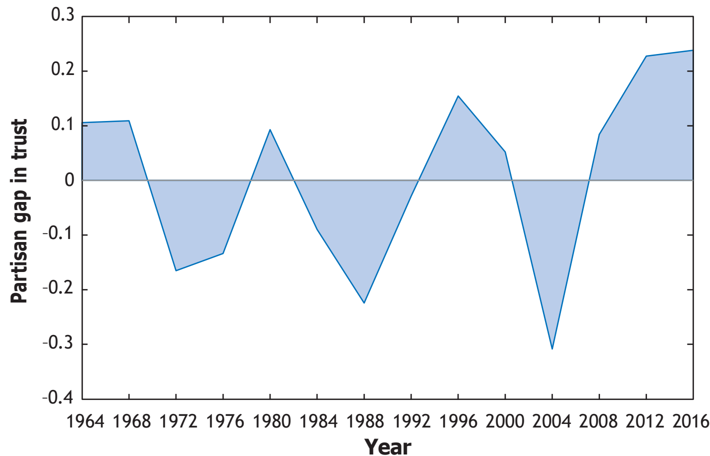

Figure 4

Partisan gap in trust in the US government over time: difference in (weighted) average trust of Democrats and Republicans from ANES data. For 1964–2012, the original trust variable was coded 1 = never; 2 = some of the time or don't know; 3 = most of the time; 4 = almost always. For 2016 the new trust variable was coded 1 = never; 2 = some of the time, half of the time, or don't know; 3 = most of the time; 4 = always. When the difference is positive, Democrats are more trusting than are Republicans, and when the difference is negative, Republicans are more trusting than are Democrats.

outlets (Prior 2013) and in social media echo chambers where left- and right-leaning citizens engage with like-minded others (Barberá et al. 2015, Flaxman et al. 2016). How this has affected the decline and partisan polarization of trust in government has yet to be established, but, with the additional stimulus of fake news, this gap in research should soon be addressed.

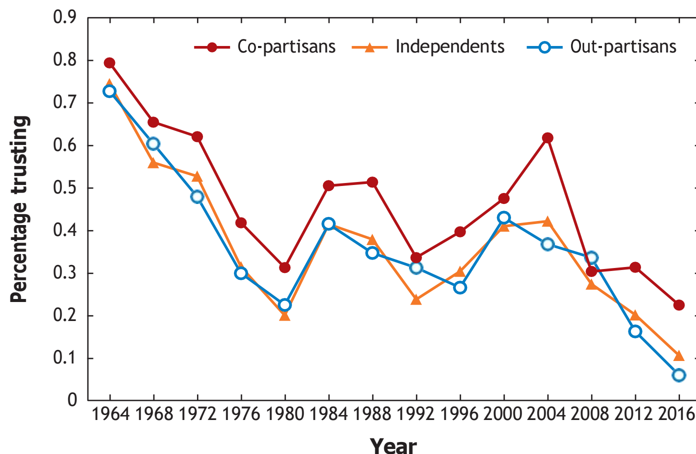

Figure 5

Percentage who trust the government among co-partisans (*red*), out-partisans (*blue*), and Independents (*orange*). People who identified as Democrats or Republicans in response to the root party identification question were designated as co-partisans or out-partisans depending on whether the sitting president was of their party. The group of Independents, thus, includes leaners. Entries are the weighted percentage of ANES face-to-face respondents saying that they trust the government most or all of the time. See **Figure 1** caption for more details about the response options and coding.

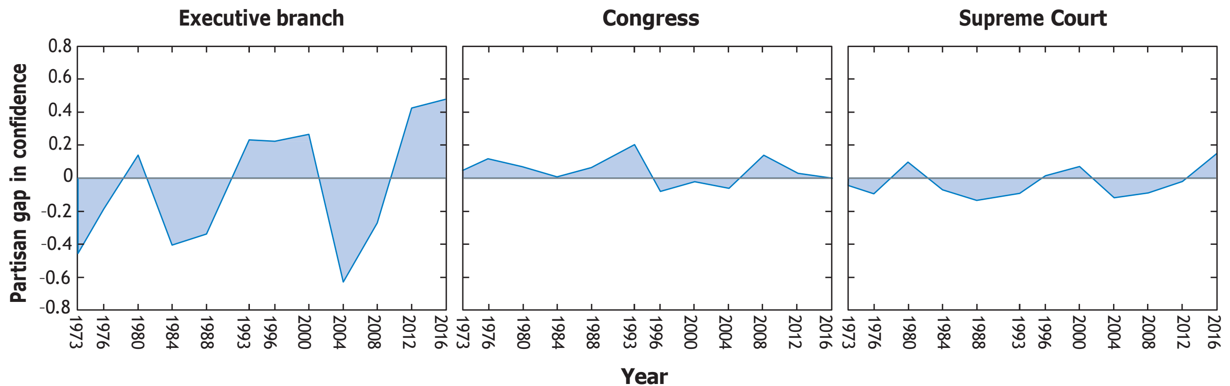

Figure 6

Partisan gap in confidence in US institutions and over time. The figures show the difference in (weighted) average confidence levels (scored 1–3) of self-identifying Democrats and Republicans from General Social Survey data.

SOURCES OF VARIATION AND CHANGE

Explanations for differences in political trust across individuals, contexts, and time are protean. Many factors related to changes in trust have been identified, but there is no consensus as to which factors are the most important.

Persona

Trust and distrust could be stable dispositions whose impact is generalized across multiple situations. Still, a constant cannot explain the changes that have manifestly occurred, so these intrapersonal factors might best be seen as establishing baseline attitudes. Genetic studies are sparse, as most deal with social rather than political trust (Mondak et al. 2017). Ojeda (2016), using sibling and twin pairs as subjects, does find that trust in government has a genetic component (with a heritability of 0.2–0.4) and argues that this is especially manifest under conditions of threat, thus highlighting the interplay between nature and the environment. Merolla et al. (2013) examine the role of oxytocin, a neuroactive hormone that plays a role in social attachment and affiliation in animals. They find that experimentally manipulating intake of oxytocin did increase trust in politicians and government, but only for those low in social trust. Studies using the Big Five inventory to examine personality differences in trust in government (Freitag & Ackerman 2016, Mondak & Halperin 2008, Mondak et al. 2017) report that trust tends to be modestly higher among those high in agreeableness and modestly lower among those high in openness and extraversion.

The idea that the connections between political and social trust create a virtuous or vicious cycle has continued to command attention because of its prominence in theses about the decline of social capital (Putnam 2001). Evidence at the individual level is mixed, though the association looks more robust when using granular measures (Zmerli & Newton 2008). There is a strong over-time association between the two time series, though social trust fluctuates less over the short term and cannot account for the sharp declines in political trust evident in several countries (Newton 2006). Keele (2007) concludes that the low and declining levels of social trust are dragging the equilibrium level of political trust down.

Another potential source of trust as a stable disposition is early political socialization. Evidence from the Jennings political socialization study is discouraging for this proposition (Damico et al. 2000, Jennings et al. 2009), while research on civic education has yielded mixed results regarding

trust (Mayne & Hakhverdian 2017a). There is more support for the idea that a generational change is afoot and is a driver of the downward trends in trust in the United States and Europe (see Dalton & Shin 2014, Norris 2011). The young tend to be less trusting of government than their elders, a reversal of the pattern seen in the 1960s, but whether this reflects a generational change wrought by postmaterial values is uncertain (Dalton 2005). The broader claim that generational change is bringing about democratic deconsolidation (Foa & Mounk 2016, 2017b) has been met with a chorus of conflicting voices in a recent online exchange (Alexander & Welzel 2017, Foa & Mounk 2017a, Norris 2017, Voeten 2017).

A final possibility is that certain demographic groups have different baseline levels of trust due to systematically different experiences. Yet demographics have weak associations with trust that vary with time and context. For example, blacks become more trusting of government when Democrats hold the presidency (Avery 2007, Wilkes 2015), though neither they nor Latinos become more trusting when represented in Congress or locally by someone of their own race or ethnicity (Gay 2002, Fowler et al. 2014; but see Pantoja & Segura 2003). Many scholars are examining whether trust develops according to a different logic depending on a citizen's race, ethnicity, or immigration status (e.g., Abrajano & Alvarez 2010, Avery 2009, Hwang 2017, Maxwell 2010, Nunnally 2012).

Political Trust as Political

The most promising explanation for change in trust is politics itself. Politics is the master *P* under which other explanatory *p*s can be grouped. Citrin & Green's (1986) list comprised policy, performance, party, and personality (of leaders). Hetherington & Rudolph (2015) prefer performance, processes, and probity and add two more *p*s, priming and polarization. What is common to these lists is that each *p* assumes that the public is reacting to events in the external world, experienced either directly or through the lens of the media and other modes of communication. The underlying thread in every hypothesis or finding is that trust declines when governments and institutions fail to meet expected goals or follow prescribed norms.

The relative influence of these alternative *p* factors is controversial. Researchers include as many as possible in multivariate analysis, but the familiar battle of regression coefficients remains inconclusive, in part because of differences in samples, measures, specifications of the predictive equation, and limited degrees of freedom for isolating the determinants of over-time change or cross-cultural differences.

Policy Dissatisfaction

In one of the earliest articles on trust in government, Miller (1974) argued that dissatisfaction with centrist policies by both the right and the left was the principle cause of declining trust in the late 1960s. It is logical that people unhappy with the direction of government policy would be distrusting, but the number of issue voters is limited (Achen & Bartels 2016). Surprisingly, the more recent literature on trust gives scant attention to policy dissatisfaction. If the parties in Congress have moved further away from their co-partisans in the electorate as they polarized, this could be contributing to the decline in trust in government. Furthermore, sharper issue divisions between Democrats and Republicans in the electorate could be behind the growing partisan gap in trust. To our knowledge, few scholars have pursued these ideas.[4]

[4] One partial exception is Jones (2015). In addition, scholars sometimes include policy liberalism and macropartisanship indicators in time series analyses of trust. These variables will pick up any tendency for trust to vary with the ideological or partisan tilt of the electorate but will not pick up the policy dissatisfaction or in-partisan/out-partisan dynamics.

Recent work studying policy dissatisfaction includes *Stealth Democracy* (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse 2002) and the literature it has inspired (e.g., Allen & Birch 2015, Andre & Depauw 2017). These compare policy distance to process distance in explaining trust-related phenomena like support for reforms of political institutions (see also Mayne & Hakhverdian 2017b).[5] McLaren (2012a,b, 2013) ties the decline in political support in the United Kingdom to the rise of anti-immigrant sentiment. Hetherington (2005, chapter 4) uses panel data to show that when new redistributive policies are initiated, policy dissatisfaction prompts mistrust. Finally, Schuck (2015) calls for scholars to pay more attention to policy failures. A small but growing literature is doing so by considering how citizens' attitudes toward government are influenced by their direct experiences with policies and bureaucrats, especially as regards the welfare state and in contexts of crisis (Ellinas & Lamprianou 2014, Kumlin & Haugsgjerd 2017). Ahmed & Braithwaite (2005) find that negative experiences with a government student loan program spill over to influence how people think about entirely different government policies.

Performance

As the theory of retrospective voting would suggest, bad economic times generally diminish trust in government; this holds true whether one employs subjective perceptions of the economy or objective indicators as measures of performance. Still, which aspect of economic performance is most important and which explains the dynamics of change over time remain uncertain. Wroe (2016) has developed new measures of economic insecurity that he argues are superior to the standard economic assessments for understanding trust in government. The Index of Consumer Sentiment, an aggregated opinion measure, is a good predictor of trust (e.g., Keele 2007, Hetherington & Rudolph 2015). Stevenson & Wolfers (2011) show a clear correlation between the unemployment rate and confidence in political institutions over time within the United States and other OECD countries, while van Erkel & van der Meer (2016) report that changes in economic growth, budget deficits, unemployment, and inflation all bear on changes in trust in government among European Union member states between 1999 and 2011. Whiteley et al. (2016) consider citizens' beliefs regarding process and performance jointly, arguing that process complaints can diminish trust directly but can also fuel the negative effects of poor performance.

Recent literature has also focused on the salience of government performance successes or failures. Chanley (2002), Chanley et al. (2000), and Hetherington & Rudolph (2008, 2015) argue that which aspect of government performance matters for trust depends on where the public's attention is focused (see also Pharr 2000). Trust will rally in response to a foreign policy crisis, they argue, if the crisis draws people's attention away from domestic problems.[6] Hetherington & Rudolph (2015) argue that economic downturns diminish trust in government more than economic recoveries rebuild it because the former are more salient to the public. Evidence in support of this argument about the role of an issue's or problem's salience is accumulating, but caution remains wise. For example, the positive impact of foreign policy crises may disappear when polarization means that politics no longer stops at the water's edge.

[5] In this literature, policy distance is the perceived gap between the current government policy and the citizen's policy ideal point, whereas process distance is the perceived gap between how the government is making policy decisions and how citizens would like those decisions to be made. The process continuum contrasts bottom-up, deliberative processes with top-down, representative processes.

[6] The logic for this result is different according to system justification theory (Jost et al. 2004), which holds that people are motivated to defend the status quo and the political system in which they live. When the system or country is threatened, the default response is heightened defense and expressions of support and attachment.

Another twist comes from Albertson & Gadarian (2015). Using news stories on public health and other crises to stimulate anxiety, they distinguish between the salience of internal threats—those coming from a "shortfall" in government—and external threats, such as a flu epidemic or a foreign policy crisis. When anxiety increases under the former condition, trust tends to decline, but when anxiety has an exogenous, external source, people turn to government for succor and trust can increase. The implication of this work is that, while in general poor performance drives down trust, an immediate crisis can have the opposite effect, at least in the short run.

Partisanship and Polarization

Partisan variations in trust in government are not new. The puzzle is why they are growing. We have already mentioned one possibility—that Democrats and Republicans are increasingly unhappy with the other party's policy agenda. Hetherington & Rudolph (2015) highlight three other ideas. The first is that the growing partisan trust gap has affective roots tied to the well-known rise in antipathy toward out-partisans. Second, partisan bias in performance evaluations may be on the rise, as their evidence comparing 2002 and 2004 suggests. The third and most innovative idea is that citizens' judgments of governments' trustworthiness respond more strongly to good performance when their party holds power and more strongly to poor performance when their party does not. According to Hetherington & Rudolph (2015), this partisan dynamic has become more pronounced in recent years.[7]

Party polarization is also a prime suspect for the overall downward trend in trust. Polarization in Congress amplifies conflict, name calling, and a failure to give credit on the occasions when it might be due while at the same time encouraging gridlock and brinkmanship on important issues (Binder 2003, Mann & Ornstein 2012). These internecine conflicts can only increase contempt for the political process and help reduce trust (see Jones 2015, Theiss-Morse et al. 2015). Time series analysis shows that congressional polarization correlates with aggregate trust levels (Jones 2015, Hetherington & Rudolph 2015). Content analysis shows that mass media have been giving increasing attention to polarization (Levendusky & Malhotra 2016), with coverage that is overwhelmingly negative (Robison & Mullinix 2016). Survey experiments suggest that confidence in Congress is boosted when legislation is portrayed as having bipartisan support (Harbridge & Malhotra 2011), while increasing the salience of polarization may lower trust levels (Robison & Mullinix 2016).

Process and Probity

A concern with process focuses attention on the conduct of politicians and whether political institutions play by the rules. One stream of research focuses on procedural justice, especially on the part of the police and courts (see Tyler & Jackson 2013). The hypothesis is that when the government treats people with respect and gives them a fair hearing, citizens are willing to accept painful outcomes and still retain faith in institutions. This form of legitimacy, if entrenched, reduces the costs of obtaining compliance with the law and gives officials more freedom to act. Whether this positive effect of procedural justice would endure if individuals found themselves consistently on the losing side of official decisions or policy outcomes is unclear.

A second stream of process-oriented research, led by Hibbing & Theiss-Morse (1995, 2001, 2002), emphasizes citizens' views of Congress. Process slides into probity when the focus is on

[7] Anderson & LoTempio (2002), Craig et al. (2006), and Blais & Ge´lineau (2007) all find winner–loser effects on trust (i.e., more trust if the candidate you voted for won, less trust if the candidate you voted for lost) after controlling for party identification. Since party-line voting has been on the rise, winner-loser effects could also be relevant to understanding the growing partisan gap.

representatives, with citizens complaining that politicians are dishonest, self-serving, and beholden to special interests. Process slides into performance when the issue is Congress's lawmaking, with citizens condemning Congress for passing legislation that serves narrow interests or failing to get anything meaningful done. These perceptions of "process" failings, possibly accurate (Brady & Theriault 2001),[8] clearly bear on trust in government. Yet, since scholars have not introduced perceptions of process into the major national surveys, we know less about the topic than we should. See Gangl (2007) and Rose (2014) for recent work making use of specialized surveys.

A third stream of research considers scandals. Trust in government took a major hit after Watergate, and scholars now assess the impact of specific scandals as well as cross-national differences in embedded corruption. Media coverage of scandals and corruption understandably conditions this relationship (Pharr 2000). Time series studies such as that of Keele (2007) show that some scandals matter for trust (e.g., the House banking scandal), while others do not (e.g., the Lewinsky affair). Bowler & Karp (2004) show that the constituents of representatives implicated in scandals become less trusting of government. This can lead to spirals of cynicism, suggests Dancey (2012), who uses panel data to show that the mistrusting are more likely to believe new claims of misconduct.

Finally, new research on electoral integrity puts process front and center. Although much of this work has a macropolitical focus, the latest round of the WVS asked how often people felt that positive practices (e.g., votes are counted fairly, election officials are fair) and negative practices (e.g., rich people buy elections, voters are threatened with violence at the polls) prevailed. Norris (2014) shows that these beliefs are strong predictors of trust in government (with negative perceptions fueling mistrust). Studies of how voting technology and experiences at the polling place influence Americans' confidence in elections unfortunately do not tie their analyses to trust in government per se (e.g., Alvarez et al. 2008, Claassen et al. 2013). Many observers hope that Web interfaces and e-government will encourage citizens to judge the government as more accessible, transparent, responsive, and the like, but research into these issues is still in the early stages (Tolbert & Mossberger 2006).

Mass Media

Media effects on political attitudes are notoriously hard to identity. That said, scholars have tied five trends to the low and declining trust in government: (*a*) more negative campaign advertisements and more coverage of them in the mass media (Geer 2012, Lau et al. 2007), (*b*) more focus on strategy and polling in election coverage (Aalberg et al. 2012, Cappella & Jamieson 1997), (*c*) less civility in news coverage and the blogosphere (Borah 2013, Mutz 2005, Sobieraj & Berry 2011), (*d*) more focus on soft rather than hard news (Boukes & Boomgaarden 2015), and (*e*) more coverage of partisan polarization, as discussed above. Social media are also receiving more attention from worried scholars (e.g., Persily 2017).[9] Some of these developments are elite-driven, as politicians and organizations seek to advance their agendas by harnessing or even fueling mass mistrust (Fried & Harris 2001, 2015).

The literatures relating trust to negative advertising, horse-race coverage, and incivility on television are the most developed, but even these are marked by inconsistent findings. For example, a 1999 meta-analysis on the effects of negative advertisements concluded that they had no consequences for trust, but that position was reversed in a 2007 follow up (Lau et al. 1999,

[8]For instance, columnist Joe Klein's "Basic rule of Congress-watching: if they've passed something, it's either meaningless, stupidly symbolic or crass porkification" (**http://swampland.time.com/2007/10/24/why_americans_hate_congress**).

[9]No review covers all of this literature, but Newton (2017) and Schuck (2017) are helpful.

2007). Subsequent studies have continued to come down on both sides of the issue (e.g., Gotlieb et al. 2017, Jackson et al. 2009). Indeed, one might also wonder why the mass media would have a strong, generalized effect on attitudes given the sharp decline in people's trust in the credibility of media and selective exposure dynamics. Still, the scholarly conversations on these topics are burgeoning, and we can hope that they yield more clarity in the years ahead.

THE POLITICAL RELEVANCE OF TRUST IN GOVERNMENT

Interest in political trust rests largely on beliefs about its consequences for the effectiveness of government and democratic stability. Accordingly, research has considered both systemic consequences and effects on individual attitudes and behavior. The former focus is prominent in historical and comparative institutional research and in the growing research on legitimacy, which typically adds an individual-level focus (see Tyler 2006). Scholars who study macro-level outcomes with aggregated survey data face the usual challenges of too many rival explanatory variables and too few degrees of freedom. This problem will diminish, if not disappear, as time series lengthen and cross-national survey research expands.

We focus on the individual-level consequences of trust for policy preferences, political participation, vote choice, and compliance. Here, one obvious difficulty is identifying the direction of influence. For example, dissatisfaction with the incumbent president is associated with higher levels of political mistrust (Erber & Lau 1990), but it is also the case that those with lower trust in government are more likely to vote for non-incumbent candidates for president (Citrin & Green 1986, Hetherington 1998). In the same vein, policy dissatisfaction lowers one's trust in government, but when trust is low, it is more difficult to enact those very policies (Hetherington & Rudolph 2015).

Consequences for Policy Preferences

The possibility that trust influences policy preferences has been raised by many scholars (e.g., Chanley et al. 2000, Sholz & Lubbell 1998), but the core ideas have been developed in a broad research program dominated by Hetherington and Rudolph (see Rudolph 2017 for an overview). Most of the research is focused on the United States, but the arguments have also been applied to other countries (e.g., Tru¨ dinger & Bollow 2011). The core claim is that people will not be willing to support policies that entail personal risk or sacrifice if they do not trust the government. When risk or sacrifice is involved, people use trust in government as a heuristic to decide whether positive outcomes will materialize; this decision then influences their support for government activity. Moreover, the same effects apply to both liberals and conservatives. Liberals use the trust heuristic when considering whether to support risky policies promoted by the right, while conservatives do the same when considering risky policies promoted by the left.

The main evidence for these conclusions comes from finding that the association between trust and policy preferences is largest among people who arguably face risk or sacrifice. Fairbrother (2017), however, tests these ideas through an experimental study of people's willingness to pay taxes on polluting activities. Some people learned that the pollution tax would be offset by tax cuts elsewhere, while others learned that the tax cut offset had only been promised. This variation made no difference to the trusting but mattered to the mistrusting, whose support for the pollution tax dropped notably when the tax offset went from a guarantee to just a promise.

Hetherington & Rudolph (2015) tweak the argument by adding a priming logic. Using both experimental and observational evidence, they show that the salience of a particular policy domain initially affects what people have in mind when they think about whether the government is trustworthy, i.e., trust becomes imbued with domain-specific considerations. Trust then exerts an

especially strong impact on policy preferences in that domain. Of course, as policy debates heat up in the real world, many things can happen simultaneously—the issue can become more salient, citizens can acquire new information about the risks and sacrifices involved, and citizens can learn where the parties stand on the matter (Lenz 2009). Future research will need to consider these complexities in determining the effects of trust on policy preferences.

Overall, the implication of this research is that trust is a resource enabling government action. When citizens trust, the government can respond to liberal demands for more government spending and regulation because they can gain the acquiescence of trusting conservatives, but the government can also achieve conservative ends such as tax cuts and privatization of Social Security because trusting liberals can be brought around. The pernicious opposing inference is that widespread political mistrust makes it harder for governments to get anything done.

Consequences for Participation

The literature on consequences for participation has long recognized competing expectations. On the one hand, trust could be a sentiment of civic affirmation that inspires political engagement, including voting. On the other hand, the trusting may be satisfied with government and view it as needing little monitoring, so trust could weaken the impulse to participate in politics. By this reasoning, heightened vigilance and activity, including protest, would be found more often among those skeptical or distrusting of government. Gabriel (2017) provides an excellent overview of these issues, reaching the disappointing conclusion that "speculations about the impact of the crisis of confidence on political activity outweigh by far sound empirical research on the relationship between trust and political participation" (p. 228). It appears that the decline of turnout in advanced democracies cannot be attributed to the concomitant erosion of trust in government.[10]

If anything, the argument that mistrust spurs engagement rather than withdrawal is looking stronger. Peterson et al. (2016) find that aggregate trends in political interest and trust are negatively correlated, while other research (Miller & Krosnick 2004, Miller et al. 2016) shows that people in both parties are more likely to make financial contributions and contact elected officials if they fear an unwanted policy change is in the offing. The idea that Trump's victory has inspired a new wave of political engagement among the left is a common media theme (see Liu 2017 for one example).

Consequences for Vote Choice

Trust may be unrelated to voter turnout because the mistrusting choose "voice" (as in voting for the opposition) rather than "exit" (as in abstention) to express their discontent (Citrin & Luks 2001). Research has consistently confirmed the idea that political mistrust motivates anti-incumbent behavior. Dalton & Weldon (2005) show that people who mistrust political parties—pure Independents in the US polity—have higher rates of voting for parties not in power. These patterns are even stronger in systems where voting is compulsory (Be´langer 2017). The fact that aggregate trust is higher in proportional electoral systems may reflect the larger set of opportunities in those countries for the mistrusting to express their malaise (Be´langer 2017, p. 244). It is unclear what occurs when the mistrusting have the choice to opt either for the established opposition or for more extreme parties (Hooghe et al. 2011), an important topic in the current era, when right-wing populist parties are an available option.

[10]Trust in parties and confidence in electoral integrity are, however, associated with higher turnout (Dalton & Weldon 2005, Norris 2014).

Consequences for Compliance

Two perspectives underlie the expectation that trust leads to compliance with the law. The first is the idea of trust as a heuristic, which inspired Hetherington and Rudolph's work on trust and policy preferences (Rudolph 2017). In the words of Scholz & Lubell (1998, p. 400),

> Compliance involves a ... risky relationship; citizens undertake some immediate costly effort like paying taxes and face some risk that future collective benefits expected in return for compliance (tax-supported public goods for tax compliance, orderly traffic for compliance with traffic rules, reduced pollution for compliance with environmental law) may not materialize unless the government and other citizens maintain their side of the bargain.

The second perspective conceives of trust in authorities as an intervening variable between procedural justice experiences and compliance decisions. As Hough et al. (2010) describe the logic, how people are treated by police and justice officials influences whether they trust those institutions, which then influences whether they confer legitimacy on those institutions, which then influences the authority that the institutions can command, which then influences people's willingness to obey and cooperate (see Tyler 2006, Tyler & Jackson 2013).

This literature has not given center stage to trust as an intervening variable, focusing instead on other attitudes such as the sense of oneself as a law-abiding citizen or as having a duty to obey. There is a lost opportunity here, especially regrettable since this is the only area of trust-related research where scholars are conducting field experiments (e.g., Jackson 2015, Mazerolle et al. 2013). Still, numerous studies have demonstrated that trust in government is correlated with attitudes related to compliance, especially concerning tax paying. Unlike the earlier studies carried out by John Scholz and colleagues, these recent efforts do not use survey data to estimate taxpayer compliance per se. Instead, they focus on future intentions or beliefs about whether cheating on taxes is ever justified, usually called tax morale (e.g., Alm & Torgler 2006, Feld & Frey 2007, Lago-Peñas & Lago-Peñas 2010, Marien & Hooghe 2011).

CONCLUSION

This review has concentrated on trust in government and avoided engagement with the large related literature on system support or satisfaction with democracy (Norris 2011). We have also focused, perhaps to a fault, on the *politics* of political trust. Long-run value changes that weaken respect for traditional authority and the erosion of social trust due to a fraying of civil society can help explain the emergence of a skeptical political culture that makes it difficult to reverse the slide in trust. However, these slow-moving sociological factors do not account for the sharp changes in trust in government that characterize recent decades.

Indeed, new manifestations of distrust have surfaced to raise alarms about the solidity of liberal democracy. Populist outbursts in the United States and Europe are signs of political distrust. Populism (Oliver & Rahn 2016) represents a revolt of the people against the elite. It is fundamentally anti-institutional in nature, seeking a direct path from popular opinion to government policy. Populists are suspicious of experts and credulous of common opinion. The "establishment" is described in conspiratorial terms; for instance, in 2016, voters were warned (by Trump) that the election would be "rigged" to prevent their victory. The sources of populism, on the political right at least, are feelings of loss, both economic and cultural, with entrenched and distant authorities perceived as the actors bearing responsibility. The explosion of populist feeling in many countries suggests that the foci of distrust should be broadened to include popular feelings about seemingly established institutional arrangements. At the same time, new research on populism and conspiratorial thinking must engage existing knowledge about trust and incorporate trust measures.

Recommendations about how to raise the level of political trust tend to have a forlorn quality. If trust must be earned, the combination of rising expectations, value conflict, and increasingly intractable problems makes a sustained period of successful governmental performance difficult. In addition, partisan polarization, both affective and ideological, is a formidable barrier to the rapid restoration of trust. Polarization makes it difficult for people to agree on the achievements of government, even on something as seemingly objective as the degree to which the economy has improved. The suggestion that political elites might push the public in a trusting direction by focusing their attention on foreign policy issues probably represents the triumph of hope over experience. Domestic issues dominate public concerns, and, beyond that, history increasingly shows that quick and successful solutions to foreign policy crises are unlikely.

What, then, are the potential avenues for a rebound in trust? One possibility is a political earthquake in which one party achieves the kind of dominance that we last witnessed in 1964 and 1974 in the United States. This might create an opportunity for overcoming gridlock and meeting demands for change. If nothing else, the emergence of a dominant party would redistribute the balance of party loyalties, which could result in higher trust over time. A second potential boost to trust would be the emergence of a charismatic leader whose virtues and popularity would be projected onto the institutions and increase confidence in them. However, charismatic authority is hard to institutionalize and its carryover depends on a sustained period of economic growth and well-being. A third possibility for increasing the level of trust might be termed a reliance on retail politics. That is, if citizens trust the institutions that they interact with most closely—the police, the tax collector, the street cleaner, the school board, and so forth—their confidence in these close-to-home representations of government might mitigate distrust of the more remote federal institutions. As Suzanne Mettler and others have pointed out, however, people are often unaware of the benefits of government policies that they are quick to condemn as wasteful.

We conclude with what may be an unanswerable question: How much political trust is too little or too much for the collective good? Reagan's aphorism about agreements with the Soviet Union was "Trust, but verify." If a virtual absence of trust fosters paralysis and disobedience, then blind faith can lead to widespread abuse of power. Skepticism, the midpoint on the continuum, seems a rational starting point, with change to depend on careful, unbiased monitoring of how government behaves. Although unbiased monitoring might be scarce in today's hyperpartisan polity, biases can be mitigated. Perhaps scholars should think harder about what level of trust is rational and how the public can be moved there.