

# What Accounts for Changing Public Trust in Government? A Causal Analysis With Structural Equation Model

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There are unimaginable decreases in public trust in government over last half of the century. This study seeks explanations for the question of “what accounts for the changes in public trust in government across time in the United States of America during years between 1952 and 1998?”. Multi-dimensionality of trust concept attracted great deal of attention from scholars from different fields in the base disciplines of psychology, sociology, political science and economics, as well as in more applied areas like management and marketing. This study combined different views into three main streams as psychology, sociology and economics to explain the determinants of trust level in government. Several hypotheses derived from these three main stream perspectives were tested with time series data from the United States. Structural equation model seemed best fitting quantitative model for the framework. This model with two equations explains several causative relationships between independent variables and trust in government as a final dependent variable.

*Keywords:* trust, trust in government, structural equation model, time series data

Issue of trust has received a great deal of attention from scholars from different fields. A broad literature from different disciplines have mentioned about various benefits of trust. Trustworthiness reduces conflict; improves communication; eases cooperation; enhances problem solving; reduces stress; enables people to realize more satisfactory relationships; amplifies organizational learning; advances change; promotes adaptive organizational forms, such as network relations; and decreases transaction costs (Carnival, 1995, pp. 184-191). Trust in general is a positive mindset and serves for good.

The aim of this paper is to present multidisciplinary view of interpersonal trust and trust in government. The study seeks to identify shared understanding of trust across disciplines, while recognizing divergent meanings scholars bring to the study of trust can add value to see and understand the picture as a whole. Firstly, the study will provide conceptual framework for trust through presenting three main streams—psychology, economics and sociology—understanding of trust. Secondly, the study will evaluate trust in both micro (individual) context as trust in others and macro (institutional) context as trust in government. Finally, the study will empirically test the hypotheses driven from the literature with the data from U.S. and discuss the implications of findings.

The existence of distrustful people is a barrier to the realization of democratic idea (Aberbach, 1969, p. 87). In other words, leaders in representative democracy cannot be successful unless they gained trust of citizens.

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Dahl (1971, pp. 7-10) argued that trust favors polarchy (democracy) while distrust favors hegemony (despotism). However, many authors have argued that major decreases in citizens' trust in others and government may harm basic tenets of democratic society and government.

### **Defining Concept of Trust**

Trust is one of the most challenging concepts in political and social thought; it is hard to define and doesn't easily fit formal models (Ruscio, 1997, p. 455). What is "trust"? Zucker (1986, p. 55) defined trust as a set of expectations shared by all those involved in an exchange. And for Carnevale (1995, pp. 5-7), trust is "an expression of faith and confidence that person or institutions will be fair, reliable, ethical, competent and nonthreatening". Denise and his colleagues (1998, p. 393) argued that the following definition of trust is most widely held and used: "Trust is a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another".

Because of multi-dimensionality, trust has received a great deal of attention from scholars from different fields in the base disciplines of psychology, sociology, political science and economics, as well as in more applied areas like management and marketing. Nonetheless, views on trust can be classified into three main streams: psychology, economics and sociology, since others adopt their views from these three perspectives to a certain extent. Each of these bodies of literature offers unique insights into the nature of trust and the processes through which trust develops.

Psychologists commonly frame their assessments of trust in terms of attributes of trustees and focus upon a host of internal cognitions that personal attributes yield. It comes from their assumptions that human being behaves irrationally based upon past experiences, future forecasts and characteristics of individuals. Rotter (1980, p. 2) posited that trust is a fairly stable belief based on individuals' extrapolations from their early-life experiences. Their personal knowledge of others becomes the primary driver of their thoughts and actions.

Economic framework tends to focus on immediate situational factors in the context of game settings and posit that "trusting" is a function of relatively rational decision making processes (Harrison, 1998, p. 474), rather than personality characteristics. Their main assumption that human is economically rational and self-interested behavior is constrained by contracts and controls. Trust is established through a calculative process whereby one party calculates the costs and/or rewards of another party cheating or cooperating in a relationship as in the case of principal agent relationships. The characteristics of interactions for calculus-based trust with rational choice are based upon economic exchanges.

Sociologists often find trust in socially embedded properties of relationships among people (Granovetter, 1985, p. 490) or institutions (Zucker, 1986, p. 57). Their assumptions of human beings as socially rational behavior are directed by formal obligations and informal relations. A variety of institutional factors, including legal forms, social networks, and societal norms regarding conflict management and cooperation, are likely to interact in creating a context for interpersonal and inter-organizational trust (Denise, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998, p. 395). Granovetter (1985, p. 491) argued that economic behavior was embedded in informal social relationships and the obligations inherent in those relationships. There are also empirical studies showing that the levels of trust and opportunism vary across cultural context (Fukuyama, 1995, p. 7).

Although rational prediction is an important part of trust and mainly used by economists, it provides incomplete understanding of trust alone. Both economic models (which disregard the variability in individual differences in the propensity to be trustworthy) and psychological models (with their preoccupation with

individual differences regardless of variation in situational factors) are better explanations of trust when combined than they are individually. Therefore, multidisciplinary approach seems as the best suitable approach to study trust in both levels together in an eclectic manner. Trust in others in general and trust in government were analyzed separately to illustrate the influence of general trust among people on governmental trust.

### **Trust in Others**

There may be possible channels that explain trust relationships between individuals and institutions (Alesina & Ferrara, 2000, pp. 2-4). First, trusting others may be moral or cultural attitudes. Then trust is expected to be very strongly influenced by individual characteristics. Second, trust may be based on past experiences in a way that on trust others if he is used to be treated fairly by his fellow men. This is sort of reciprocity argument for trust, which may be evaluated in both individual and group level. Third, one may trust more the people who are similar to himself, that are family members or members of the same social, racial or ethnic group. Fourth, people may trust more with whom they had a longer interaction. People who have lived longer in a community may be more likely to trust. Fifth, legal institutions may affect trust. If a criminal behavior is effectively executed, individuals trust more, because they will feel more protected against extreme non-cooperative behavior.

Previous research explains that the factors such as divorce rates, crime rates, alienation due to urbanization, changing role of women, leisure time activities and mobilization influence people's expectations of others' trustworthiness (Sheffield, 1998). Mobilization reduces gaining social connectedness to individuals' community. One of the most fundamental forms of social capital is the family, loosening of bonds within family reduces social capital, and hence trust in others (Putnam, 2000, p. 135).

It has been further hypothesized that income inequality and levels of unemployment should decrease level of interpersonal trust. Hard economic times also may lead people to perceive others negatively (Lipset & Schneider, 1987, pp. 8-11). When societies' resources become more inequitably distributed, people may begin to feel exploited by others, thus diminishing their faith in their fellow citizens. The more those citizens participate in their communities, the more they learn to trust others (Brehm & Wendy, 1997, p. 1003).

### **Trust in Government**

"Trust in government" concept may also have implications for interpersonal trust among the members of the community. Trust in government can be seen only one instance of trust in mankind (Cole, 1973, p. 814). If one cannot trust other people generally, she/he certainly cannot trust those under the temptations and with the power come with public office. Trust may be partly about the honesty and integrity of the people who serve in government.

Cynicism about the government is mainly related to variety of subjective economic complaints (Parker, S. & Parker, G., 1993, p. 443). Current economic conditions such as inflation, unemployment and waste of governmental resources are common economic complaints about government. In contrast to this, growing economy helps to restore confidence in government (Brehm & Wendy, 1997, p. 1004). Exposure to negative media coverage about the government could undermine confidence (Brehm & Wendy, 1997, p. 1006). People, thanks to the media, are closer to the private lives officials. Director of Council for Government Excellence Hamilton (1999, pp. 1-2) highlighted that media particularly accentuate differences and conflicts between politicians, and its focus is on personal lives rather than substance, they are increasingly negative, cynical and adversarial. Previous findings illustrate that people who do not trust in government blame politicians, poor

management and poor performance. People think that government spends its money wastefully and ineffectively.

From the literature given, these hypotheses can be derived:

Hypothesis 1: Trust in government is more likely to increase if trust in others is high.

Hypothesis 2: Trust in government is more likely to decrease if economic conditions are bad.

Hypothesis 3: Trust in government is more likely to decrease if tax burden of citizens increases.

Hypothesis 4: Trust in government is more likely to decrease in increased income inequality.

Hypothesis 5: Inefficiency considerations/poor performance of government is more likely to reduce trust in government.

Hypothesis 6: Unemployed people are less likely to trust in others and government.

Hypothesis 7: Increasing crime rate is more likely to reduce trust in others and government.

Hypothesis 8: Decline in social capital is more likely to reduce trust in others and government.

Hypothesis 9: Religious people are more likely to trust in others.

Hypothesis 10: Declining family values are more likely to reduce trust in others and so government.

Hypothesis 11: Negative attitudes of media toward public officials are more likely to reduce trust in government.

Hypothesis 12: Trust in people is more likely to decrease while the country is experiencing high mobility.

### **Research Design**

Research design includes the research question, the model, the statistical technique and the data. This study differs from others in essential ways: national samples were used at an aggregate level rather than individual as unit of analysis, constructing more complete model of causes of trust rather than examining few aspects of trust, relationships were studied over time, and casual effects of hypothesized relationships were examined through structural equation model.

### **Research Question**

The previous researches underline continuous decline in citizens' trust in government over last half of the century. This research question explores "what accounts for the changes in public trust in government across the time in the United States of America during years between 1952 and 1998<sup>1</sup>?".

### **Model and Statistical Technique**

To answer the research question of the determinants of trust level in government, the paper combined several perspectives into the model that have several hypotheses derived from the literature given above, which includes several causative relationships between the independent variables and trust in government as the final dependent variable.

A number of studies suggest causal relationships between variety of socioeconomic variables and trust. Multiple regressions alone would not be good empirical choice, since many of the variables that influence trust in government are causally related to other variables in the model. For example, there are many factors that influence trust in government influence trust in other people, which also indirectly affect trust in government. Nonetheless, single equation regression techniques would not allow us to measure these causal relationships or indirect affects between variables.

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<sup>1</sup> 1952 was chosen as a beginning year because national election study (NES) data for trust in government was available after 1952.

The causal model with time series data has two equations, each with several explanatory variables. This paper estimated the changes in trust in government by using an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analysis for each structural equation. The paper treated each equation in the model separately and estimated coefficients sequentially. This structural model posits that trusting in others is more likely to result in a greater confidence in government. In constructing this model, recursive-modeling techniques are employed and standardized regression coefficients represent the path coefficients.

### Data

There are 4 endogenous and 7 exogenous variables in the model to explain trust in government. Annual aggregate national level<sup>2</sup> time series data<sup>3</sup> regarding the variables were gathered from various sources, because there was no unique source to present all these different types of data. Descriptive information and sources of data were illustrated in Table 1. The operationalization of the concepts/factors in the model was explained in detail as following.

Table 1

#### *The Description of the Variables*

Variables	Descriptions	Mean	Sd	Source
TRUSTGOV	Trust in government	48.620	18.760	I
LABOR	Female labor force (%)	47.290	8.830	II
MURDER	Number of murder per 100,000 people	7.350	1.990	III
GINI	Income inequality	0.376	0.025	IV
CAPACITY	Bureaucratic capacity	13.370	4.070	V
TAXBURD	Total personal income tax as % of GDP	9.260	0.970	V
UNEMPL	Civilian unemployment rate	5.800	1.540	II
INFLATION	Annual inflation rates	4.020	3.060	VI
HONESTY	Trust in others	42.650	12.200	VII
TVWATCH	Average TV viewing hours	6.120	0.940	VII
RELIGION	% of people attending church	82.040	9.150	I
CIVIC	Associational membership index	13.890	6.380	VII

Notes. I: National election study, retrieved from <http://www.umich.edu/~nes/>;

II: Bureau of Labor statistics data, retrieved from <http://146.142.4.24/cgi-bin/surveymost>;

III: Statistical abstract of the United States, 1999;

IV: US Census Bureau, retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/hhes/income/histinc/f04.html>;

V: Economic Time series page, retrieved from <http://www.economagic.com>;

VI: Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, retrieved from <http://minneapolisfed.org/economy/calc/hist1913.html>;

VII: Putnam data set and Bowling alone, 2000.

**Trust in government.** Trust in government the final dependent variable, drawn from national election study survey.<sup>4</sup> This study used the question of “how much time do you think you can trust the government in Washington about what it does—just about always, most of the time or some of the time?”. As a measure of

<sup>2</sup> The researches that do individual level of analysis include age, race, education and income level, and other individual characteristics etc.. However, this study didn't include these factors since it uses national aggregate level data.

<sup>3</sup> This study used aggregate time series data even though we knew that we might have problem of ecological fallacy, making inference from aggregate level data, because many variations may be expected in those aggregate level data regarding individual level unit of analysis. However, there was no way to collect time series data between 1952 and 1998 on individual bases.

<sup>4</sup> Data drawn from NES were biennial, so linear projections were made for those missing years.

trust in government, total percent (%) of “just about always and most of the time” was used among 4 categories of ordinal level data. If mistrust is not related with personal values and experiences, then their explanations may lie in a generalized beliefs or moods, which would measure the variable best in an aggregate level.

**Trust in others.** Trust in others (people) also called as a national mood is a general feelings about others. The statement of “most people are honest” in Putnam dataset<sup>5</sup> was used to measure trust in others. Total percent of respondents who generally and definitely agree with this statement formed “trust in others” variable.

**Crime.** To test the hypothesis regarding impact of crime on trust in others and government, the paper used numbers of murder per 100,000 people.<sup>6</sup>

**Income inequality.** Gini Coefficients (GINI) were used to measure income inequality in the society. Income inequality within the communities is useful to illustrate social distress in the community. Greater income inequality leads to increased distrustful environment. This ratio ranges from 0 (perfect equality) to 1 (perfect inequality). GINI ratios were gathered for families as of March for following years, drawn from US Census Bureau.

**Bureaucratic capacity.** Government performance or bureaucratic capacity of government was operationalized as government spending as percent of GDP by controlling transfer payments to the individuals. All values are in billion dollars in a given year and data were drawn from *Economic Time* series page. Formula may be given as the following:

$$\text{Bureaucratic capacity} = \frac{(\text{Total gov. spending} - \text{transfer payments})}{\text{GDP}} * 100$$

**Civic involvement.** The paper used an associational membership index developed by Putnam (2000, p. 54) to measure civic engagement. He established an index by taking average membership rate in 8 national professional associations between 1901 and 1997. Unions<sup>7</sup> and professional organizations serve for both economic and sociological benefits of their members. They function as an important locus of social solidarity, a mechanism for mutual assistance and shared expertise. These organizations have traditionally been among the most common forms of civic connectedness. The development trends in these organizations may have implications on the conditions of other civic organizations.

**Religion.** Religion is an important institution to teach and enhance cooperation among people, and encourage them to trust in human being in general. Religiosity was measured as percentage of people attending church. The data was drawn from NES question of “Would you say whether you go to church regularly, often, seldom or never?”. By excluding ordinal category of never,<sup>8</sup> the study formed the variable of religiosity.

**Leisure time activities.** To measure what people do as their leisure time activities, this paper used an average TV viewing hours. Putnam (2000, p. 222) noted television is one of the most important leisure time activities for most of Americans. Viewing TV rather than involving with others may have either positive or

<sup>5</sup> This study used Putnam data set, since NES data set had questions in only nine (9) years to measure “most people are trusted”. Putnam’s data was missing between 1952 and 1959, so these years were projected based on the year period between 1960 and 1970.

<sup>6</sup> Initially, the paper intended to use violent crime rates as a measure of concept; however, it had high multicollinearity with other two independent variables. To abstain specification bias, rather than excluding variable that the paper used murder rate as a measure of crime, since it is highly correlated with violent crime rate but less correlated with other two independent variables. This study preferred original structured data rather than doing an index for crime.

<sup>7</sup> Union membership rates could be another measure for civic involvement. The literature on union membership decline relates the problem to female labor force increase. In addition, the paper estimated the model with union membership rates; it highly correlated with female labor force as expected. Therefore, the paper used associational membership index rather.

<sup>8</sup> Variation was generally between seldom and never categories, in the favor of never attendance.

negative implications in constructing views on others. It may teach viewer more about society and good things which may lead to increase in trust level or alienate individuals from community by preventing him/her involving with others. Spending all of your time in front of TV set may destroy civic life.

**Decline of family values.** Female labor force was used to measure decline of family values<sup>9</sup> in the way that values the decreasing role of women at home and cooperation with community/neighborhood and relatives. Labor force participation rate (civilian population) aged 16 years old and older were included, and the data were drawn from Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Most of females were homemakers in the first half of the century. Putnam (2000, p. 198) argued that rate of women's investment in social-capital formation has been reduced by their movement into the labor force, since they were heavily investing in social-capital formation much more than men. They were busy with neighborhood activities. Having job decreases the time available for exploring those opportunities to involve with others in their communities.

**Annual inflation rates.** Annual rate of inflation (annual percent change) based on consumer price index was used as a measure of economic conditions of the time. This may help us to infer that citizens would be dissatisfied with government services, which could not handle economic policy that results in inflation, which leads to less trust in government.

**Civilian unemployment rate.** Civilian unemployment rates were used to measure its impact on both trust in others and government. Unemployed citizens expect to be employed by both private and public organizations, and also everybody expects government to solve this economic policy problem. The data was driven from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

**Tax burden.** Tax burden of citizens was operationalized as a total of federal, state and local government personal income tax receipts out of percent of GDP. All values are in billion dollars in a given year and data were drawn from *Economic Time* series page. Tax burden formula may be given as in the following:

$$\text{Tax burden} = \frac{(\text{Fed. gov. pers. income tax} + \text{State \& local gov. pers. income tax})}{\text{GDP}} * 100$$

## Findings and Discussions

This part describes the results and presents findings of research hypotheses. First, the descriptive statistics about the data were examined; then the results of ordinal least squared (OLS) regression analyses regarding hypothesis testing were evaluated; finally theoretical findings were discussed. The study estimated the structural equation model sequentially with an OLS multiple regression method. The standardized and unstandardized coefficients for the full structural model were illustrated in Table 2 and Table 3.

The fit for each structural equation is quite high, the estimated  $R^2$  for trust in others equation is 0.97, for the trust in government equation 0.86. The paper also runs into autocorrelation in both equations, and corrected them by using the Cochrane-Orcutt two-step procedures.<sup>10</sup> Even though the study did not run into serious

<sup>9</sup> Divorce rates have been also suggested to measure decline in family values, since with dissolution of family, members of family become more pessimistic with others. The impact of change in female labor force is more comprehensive in social capital formation, the study preferred female labor force rate. On the other hand, female labor force was also highly correlated to the divorce rates. It is assumed that females who have economic independence are more likely to divorce.

<sup>10</sup> This paper estimated  $p$  as defined in Cochrane-Orcutt two-step procedure. In addition to this, it also checked whether there is difference between this  $p$  values and the Durbin's two-step method of estimating  $p$  (See Gujarati for detail, 1995, p. 429). It also included both estimation results—initial estimates and revised estimates after correcting auto-correlation (see Table 2 and Table 3).

heteroscedasticity problem,<sup>11</sup> it had multicollinearity problem<sup>12</sup> to a certain extent.

There are several shortcomings and limitations in the analysis. Several of the variables from biennial survey data that created partial problem of measurement. There was no other available data. Some other arguments underline the measurement problem about national election study in the way that there has been substantial declines over-time comparability of items measuring public policy preferences and items measuring support for political system (Abrahamson, 1990, p. 178). Research remarks on the inconsistency among different measures of trust and distrust in government citing from recent public opinion surveys which found that people trust the federal government does the right thing (Sheffield, 1998).

The causal model has important missing variables because of unavailable time series data. Therefore, the paper could not test the hypothesis 11 and 12. Both of these important concepts are mobility and media effects, which theoretically argued that these are important in explaining trust in government. Dramatic national crises such as the events of the late 1960s, i.e., the Watergate scandal, bad news about the government in terms of disastrous foreign war, racial conflict, social non-connectedness etc., push confidence levels down (Lipset & Schneider, 1987, pp. 8-11).

### **Trust in Government**

OLS estimate of trust in government accounts for 86% of variation. It can be concluded that the trust in other people positively associated with trust in government ( $p < 0.10$ ). Crime is the most important factor in explaining the variation. Virtually there is no chance that crime rates are not linearly associated with trust in government.

As shown in Table 2, there is strong negative correlation between trust in government and inflation rate. Inflation and unemployment both tend to depress the views of people. Although not significant, there is positive relationship between unemployment and trust in government, which is parallel to the findings of Lipset and Schneider (1987, pp. 8-11). They argued that the consequences of inflation and unemployment are in some respect parallel but in some respect divergent. Both create negative feeling about current state of affairs, but generally inflation has uniquely depressing effect on assessment of future. Economic ratings suggest that with unemployment rate goes up, expectation for the future of the economy tends to improve.

When asked why citizens distrust government, they tend to stress poor performance. There is clear support for the predicted influence of bureaucratic capacity of government on trusting in government. In a democracy, public satisfaction with government performance is an important measure.

Tax rates, actually, is one of the most important complaints about government, and additionally, citizens often state that government waste taxes (Sheffield, 1998). Contrary to expectations, there is no significant association between tax burden and trust in government. It can be inferred that income inequality doesn't have impact on trust in government or it is negligible in terms of relative impact ( $\text{Beta} = -0.011$ ). Higher income equality does not appear to elicit a greater trust in government.

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<sup>11</sup> To detect the problem of heteroscedasticity, the paper checked residuals against independent variables, and the distribution was homogenous.

<sup>12</sup> This paper excluded several related variables such as divorce rate and left female labor force thinking that original model was misspecified. Also as suggested by Berry and Feldman (1985, pp. 26-27), the study found new variables to solve problems. For example, violent crime rate was highly correlated with some other variables, the study used murder rate highly correlated with crime but not with others. Nonetheless, the study still has medium level multicollinearity in the trust in government equations. If one of the correlated variables could be excluded, the paper could end up with specification bias. Therefore, even though there is a problem of inconsistency, the estimate is still unbiased.



Table 2

*Multiple Regression Results: Trust in Government, 1952-1998*

Variables	Initial coefficients		Revised coefficients	
	B	Beta	B	Beta
INTERCEPT	78.161		19.679	
GINI	-102.906	-0.136	-6.937	-0.011
CAPACITY	1.096	0.238**	1.605	0.334***
TAXBURD	0.342	0.018	-0.972	-0.073
UNEMPL	0.610	0.050	0.126	0.020
INFLATIO	-1.325	-0.216***	-0.554	-0.133*
HONEST	0.423	0.275**	0.369	0.236
MURDER	-3.394	-0.361***	-3.703	-0.392***
F-Ratio	137.460		43.013	
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.950		0.086	
Durbin's d	0.686		1.392	
Number of cases	47		46	

Notes. \* p < 0.10; \*\* p < 0.05; \*\*\* p < 0.01.

**Trust in Others**

OLS estimate for trust in others accounts for 97% of variation. The coefficient of the effect of female labor force on trust in others is the strongest in that equation (Beta = -0.897). Income inequality is the only one that doesn't have significant relation with trusting other people. The explanation is that this relationship is puzzling. Unemployment and murder rates are negatively associated with trusting people. People with no job seem more pessimistic on others (see Table 3).

Table 3

*Multiple Regression Results: Trust in Others, 1952-1998*

Variables	Initial coefficients		Revised coefficients	
	B	Beta	B	Beta
INTERCEPT	123.127		71.695	
GINI	-50.572	-0.103	-36.928	-0.080
TVWATCH	5.742	0.443***	3.697	0.277**
RELIGION	-0.265	-0.207	-0.223	-0.181***
CIVIC	0.543	0.284*	-0.672	0.356**
LABOR	-1.530	-1.107***	-1.256	-0.897***
UNEMPL	-0.611	-0.800***	-0.697	-0.101***
MURDER	-0.776	-0.127**	-1.087	-0.110**
F-Ratio	434.509		220.722	
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.980		0.970	
Durbin's d	1.262		1.826	
Number of cases	47		46	

Notes. \* p < 0.10; \*\* p < 0.05; \*\*\* p < 0.01.

Civic participation/associational membership is positively associated with trust in people. Civic

participation, whose common sense concept is the ability of people to work together, is believed to be essential to the fabric of the civil society. Television viewing is statistically significant but unexpectedly positively relate with trust in others. Although in theory, it has been argued that exposure to the television, particularly its violent content, results in a view of world as a mean and scary place (Brehm & Wendy, 1997, p. 1006).

Religion is another factor that has unexpectedly negative relation with trusting people. People who are active in the community affairs and regularly attend religious services are more likely to trust in others. It should also not be forgotten that the religiosity question format in NES changed 3 times, which may result in inconsistent answers from a methodological viewpoint. Even though structure seems similar, number of categories increased from 4 to 5, and hence there is serious shift in answers regarding never attendance to the church.

**Causal Analysis**

Crime is the most important factor overall which decreases trust in government (Beta = -0.418). Following it, bureaucratic capacity has considerable influence on trust in government. Implications of this influence were discussed earlier. Decline of family values will bring extra burden on government in running schools and other public services regarding children.

On the other hand, female labor force even though has no direct effect, its impact on trust is very high relative to other variables (Beta = -0.216). Increase in women labor force represents decline of family values. It means less attention to children, neighborhood and community. Overall, watching TV as a leisure time activity, unemployment rates and religion have negligible effect on trust in government.

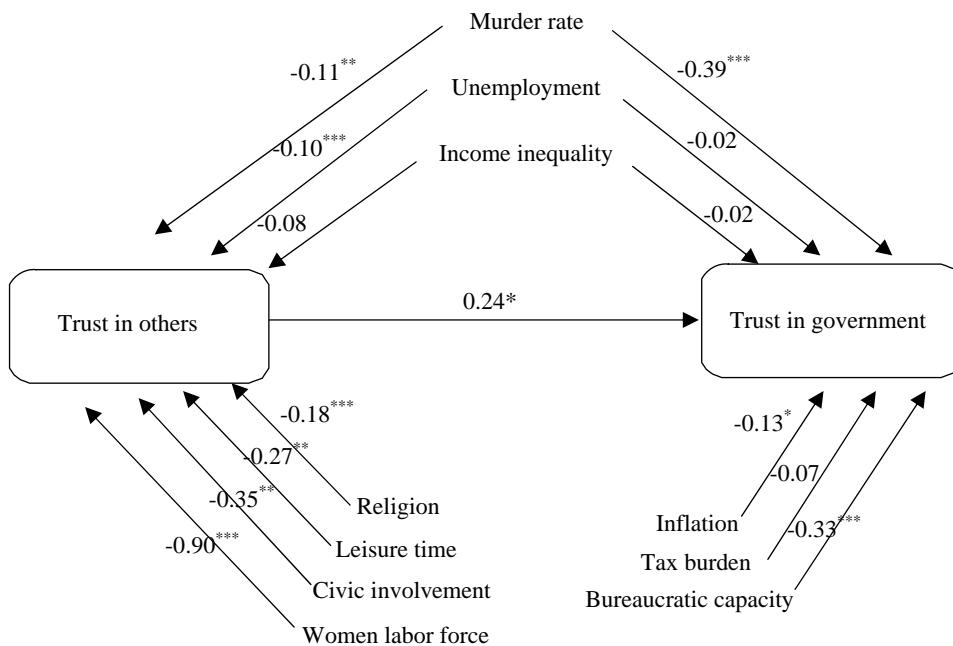


Figure 1. Trust in government model with structural equations (\* p < 0.10; \*\* p < 0.05; \*\*\* p < 0.01).

It can be seen that change in trust in government is associated with widespread economic satisfaction. But lack of insufficient economics and expressed attitudes suggest the need for explanations from sociological views such as cultural values and social capital. It can be seen that decline of family values, trust in others and civic involvement have influence on trusting in government (see Figure 1 and Table 4). More connections with government and other issues seem to result in more confidence on government.

Table 4

*The Effects of the Variables on Trust in Government*

Variables	Direct effect	Indirect effect	Total effect
HONESTY	0.236	-	0.236
LABOR	-	-0.216	-0.216
MURDER	-0.392	-0.026	-0.418
GINI	-0.011	-0.019	-0.030
CAPACITY	0.334	-	0.334
TAXBURD	-0.073	-	-0.073
UNEMPL	0.020	-0.024	-0.004
INFLATION	-0.133	-	-0.133
TVWATCH	-	0.020	0.020
RELIGION	-	0.050	0.050
CIVIC	-	0.090	0.090

*Note.* All are standardized coefficients.

### Conclusion

This paper sought to answer the question of “what accounts for changing public trust in government across time in the United States of America during years between 1952-1998?”. Because of multidimensional aspects of trust in government, the paper tested the hypotheses with a structural equation model including two separate equations, each with several explanatory variables. Hopefully, this study and the findings as an example will shed light for further research and inquiry about Turkish Government.

The findings suggest that all three psychological, sociological and economic streams provide better explanations of governmental trust when combined rather than they can do individually. The paper finds support for most of the hypotheses in the national election studies survey. Crime, widespread economic satisfaction and bureaucratic capacity are very important factors overall causing change in trust in government. It can be seen that decline of family values, trust in others and civic involvement have strong influence on trusting in government.

There is a considerable concern among citizens that government is incompetent and cannot be trusted. It seems that younger generations report a greater level of distrust in government, political and civic participation declines as well. Declining and low citizen trust ratios mean citizens are granting less legitimacy and approval to government. Then, they are less likely to provide tax monies and voluntary compliance with laws. Bright young generations will not be willing to go into government. In turn, mutual trust will deteriorate and this will harm communities’ social capital and future.

Decline of trust in government will not bring the end of nation state in general. But sure this distrust will influence the politicians in making public policies either with vote-maximizing motive or frank response to the complaints. Findings illustrate why people have lost their confidence on government. Then this point should be asked, “so how can we improve public trust in government?”. Of course some of the factors contributing to the decline in public trust are not easily changed. Definitely we need to improve the way government works as responsive, accountable and efficient. We need to improve public understanding of government by focusing on public education about the government. Public need to know more about the government that it is not a holy organization, and public employees are not angels. Running government is costly and freedom is not free.

Strong bureaucratic nation state will have to share some its roles with market and nonprofits. We see huge trends on public administration to delegate its powers and public services to nongovernmental organizations with contracting out and privatization policies. We also need to note the importance of having dynamic future-oriented public organizations to provide public service better, but cost less.

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