Political trust has never returned to Great Society-era levels. Conventional wisdom suggests that chronically poor performance explains why. Over the last 25 years, however, performance has often been at least very good. We show that one key to understanding the persistence of lower levels of political trust is that Americans have become more apt to use less favorable criteria when asked to evaluate government. When more people identify international problems as most important, trust increases. Hence the steep decline in concern about international issues after the 1960s has set a lower baseline than before. In addition, we show that the effect of economic performance on political trust is asymmetric. Since fewer people think the economy is important during good times than bad, even the often strong economies of the past 30 years increased trust less than the poor economies diminished it. Taken together, our results imply that a return to 1960s-era trust levels is unlikely.

In the mid to late 1960s, trust in the federal government began a dramatic decline that lasted more than a decade and a half. In 1964, 76% of Americans said they trusted the government in Washington to do what is right at least most of the time. By 1980, only 25% did. Considering the events of the late 1960s and 1970s, this decline was predictable. The scholarly conventional wisdom suggests that government performance drives trust (e.g., Chanley, Rudolph, and Rahn 2000; Citrin 1974; Hetherington 1998), with economic considerations particularly important (Citrin and Green 1986; Weatherford 1984). Performance during this period was awful. In addition to Watergate, the American people endured urban race riots, stagflation, stagnant financial markets, and an energy crisis. Each no doubt contributed to the proverbial malaise of the era.

Although scholars have done well to identify the causes of the decline, they have yet to explain its persistence, which is a problem of some magnitude. A well specified dynamic theory of political trust ought to explain increases, decreases, and stasis, but measures of government performance fail in this regard. On the international front, the United States effectively vanquished its Cold War nemesis with the demise of the Soviet empire in the early 1990s. Yet political trust reached its minimum as measured by the National Election Study soon after this success. On the home front, the length and breadth of the economic expansions in both the Reagan and Clinton years produced outcomes sometimes even stronger than those of the post-World War II years. Although the mid-1980s and late-1990s both saw increases in political trust, neither era even approached trust levels achieved in 1972, much less 1964.

Moving beyond performance, we demonstrate that people decide how much they trust government based on the problems they think are important at any given point in time, a process we broadly define as priming. Specifically, Americans trust the government more when they are concerned about international problems, suggesting that persistently high levels of concern about foreign threat at the height of the Cold War produced what appear in retrospect to be anomalously high levels of political trust in the 1950s and 1960s. A performance-based theory would suggest victory in the Cold War should increase trust, but our results suggest that it did more to harm trust than it did to repair it. Priming also explains the dramatic surge in trust after 9/11, which very briefly returned trust to 1960s-era levels. The continued importance of international concerns in the three years that followed is also consistent with the fact that, despite much weaker economic performance and a war the public began to sour on, trust in government at the end of 2004 was higher than at the end of the Clinton presidency.

In addition, priming is central to understanding the effect of the economy on the dynamics of political trust.
Economic issues are like international issues in that they become more important to the public during crises (Behr and Iyengar 1985), but they are different in that economic crises attract public scorn while international crises rally the public (Mueller 1973). This means that feelings about government are sure to suffer a lot during bad economic times because such conditions capture widespread public attention, giving economic considerations greater weight when citizens evaluate government. In contrast, fewer Americans will perceive the economy as a pressing concern during boom times, which suggests the economy will do less to shape evaluations of the government when economic times are good. In short, we show that judgments of economic importance condition the effect of traditional measures of economic performance. This asymmetry explains why trust has plummeted when times were bad, as they were in the 1970s and the early 1990s, and why trust has increased more modestly during the major economic expansions of the last 30 years.

Understanding the persistence of relatively low levels of political trust is important because it has a wide range of meaningful consequences. Variation in trust is the key to understanding why government pursued a Great Society in the mid-1960s but a Reagan Revolution in the early 1980s (Hetherington 2005). Indeed, both individual- and aggregate-level studies suggest that trust is the foundation of public support for liberal domestic policies (Chanley, Rudolph, and Rahn 2000; Hetherington 2005), particularly among self-identified conservatives (Rudolph and Evans 2005). In addition, political trust increases citizen compliance with government demands such as taxpaying (Scholz and Lubell 1998), engages collective restraint in the face of social dilemmas (Tyler and Degoe 1995), and shapes the likelihood of voting for incumbents and third-party candidates (Hetherington 1999). Finally, by affording representatives greater leeway to depart from constituency ideal points, trust may enable them to place collective interests ahead of parochial concerns when allocating scarce resources (Bianco 1994). Since trust has such important implications for public policy, political behavior, and democratic representation, scholars must understand why trust rises and falls and, in particular, why it has remained low relative to its Great Society-era heights.

Sources of Political Trust

Following the lead of other empirically oriented scholars, we define political trust as people’s evaluations of how government is doing its job compared to their expectations of its performance (see, e.g., Miller 1974). Prior scholarship suggests that performance, process, and probity are its three most important determinants. While all these variables perform well in cross-sectional analyses, none can explain why political trust never returned to high levels for any length of time.

Fluctuations in economic outcomes appear to covary with movements in political trust over time. Trust declined through the 1970s, a decade characterized by declining real income, high unemployment, and skyrocketing inflation. Trust then increased with the economic resurgence of the middle Reagan years, only to decline again in the early 1990s during a recession. When a long, uninterrupted economic rebound occurred under Bill Clinton, trust in government rebounded, despite the president’s persistent and intense scandal problems. Taken together, a strong link between political trust and the economy appears to exist.

The empirical evidence, however, suggests a more complicated story. At the individual level, citizens’ economic perceptions sometimes have large effects on trust, but sometimes they have no effect (Citrin and Green 1986; Hetherington 1998; Miller and Borrelli 1991). Although time-series analyses have generally found more consistent evidence for the importance of the economy (Chanley 2002; Chanley, Rudolph, and Rahn 2000; Keele 2007), these models treat the effect of the economy as constant over time and, hence, may overestimate its effect in some years and underestimate it in others.

In addition to economic performance, perceptions about political processes and institutional performance affect trust, particularly those relating to Congress. Congress is unpopular relative to the presidency and judiciary because its processes are so public (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1995). Americans like democracy in theory but are troubled by it in practice, disliking the sometimes bitter partisan disagreement inherent in the legislative process. Moreover, the public tends to think that members of Congress typically play ordinary Americans for suckers by abusing legislative perquisites while ignoring collective outcomes (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002). Not surprisingly, then, congressional approval, a barometer of both performance- and process-related concerns (Durr, Gilmour, and Wolbrecht 1997), is a key determinant of political trust (Hetherington 1998).

Finally, probity, usually operationalized in the form of government scandals, also affects political trust (Chanley, Rudolph, and Rahn 2000; Keele 2007; but see Miller and Borrelli 1991). One should not,
however, overweight the importance of scandals. Although the conventional wisdom holds that trust bottomed out in the mid-1970s because of Watergate, the government’s inability to deal with the economic challenges of the decade were even more influential (Weatherford 1984). Furthermore, trust continued to decline for several years after Richard Nixon’s resignation and increased markedly during Clinton’s second term even though the Monica Lewinsky scandal dominated it.

**Priming and the Dynamics of Political Trust**

We believe that the concept of priming offers untapped theoretical insight into the question of why trust moves, and, importantly, why it has never returned to Great Society-era levels. Broadly conceived, priming can be defined as “changes in the standards that people use to make political evaluations” (Iyengar and Kinder 1987, 63).

Following Miller and Krosnick (2000), we view priming as the second half of a two-stage process. The first stage is agenda setting, which is the “process by which problems become salient as political issues” (Erbring, Goldenberg, and Miller 1980, 16–17). Although the mass media plays a prominent role in the agenda-setting process, public concerns often come from other sources. Indeed, scholars have shown that the public’s national importance judgments are shaped by a diverse set of sources, including media coverage, personal experience, real-world cues, interpersonal communication, and presidential rhetoric (Behr and Iyengar 1985; Erbring, Goldenberg, and Miller 1980; Iyengar and Kinder 1987; MacKuen 1984; MacKuen and Coombs 1981; Mendelsohn 1996; Miller and Krosnick 2000; Yang and Stone 2003).

Priming is a related but distinct phenomenon that occurs after agenda setting has taken place. Priming effects occur when public attention to an issue influences the weight assigned to it during the formation of political evaluations (Druckman 2004; Krosnick and Kinder 1990; Miller and Krosnick 2000). Although priming has long been thought to work through the mechanism of accessibility (Price and Tewksbury 1997), recent work suggests that it is, instead, mediated by national importance judgments (Miller and Krosnick 2000). So conceived, priming can be investigated as an aggregate-level phenomenon by tracking public perceptions of the nation’s most important problem over time and examining their impact on political evaluations (e.g., Behr and Iyengar 1985; Edwards, Mitchell, and Welch 1995; Johnston et al. 1992).

Shifts in national importance judgments are potentially significant because they prime the public to focus its performance evaluations in particular domains. We predict that performance evaluations concerning a given issue will exert a greater impact on political trust as the proportion of the public naming that issue as nationally important increases. The argument that national importance judgments can produce priming effects already enjoys empirical support in the study of presidential approval (Edwards, Mitchell, and Welch 1995). We believe that these theoretical insights can be fruitfully applied to the study of more global attitudes toward government such as political trust.1

The economy is unique in the study of political trust because we can measure people’s perceptions of its performance in the aggregate with some precision. Obviously people ought to trust government less when they think the economy is doing worse, and vice versa. But decades of scholarship suggest the effects of good and bad economies ought to differ. Campbell et al. were the first to hypothesize such an asymmetry in explaining why party fortunes change over time. Starting from the assumption that politics carries low salience for most people most of the time, they argued that good performance would do “little to motivate the electorate to connect events of the wider environment with the actors of politics” (1960, 556). In contrast, “economic . . . calamity can force events across the threshold of political awareness” (Campbell et al. 1960, 556). Mueller (1973) later demonstrated this asymmetry empirically in his work on presidential approval. Subsequently, others found evidence for Campbell et al.’s theory in models of aggregate (Bloom and Price 1975) and individual-level (Cover 1986; but see Radcliff 1994) voting behavior. Evidence of a more general negativity bias also appears in evaluations of the character of presidential candidates (Goren 2002) and confidence in the Supreme Court (Grosskopf and Mondak 1998), with further scholarly evidence suggesting that such

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1In the empirical analyses to follow, we assume that agenda setting has taken place and is manifested through the public’s judgments concerning the national importance of particular issues. Our theory does not require that we posit a single source of agenda-setting effects. What is central to our theory is the proposition that these national importance judgments, once formed, are politically consequential and will shape political trust.
biases are pervasive in politics (e.g., Lau 1985) and beyond (e.g., Jordan 1965).

We anticipate, then, that the public’s assessments of economic importance ought to condition the effect of economic performance on political trust. Since human beings tend to overweight negative information (Kahneman and Tversky 1974; Tversky and Kahneman 1981), more people will identify the economy as an important problem when it is relatively bad (see also Bloom and Price 1975). When the economy is good, however, salience will be lower and, by implication, fewer people will judge the government based on how it is performing. Failing to account for these conditional effects may, in fact, explain the inconsistent results of economic perceptions on the individual level.

Our theory squares nicely with variation in individual-level findings. Specifically, Hetherington (1998) finds that retrospective economic evaluations had a significant effect on political trust in 1988 when the economy was fair, but they had no effect in 1996 when it was very good. Similarly, Citrin and Green (1986) find that these same economic perceptions had a significant effect on political trust in 1980 and 1982 when the economy was poor, but they had no effect in 1984 when the economy was again very good.

When there are no data available to tap public perceptions of government performance, we expect that the public’s national importance judgments in certain areas will exert a direct impact on political trust. When people identify crime as important, for example, there is scant chance they are satisfied. People expect government to protect law abiders from law breakers, so concerns about crime imply that they think performance is poor. Hence, when more people think crime is an important national problem, the public ought to trust government less. Indeed, the trust literature has already provided limited evidence in support of this expectation (Chanley, Rudolph, and Rahn 2000; Mansbridge 1997; Pew Research Center 1998).

We also expect that the salience of international issues will affect trust, but, unlike crime, more concern about international issues ought to increase political trust. Most Americans have little reason to consider the foreign world unless the country is facing a crisis. During a crisis, people are more inclined to think collectively because only government can respond to the threat (Alford 2001; Mueller 1973). Indeed, research in social psychology shows that external intergroup threat increases perceptions of both ingroup and outgroup homogeneity (Rothgerber 1997). As a result, patriotism rises during international crises, which helps explain the rally in approval ratings that the president typically receives (Mueller 1973).

In addition, the government is likely to receive less negative media coverage when confronting international problems as compared to domestic ones. This is in large part the result of the executive branch’s natural informational advantage. The media are less able to present opposing interpretations of international crises than domestic problems because the most sensitive information about the crisis is available only from the executive branch (Baker and Oneal 2001). In addition, presidents are typically able to maintain high levels of approval even when performance in confronting the threat is poor because competing elites often mute their criticism so as not to seem unpatriotic (Brody 1991). Moreover, even when media coverage of the government on foreign affairs turns negative, as has been the case recently with the war in Iraq, people still evaluate the president more favorably on foreign affairs than they do on domestic concerns like the economy. For example, even though Americans’ approval of President Bush on Iraq deteriorated toward the end of 2004, the average approval of his performance on Iraq and terrorism was always significantly higher than approval of his handling of the economy, which, arguably, was performing quite well. In fact, even though a majority of Americans turned against the Iraq war for the first time in the fourth quarter of 2004, political trust increased sharply that quarter, likely reflecting the marked increase in concerns about international problems, a point we take up in more detail below.

Finally, there are striking asymmetries in the affect that citizens hold toward different parts of government, all of which suggest that evaluations of...
government ought to be more favorable when international concerns are salient. Americans have particularly positive feelings toward the parts of government that might combat a foreign threat. In the 2004 NES, for example, the mean feeling thermometer score for the military was 79 degrees, by far the highest of any part of the government. In contrast, the mean feeling thermometer score for Congress, the part of government that most Americans have in mind when they think about government (Feldman 1983; Williams 1985), was 58 degrees. The mean feeling thermometer for “people on welfare,” the group that Americans think receives the bulk of government money (Gilens 1999) and is, hence, critical in explaining people’s evaluation of government (Hetherington 2005, Chap. 2), was an even chillier 56 degrees. This suggests that people will trust government more when the part of government they are thinking about is the military rather than Congress or the Department of Health and Human Services.4

A question wording experiment conducted shortly after 9/11 underscores the importance of priming. In an ABC News poll taken on January 9, 2002, half of the sample was invited to judge the government’s trustworthiness when thinking about the economy, health care, Social Security, and education while the other half was invited to think about national security and the war on terrorism. Among those primed to think about domestic concerns, only 38% provided trusting responses. In contrast, 69% of those primed about national security did.

There is more general, but still descriptive, evidence of political trust increasing during times of international crisis. During the first Gulf War, trust increased for a time along with President Bush’s popularity (Hetherington and Nelson 2003; Parker 1995). In the months after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the percentage of people citing terrorism, Iraq, or foreign affairs was correlated with aggregate levels of political trust (Hetherington 2005, Chap. 8). According to the biennial NES time series between 1958 and 1996, a correlation exists between the percentage of people citing an international problem as most important and levels of political trust (Alford 2001).5 Evidence from time-series analyses has been supportive (Chanley 2002) but not consistently so (Chanley, Rudolph, and Rahn 2000).

### Time-Series Data and Measures

The theory outlined above is dynamic in the sense that we predict that, over time, changes in the public’s national importance judgments will lead to changes in political trust. Testing our hypotheses thus requires a time-series analysis of longitudinal data. In this section we describe our data and the construction of our time-series measures.

### Political Trust

The concept of political trust is commonly measured with the following instrument: “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?” First administered in 1958, this instrument has appeared on the biennial ANES survey since 1964. By the 1970s, other survey houses began to measure political trust at more frequent intervals, although not always using the same question wording. Many organizations, such as Gallup, CBS News, and the New York Times, adopted language identical to that of the NES instrument. Others have employed similar instruments but with differently worded questions or

4Although Americans usually think well of the government’s ability to combat external threat, we recognize that they may be dissatisfied at times. The Iran hostage crisis, Vietnam, and the war in Iraq starting in 2004 come to mind as possible examples. If perceptions of international performance vary systematically as is true of economic performance, it would make sense to model the effect of government performance in the international arena as conditional on the proportion of the public identifying this area as most important. Unfortunately, we cannot measure international performance with any precision. We created a weak proxy for international performance by using Stimson’s (1999) algorithm to create a quarterly measure of Foreign Policy Approval based on the proportion of the public who approved of how the president is handling (foreign affairs, foreign policy, foreign relations). We call the proxy weak because, most centrally, it focuses on a partisan figure, the president, and fails to tap feelings about either protecting the nation or any of the more popular actors in prosecuting foreign policy. Not surprisingly, this measure did not affect political trust nor did its interaction with the importance of international issues approach statistical significance. Let us make clear, however, that our inability to measure the public’s perceptions about government performance on international issues makes it more difficult for us to support our own hypothesis of an unconditional effect because data limitations force our model to assume that the public always perceives government performance on international issues to be good. To the extent that this is not always true, the effect of concern about international issues will be attenuated. Our statistical model thus performs a conservative test.

5The link between public concern about international issues and political trust is not simply an aggregate level phenomenon. In the 2004 NES, for example, those who identified an international problem as most important expressed fifty (shouldn’t this be 50, not fifty)% more trust in government (mean = .37) than those who identified another issue (mean = .24).
response options. ABC News and the Washington Post, for example, often drop the phrase “do you think you can” from the stem of the NES question. The Los Angeles Times typically uses the NES stem but adds “hardly ever” as a fourth response option. Yankelovich/Time has asked still another variant: “Thinking about the government in Washington, how much trust do you have in the federal government to do what is right—a lot of trust, some trust, only a little trust, or none at all?” Because no single version of the trust question has been asked at quarterly intervals over an extended period of time, longitudinal analyses of political trust have, until recently, been limited to annual data.

Exploiting the analytical advantages of Stimson’s (1999) “dyad ratios” algorithm, Chanley, Rudolph, and Rahn (2000) were able to construct a quarterly measure of political trust from a diverse set of survey marginals in the Roper archive. Stimson’s method overcomes the problem of intermittent time-series data in public opinion research by allowing the analyst to treat related but individually incomplete series as indicators of a single underlying construct based on their common movement over time. His technique establishes a common metric for these multiple indicators through a recursive process and produces an overall index for the attitude under study. In addition, the procedure generates a loading for each component series that enables the researcher to observe how strongly each series correlates with the overall index.

Using Stimson’s algorithm, we measure political trust by updating the quarterly series developed by Chanley, Rudolph, and Rahn (2000) that extends from 1976: 1 through 2006: 1. For descriptive purposes, we also create an annualized version of the series from 1958 to 2006. Five different series contributed to the construction of the political trust index. The question wording and frequency of administration for each of these series is reported in Table 1. Table 1 also reports the loading (correlation) between each component series and the overall index. Each of the individual series loads quite well, and the implied measurement model performs admirably, with the quarterly trust index explaining more than 90% of the variance in the individual series.

### National Importance Judgments

To test for aggregate level priming effects, we measure and track public perceptions about the most important problem facing the nation. We expect that the public will place disproportionate weight on the issues it considers most important at a given point in time. To measure national importance judgments, we rely principally on responses to the question: “What do you think is the most important problem facing this country today?” This question, and subtle variants of it, has been asked by survey houses more than 400 times since 1976. Using these data and Stimson’s algorithm, we create three quarterly most important problem (MIP) series. The first of these series, MIP International, represents the proportion of the public who named international issues or concerns (e.g., foreign policy, national defense, terrorism, war, the Middle East, or specific foreign nations/leaders) as the nation’s most important problem. A second series, MIP Economy, reflects the proportion who named economic issues (e.g., economy, unemployment, inflation, prices, or interest rates) as most important. The third series, MIP Crime, is based on the proportion of the public who named crime or violence, or specific instances thereof, as most important. Details concerning the

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6 Technical details concerning the “dyad ratios” algorithm are reported in Appendix 1 of Stimson (1999). Initially designed to create a measure of policy mood, Stimson’s method, which is publicly available on his website, has since been used to create a variety of time-series measures, including congressional approval (Durr, Gilmour, and Wolbrecht 1997), political trust (Chanley, Rudolph, and Rahn 2000), public support for the Supreme Court (Durr, Martin, and Wolbrecht 2000), and racial policy preferences (Kellstedt 2000).

7 The original series ran from 1980: 1 through 1997: 4 (Chanley, Rudolph, and Rahn 2000) and has previously been updated through 2001 (Chanley 2002). Our updated series not only extends back to 1976: 1, but includes more than a dozen quarters’ worth of data after 9/11. It is possible to extend the quarterly series back as far as 1972: 2 if one is willing to include additional questions in the construction of the trust index, such as: “How much trust and confidence do you have in our Federal government to do a good job in carrying out its responsibilities?” and “How much trust and confidence do you have in the federal government to do a good job in carrying out its responsibilities?” (see Keele 2007). Because these items can also be interpreted as indicators of performance, we exclude them to avoid any potential confound between political trust and our performance-related explanatory variables. It should be noted, though, that including these alternative indicators in our trust index and beginning the analysis in 1972 does not alter any of the substantive findings we report in the sections to follow.

8 A potential criticism of the “most important problem” questions is that they may not faithfully reflect what is actually the most important problem facing the nation at any given point in time. For our purposes, however, these questions are particularly appropriate because they capture what the public perceives to be the most important problem. While these questions are certainly not without limitations as indicators of national importance judgments (Wlezien 2005), they are clearly the best available indicator over time.
construction of these three measures are reported in Table 2. The eight component series generally load quite well on the three indexes, and the measurement models perform well, as each index explains at least 85% of the variance in its component series.9

Performance, Process, and Probit

As a measure of economic performance, we employ the Index of Consumer Sentiment from the University of Michigan’s Survey of Consumers. This composite measure reflects public perceptions of personal and national economic conditions and is comprised of indicators that are both retrospective and prospective in nature.10 While we anticipate that economic sentiment will influence political trust, we expect that the effects of economic sentiment will be moderated by the extent to which the public views economic concerns to be important.

We also include measures of presidential and congressional approval. Presidential approval is a clear indicator of performance, generally rising and falling with national conditions. Some research finds that people tend to trust the government more when they approve of the president (Citrin 1974; Citrin and Green 1986; Citrin and Luks 2001; Miller and Borrelli 1991).11

Although few Americans know enough about politics to gauge the performance of Congress, its effect on trust is, somewhat curiously, even stronger than that of presidential approval (Feldman 1983; Hetherington 1998; Williams 1985). This suggests that congressional approval taps more than performance. Variation in congressional approval is largely a function of discord in the lawmaking process, such as the occurrence of veto overrides, conflict within Congress, and major bill passage (Durr, Gilmour, and Wolbrecht 1997). Since these are many of the elements that Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (1995)

### Table 1 Correlations of Political Trust Indicators with Overall Index

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Name</th>
<th>Item Wording</th>
<th>Correlation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trust 1</td>
<td>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? (n = 112, asked in 70 quarters)</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust 2</td>
<td>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, or hardly ever? (n = 19, asked in 19 quarters)</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust 3</td>
<td>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, or never? (n = 11, asked in 10 quarters)</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust 4</td>
<td>How much of the time do you trust the government in Washington to do what is right—just about always, most of the time, or only some of the time? (ABC/Washington Post) (n = 35, asked in 28 quarters)</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust 5</td>
<td>Thinking about the government in Washington, how much trust do you have in the federal government to do what is right—a lot of trust, some trust, only a little trust, or none at all? (n = 3, asked in 3 quarters)</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

% variance explained 90.77

Note: Data are quarterly and cover the period from 1976:1 to 2006:1.

---

9Two of the series, MIP 4 and MIP 7, did not perform particularly well in the crime model. However, we elected to retain them since they do perform well in the other two models and since excluding them during the construction of the MIP series does not affect the future performance of any of the three MIP series in our statistical models.

10Our measure of performance is deliberately subjective. It reflects not only the objective economy, but also public sentiment during periods of “irrational exuberance” and “irrational pessimism” (DeBoef and Kellstedt 2004).

11Political trust and approval are related yet theoretically distinct concepts. When people are asked whether they approve or disapprove of Congress or the President, their responses tend to reflect their feelings toward the occupants of those institutions rather than their feelings toward the institutions themselves (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1995). As a result, congressional and presidential approval frequently bears the imprint of individuals’ partisan attachments. Political trust, by contrast, is more diffuse in nature. Although there is a slight partisan component to political trust (Citrin and Luks 2001), it reflects a broader orientation toward the national government as a whole (Hetherington 1998). Moreover, our analysis provides further evidence that the relationship between presidential approval, in particular, is really driven by economic evaluations. Once they are taken into account, political trust has almost now correlation with political trust, further suggesting its conceptual distinctiveness.
identify as manifestations of the political process that Americans intensely dislike, we view this as a measure of process as well.\textsuperscript{12}

Following Chanley, Rudolph, and Rahn (2000), congressional approval is measured using an updated version of the quarterly series developed by Durr, Gilmour, and Wolbrecht (1997) while presidential approval is measured using the quarterly mean response to Gallup’s familiar question: “Do you approve or disapprove of the way President ______ is handling his job as president?” Economic perceptions are, of course, strongly tied to both presidential approval (MacKuen, Erickson, and Stimson 1992) and congressional approval (Durr, Gilmour, and Wolbrecht 1997; Rudolph 2002). Not surprisingly, the effects of approval and economic perceptions on political trust are both attenuated when both variables appear on the right-hand side of the equation (Chanley 2002). As a result, we create distinctly political measures of performance by purging both approval series of their economic variance.\textsuperscript{13}

To account for the effects of government scandals, we create a dummy series that assumes a value of one during quarters in which a scandal was highly visible. The scandals included are drawn from the literature on political trust (Chanley, Rudolph, and Rahn 2000) and political approval (Durr, Gilmour, and Wolbrecht 1997). Our series includes Koreagate (1977: 1), ABSCAM (1980: 1), Iran-Contra (1986: 4), Jim Wright (1989: 2), Keating Five (1990: 4), House Banking (1991: 3), House Post Office (1992: 2),

\textsuperscript{12}At the individual level, Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (1995) also show a strong relationship between specific measures of process and congressional approval.

\textsuperscript{13}We accomplish this by separately regressing each approval series on consumer sentiment and saving the residuals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Name</th>
<th>Item Wording</th>
<th>MIP International</th>
<th>MIP Economy</th>
<th>MIP Crime</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MIP1</td>
<td>What do you think is the most important problem facing this country today? (Gallup) (n = 146, asked in 92 quarters)</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIP 2</td>
<td>What do you think is the most important problem facing the country today? (CBS/NYT) (n = 127, asked in 74 quarters)</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIP 3</td>
<td>What do you think is the most important problem facing this country today? (ABC / Wash. Post) (n = 39, asked in 34 quarters)</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIP 4</td>
<td>Which of the following do you think is the most important problem facing this country today? (AP) (n = 8, asked in 7 quarters)</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>-0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIP 5</td>
<td>What is the most important problem facing this country today? (LA Times) (n = 28, asked in 25 quarters)</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIP 6</td>
<td>What is the most important problem facing the country today? (PSRA) (n = 24, asked in 23 quarters)</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIP 7</td>
<td>What would you say is the single most important problem facing the U.S. today, that is, the one that you, yourself, are most concerned about? (Wirthlin) (n = 30, asked in 17 quarters)</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>0.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIP 8</td>
<td>What do you think is the single most important problem for the government—that is, the President and Congress—to address in the coming year? (CBS) (n = 28, asked in 15 quarters)</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

% variance explained

|                | 85.37 | 89.53 | 85.04 |

Note: Data are quarterly from 1976:1 to 2006:1. Because the response categories reported for open-ended questions and number of accepted responses varies across survey houses, we treat identically worded questions from different survey houses as separate entries. Results are not sensitive to this decision.

Finally, recent work suggests that political trust may also be shaped by other nonperformance related factors such as interpersonal trust (Keele 2007). To control for this possibility, we used Stimson’s algorithm to create a quarterly measure of interpersonal trust from 1976: 1 – 2006: 1. Although we include interpersonal trust on the right-hand side of the equation, it is not our contention that interpersonal trust is causally antecedent to political trust. Rather, we include it on the right-hand side of the equation to ensure that we are only modeling the “political” dimension of trust and not some general propensity to trust.

Descriptive Analysis

Before subjecting our theory to multivariate analysis, we visually examine the simple dynamics of political trust and the MIP series over time. To offer the broadest possible historical perspective, we first present the annualized versions of these series in Figure 1. Political trust enjoyed its highest recorded levels in the 1950s and 1960s. The heights of the 1960s, however, were soon followed by the depths of the 1970s. After a temporary rebound in the 1980s, trust resumed its decline in the early 1990s and reached its global minimum in 1994. Political trust began a slow ascent in the late 1990s and surged after 9/11. Although it appears to have since lost some of its momentum, it is still relatively high, especially given the economic softness experienced during most of the George W. Bush years. At no point in the annual series did levels of trust approach the former heights of the 1950s and 1960s.

Annualized versions of the three MIP series also appear in Figure 1. Each series appears to follow a course that is at least broadly consistent with its hypothesized impact on political trust. Like political trust, MIP International was relatively high in the 1950s and 1960s, declined in the 1970s, but rebounded somewhat during the Reagan years. Also like political trust, MIP International bottomed out in the early 1990s, started to grow in the late 1990s, and jumped dramatically after 9/11.14 The path of MIP Economy, by contrast, follows a much different course. Unlike political trust, MIP Economy reached its heights in the 1970s and was declining rapidly during the Reagan years. It increased sharply during the recession of the early 1990s but dropped soon after and remained low for the rest of the decade. Interestingly, MIP Economy and MIP International have been increasing simultaneously since 2000. The path of MIP Crime was relatively flat from the late 1950s through the early 1990s, typically fluctuating below the 10% mark. It increased sharply in the early 1990s and stayed relatively high for the remainder of the decade. MIP Crime began to decline in 2000 and has yet to reverse course.

The quarterly versions of these four series appear in Figure 2. In some respects, the quarterly and annual series tell much the same story for the period they share in common. The quarterly series, however, adds much greater precision to the tale. In the case of political trust, for example, it shows how the steep descent begun in the early 1990s was briefly interrupted by the Gulf War. It also shows that in the immediate aftermath begun in the early 1990s was briefly interrupted by the Gulf War. It also shows that in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, political trust reached, albeit temporarily, levels not seen since the pre-Watergate era. Importantly, all four series exhibit considerably more short-term variation than their annual counterparts. In the analyses to follow, we exploit this variation to test whether fluctuations in performance and national importance judgments have meaningful consequences for political trust.

14The bivariate correlation between political trust and MIP International over this period is an impressive 0.85. It should be noted that although this period includes the entire Vietnam era, an era in which international performance was arguably poorer than usual, the overall relationship between public concern for international issues and political trust remains both positive and strong.
A Dynamic Model of Political Trust

Our theory anticipates that political trust will be a function of performance, process, probity, and priming. Our theory is dynamic in the sense that we expect shifts in the explanatory variables to have both immediate and lasting effects on political trust. More specifically, we expect that current values of the explanatory variables will not only affect current levels of political trust, but will also influence future levels of trust at a progressively diminishing rate. To capture these dynamics, we rely on a Koyck distributed lag model.16

\[ Y_t = \alpha + \lambda Y_{t-1} + \beta_0 X_t + u_t, \]

Theoretically, our model implies that political trust is a function of both current and lagged values of the explanatory variables. The effects of the lagged explanatory variables are expressed through the lagged dependent variable and decay exponentially through time at a rate determined by the autoregressive parameter on lagged trust, \( \lambda \). While the immediate effect of a one-unit change in \( X_t \) is simply \( \beta_0 \), its cumulative effect is equal to \( \beta_0 / (1 - \lambda) \). We estimate our model using OLS.17

Analysis and Results

The results of our model appear in Table 3. The first data column reports the results of an equation in which only the direct effect of each variable is examined. The second data column reports the results of a second equation that also examines the conditional effect of economic sentiment by including the hypothesized interaction between economic sentiment and the proportion of the public that identifies the economy as most important.

A quick inspection of the sign and significance of the coefficients in the first equation reveals that our results comport well with theoretical expectations. First, congressional approval is positively related to political trust while the effects of presidential approval are statistically negligible. Consistent with previous research at both the individual and aggregate level, this result implies that political trust is more closely tied to public perceptions of Congress than to those of the president. As expected, the results further indicate that political trust drops during periods of government scandal and is positively associated with interpersonal trust. Finally, consistent with performance-based explanations of political trust, the results reveal a positive association between economic sentiment and political trust.

Of central interest in our analysis are the effects of the public’s national importance judgments. To assess their impact, we turn to the results of the fully specified model in Table 3. The results clearly suggest

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15Granger causality tests indicate no evidence of simultaneity. Using lag lengths of 1–6, we failed to reject the null hypotheses that political trust does not Granger cause any of the variables in our model at the 0.05 level.

16In bivariate form, the model begins with an infinite lag model with an exponential rate of decay, \( Y_t = \alpha + \beta_0 X_t + \beta_0 \lambda X_{t-1} + \beta_0 \lambda^2 X_{t-2} + \ldots + \epsilon_t \). We assume that the errors in this equation generated by an autoregressive process, \( \epsilon_t = \lambda \epsilon_{t-1} + u_t \), where \( u_t \sim IID (0, \sigma^2) \) and where the effects of unmeasured shocks persist at the same rate (i.e. \( \lambda \)) as the effects of the explanatory variables. The Koyck-transformed model can thus be rewritten as \( Y_t = \alpha + \lambda Y_{t-1} + \beta_0 X_t + u_t \), where \( u_t \sim IID (0, \sigma^2) \), and estimated with OLS (Beck 1992; Pindyck and Rubinfeld 1998).

17Even if \( u_t \) is serially uncorrelated, OLS may yield biased but consistent estimates. The nature of this bias is such that the effect of the lagged dependent variable tends to be overestimated while the effects of the explanatory variables tend to be understated (Achen 2000). In practice, however, the magnitude of this bias is likely to be minimal when certain conditions are satisfied. Specifically, Monte Carlo analyses suggest that, when \( u_t \) is serially uncorrelated, \( Y_t \) is stationary, and \( N \) is sufficient large (i.e., \( N > 75 \)), the average bias in OLS estimates is typically 2% or less (Hendry 1995; Keele and Kelly 2006). Importantly, all three conditions are satisfied with the current data and model. First, our sample size exceeds 100 cases. Second, we performed the DFGLS unit-root test (Elliott, Rothenberg, and Stock 1996) on political trust and rejected the null hypothesis of nonstationarity at the 0.05 level. Finally, as the diagnostics from our model later indicate, we find no evidence of serial correlation in the residuals.
that political trust is responsive to the public's national importance judgments. Consider first their direct effects. As expected, the coefficient for MIP International is both positive and statistically significant.18 This implies that political trust rises when international concerns are particularly salient. The coefficient for MIP Crime, by contrast, is negatively signed and statistically significant, implying that political trust falls when crime-related considerations take center stage.

Also consistent with expectations the interaction between Economic Sentiment and MIP Economy is both substantively and statistically significant, suggesting that the effects of economic sentiment are moderated by the extent to which the public attaches importance to economic issues. The positive sign indicates that economic sentiment exerts a greater impact on political trust when economic considerations are more salient. Since economic considerations are more salient when the economy is sour than when it is robust, this result supports the

\[\text{TABLE 3 Determinants of Political Trust}\]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Political Trust (_t)</th>
<th>Political Trust (_t-1)</th>
<th>Immediate Impact</th>
<th>Cumulative Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political Trust (_t-1)</td>
<td>0.41**</td>
<td>0.37**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.07)</td>
<td>(0.08)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congressional Approval (_t)</td>
<td>0.20*</td>
<td>0.24**</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.09)</td>
<td>(0.09)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presidential Approval (_t)</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.05)</td>
<td>(0.05)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal Trust (_t)</td>
<td>0.24**</td>
<td>0.23**</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.08)</td>
<td>(0.08)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Scandals (_t)</td>
<td>-0.04**</td>
<td>-0.04**</td>
<td>-3.3%</td>
<td>-5.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.01)</td>
<td>(0.01)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIP Crime (_t)</td>
<td>-0.26**</td>
<td>-0.27**</td>
<td>-5.2%</td>
<td>-8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.10)</td>
<td>(0.10)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIP International (_t)</td>
<td>0.11*</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.05)</td>
<td>(0.04)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIP Economy (_t)</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>-0.31</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.04)</td>
<td>(0.19)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Sentiment (_t)</td>
<td>0.21**</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.06)</td>
<td>(0.09)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Sentiment (_t) x MIP Economy (_t)</td>
<td>——</td>
<td>0.46*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(—)</td>
<td>(0.22)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.05)</td>
<td>(0.08)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Sentiment</td>
<td>——</td>
<td>——</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Salience</td>
<td>——</td>
<td>——</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Salience</td>
<td>——</td>
<td>——</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Durbin's H</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.31)</td>
<td>(0.42)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ljung-Box Q ( (df = 40))</td>
<td>34.84</td>
<td>37.45</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.70)</td>
<td>(0.59)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adj. R(^2)</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Entries in the first and second data columns are OLS estimates with standard errors in parentheses. Data are quarterly from 1976:1 to 2006:1. Durbin's H statistics indicate an absence of serial correlation in the residuals. Box Q tests fail to reject the null hypothesis that the residuals are white noise. Entries in the third and fourth data columns report the percent change in political trust associated with a one-standard deviation shock to each explanatory variable while all other variables are at the mean values.

* \(p < 0.05\), ** \(p < 0.01\).

hypothesized asymmetric effect in which political trust suffers more from hard times than it benefits from good ones.

We turn now to a consideration of the magnitude of these effects and to an assessment of their dynamic impact over time. Given the dynamic nature of our model, it is important to consider both the immediate and the cumulative effect of a given variable. Table 3 also reports the effects of a one standard deviation shock, holding all else constant, for each of our variables. Consider first a one standard deviation shock (0.069) to Congressional Approval. The immediate impact of this shock on political trust would be an increase of nearly 0.02 points (0.069 x 0.24), which given the scaling and variance of the dependent variable, amounts to a 4.9% increase. Recall that the cumulative effect of a variable depends on the expression, \( \beta_0 / (1 - \lambda) \), where \( \lambda \) is the coefficient for lagged trust. Since the effects of explanatory variables persist over time at a rate determined by \( \lambda \), the cumulative effect of this shock is nearly 8%.

The magnitude of the effects for national importance judgments can be similarly calculated. The immediate impact of a one standard deviation jump in MIP International on political trust is about 0.011 points (0.12 x 0.09), which represents a 3.2% increase in political trust. After taking the rate of decay into account, the cumulative effect of this jump is an increase in political trust of more than 5%. The effects of national importance judgments concerning crime are, in the abstract, larger than those concerning international matters. A one standard deviation increase in MIP Crime decreases political trust by 0.018 points, a decline of 5.2%. The cumulative effect of heightened concerns about crime is an 8.3% reduction in trust.

To illustrate the moderating influence of MIP Economy on Economic Sentiment, we compare the effect of a one standard deviation increase in Economic Sentiment (0.12) when MIP Economy is relatively low (i.e., one standard deviation below its mean) to when it is relatively high (i.e., one standard deviation above its mean). When the public does not consider economic matters to be salient, the effects of the public’s economic perceptions are considerably smaller. Under such conditions, a one standard deviation increase in Economic Sentiment produces about a 3.8% increase in political trust immediately and about a 6.1% increase over time. When the public considers economic matters to be salient, however, the effects of the public’s economic perceptions are considerably larger. Under these conditions, the same one standard deviation shock in Economic Sentiment increases political trust by roughly 12% immediately and by nearly 19% over time. Simply put, the effects of economic sentiment on political trust are more than three times as large when economic matters are salient than when they are not.

This asymmetry helps to explain why trust decreased so much during the 1970s when times were so bad but failed to recover completely in the 1990s when times were so good. To illustrate this point, we attempt to recreate the economic worlds of the Carter and Clinton administrations. Suppose, for example, that, holding all else constant, we shocked Economic Sentiment to return to its real-world values in 1978 and 1998. What would the predicted impact on political trust be? The years 1978 and 1998 are particularly well suited for such a simulation because they are nearly mirror opposites in terms of economic conditions. In 1978, Economic Sentiment was relatively negative, about 0.75 standard deviations below its mean. In 1998, Economic Sentiment was much more positive, about 1.3 standard deviations above its mean. MIP Economy was approximately one standard deviation above its mean in 1978 and one standard deviation below in 1998. If we shocked Economic Sentiment to return to its 1978 level, our model predicts political trust would decline by roughly 10.0%. If we instead shocked the series to return to its 1998 level, however, the predicted increase in political trust is only 5.1%, an effect roughly half that of the 1978 simulation. Despite the fact that the 1998 levels of Economic Sentiment were more positive than 1978 levels were negative.

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The point of departure for these calculations is the equilibrium value of political trust when all variables are set to their sample mean, which is nearly identical to the sample mean of the political trust series.

The magnitude of MIP International’s impact is not simply a function of the time period analyzed (1964–2005). If we estimate our model using annual data across a longer period (1964–2004), the effects of MIP International are actually larger than those reported here. Because the annual data conceal substantial within-year variation for many of our time series (compare Figures 1 and 2), we report the results of the quarterly analyses.

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(based on their respective deviations from the mean), the moderating influence of MIP Economy makes the negative economic conditions much more consequential than the positive ones.

Conclusion

We have demonstrated the critical import of priming effects in understanding the dynamics of political trust. Less public concern about international issues and more about crime have kept trust relatively low. In addition, the conditioning effect of national importance judgments on economic perceptions has inhibited often excellent economies from returning trust from its post-Great Society swoon.

Although our macrolevel design naturally limits our ability to draw individual-level inferences, the results suggest that individuals respond differently to economic and international threats. The root cause of such behavior likely lies not in elite rhetoric, but, rather, in human nature itself. Social psychologists have long observed that outgroup threats trigger various manifestations of ingroup solidarity, including increases in patriotism and national identity. Since international dangers can pose a threat to a nation’s political system, such dangers ought to increase support for that system. Economic problems, by contrast, tend to be more home-grown and are less likely to trigger such ingroup outgroup thinking.

Quite understandably, scholars viewed post-1960s trust levels as atypical because they differed from those gathered in the late 1950s and the early 1960s when the trust questions debuted. The political events of the time, such as defeat in Vietnam, the Nixon resignation, and a decade of economic weakness, suggested that better performance over the long haul would return trust to bygone era levels (Citrin and Green 1986). If variation in trust was only about performance, however, it should have achieved a level at least approaching those early readings at some point in the past 25 years. Yet, with the exception of a short-lived burst after 9/11, it has never come close.

Rather than the post-1960s period being atypical, our results suggest that the 1950s and 1960s were. The conditions and imperatives in post-World War II America produced anomalously high levels of political trust. Through the 1950s and 1960s, economic performance was most often solid and sometimes spectacular. Crime was a negligible concern for Americans. And, perhaps most importantly, the threat from the outside world was always very high.

This constellation of factors, which has yet to reoccur for any sustained period, combined to produce in the 1960s a rising tide of political trust, which is the foundation of public support for liberal public policy (Chanley, Rudolph, and Rahn 2000). These more liberal policy preferences paved the way for the policy liberalism of the Johnson years (Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson 2002).

Most periods in American history are not characterized by widespread fear of nuclear annihilation, however. As Americans started to think less about government in terms of external threat and more in terms of redistributive social programs (Jacoby 1994), trust in government went into a decline from which it has not recovered. The economy’s asymmetric effect has kept trust relatively low. When the economy is performing badly, more people care about it, which increases its (negative) effect on trust. Since fewer people care about the economy when times are good, trust increases less in periods of prosperity than it decreases in periods of weakness. If economic performance is the engine that drives political trust, that engine needs to work twice as hard for twice as long to raise trust as it does to lower it. As a result, even the long, uninterrupted periods of economic success in the 1980s and 1990s could not return trust to its mid-1960s peak.

There is little to suggest that low to moderate levels of trust will not persist well into the future. Although terrorism has the capacity to spook the American public, analysts should not conclude that fears about terrorism are equivalent to those about the Soviet Union in the 1950s and 1960s. Accounting for the 18 times the Gallup Organization asked its most important problem question during the 1950s, the median percentage of Americans choosing an international concern was 53. Furthermore, in Gallup’s 15 surveys using the most important problem questions between May 1960 and October 1962, 12 recorded a percentage of international concerns greater than or equal to the 67% who cited terrorism and other international issues in the first poll taken after September 11, 2001. Whereas the post-9/11 percentage citing terrorism and foreign policy quickly receded into the 40s, Americans in the late 1950s and early 1960s lived with 9/11 levels of anxiety about foreign threat for years.

The resultant environment has had a profound effect on political outcomes. Lower levels of political trust have allowed for a successful assault on some of the redistributive social programs at the heart of the Great Society and likely paved the way for Republican domination of the White House and later Congress.
(Hetherington 2005). Our results suggest that, other things being equal, another Great Society or New Frontier is unlikely in a post-Cold War world.

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**References**


Marc J. Hetherington is associate professor of political science, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN 37235. Thomas J. Rudolph is associate professor of political science, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Urbana, IL 61801.