Political Trust

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Political trust—trust in government and democracy—has been declining across the democratic world for several decades.[1] This phenomenon is especially pronounced in the United States, where it is accompanied by a fall in social trust—trust in society generally. Collapsing trust is arguably connected to increasing American political polarization, perhaps as both cause and effect. We can see the causal arrows running in both directions: low trust in government increases polarization, and high polarization decreases trust in government. When people mistrust government, they will resent government more and support and obey it less. They will also refuse to believe important governmental messages. They will see those messages as lies or as based on a desire to control the populace. Those who support the government, by contrast, will act more cooperatively. This will create cleavages between different political groups. Unfortunately, COVID-19 has made failures of political trust palpable and tragic. People die

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    1. Jacques Thomassen, Rudy Andeweg & Carolien van Ham, *Political Trust and the Decline of Legitimacy Debate: A Theoretical and Empirical Investigation into Their Interrelationship*, *in* HANDBOOK ON POLITICAL TRUST 509, 509–25 (Sonja Zmerli & Tom W.G. van der Meer eds., 2017). *But see* MYTH AND REALITY OF THE LEGITIMACY CRISIS: EXPLAINING TRENDS AND CROSS-NATIONAL DIFFERENCES IN ESTABLISHED DEMOCRACIES (Carolien van Ham, Jacques Thomassen, Kees Aarts & Rudy Andeweg eds., 2017).

refusing COVID-19 vaccines on the grounds that the government officials who push for vaccination cannot be trusted. Perhaps officials have contaminated the vaccine or want to take away individual liberty. Other political groups have eagerly defended the vaccine. Each side sees the other as behaving badly, creating suspicion on both sides of the political aisle. Similarly, an already polarized population will tend to trust government less when the other party is in power; some will distrust government so much that they will not believe that the election was legitimate. Tragically, we saw political distrust unfold on January 6th, 2021. The problem of political trust is pressing.

To put it plainly, political and legal philosophers should study political trust. Its decline creates political instability and political polarization, both of which threaten social cooperation. If legal philosophers hope to understand what makes societies stable, cooperative, and just, they must study political trust. Perhaps good legal philosophy can identify the institutions best suited to create trust across the political divide. We might thereby contain the damaging social consequences of deep disagreement.

Towards this end, I hope to introduce an attractive conception of political trust into political and legal philosophy. Both areas have so far largely ignored trust at the institutional level. I will base my account of political trust on the empirical work on its causes and consequences. This Article develops a definition of political trust that matches our intuitions about trust, one that also fits the extensive literature on political trust found in the social sciences. With an intuitive, yet scientifically respectable, conception of political trust, philosophers and legal theorists can learn about political trust from that literature. Here I draw on my two recent books on this topic, *Must Politics Be War?* and *Trust in a Polarized Age*. This article focuses on the concept of political trust in those works. It provides a standalone account of political trust as a way to frame the continuing trust literature. A standalone essay on political trust will help the reader follow and understand the literature as it develops.

Political trust, I argue, is a subset of social trust, which in turn is a subset of interpersonal trust. My argument uses tools philosophers developed to analyze interpersonal trust. However, to show that political trust is a kind of trust, we need analyses of interpersonal trust and social trust. This requires that I introduce

several concepts. I thus build an account of political trust from more rudimentary components.

I outline a descriptive notion of political trust, an account that reveals how we understand trust. I am not trying to determine when our trust is justified or appropriate. To accomplish the latter task, we must tie trust to trustworthiness, since trustworthiness justifies trust. But I will not develop an account of political trustworthiness here.

Part I develops an account of interpersonal trust. Part II explains social trust as trust that most people will comply with salient social norms. Part III defines political trust as social trust that governmental officials will follow institutional norms. These norms demand that officials produce desired outcomes. Part IV reviews how social and political trust are understood and measured in the empirical literature. It also addresses some challenges to that literature. I also review the empirical literature on the causes and consequences of political trust. Part V outlines the significance of political trust for political and legal philosophy.

I. TRUST

In this section I will understand trust as a three-place relation. *A* trusts *B* to engage in some line of conduct only if *A* depends on *B* to follow it. *A* also believes that *B* acts from moral concern or regard, rather than merely prudential or strategic reason. I outline each component going forward.

Russell Hardin argues that trust is a three-place relation: *A* trusts *B* to Φ.[2] To trust another, then, implies that the *truster* expects the *trustee* to engage in some line of conduct.[3] Those who trust must think that trustees are *willing* or *disposed* to do what the trusters trust them to do. Second, trust requires thinking that the trustee is *competent* to perform the action we trust her to perform.[4] As Annette Baier has argued, "Trust . . . is reliance on others' competence and willingness to look after, rather than harm, things one cares about

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2. RUSSELL HARDIN, TRUST AND TRUSTWORTHINESS 9, 13 (2004).

3. I use the term "trustee" to denote the person who is trusted to engage in some line of conduct. A "truster" trusts the trustee to engage in that line of conduct.

4. HARDIN, *supra* note 2, at 8.

which are entrusted to their care."[5] For John to trust Reba, then, John must possess a "competence" belief.[6] Third, if John trusts Reba, he must be vulnerable to her or dependent upon her in some way. In paradigmatic cases of trust, we think the truster takes some kind of risk in trusting others. *Reliance* is exposure to this risk of betrayal.[7]

The trust literature ubiquitously distinguishes *mere* reliance from trust.[8] As Karen Jones argues, "Trust[] is not an attitude that we can adopt toward machinery. I can rely on my computer not to destroy important documents or on my old car to get me from A to B, but my old car is reliable rather than trustworthy."[9] Based on the broad consensus on this point, Jeremy Wanderer and Leo Townsend take it "*for granted* that there is a basic difference between reliance and trust."[10]

Philosophers have distinguished trust from mere reliance by deploying P.F. Strawson's familiar idea of the participant stance.[11] Richard Holton argues that "the difference between trust and reliance is that trust involves [taking] something like a participant stance towards the person you are trusting."[12] When John takes the participant stance with respect to Reba, he recognizes that Reba is "a creature that acts for reasons" and he allows Reba's reasons "to factor into [his] thinking and support [his] beliefs and decisions."[13] Thus, John does not view Reba as an obstacle to be conquered or avoided. He rather sees her as a moral agent he can hold accountable for wrongful action. Immoral choices and their

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5. Annette Baier, *Trust and Antitrust*, 96 ETHICS 231, 259 (1986). *See also* Karen Jones, *Trust as an Affective Attitude*, 107 ETHICS 4, 4 (1996); Amy Mullin, *Trust, Social Norms, and Motherhood*, 36 J. SOC. PHIL. 316, 322 (2005).

6. CRISTIANO CASTELFRANCHI & RINO FALCONE, TRUST THEORY: A SOCIO-COGNITIVE AND COMPUTATIONAL MODEL 12 (2010).

7. Reliance can be weak; as Holton suggests, "I do not need to have the belief that you will do what I rely [on] you to do, but I do need to lack the belief that you will fail." Richard Holton, *Deciding to Trust, Coming to Believe*, 72 AUSTRALASIAN J. PHIL. 63, 71 (1994).

8. *See* Baier, *supra* note 5, at 234.

9. Jones, *supra* note 5, at 14.

10. Jeremy Wanderer & Leo Townsend, *Is It Rational to Trust?*, 8 PHIL. COMPASS 1, 3 (2013) (emphasis added).

11. P.F. STRAWSON, FREEDOM AND RESENTMENT AND OTHER ESSAYS 10 (1974). Strawson speaks of an "attitude" rather than a "stance."

12. Holton, *supra* note 7, at 67. *See also* Wanderer & Townsend, *supra* note 10, at 3; Pamela Hieronymi, *The Reasons of Trust*, 86 AUSTRALASIAN J. PHIL. 213, 216 (2008).

13. Hieronymi, *supra* note 12, at 226–27.

associated display of ill will make the negative *reactive attitudes*, like resentment, appropriate.[14] We expect others to act as they know they ought, so we can appropriately blame those who make immoral choices. The participant stance renders the reactive attitudes appropriate and so it distinguishes trust from mere reliance. We can therefore say that for *A* to trust *B*, *A* must see *B* as a participant in a shared moral practice.

The truster must also think that the trustee has an adequate moral motivation to Φ. Philosophers working on trust disagree about how to understand this motive. Jones argues that trustees must bear trusters "goodwill"[15] while others insist that the trustee must be thought to act from "moral integrity."[16] Philip Nickel argues that acting from moral obligation is the right motive.[17] Amy Mullin claims that we can trust others only if we believe that they comply with social norms.[18] Colin O'Neil offers a similar point that a trustee warrants trust when she believes in her obligations.[19] And Jones, once an advocate of the goodwill condition, claims that trustees need only respond appropriately to "another's dependency."[20]

In my view, the goodwill condition is too vague. John can trust Reba even if he thinks she lacks general goodwill towards others. Or so long as he thinks Reba acts, or is generally willing to act, from moral considerations. This does not force us to believe that Reba, qua trustee, has significant moral integrity. Nor need we think that she recognizes and acts upon most of her obligations. And yet both factors bear on John's overall judgment that Reba is trustworthy in particular contexts.

I also reject Hardin's "encapsulated-interest" account of trust. Trust for Hardin includes the belief that the trustee encapsulates the truster's interest into her own. As Hardin describes his view, "I trust you because your interests encapsulate mine to some extent—

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14. MARGARET URBAN WALKER, MORAL REPAIR: RECONSTRUCTING MORAL RELATIONS AFTER WRONGDOING 79 (2006).

15. *See* Jones, *supra* note 5, at 4.

16. *See* Carolyn McLeod, *Our Attitude Towards the Motivation of Those We Trust*, 38 S.J. PHIL. 465, 465 (2000).

17. *See* Philip Nickel, *Trust and Obligation-Ascription*, 10 ETHICAL THEORY & MORAL PRAC. 309, 309–16 (2007).

18. *See* Mullin, *supra* note 5, at 316.

19. *See* Collin O'Neil, *Lying, Trust, and Gratitude*, 40 PHIL. & PUB. AFFS. 302, 309 (2012).

20. Karen Jones, *Trustworthiness*, 123 ETHICS 61, 68–69 (2012).

in particular, because you want our relationship to continue."[21] But we can trust those with no knowledge of our particular interests. We can trust other citizens in large nations, or persons who interact with us anonymously. One implication of Hardin's position is that trust is counterintuitively intimate. Hardin claims that "[t]rust as encapsulated-interest rules out the possibility or coherence not only of generalized trust but also of widespread trust by any individual."[22] But this implies that social trust is incoherent *by definition*, which is erroneous.

We can construe the motives characteristic of trustworthiness as moral reasons to comply with social norms. Here I follow Bernard Lahno and Mullin. Lahno argues that "a situation of trust is perceived by a trusting person as one in which shared values or norms motivate both his own actions as well as those of the person being trusted."[23] Mullin claims we often trust strangers with whom we have no relationship: trust is possible with "the assumption of a shared commitment to a particular social norm."[24]

Trustees must be seen as having sufficient, motivating moral reasons to act. John does not trust Reba to Φ if he believes that she only Φs because she fears getting caught not Φing. Nor can he trust her if she Φs to gain John's trust only to betray him. This intuition tempts theorists to think that trust involves a belief in the goodwill of another person. But we do not need to appeal to goodwill, only that we see that the relevant norm provides the trustee with sufficient moral reason to act. We believe the trustee "is *internally committed* to a particular social norm and considers that norm to be of significant importance in some arena of action."[25] A person is internally committed to a social norm when she follows it because she believes that she morally ought to follow it. Or that others think she morally ought to follow it and she fears their sanction.

One might object that we can sometimes trust persons to follow social norms for nonmoral reasons. We might trust someone to do her job simply because she enjoys it. Yet moral reasons need only be *sufficient* to drive norm compliance in most conditions. Suppose

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21. HARDIN, *supra* note 2, at xix.

22. *Id.* at 179, 182.

23. Bernard Lahno, *On the Emotional Character of Trust*, 4 ETHICAL THEORY & MORAL PRAC. 171, 171 (2001).

24. Mullin, *supra* note 5, at 323.

25. *Id.* (emphasis added).

that Reba acts on nonmoral reasons, but her moral reasons remain sufficient to motivate her to comply with the norm. John need not worry that Reba will violate the norm if her nonmoral reasons run dry. But if Reba violates the norm when nonmoral reasons favor violation, she is untrustworthy with respect to that norm. Further, if John knows Reba lacks moral motivation to obey the norm, she is similarly untrustworthy. John can rely on her, but he will not make himself generally vulnerable to Reba's misconduct. We do not trust even predictable psychopaths, since we know they lack moral concern.

We can now state some necessary conditions on trust. Note that I do not claim to specify sufficient conditions. I do this in order to remain neutral between doxastic and non-doxastic accounts of trust. Doxastic approaches hold that trust is a belief or a set of beliefs, whereas non-doxastic approaches understand trust as an attitude, affect, or stance.[26] I adopt a doxastic approach insofar as I claim that beliefs form necessary conditions on trust. But I leave open whether trust essentially involves certain stances or affects. My arguments do not depend on whether trust has non-doxastic elements.

We define trust as follows:

> *Trust: A* trusts *B* to Φ only when *A* has a goal and believes (i) that participant *B*'s Φing is necessary or helpful for achieving the goal and (ii) that *B* is willing and able to Φ by complying with social norm S where moral reasons are sufficient to motivate *B* to comply with S.

This condition includes a social norm S. Complying with S facilitates or requires the action Φ that *A* trusts *B* to execute.[27] It also requires that moral reasons be sufficient to motivate *B* to comply with the social norm. Otherwise, we must allow that *A* can trust *B* even when *A* believes *B* happily ignores the moral reasons that apply to her. If *A* doubts *B* has sufficient moral motivation to comply

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26. For a doxastic account of trust, *see* Arnon Keren, *Trust and Belief: A Preemptive Reasons Account*, 191 SYNTHESE 2593, 2598 (2014). Jones, *supra* note 5, and Holton, *supra* note 7, for instance, think of trust as a kind of affective attitude or participant stance respectively, and not as a belief.

27. Thick forms of interpersonal trust are based on what Cristina Bicchieri has called "schemata" or complexes of norms, which are often implicit, and can make it mistakenly appear as though thick interpersonal trust, like friendship trust, is not mediated by social norms. CRISTINA BICCHIERI, THE GRAMMAR OF SOCIETY 81 (2006).

with S, this can eject *A* from the participant stance. *A* attends to *B*'s nonmoral reasons alone.

II. SOCIAL TRUST

We now have a working account of interpersonal trust. To scale up to social trust, we must appeal to a social norm type that I call *moral rules*. To define the latter idea, let's begin with the obvious: social norms are norms.[28] They consist of routine social behaviors that follow a public standard and engender normative attitudes over time.[29] People obey conventions because they believe doing so will help them; norm-following is often less deliberate and sometimes occurs even if a person anticipates no benefit from compliance.

I draw on Cristina Bicchieri's account of norms. Many norms are based on empirical expectations that the norm applies and that others will comply with the norm. Social norms arise from empirical expectations *and* normative expectations. Normative expectations imply that people believe that everyone thinks they ought to obey the norm. In some scenarios, social norm violations yield social sanction. Community members mind the norm violation. They think the sanctioned person should have observed it.[30] Bicchieri thinks normative expectations include prudential normativity. Norm violators show themselves unwise. I think many normative expectations have a moral character: violations can generate public moral sanction. Upon observing violations, people will typically blame and punish violators, drawing on the followers' resentment and indignation (or people will at least anticipate blame and punishment).

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28. *See* Cristina Bicchieri, Ryan Muldoon & Alessandro Sontuoso, *Social Norms*, *in* STANFORD ENCYCLOPEDIA OF PHILOSOPHY (Edward N. Zalta ed., 2018); Michael Rescorla, *Convention*, *in* STANFORD ENCYCLOPEDIA OF PHILOSOPHY (Edward N. Zalta ed., 2019). In defining social norms, I do not thereby advance a social practice definition of norms such as that found in GEOFFREY BRENNAN, LINA ERIKSSON, ROBERT E. GOODIN & NICHOLAS SOUTHWOOD, EXPLAINING NORMS 20–21 (2016).

29. A descriptive norm implies that persons conditionally prefer to follow the norm so long as they believe others will follow the norm. *See* CRISTINA BICCHIERI, NORMS IN THE WILD: HOW TO DIAGNOSE, MEASURE, AND CHANGE SOCIAL NORMS 19 (2017).

30. BICCHIERI, *supra* note 27, at 11. Brennan et al. acknowledge that norms primarily "serve the function . . . of making us accountable to one another" when we observe violations of normative expectations or beliefs. *See* BRENNAN ET AL., *supra* note 28, at 15, 36.

Gerald Gaus extends Bicchieri's analysis to develop the idea of a "social-moral rule." Social rules are construed along a "set/subset" analysis. Rules identify "a certain set of actions" that may, must, or must not be performed.[31] Social rules "issue directives for actions with these properties" rather than identifying particular actions. For example, a social rule might prohibit lying, but not identify specific acts as lies.

For Gaus, social rules have four features: "a set of persons to whom the prescription is addressed"; "a property of actions"; "a deontic operator such that actions with that property may, must, or must not be performed"; and a statement of the conditions under which the deontic operator applies to the relevant actions.[32] A rule against lying will direct a set of persons not to engage in lying actions; lying is prohibited in some social contexts. Social rules enable publicly recognized directives. These directives require or permit group members to choose certain behaviors in a specified context. Social norms exist based on expectations alone, even if no one practices them. But social rules must exist as a social practice.[33] Social rules also create a practice of "reciprocal obligation."[34] We believe that we should all follow the rule out of a sense of reciprocity. As I follow the rule, I expect others to do likewise. They expect the same of me. Gaus understands reciprocity as establishing relations of mutual authority. We can authoritatively direct one another to comply with the rules.[35]

Social-*moral* rules are then distinguished by the following conditions: they are infused with moral emotions, they are seen as nonconventional and categorical, they promote mutual benefit, and they concern how we treat others, they are enforced with social ostracism, and violations are seen as warranting punishment.[36] I shall call this kind of social norm a *moral rule*.

Bicchieri argues that people follow social norms solely based on conditional preferences. They only prefer to follow the norm if they

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31. GERALD GAUS, THE ORDER OF PUBLIC REASON 123 (2011).

32. *Id*.

33. *See* H.L.A. HART, THE CONCEPT OF LAW 54–56 (3d ed. 2012). Here I distinguish a social rule from what Brennan et al. describe as a reductive account of norms, which characterizes norms in purely non-normative terms. *See* BRENNAN ET AL., *supra* note 28, at 15. Rules are defined in part by the presence of normative expectations or normative attitudes.

34. GAUS, *supra* note 31, at 171.

35. *See id.*

36. *Id*. at 172–73.

think others will do so. On this basis, Bicchieri contrasts social and moral norms: a "social norm is different from a shared prudential or moral norm because it involves (socially) conditional preferences."[37] For Bicchieri, people want to follow the moral norm (say, a norm that prohibits harming others) no matter what. Moral norms are categorical, for "one's personal moral convictions are the primary motivator of one's actions, and such convictions overwhelm any social considerations."[38] Geoffrey Brennan, Lina Eriksson, Robert Goodin, and Nicholas Southwood insist on a similar distinction: "Moral norms are clusters of unconditional normative judgments, whereas social norms are clusters of conditional normative judgments."[39] Moral norms are "practice-independent" whereas social norms are "practice-dependent."[40]

These views threaten my account of trust because I define moral rules as a social norm. Gaus resolves the problem by reinterpreting the idea of a conditional preference. For if there are low expectations that people will follow the rule, Gaus argues that "this undermines the belief that a reciprocal structure of obligation is in fact recognized in the group."[41] So people follow moral rules conditionally: if the rule were not in effect, people would not recognize reciprocal obligations.[42] We can likewise sidestep Brennan et al.'s contrast between social and moral norms with a "social-moral" norm. For Brennan et al., moral norms are strictly personal, whereas social norms are interpersonal, but not moral. But we can allow that some moral norms are interpersonal, even if we follow them conditionally.

On this basis, then, moral rules are constituted by (a) empirical expectations that persons generally comply with the rule and (b) normative expectations that people believe that others think they *should* follow the rules.[43] The normative expectations appeal to (c) a moral (rather than a prudential) "ought" that (d) establishes a

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37. BICCHIERI, *supra* note 27, at 72.

38. *Id*. at 31.

39. BRENNAN ET AL., *supra* note 28, at 61.

40. *Id.* at 59.

41. GAUS, *supra* note 31, at 171.

42. In this sense, then, the norms are practice-dependent in that if the norms did not exist, people would not believe that the associated obligations exist, but people do not generally believe that moral norms are practice-dependent in the way that conventions are. I thank Brock Mason for this point.

43. That is, it is commonly believed that everyone should follow the rule.

practice of reciprocal obligation. Finally, (e) violations of the rule typically evoke, and are thought to evoke, negative reactive attitudes. Violations may also evoke blame and punishment.

Social trust is trust that is mass and mutual: community members place it in all or almost all community members. Large societies typically lack shared goals of substance. So social trust only implies that people believe others are necessary or important to achieve each person or group's diverse ends. Further, people signal their ability and willingness to act in certain ways by following moral rules. Critically, social trust does not depend on the belief that people will follow only one moral rule. It refers to a broad range of moral rules. Social trust, therefore, carries a generic expectation that members of society will comply with moral rules. Social trust need not require an affective state of security that others will act appropriately. Rather, social trust requires that we believe that most others will abide by a large set of "ordinary ethical rules that are involved in the situation" [44]—that is, moral rules. When we socially trust, we believe others will choose "[e]thically justifiable behavior"—that is, "morally correct decisions and actions based upon ethical principles of analysis."[45] Thus, an individual trusts members of her society in the following case:

> *Personal Social Trust: A* socially trusts [participant] members of the public [$P_1, P_2 \ldots P_n$] to follow moral rules [$R_1, R_2 \ldots R_n$] only if *A* believes that [participant] members of the public are necessary or helpful for achieving her goals and that they are generally willing and able to do their part, knowingly or unknowingly, to achieve those goals by complying with moral rules, where moral reasons are sufficient to motivate compliance.

To trust his society, John must believe that other members will act according to shared moral rules, and that these rules allow him to reliably pursue his projects and plans.[46]

Social trust *per se* arrives if most members of the public have these expectations:

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44. David M. Messick & Roderick M. Kramer, *Trust as a Form of Shallow Morality*, in TRUST IN SOCIETY 89, 91 (Karen S. Cook ed., 2001).

45. Larue Tone Hosmer, *Trust: The Connecting Link between Organizational Theory and Philosophical Ethics*, 20 ACAD. MGMT. REV. 379, 399 (1995).

46. The person with the belief need not be aware that she holds the belief, however.

> *Social Trust:* a public exhibits social trust to the extent that its participant members generally believe that other participants are necessary or helpful for achieving one another's goals and that (most or all) members are generally willing and able to do their part to achieve those goals, knowingly or unknowingly, by following moral rules, where moral reasons are sufficient to motivate compliance.

Societies create social trust by means of *mass compliance with moral rules*.[47] If we think and observe that others comply with moral rules, the necessary empirical expectations exist. Normative expectations backed by punishment must also be in play. Punishment typically plays a central role in stabilizing moral rules. Social trust requires a belief that people ordinarily have adequate moral motivation to follow moral rules. They ignore this motivation only as a moral fault.[48]

To enrich my account of social trust, I will contrast it with Eric Uslaner's well-known approach. Uslaner claims that social trust is tied to "moralistic trust," which involves persons believing that "others share your fundamental moral values and therefore should be treated as you would wish to be treated by them."[49] Social trust, also known as generalized trust, resembles moralistic trust because "[g]eneralized trusters see the world as a benign place with limitless opportunities. They believe that most people share the same fundamental values . . . ."[50] Perhaps, therefore, we should understand social trust as involving beliefs about the world in general. Maybe social trust assesses whether humans are fundamentally good or trustworthy. It might be a general attitude. Yet I say social trust summarizes our beliefs that people comply with moral rules.

However, Uslaner's account faces difficulties. He admits that moralistic and generalized trust do not require agreement on central moral debates concerning religion and politics: moralistic trusters "don't necessarily agree with you politically or religiously," and "[p]lacing trust in others does *not* require

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47. At least in combination with certain more ingrained traits, like personality, as we will see below.

48. Social trust may require punishing those who fail to punish. *See* ROBERT BOYD & PETER J. RICHERSON, THE ORIGIN AND EVOLUTION OF CULTURES 193–202 (2005).

49. ERIC M. USLANER, THE MORAL FOUNDATIONS OF TRUST 18 (2002).

50. *Id.* at 79.

agreement on specific issues or even philosophies."[51] But Uslaner waffles between describing moralistic and social trust in terms of shared values, worldviews, or goodwill. Social trust allows for widespread disagreement but also involves shared values and worldviews. It is unclear, therefore, how much consensus Uslaner thinks social trust requires. We can resolve the ambiguity by simply replacing shared values and worldviews with a shared preparedness to comply with moral rules. Social norms can, like shared values, focus social agreement. Social norms can do so between persons with considerably different religious, political, and moral beliefs. In this way, my view merely amends Uslaner's. And indeed, he admits that social trust is more conditional than moralistic trust. And he allows that social trust can be conditional on observed behavior.[52]

My view provides reason to expect social trust to be stable over time. We socially trust when we *generally* believe that others can be trusted. Social trust should not change if we observe a single moral violation. Flouting a traffic norm will not reduce social trust. In such cases, we might partition our trust by context: flouting traffic norms will normally not challenge one's belief that most people follow most moral rules. Social trust will only decline, therefore, when people observe widespread defection from central moral rules. Some trust researchers think that empirical measures of social trust show that trust does not respond to observation. But I will argue otherwise.

III. POLITICAL TRUST

Many researchers distinguish between trust *in society* and trust *in government*. Citizens do too.[53] But researchers disagree about their causality. Sonja Zmerli and Ken Newton find that "robust and statistically significant correlations [exist] between generalized social trust, on the one hand, and confidence in political institutions and satisfaction with democracy, on the other" in twenty-three

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51. *Id.* at 2, 18.

52. *Id.* at 85; *see also id.* at 112 (Our experience can affect our "basic sense of optimism and control.").

53. Hardin stresses this distinction and doubts a connection between the two. *See* HARDIN, *supra* note 2, at 151.

European countries and the United States.[54] However, Bo Rothstein and Dietlind Stolle argue that citizens make even finer distinctions, including between legal institutions (such as the police and judges) and political institutions (such as democracy and elected officials). Rothstein and Stolle understand these as *order* institutions and *political* institutions, respectively. They document "a rather strong relationship between aggregate levels of confidence in *order institutions* and generalized trust."[55] People evaluate the trustworthiness and impartiality of order institutions at micro- and macro-levels. Generalized trust weakens when people "experience widespread corruption, inefficient institutions, unreliable police, and arbitrariness and bias of courts."[56] However, Rothstein and Stolle find that "there is no relationship between *political* institutions with elected office and generalized trust at the aggregate level."[57] Generalized trust depends on trust in the police and the courts, not trust in politicians.

Following Rothstein and Stolle, we can distinguish three types of trust: social, legal, and political. Social trust is by now familiar. Legal trust is trust in order institutions such as law enforcement and the courts. Political trust is placed in institutions directly affected by the political process. In particular, political trust is placed in *government officials*: elected officials, political parties and their leadership, and members of the civil service. Social trust, recall, is trust placed by most people in all or most of other members of society. Political trust is a subset of social trust: it is trust in (some set of) government officials who are members of society generally.

Political trust involves relying on government officials to follow what I call an *institutional rule*. Institutional rules are norms backed by empirical and normative expectations that constitute social institutions and specify their aims. Institutional rules differ from other moral rules because they are tied to the public purposes of social institutions. The rules specify the function of the institution and how to execute that function appropriately. Institutional rules

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54. Sonja Zmerli & Ken Newton, *Social Trust and Attitudes Toward Democracy*, 72 PUB. OP. Q. 706, 706 (2008).

55. Bo Rothstein & Dietlind Stolle, *The State and Social Capital: An Institutional Theory of Generalized Trust*, 40 COMPAR. POL. 441, 450 (2008) (emphasis added).

56. *Id.* at 451.

57. *Id.* at 450 (emphasis added).

are social norms that facilitate some institutional purpose or value. The institutional rules governing the American presidency require that Presidents stay in office by winning elections rather than through military force. Related norms require that they honor their campaign promises. When citizens come to believe that a President fails to follow these norms, they will trust the President less. An institutional norm of the Environmental Protection Agency is to protect endangered species. When the public believes the EPA has failed to do so, trust in the EPA will fall.

Institutional rules contain morally normative expectations. People think members of the institution *morally ought* to follow the relevant norms. They believe that others believe that the institution's officials should follow the norms. Observed norm violations could justify resentment, blame, and appropriate punishment. Some theorists may be inclined to de-moralize institutional rules. Perhaps we expect compliance for prudential, but not moral, reasons. This is a mistake. Prudential normativity cannot render our resentment and blame appropriate. We see political institutions as moral agents or as comprised of moral agents.[58]

Institutional rules relate to the publicly recognized purposes of the institutions they comprise. Political trust then will involve empirical and normative expectations that the institution regularly achieves certain outcomes.[59] Political parties should produce particular public policies. Civil servants should help their agencies complete their objectives honestly and within their authority. When civil servants fail, citizens resent or are indignant with them. We will see that normative expectations apply to both the political decision-making process and the outcomes achieved. Empirical research shows that citizens expect government officials to be fair and avoid corrupt decision-making procedures. Yet they should also achieve the substantive goals of economic growth and economic security for all. Citizens express disappointment in

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58.   *Contra* Paul Faulkner, *Finding Trust in Government*, 49 J. Soc. Phil. 626 (2018), I think our common understanding of democratic citizenship involves holding political leaders responsible for outcomes (which Faulkner acknowledges) using reactive attitudes (which Faulkner denies, in claiming that "affective trust" cannot be directed toward government appropriately). We hold institutions responsible in a similar fashion.

59.   This also means that the outcome measure is correlated with the competence condition for interpersonal trust.

officials who fail in either respect. In some cases, they resent the officials as well.

We can now define political trust:

> *Political Trust*: a public exhibits political trust to the extent that its participant members generally believe that government officials are necessary or helpful for achieving widely shared political goals and that (most or all) government officials are generally willing and able to do their part to achieve those goals, knowingly or unknowingly, by following institutional rules, where moral reasons are sufficient to motivate officials to comply with those rules.

We politically trust when we trust that government officials will observe institutional rules and produce certain outcomes. Political trust can be understood as trust in government. In democracies, political trust is trust in democratically chosen officials and the officials they appoint. So, measures of trust in democracy can be understood along those lines.

Unlike social trust, political trust varies between different groups, such as agencies, departments, parties, and legislatures. In some cases, political trust may focus on a single person, such as the President of the United States. In other cases, people may politically trust the EPA. Political trust is always placed in one or more people publicly seen as morally responsible agents. Even so, people may politically mistrust leaders of an institution but trust the institution itself. One might trust the FBI but distrust the director of the FBI. The empirical data focuses on institutions and large groups, which fits my definition of political trust.

It is, again, critical that political trust is moralized. Political trust is not merely the empirical expectation that political institutions are reliable. It includes the normative expectation that institutions respond to moral considerations, such as shared values and procedural rules.[60] As we shall see, political trust falls when people believe some governmental institution treats them unfairly or unjustly. Perceived mistreatment generates the negative reactive attitudes. I grant that one can describe some benefits of political trust as nonmoralized political reliance. After all, nonmoral agents like robots and psychopaths can produce good outcomes.

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60. Or officials in the institution believe they are rightfully held accountable by people for violating institutional rules.

Nonetheless, imagine that citizens believe that all political officials are robots or psychopaths. In that case, they cannot take the participant stance with their rulers. This will create fear, confusion, and alienation and will undermine trust. In contrast, trust *relaxes* in a way that reliance does not, since it establishes social relations with the trustee. This makes it easier for persons to become dependent on one another.

IV. POLITICAL TRUST: MEASUREMENT, CAUSES, AND CONSEQUENCES

The empirical trust literature measures social trust in two ways: through *direct* measures of trust, which let subjects report their own trust levels, and through *indirect* measures, which attempt to determine trust levels by observing agent decisions, behavior, and reactions.[61] Direct measures are self-report surveys, which have been around since the early 1940s. They begin with what I will call the *standard trust question*, which the General Social Survey (GSS) phrases as follows: "Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?"[62] Some new surveys include "wallet" questions, which begin "If you lost a wallet or purse that contained two hundred dollars, how likely is it to be returned with the money in it if it was found by . . ." and then specify different groups.[63] Today, researchers use modified versions of these questions.[64] In many cases, researchers formulate an overall social trust index from these questions.

Empirical researchers understand political trust as including trust in government or trust in democracy. But political trust also includes trust groups like the civil service, the legislature, and elected officials.[65] Direct measures of political trust began in the 1960s with questions like, "Using this card, please tell me on a score

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61. Paul C. Bauer & Markus Freitag, *Measuring Trust*, *in* THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF SOCIAL AND POLITICAL TRUST 15, 17 (Eric M. Uslaner ed., 2018).

62. M. Kent Jennings & Laura Stoker, *Social Trust and Civic Engagement Across Time and Generations*, 39 ACTA POLITICA 342, 350 (2004).

63. Bauer & Freitag, *supra* note 61, at 19.

64. *Id.* at 18.

65. Pippa Norris, *The Conceptual Framework of Political Support*, *in* HANDBOOK ON POLITICAL TRUST, *supra* note 1, at 19–32.

of 0–10 how much you personally trust each of the institutions I read out. 0 means you do not trust an institution at all, and 10 means you have complete trust."[66] One of these institutions is the federal government. Surveys distinguish it from other groups with the following language: "People have different ideas about the government in Washington. These ideas don't refer to Democrats or Republicans in particular, but just to the government in general. We want to see how you feel about these ideas. For example, . . ."[67] Today, measures of political trust draw on the World Values Survey and the American National Election Survey. Often these questionnaires contain few questions with limited responses. More recent surveys ask a larger number of questions with up to an 11-point scale, yielding richer data. Sometimes they challenge older empirical results.[68] Studies of political trust might end up appealing to somewhat different conceptions of political trust. Yet we still have reason to think that surveys approximate one underlying construct.[69]

Many readers, philosophers in particular, will worry that these questions are too vague. Perhaps people have different views about who counts as "most people." However, generalized trust is stable across a wide variety of contexts. Examples include across cultures[70] and within different radii of groups trusted.[71] Researchers typically claim that these measures indicate some stable, society-wide attitude. Individuals think that they can rely upon others to behave ethically. The same goes for political trust.

In the 1960s, researchers began to study game-theoretic behavior in laboratory settings. Some economists use these studies to build indirect measures of trust from trust games. The classic trust game resembles the ultimatum game. In the canonical lab experiment, researchers randomly pair subjects with one another. They give both players an endowment and then ask the first mover

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66. Bauer & Freitag, *supra* note 61, at 17.

67. *Id.*

68. Sofie Marien, *The Measurement Equivalence of Political Trust*, *in* HANDBOOK ON POLITICAL TRUST, *supra* note 1, at 89–103.

69. *Id.* at 98.

70. Tim Reeskens & Marc Hooghe, *Cross-Cultural Measurement Equivalence of Generalized Trust. Evidence from the European Social Survey (2002 and 2004)*, 85 SOC. INDICATORS RSCH. 515, 530 (2008).

71. Jan Delhey, Kenneth Newton & Christian Welzel, *How General Is Trust In "Most People"? Solving the Radius of Trust Problem*, 76 AM. SOCIO. REV. 786, 786 (2011).

if she will send part of her endowment to the second mover. Researchers offer to triple whatever the first mover sends to the second mover. They then ask the second mover how much he or she wants to return to the first mover. When the second mover finishes this task, the researchers pay the players, ending the experiment. In these games, players do not know each other. They are paid privately. Trust games have prisoner's dilemma payoffs but are played in sequence.[72]

Accordingly, the second mover has no incentive to return part of her endowment to the first mover. The first mover can infer this and so should send nothing, according to basic strategic reasoning. But researchers find that first movers send money and second movers return some of their gains.[73] Their behaviors thus appear to exhibit trust and trustworthiness respectively. The first mover exhibits trust: trusting the second mover means believing that the second mover will return some of the endowment. The second mover exhibits trustworthiness: she doesn't have to return part of her gains, but she probably does so to be fair.

In some cases, trust games involve multiple parties, and so ask players to trust multiple people to act cooperatively.

Using trust games to indirectly gauge trust and trustworthiness faces a considerable challenge. Desires other than trust may motivate cooperative behavior, such as concerns with efficiency, reciprocity, and altruism.[74] But many think behavioral measures of trust beat the survey measures, as we will see below.

The direct and indirect measures of social and political trust may not satisfy philosophers. Even so, my account of social trust fits the literature. The standard trust question and its newer supplements evoke reliance, expectations, and moral behavior, like playing fair. The trust game invokes similar ideas. Both the direct and indirect measures depend on normative expectations about proper behavior. They arguably invite the negative reactive attitudes when trust is low. In addition, Marc Cohen's account of

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72. Rick K. Wilson, *Trust Experiments, Trust Games, and Surveys*, in THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF SOCIAL AND POLITICAL TRUST, *supra* note 61, at 1, 3.

73. *Id.*

74. *Id.* at 4. *See also* James C. Cox, *How to Identify Trust and Reciprocity*, 46 GAMES & ECON. BEHAV. 260–81 (2004).

social trust also parallels the empirical trust literature.[75] On Cohen's account, we cannot define social trust through expectations alone; trust requires that the truster depend on the trustee. Moreover, we should characterize social trust in terms of obligations. *A* socially trusts *B* to act "in accordance with some (specified) general or background moral obligation, where *A* can assume that *B* is committed to acting in that way because of the character of the obligation."[76] Accounts of social trust should appeal to "fundamental constitutive practices that make a social order possible."[77] Moral rules plainly constitute the practices that enable social orders to form and function. My account of social trust includes normative expectations. It should fit definitions of social trust in the empirical literature.

Admittedly, my conception of *political* trust diverges the conceptions of political trust found in the empirical literature. The literature often measures *satisfaction* with government and democracy. Surveys often fail to make the moralized element of political trust explicit. However, when citizens are asked whether they trust the government, researchers invite them to make moral judgments. One example involves judging whether governments obey fair procedures and produce promised results. Suppose citizens think institutions generate good outcomes because officials care about them. Or perhaps they think officials possess good character and behave ethically. In those cases, citizens should increase their political trust. Consequently, when citizens are surveyed about trusting government officials, their answers should reflect their political trust. When surveys measure satisfaction, matters become more complicated. Presumably, trust and satisfaction are related. High political trusters are more satisfied with government than low trusters.

Some researchers criticize survey measures of trust based on laboratory experiments: direct and indirect measures of trust do not always coincide. Trust game experiments suggest a "lack of . . .

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75. Marc A. Cohen, *Alternative Conceptions of Generalized Trust (and the Foundations of the Social Order)*, 46 J. SOC. PHIL. 463, 465 (2015).

76. *Id.* at 475.

77. *Id.*

close correlation between behavior and questionnaire responses."[78] Those who claim that they are high trusters are not more likely to cooperate in micro-level trust games.[79] Worrisomely, "the three questions most often used in survey research to measure general trust were not predictive of the likelihood that subjects will trust each other even in a repeated setting," such that the subjects may be "responding in a glib manner to this survey instrument."[80] In a recent survey of the self-report measures, Rick Wilson documents research refuting correlations between the two measures. This is a serious concern: people may say that they trust others but act otherwise.[81]

Nevertheless, some authors find that "specific questions about past experiences of being trusted or extending trust in the past" correlate with trusting behavior.[82] Answers to these survey questions "were positively related to trustworthy, if not trusting, behavior."[83] Since trust is often driven by the observation of trustworthy behavior, showing that highly trusting persons are trustworthy in the lab suggests the presence of mutual trust. More directly, new work finds a correlation between self-report measures of trust and trust game behavior. The correlation arises when trust games have sizeable financial payoffs. Sapienza and colleagues claim survey measures and trust game behaviors increasingly correlate as payoffs rise.[84] And Wilson claims that "when the appropriate controls are put into place (at least among students in the lab), it appears that the first mover's behavior and the [standard trust question] are correlated."[85] So the trust game data probably does not undercut the survey data.

Direct measures of trust engage people in ordinary social contexts. Indirect measures take place in the laboratory. The setting may lead participants to view their actions as distinct from trust in

78. T.K. Ahn, Elinor Ostrom, David Schmidt & James Walker, *Trust in Two-Person Games: Game Structures and Linkages*, *in* TRUST AND RECIPROCITY: INTERDISCIPLINARY LESSONS FOR EXPERIMENTAL RESEARCH 323, 345 (Elinor Olstrom & James Walker eds., 2003).

79. *See id.*

80. *Id.*

81. Wilson, *supra* note 72, at 15.

82. Ahn et al., *supra* note 78, at 345.

83. *Id.*

84. *See* Paola Sapienza, Anna Toldra-Simats & Luigi Zingales, *Understanding Trust*, 123 ECON. J. 1313, (2013).

85. Wilson, *supra* note 72, at 8.

strangers or institutions. So even if trust game data and survey data conflict, we need not favor the lab. Further, the survey measures are cross-cultural. They allow us to compare trust between different cultures and different types of institutions. The direct measures have more variety and depth than the trust game data. Based on the foregoing, I focus on direct measures of social and political trust. But given the tension, we should use the survey data cautiously.

We now have an empirically and intuitively respectable account of political trust. Now consider what the survey data suggests about the causes and consequences of social and political trust.[86]

A central question in the social trust literature concerns "whether social trust is . . . a deeply held disposition socialized early in life that remains relatively immune to subsequent experiences or . . . an impressionable outlook shaped continuously throughout life by an individual's experience."[87] Thus, cultural factors fix individuals' social trust, such as upbringing, family, and broader cultural experiences; these factors lock trust levels from an early age. We can all this the *culturalist* approach. The contrasting *institutionalist* approach claims that trust is determined by observations and experience of trustworthiness in institutional settings. There is evidence for both the culturalist and the institutionalist positions. The culturalist approach draws on the fact that national social trust levels are remarkably stable over time. Indeed, levels remain stable despite significant social and political change. Social trust may not be affected by a change in perceived trustworthiness in the population. Social trust will have nonrational determinants.[88] But differences in institution behavior affect the trust levels of persons from the same culture.[89]

Ethnic diversity is often thought to reduce social trust, though "meta-analyses show substantial variation in the relationship

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86. Setting aside personality type. For a discussion, *see* Matthew Cawvey, Matthew Hayes, Damarys Canache & Jeffery J. Mondak, *Biological and Psychological Influences on Interpersonal and Political Trust*, *in* THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF SOCIAL AND POLITICAL TRUST, *supra* note 61, at 119, 127.

87. Peter Thisted Dinesen & Kim Mannemar Sønderskov, *Ethnic Diversity and Social Trust: A Critical Review of the Literature and Suggestions for a Research Agenda*, *in* THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF SOCIAL AND POLITICAL TRUST, *supra* note 61, at 175, 176.

88. *Id.*

89. *See* John Helliwell, Shun Wang & Jinwen Xu, *How Durable Are Social Norms? Immigrant Trust and Generosity in 132 Countries*, 128 SOC. INDICATORS RSCH. 201-219, (2016).

between ethnic diversity and social trust."[90] Ethnic diversity negatively affects trust, but usually due to lack of contact and a segregation effect.[91] Interactions with others "indicate that the estimated effect of diversity becomes less negative/more positive under contact."[92] Still, overall, Dinesen and Sønderskov argue that "exercising great caution, we do believe it is fair to say that the main finding from the literature is a negative—albeit not always significant—relationship between ethnic diversity and social trust," though there's "not really a consensus."[93]

Political trust varies more than social trust. It responds to citizens' evaluations of the success of those institutions in pursuing their publicly recognized aims. The prime cross-time institutional causes of political trust are economic performance and corruption.[94] When people feel that their individual economic performance is strong, they trust more. When they observe political corruption, they trust less.[95] Thus, when citizens observe that officials follow political norms, this will tend to increase political trust in those officials. This is akin to how obeying shared norms of citizenship raises trust in other citizens.[96] In particular, when citizens think officials treat them fairly, their political trust will increase.[97]

Effective social insurance also seems to increase political trust, as "the more positively an individual evaluates the state of social protection in the country, the higher the satisfaction with democracy."[98] Political trust often decreases in response to major economic crises and the fear of declining income.[99] Economic inequality appears to decrease political trust, probably because inequality is seen as a sign of corruption. Uslaner argues that

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90. Dinesen & Sønderskov, *supra* note 87, at 179.

91. *Id.* at 178–79.

92. *Id.* at 183.

93. *Id.* at 196–97.

94. Tom W.G. van der Meer & Sonja Zmerli, *The Deeply Rooted Concern with Political Trust*, *in* HANDBOOK ON POLITICAL TRUST, *supra* note 1, at 1, 7.

95. *Id.*

96. Jan van Deth, *Compliance, Trust, and Norms of Citizenship*, *in* HANDBOOK ON POLITICAL TRUST, *supra* note 1, at 212, 224.

97. Marcia Grimes, *Procedural Fairness and Political Trust*, *in* HANDBOOK ON POLITICAL TRUST, *supra* note 1, at 256, 256.

98. Staffan Kumlin & Alte Haugsgjerd, *The Welfare State and Political Trust: Bringing Performance Back In*, *in* HANDBOOK OF POLITICAL TRUST, *supra* note 1, at 285, 289.

99. *Id.*

"[i]nequality leads people to believe that leaders listen far more to the rich than to others in society."[100] Perceived unfairness reduces trust in government. Importantly, small acts of "petty" corruption don't decrease political trust much, though this does not hold if people observe the police or the courts receiving gift payments.[101] But "grand" corruption—major events observed by the public—can greatly decrease political trust.[102]

While ethnic diversity doesn't seem to decrease social trust across all contexts, it may decrease political trust.[103] Participating in civil associations seems to increase political trust, though it is not clear why.[104] Mass media affects political trust, but the effect is more modest and less negative than one might expect.[105] Education helps citizens track the behavior of governments. It can create political trust when political performance is strong and lower political trust when political performance falters.[106]

Social trust increases political trust, though the causal connection may be indirect. Social trust may increase economic growth, improving personal economic performance, and political trust in turn.[107]

We need reasonably high political trust for a number of reasons. Marc Hetherington argues that political trust gives leaders the confidence they need to enact programs that improve lives. Less informed citizens may not understand how the programs work. Low trusters will not trust leaders to enact policies that work for

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100. Eric M. Uslaner, *Political Trust, Corruption, and Inequality*, *in* HANDBOOK ON POLITICAL TRUST, *supra* note 1, at 302, 302.

101. *Id.* at 308.

102*. Id.*

103. Lauren McLaren, *Immigration, Ethnic Diversity and Political Trust*, *in* HANDBOOK ON POLITICAL TRUST, *supra* note 1, at 316, 320. For an important analysis of the trust-diversity relationship, see Robert D. Putnam, E Pluribus Unum*: Diversity and Community in the Twenty-First Century*, 30 SCANDINAVIAN POL. STUD. 137, 137–74 (2007).

104. Christopher Liu & Dietlind Stolle, *Social Capital, Civic Culture and Political Trust*, *in* HANDBOOK ON POLITICAL TRUST, *supra* note 1, at 338, 338–39. For a classic analysis of the trust-association connection, see ROBERT PUTNAM, BOWLING ALONE: THE COLLAPSE AND REVIVAL OF AMERICAN COMMUNITY (2001).

105. *See* Ken Newton, *Political Trust and the Mass Media*, *in* HANDBOOK ON POLITICAL TRUST, *supra* note 1, at 353, 353.

106. Quinton Mayne & Armen Hakhverdian, *Education, Socialization, and Political Trust*, *in* HANDBOOK ON POLITICAL TRUST, *supra* note 1, at 176, 181.

107. *See* Sonja Zmerli & Ken Newton, *Objects of Political and Social Trust: Scales and Hierarchies*, *in* HANDBOOK ON POLITICAL TRUST, *supra* note 1, at 104, 105.

reasons voters cannot easily grasp.[108] Rothstein argues that countries with higher political trust have higher quality government. That leads government to spend more on social policies and improve other outcomes.[109] Political distrust may, therefore, make it harder for governments to function. Distrust deprives citizens of better policy.

On the other hand, democracies depend on a degree of distrust in political officials and political parties.[110] So how much political trust is optimal? To answer this question, we need to distinguish between trust in democracy and trust in specific parties and officials. Maybe people should trust democratic institutions but remain somewhat skeptical of prominent and influential political officials.[111] However, again, if citizens are too mistrustful, political officials may lose their ability to enact unpopular but good policies.

V. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF POLITICAL TRUST FOR POLITICAL AND LEGAL PHILOSOPHY

The significance of political trust for political and legal philosophy is manifest: political trust helps political institutions function effectively. Political trust promotes the public good because it improves government effectiveness and produces positive social outcomes. Moreover, political trust is part of the reason we have certain kinds of institutions.

We should want more political trust. If so, we should favor familiar liberal democratic institutions, along with a market economy and considerable social supports.

With a better grasp on the concept, causes, and consequences of political trust, we better follow the literatures in multiples fields as they develop. With good fortune, interdisciplinary trust research can unlock some of the most pressing questions of our time: how can nations build political trust once it has been lost? Perhaps

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108. *See* MARC J. HETHERINGTON, WHY TRUST MATTERS: DECLINING POLITICAL TRUST AND THE DEMISE OF AMERICAN LIBERALISM (2005).

109. *See generally* BO ROTHSTEIN, THE QUALITY OF GOVERNMENT: CORRUPTION, SOCIAL TRUST, AND INEQUALITY IN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE (2011). Political trust can cause politicians to be trustworthy, engendering further trust in turn.

110. *See* Mark E. Warren, *What Kinds of Trust Does a Democracy Need? Trust from the Perspective of Democratic Theory*, *in* HANDBOOK ON POLITICAL TRUST, *supra* note 1, at 33.

111. We may want, for instance, most members of political institutions to be trustworthy so that they can keep inherently less trustworthy politicians in check.

political polarization and political distrust causally connect. If so, can we use trust to reduce excessive political polarization? With a clearer idea of political trust in hand, we can make progress on pressing political matters. Perhaps we can resolve ongoing conflicts within the United States related to election integrity and COVID-19 containment.

If we step back from current challenges—as important as they are—we can also see how understanding political trust advances political philosophy. Political trust advances a large sub-field in contemporary political philosophy: the public reason literature.

Political trust is also a critical ingredient of political stability, including when stability is driven by the moral motivations of citizens.[112] In one respect, political trust is a precondition for persons to rationally and reasonably comply with political institutions. Compliance depends on trusting others to comply in response to our compliance. Without political trust, citizens will doubt that others act reciprocally. This reduces the incentive for people to be trustworthy, which will lower trust further.

Political trust is also significant for social contract theory. Political trust is one of the outcomes that we want a social contract theory to *rationalize*. We want a shared agreement to give persons good reason to trust one another. A society can enjoy the benefits of political trust in a stable, predictable fashion. Furthermore, if the institutions we jointly authorize somehow undermine our political trust, a social agreement to follow the directives of these institutions cannot survive for long. When political officials breach public trust, our reasons to trust them and be trustworthy in obeying them weaken. In this way, studying political trust helps establish the success conditions for a social contract.

Political trust is especially important for contract theories that appeal to public reason. On these accounts, rules achieve justification when shared or public reasons vindicate them. Specifically, public reasons justify the rules by helping us see why obeying the rule is morally required.[113] Then, when people follow their public reasons, they provide others with reasons to trust them. We all have moral reasons of our own to comply with shared legal and constitutional rules. Public compliance with public reasons

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112. *See* JOHN RAWLS, POLITICAL LIBERALISM xl (2d ed. 2005).

113. *See id.* at 212–54.

then illustrates that people support shared institutions, evincing trustworthiness. A disposition to comply with rules for public reasons can therefore form and preserve political trust.

Understanding political trust helps us to understand the rationale for a society's social contract. It also helps us see why social contract theory offers a compelling approach to social life. Understanding political trust, then, has an immediate payoff in terms of analyzing and addressing current political problems. But it also advances the historical aims of political philosophy.