**NEW DIRECTIONS IN POLITICAL TRUST RESEARCH**

**Workshop, 6-7 July 2023**

Long before the populist tide of the last decade, exemplified by the election of leaders like Donald Trump, Narendra Modi and Boris Johnson, and by events such as Britain’s Brexit referendum in 2016, academics and policy-makers have been concerned with the decline of political trust in many established democracies. Political, or vertical, trust is a significant contributor to a host of important outcomes such as social cohesion, economic growth, government performance and even subjective well-being. Indeed, political trust is recognized as one of the most valuable elements of social cooperation, political stability and peace available to democracies. Its importance has been highlighted over the past three years as the coronavirus pandemic has forced us to confront the need for cooperation between citizens and governments, and emphasized the vital role of trust in facilitating such cooperative links.

Given the importance and reach of the concept, it is hardly surprising that political trust has been extensively studied by scholars across a variety of academic disciplines, resulting in a large number of specific studies as well as broader reviews (Levi and Stoker, 2000; Pharr and Putnam, 2000; Dalton, 2004; Zmerli and Hooghe, 2011; Norris, 2011; Zmerli and van der Meer, 2017; Citrin and Stoker, 2018; Uslaner, 2018; van Ham et al, 2018; Schnaudt, 2019; Martini and Quaranta, 2020). The bulk of these studies have focused on three issues: the distribution of trust across countries and over time; the causes of trust, both at macro/aggregate and micro/individual levels; and the effects of trust on people’s attitudes and patterns of behaviour. These studies are individually and collectively important for our understanding of trust, not least in increasing awareness of its role in times of social crises like the coronavirus pandemic.

Yet the focus of the scholarly analysis on these three issues has meant that other key issues around political trust have been less extensively explored, leading to shortfalls in our understanding. There is a need for researchers to move beyond the historical focus on the levels, causes and effects of political trust to explore a new and wider set of issues that promise both an expansion of scholarly understanding of the topic as well as findings and recommendations that can help policy-makers deal with low and declining rates of trust in many countries. While low and declining trust is more of a problem in some countries than in others, it extends to politically stable systems such as Germany, where levels of trust in the federal government have recently been shown to be low and in decline (Bertelsmann, 2019), and where low-trust individuals have engaged in anti-system movements such as the PEGIDA protests or, most recently, the ‘Querdenker’. The Head of Public Affairs for Edelman Germany (Edelman is a company that conducts regular worldwide surveys on trust) recently observed that “Trust in government and those responsible for government has decreased” and cautioned that “Without trust in government action, it will be difficult to address social challenges” (Edelman, 2021).

In short, there is a need to identify new avenues of research on political trust, capable of answering important scholarly and policy-related questions. These questions include how best we should *measure* political trust, what is the optimum *level* of political trust, what is the appropriate *balance* between trust and related attitudes such as scepticism, how do individuals *form* trust judgements, and how can declines in trust be *remedied*?

The purpose of the workshop is to identify and explore fresh avenues of research on political trust, and to devise new research projects capable of furthering scholarly and policy knowledge on these areas. By gathering a range of subject experts from across Europe and beyond, the workshop will provide a forum for (i) Discussion on key research priorities in the study of political trust, (ii) Identifying and stimulating new research networks among workshop participants and (iii) Generating new and innovative research proposals capable of extending our understanding on key issues around political trust. The workshop is thus designed to provide an important forum for identifying gaps in the scholarly knowledge base on political trust, and to design research networks and projects capable of filling these gaps.

The proposed workshop represents a follow-up to an earlier initiative supported by the Fritz Thyssen Foundation. In 2014, the Foundation financed a book-related workshop on political trust, that led to the important compendium volume *Handbook on Political Trust* (Zmerli and van der Meer, 2017) This book provided an overview of the current state of research on political trust. Since then, the political and social world has changed – the rise of populism and the crisis of the coronavirus pandemic being two clear examples – and there is a need for a new and fresh research programme to extend our understanding of political trust as a vital social and political commodity. The proposed workshop builds on the earlier initiative supported by the Foundation and provides an important platform for designing and taking forward the next wave of political trust research.

**Nature and outcomes of workshop**

The workshop will be held over two days (6-7 July) in summer 2023. It will involve over twenty political trust scholars, ranging from professors to post-doctoral researchers, drawn from 11 countries. The workshop will comprise various sessions, each devoted to a key theme for scholarly and policy understanding of political trust. The themes have been drawn from the Conclusion to a recently published special issue on political trust in *Frontiers in Political Science* (Weinberg et al, 2021), which identified a number of key areas for future research. Additional themes have been identified through a recent ‘call for proposals’ among a network of trust scholars.

Each of these themes will have a proposing team which will prepare a short ‘position/issues paper’, which will be circulated to all participants before the workshop, and which will serve as the starting point for thematic discussions at the workshop. These discussions are designed to extend and flesh out the theme, and to identify dedicated projects capable of initiating new research on each theme. The workshop will also identify core teams to take forward research projects on identified themes, which we anticipate leading to new and innovative grant proposals to national and European/international funding agencies. These research applications will be designed – individually and collectively – to provide much-needed extensions to our current understanding of political trust, with important payoffs for scholars across academic disciplines and for national and European policy-makers.

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