

The Authorities Really Do Matter: Party Control and Trust in Government

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For some time, one line of research on trust in government has stressed that trust results from evaluations of the institutions of government. Here, trust reflects public sentiments toward the responsiveness of the political process. Another line of research has alternatively countered that trust tends to be a reflection of political leaders. But this research has been largely unable to demonstrate that the performance of authorities matters relative to evaluations of the political process. Changes in partisan control of Congress and the presidency, however, provides us with a natural experiment where authorities change while the political process is constant. Here, partisans should trust government more when their party controls Congress, the presidency, or both. I find that trust does respond to changes in partisan control of the Congress and presidency, which demonstrates that the effect of authorities matters relative to evaluations of the political process.

One of the enduring debates in American political science revolves around the character of trust in government. This debate goes to the very heart of the assumptions that underlie research on trust in government. These assumptions about the nature of trust were developed by Easton in his early work on the legitimacy of political institutions (1965). Easton defined trust as an evaluative orientation directed toward political systems. But he divides a political system into the “regime,” the institutional structures of government, and the “authorities,” the elected leaders of a government. Easton argues that discontent directed toward the authorities will be resolved through electoral replacement. But distrust that is directed at the regime is not easily resolved and may threaten the government’s existence.

Easton’s definitions have come to shape the contours of the debate over trust in government that developed after the precipitous decline in trust during the 1960s and 1970s. The earliest empirical work on trust by Miller and Citrin, in fact, debated the decline in the terms that Easton defined. Miller (1974a, 1974b) argued that trust was directed at the U.S. regime, and for trust to rebound, it would require “institutional and structural changes if permanent rectification of the situation is to be attained” (1974b, 1001). Citrin (1974) countered that trust was an evaluation of authorities and not the regime, and since the decline in trust merely

reflected dissatisfaction with incumbents, whatever cynicism existed in the electorate was merely ritualistic grumbling. Citrin, however, did not argue that trust in government was without consequence. This ritualistic grumbling could seriously endanger incumbents' reelection prospects. Moreover, later work has demonstrated that low government trust creates a climate in which it is difficult for political leaders to succeed (Hetherington 1998a).

Since the Miller-Citrin debate, it has become evident that evaluations of authorities are important predictors of trust. Indicators such as presidential approval, economic performance, congressional approval, scandals, and crime all appear to be formative influences on how trusting citizens are of their government (Chanley, Rudolph and Rahn 2000; Citrin and Green 1986; Citrin and Luks 1998; Craig 1993; Erber and Lau 1990; Feldman 1983; Hetherington 1998a, 1998b; Lawrence 1997; Mansbridge 1997; Miller and Borelli 1991; Orren 1997; Pew Research Center 1998; Williams 1985). But despite the voluminous literature on the topic of authorities and trust in government, there remains an important gap in our knowledge about trust in government. To wit, we do not know if authorities matter *relative* to how citizens judge the responsiveness of the political process. This was, in fact, Miller's point about evaluations of authorities and trust. He argued that while some distrust existed due to how citizens evaluated incumbent authorities, "other forms of discontent predominate." Particularly, he saw citizens as disenchanted with a political process they viewed as unresponsive and broken regardless of who was elected.

Arguments that focus on authorities and trust have been unable to answer Miller's challenge primarily due to an inability to demonstrate that authorities matter relative to evaluations of the political process. This inability exists due to a dearth of statistical controls for process (the sequence of activities and systems involved in carrying out or enacting public policy) in most research designs. The typical research design used to demonstrate the linkage between authorities and trust regresses an indicator of trust on one or more indicators of government performance. But most often such research designs have no means of controlling for citizen evaluations of process. Given this gap in our knowledge, there is still much to learn in the study of trust. What is required to put the connection between authorities and trust on surer ground is some mechanism where we can hold views of the political process constant when there is a change in authorities. Thus, we could then observe whether trust changes when authorities vary but the process is constant. This would be evidence that evaluations of authorities matter relative to process. The question, then, is: does such a mechanism exist?

Every time partisan control of either a branch of Congress or the presidency changes provides us with a natural experiment of this very type. When a new party captures the White House or Congress, we have a moment in time where the process remains constant (changes to the structure of the political process, such as term limits or the line-item veto, rarely occur during an election) while the authorities in charge of that institution change. That is, partisans' trust in gov-

ernment should shift upward when their party captures either the Congress or the Presidency and fall when their party loses either institution. Independents, on the other hand, devoid of partisan attachments, should be less trusting of government regardless of who controls the Congress or presidency. As such, party control of government provides us with a natural experiment where we can observe if trust changes when authorities change but the political process is constant. While not a direct predictor of levels of trust in government, this mechanism allows for the first demonstration of authorities affecting trust relative to process.

Using National Election Studies data from 1964 to 2002, I test whether changes in political leaders affect trust while the process is constant. I find evidence that trust changes among partisans when partisan control of the Congress and the presidency change, and these changes are robust across time and with controls for aggregate political performance. I also find that Independents tend to be less trusting than partisans, suggesting that they do not rely on evaluations of the authorities when deciding to trust the government, which points to an important consequence should the number of Independents increase. The qualitative result is a new understanding of how evaluations of authorities matter relative to process, one where we see that changes in political leaders matter even if we control for process.

Political Parties and Trust

In recent years, a burgeoning literature has focused on understanding political parties as endogenous institutions. In this literature, political parties are organizations created by and for elites to win elections and govern (Aldrich 1995; Rohde 1991). The party organization, comprised of office seekers, office holders, investors, and personnel produces a political good for citizens to consume at elections. In the course of campaigns and governance, political actors use parties to regulate access to elected office, mobilize voters, and determine outcomes for the polity (Aldrich 1995). The last function of political parties, determining outcomes for the polity, is what concerns us most directly.

Office holders use the party organization to shape policy outcomes through agenda control and coalition formation. When a party wins a majority in Congress, it is the party leadership that has agenda control and forms coalitions among its members to pass legislation. The president, the *de facto* leader of the party, also influences policy outcomes through the veto, coalition formation, and drafting legislation. The party organization, in its attempts to produce policy, tries to win control of the major institutions of government. And with each institution the party controls, the party should have greater success in achieving its policy goals. The key insight is that governance is really *party* governance. While the opposition is not powerless, the majority party is the party that governs. Moreover, when a party controls either the Congress or the presidency, it sends a signal to its partisans about trust in government. A signal that the party they trust controls some part of the government, and therefore, the government is now more

trustworthy. To fully understand the content of that signal, we must examine what parties mean to the public.

While citizens are not an actual part of the party organization, many citizens have an affective attachment to the party organization. Indeed, in *The American Voter*, partisanship is conceived as a psychological attachment that often does not reflect “formal membership or an active connection with a party apparatus” (Campbell et al. 1964, 121). Here, the party is a group toward which individuals develop an affective attachment with some degree of intensity. The affective attachment to a party then serves as an important cue in a variety of political decisions (1964, 122). I assume, here, that trust is part of the citizens’ affective attachment to the party organization; in short, citizens trust the party with whom they identify.

I need to be more specific, though, on what it means to trust a political party. Trusting a political party has two aspects. First, trusting a political party is a willingness to rely on the party, since you expect the actions of the party to take you into account in some relevant way (Hardin 1998). For most citizens, the actual recognition of how the party takes their views into account is probably tenuous at best, since that would require crystallized preferences and observing the party taking action on those preferences. So while trusting a party may not be built on specific actions taken by the party, it depends on the second aspect of trusting a political party. The second aspect is that trusting a political party is always relative to distrusting the opposition party. That is, a citizen always trusts the party he or she identifies with more than he or she trusts the opposition. While individuals may not be able to directly observe that their party always acts in their interest, they assume that their party will act in their interest more often than the opposition party. By implication, then, the stronger the partisan attachment, the more trusting a person is of the party.

If elites use party organizations to govern, and partisans trust their party, what does this mean for trust? The conclusion is that partisans’ trust should increase when their party gains control of government and decline when their party loses control of government. Therefore, a partisan’s trust will fluctuate with the parties’ changing electoral fortunes. Democratic partisans’ trust should increase or decrease when the Democrats capture or lose control of the government, while Republicans’ trust will drop with each Democratic victory and rise with each Republican win.¹ More substantively, this mechanism implies that partisans believe the process works and can be trusted when their party controls it. While it is unlikely that partisans will trust unconditionally (even some Republicans probably came to distrust Richard Nixon), in general, for partisans, trust is about the people in government and their performance.

¹Of course, for the mechanism to work a large segment of the electorate must know which party controls the government. In general, if citizens do not know which party controls Congress or the presidency this only makes it harder to find the effect I am looking for, making the test more conservative. Please see the online appendix (available at <http://www.journalofpolitics.org>) for details on the numbers of citizens that know which party controls government institutions.

As a corollary, I also expect differences in trust between partisans and Independents. First, Independents without an attachment to a party organization should be unaffected by changes in party governance. And second, one might presume that Independents, without any stake in either party, should be the least trusting compared to both Democrats and Republicans. If this corollary holds true, it provides additional insight into the regime/authorities divide that underlies trust in government. For it implies that authorities are important for partisans but for Independents the authorities matter little, as their distrust stems more directly from dissatisfaction with the political process. Therefore, any rise in the number of Independents implies that the portion of the public that distrusts the government regardless of who is elected is increasing.

In sum, this partisan mechanism allows us to test for a shift in trust when authorities change, but the political process, and any reforms that might be made to it, is constant across the election. The key theoretical insight is not any direct effect party identification may have on trust in government, but instead that trust changes following a shift in the authorities. Here, partisans' trust depends on who controls the process rather than the nature of the process itself, while the trust of Independents is not linked to changes in which party control the government.

Controlling for Other Effects

Given that government performance is a proven predictor of party identification, indicators of government performance are obvious confounds to observing fluctuations in trust due to partisan loyalties. We know that partisanship is, for some, a product of party performance (Fiorina 1981; MacKuen, Erikson, and Stimson 1989), and party performance is measured with the same indicators that are used to measure government performance: the economy and presidential approval. To not include measures of performance could bias the effect of partisan control on trust. Controlling for economic performance and presidential approval will avoid such bias in the analysis. In addition, I want to avoid any bias due to an omitted demographic variable. Hence, standard demographics such as education, age, and race, among others, are included in the analysis.

I also control for ideology, since it is possible that liberals are more trusting of government, while a conservative's suspicion of government translates into lower levels of trust. Moreover, any correlation between party identification and ideology implies that I should also control for average differences in trust due to party identification. That is, Democrats may be more trusting of government than Republicans, regardless of which party controls government. As such, I include controls for party identification as well.

Analytic Strategy

The model, here, is one of individual choice in the context of changing party electoral outcomes. More specifically, I examine whether levels of trust change

among partisans when their party captures the Congress or the Presidency as a means of capturing if authorities matter to trust relative to process. Two different methodologies are used to test this proposition.

First, I use difference of means tests as a straightforward way to test the party control hypothesis. If we examine mean levels of trust, we should see a higher Democratic mean when the Democrats are in control. Conversely, the advent of Republican control should raise the Republican mean and lower the Democratic mean. Difference of means tests also allow for comparisons between partisans and Independents. While the analysis of means does not allow for controls, it does allow for an easily interpretable demonstration of partisan changes in trust over time as a result of shifts in party control of the presidency.

The next test allows for the controls that are lacking in the difference of means analysis. To analyze the cross-sectional, cross-time variation in trust with controls for longitudinal changes in government performance, I employ a pooled cross-sectional/time series model. A pooled cross-sectional/time series model has a number of advantages: (1) it allows for the estimation of microlevel partisan shifts in trust over time in response to changes in party governance; (2) it allows for the inclusion of microlevel demographic controls; (3) the design can incorporate aggregate government performance measures.

The ability of a pooled cross-sectional/time-series model to incorporate aggregate measures is particularly advantageous. While cross-sectional indicators of government performance could be used in the models, in any given cross-section, these indicators are constants, not variables, at the microlevel. Even though perceptions of government performance do vary across citizens, the cross-sectional variation is, in reality, perceptual errors, while the time serial variation in government performance is real (Kramer 1983; Markus 1988). Therefore, in the analysis, aggregate measures of economic performance and presidential approval will be used as covariates instead of items from the cross-sections where partisanship and ideology are measured.

To recapitulate, to estimate whether trust changes when partisan control of government changes, I use two separate analyses. In the first, the mean level of trust for Democrats and Republicans will be compared under different presidential administrations. In the second, I analyze the effect of a change in party control of the House, Senate, and presidency on partisans' trust, while controlling for demographics, party identification, ideology, and aggregate indicators of government performance.

Model, Data, and Estimation

The data used in the analyses are from the cumulative 1952–2002 American National Election Studies (ANES). To measure trust in government, I use the NES trust index,² scaled from 0 for “least trusting” to 100 for “most trusting.”

²Please see the online appendix for a more detailed description of this variable as well as results that do not use the 100-point scale.

TABLE 1

Mean Difference Between Partisans on Trust in Government Index

	1964–2002	Kennedy	Nixon	Carter	Reagan	Clinton	Bush
Democrats	35.8	55.0	34.2	30.7	33.9	34.5	40.0
Republicans	36.5	46.5	40.4	26.6	41.1	30.7	46.9
Difference	.66	8.48*	6.16*	4.15*	7.15*	3.66*	6.92*
N	26,404	834	3,004	1,831	3,240	3,249	1,227
Partisans	36.1	52.1	34.5	28.5	33.6	29.0	42.7
Independents	32.9	46.4	32.2	26.4	32.3	25.4	36.8
Difference	3.2*	5.7*	2.3*	2.1*	1.4*	3.6*	5.9*
N	30,061	5,361	7,493	3,786	1,0174	3,270	908

Note: One tailed tests. Comparison of means made between two dummy variables. Party dummy I: 0 Republican, 1 Democrat with “Independent” partisans included and all Independents excluded. Party dummy II: 1 Independents; 0 Partisans, “Independent” partisans are included in the partisan category.

* $p < .01$.

This scale is one constructed in the cumulative file for comparisons of all the trust in government items over time. In the analysis of means, I performed differences of means tests between two different groups of partisans: Democrats and Republicans and partisans and Independents. The two partisan groups in the analysis are operationalized as dummy variables, which are recoded versions of the 7-point party identification scale. For the first party dummy variable, Republicans are coded as 1, with Democrats coded as 0. Respondents who labeled themselves as “Independent” Democrats and Republicans were included in the variable, while Independents were excluded.³ For the second-party dummy variable, Independents are coded as 1 with “Independent” partisans and partisans coded as 0.

The data begin in 1964 allowing for an analysis of means over six different changes in partisan control of the presidency, three changes from Republican to Democrat and three changes from Democrat to Republican. Table 1 contains the results from the analysis of means.

First, Democrats are not, in general, more trusting than Republicans. The difference in mean levels of trust between Democrats and Republicans from 1964 to 2002 was a statistically insignificant .66. Partisans were, as predicted, significantly more trusting than Independents by a little over three points for the entire period.

When partisan levels of trust are broken down by presidential administrations clear partisan differences in trust emerge. The average difference between partisans across all presidential administrations is a little over six points. For each par-

³ All the analyses were also conducted with party dummy variables where “independent” Democrats and Republicans were excluded. In all the cases, the differences were not significant. See the online appendix for these analyses.

tisan change in the presidency, trust in government levels switch with perfect regularity.⁴ During the Kennedy administration, for example, Democrats were eight-and-a-half-points more trusting than Republicans, but during the Nixon administration, Republicans were over six points more trusting than Democrats. The results also demonstrate that Independents do not care which party controls the presidency and are, generally, less trusting than partisans. It is striking that Republican trust was five points higher than Independents during the presidency of Bill Clinton. This is preliminary evidence that for Independents authorities are of little import.

The results, thus far, provide us with preliminary evidence that (for partisans) authorities matter relative to process. Here, partisans' faith in government is closely linked to which party controls the presidency, even with the process constant across the election. Of course, given the lack of controls in the analysis here, I cannot be confident that such differences among partisans are robust. In the next analysis, the lack of controls is remedied. Before presenting the results, a description of the measures used in the model follows.

The measure of party control of government is now refined to capture the effect of a change in partisan control of the House, Senate, or the presidency. As such, a separate dummy variable measures the effect of a change in the partisan control of each institution. Respondents are scored 0 if their party does not control the institution during that period and 1 if their party does control the institution under the period in question. The coefficient, then, represents the average increase in trust for partisans if party control of that institution changes in their favor.

The ideology measure I use is a proxy measure that is scaled from -1 to 1 with lower values indicating a stronger preference for government intervention.⁵ For party identification, I include a dummy variable for each category of the 7-point

⁴The difference in partisan trust is maintained in the three administrations that are excluded from the table since the president changed but the party of the president remained the same. See the online appendix for these results.

⁵The analysis does not rely on the 7-point scale of ideological self-identification as a measure for ideology for the following reason. The link between trust and ideology depends on respondents' preferences for government involvement in society. It is well known, however, that many citizens label themselves as conservative, while being operationally liberal. That is, while they self identify as a conservative, they prefer an expansion of Federal policies and programs (Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson 2002). Using the ideological self-placement scale here will contaminate the linkage between trust and ideology for this reason. So instead I use a question that asks respondents whether the government should guarantee jobs and the standard of living for citizens. Here, a response that endorses government job guarantees expresses a desire for added government intervention in the economy—a liberal preference. In contrast, a response objecting to government job and standard of living guarantees expresses a desire for less government intervention in the economy—a conservative preference. So here we have a question that taps the preference for more or less government with good over time coverage between 1964 and 2000. There is one-question wording change over time for the jobs question. The response categories are shifted from a dichotomous choice to a 7-point scale in 1972. I standardized both variables and then combined the responses to create a single-over-time jobs question. See the online appendix for models that use the standard NES ideology scale.

party identification scale. The dummy variable for Independents is excluded from the analysis as the comparison group.

The University of Michigan's Index of Consumer Sentiment (ICS), a set of survey items designed to tap public perceptions of economic prosperity, serves as the summary indicator of economic performance. The Index of Consumer Sentiment is a monthly time series, while the model to be estimated is a biennial time series. As such, each biennial observation of economic performance is an aggregate of the Index of Consumer Sentiment for the two-year period preceding an election, with recent economic performance weighted more heavily.

The presidential approval measure is an aggregate of Gallup and CBS/*New York Times* presidential approval survey questions. Presidential approval, like the Index of Consumer Sentiment, is aggregated over the two-year period preceding an election year with recent quarters weighted more heavily.⁶

To control for demographic influences, age (7-point scale), race (1 Black, 0 White), income (\$1000s per year), education (7-point scale), whether or not the respondent lived in the South (1 lives in the South; 0 lives elsewhere) and gender (0 Female, 1 Male) are also included in the model. The dependent variable remains the 100-point trust scale from the difference of means analysis.

The equation is specified as linear and uses Ordinary Least Squares to estimate the parameters of the model. The partisanship and ideology equations span each presidential and off-year election from 1964 to 2000.⁷ The residuals of the model displayed no signs of autocorrelation, and as a result, the models do not include autoregressive corrections. After estimating each model, the residuals were also examined for evidence of misspecification or heteroskedasticity and none was found.

Results

The results in Table 2 again establish that changes in party control of government institutions have an effect on how partisans trust the government. For a change in party control of each institution, partisans' trust increases. In the model without controls, a change in the presidency boosts the trust of partisans eight points, with an increase of a point for a change in the Senate, and a substantive boost of over three points for a change in control of the House. Therefore, if the Democratic party were to capture both the presidency and Congress, Democrats' trust would increase about 13 points.

I assume that the effects in the model are cumulative, that is, as each branch of government is captured by a party, a partisan's trust increases by some added increment. If this is true, then we must assume that partisans' trust will increase the same amount if the House and Senate revert to their party in separate

⁶Please see the online appendix for details on how these two measures are weighted.

⁷Three elections are missing in the models that include the ideology measures. The ideology indicator was not measured in 1966, 1970, and 2002.

TABLE 2
The Effect of Change in Party Control on Trust in Government, 1964–2000

	Trust in Government	Trust in Government	Trust in Government
Change in Control of Presidency	8.26** (.33)	7.30** (.33)	6.22** (.37)
Change in Control of Senate	1.20* (.50)	.92* (.49)	1.10* (.52)
Change in Control of House	3.36** (.54)	2.59** (.53)	-.27 (.71)
Economic Expectations	—	.06** (.005)	.05** (.006)
Presidential Approval	—	.10** (.007)	.09** (.007)
Ideology (Jobs -1 to 1)	—	—	-.33* (.18)
Age (1/7)	—	—	-.71** (.10)
Race (0/1)	—	—	-1.33* (.55)
Income (\$1000/year)	—	—	.20 (.16)
Education (1/7)	—	—	-.15 (.11)
Strong Democrat (0/1)	—	—	6.79** (.75)
Weak Democrat (0/1)	—	—	5.63** (.73)
Independent Democrat (0/1)	—	—	1.53* (.78)
Independent Republican (0/1)	—	—	1.15 (.72)
Weak Republican (0/1)	—	—	4.72** (.68)
Strong Republican (0/1)	—	—	5.07** (.72)
South (0/1)	—	—	-.83* (.37)
Gender (0/1)	—	—	.66* (.33)
Constant	27.9** (.33)	-9.35** (1.33)	-1.19 (1.67)
N	25,581	25,348	19,638
RMSE	23.8	23.3	22.7

Note: OLS estimates. Robust Standard Errors in Parentheses. One-tailed test. All three change in control of institution variables are coded 0/1. A respondent is coded 1 if control of that institution changes in favor of the party he or she identifies with and 0 otherwise.

Independents are the omitted dummy variable and serve as the baseline for the partisan dummy variables. Trust is 0 to 100 with higher scores indicating greater trust.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .001$.

elections as it will if the House and Senate revert in the same election. The effects, however, may be multiplicative as a partisan's trust makes greater gains for every branch captured by his or her party. To know precisely would require specific survey questions relating to how much citizens trust government relative to which party controls Congress after a series of changes in party control. At present, however, such questions are beyond the data available. In column 2, controls for government performance are now included in the model.

The model with controls for government performance confirms past findings that both the economy and presidential approval are important for evaluating the trustworthiness of government. Given a popular president and economic prosperity, citizens are more trusting of government. Again, each time an institution changes party leadership, one set of partisans' faith in government is bolstered. While government performance is an important predictor of trust, partisans recognize that when their party controls the Congress or the presidency, the government is more trustworthy. While the effect of party control on macrolevels of trust is negligible, since each party offsets the other, the model demonstrates that for each set of partisans much of what determines their faith in government is the authorities even with the process held constant.

The reader may notice that the effect of a change in control of the House is no longer significant in the final specification. Further inspection revealed that the House measure is no longer significant once I control for differences in partisanship. I believe that this is a function of only one change in control of the House for the period under observation. If we had a series of changes in the House as we do in the Senate, I think we would see the changes in trust that are expected given a change in control of the House.

But I must ask whether the differences in trust among partisans are sizeable effects. Here, it might be useful to compare the shift in trust due to a change in partisan control of the presidency to shifts in the economy and presidential approval. For example, the largest change in Index of Consumer Sentiment from one election to another was an increase of 32 points between 1982 and 1984. Given the results in the model, this increase in economic expectations would have caused trust to increase about two points. Compare that to when Reagan took office and trust among Republicans increased a little over six points. Or as another example, the largest change in presidential approval occurred between 1988 and 1990 when Bush's popularity increased 22 points. Such a shift in presidential approval would have caused an increase of two points in trust in government, whereas the switch to a Democrat in the White House in 1992 caused trust to increase over six points among Democrats.

But, more importantly, we are able to witness significant shifts in trust as government authorities change but the process is constant. The effect of presidential approval gives us no sense of the importance of presidential performance relative to evaluations of the political process, but the changes in trust among partisans occur within the context of the process remaining constant. As such, we cannot help but judge evaluations of authorities important relative to the politi-

cal process—at least for partisans. For the results from the model also demonstrate that partisans are significantly more trusting of government than Independents. Strong Republicans—a group we might expect to be particularly jaded about the trustworthiness of government—are five points more trusting than Independents. This is an important caveat to the main finding. Clearly, partisans view the political process as something that works and works for them when their party is in control. But for Independents, no group represents them in politics leaving them particularly cynical.

Conclusion

Trust in government is a topic in American politics that still motivates much research. The reason the topic is still compelling is that trust appears to have far-reaching consequences. Even within the context of the Miller-Citrin debate, trust is critical to both sides. Under one formulation, trust is a precursor to demands for political change, perhaps even radical change. Under the other, trust is an important barometer of public satisfaction with government, and has important electoral consequences. Moreover, later research has demonstrated that trust creates a climate in which elected officials are able to enact policy and avoid stalemate and gridlock (Hetherington 1998a, 1998b). But given the importance of trust in government, we are, in many ways, in the early stages of sorting out the relative importance of its predictors.

The analysis here decisively demonstrates that partisans trust government more when their party controls the government. For the last eight presidencies and for changes in control of Congress, the trust of partisans has reacted when party control of government has shifted. In and of themselves, such partisan shifts in trust are hardly surprising, and, at first glance, such changes in trust may seem to be of little theoretical importance. But this partisan reaction to trust allows for a natural experiment where we can see if trust shifts while the process is held constant and the authorities change. Thus far in the literature, it has been unclear that government performance would matter to trust once the political process is taken into account. While the analysis, here, is unable to sort out the marginal effects of both process and authorities, government performance should have some marginal effect even with controls for the political process.

At first blush, one might view the results, here, as a vindication of Citrin's view of trust. But the reality is more complicated. One must remember that to say authorities matter relative to process does not diminish the role of process. This is particularly true it would seem for Independents. Being a partisan implies a belief that the process works and works for you when your party is controlling it. But Independents care little for which party controls government. This implies two very different views of trust in government: a partisan view which is about the performance of those in office and an Independent view where the authorities matter little.

This striking difference between the trust of Independents and partisans can only emphasize the need to better understand the relative impacts of process and authorities. The research, here, is a first step in looking at the two concepts relative to each other, but, in truth, we need better survey instruments to measure evaluations of the political process. Only then will be able to let process and performance compete and begin to understand for whom which matters and when. Only then will we start to fully understand the role of trust in government in American politics.

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