

Is Washington Really the Problem?*

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Prepared for presentation at the 1999 Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, IL, April 15-17, 1999.

In the 1950s and the 1960s almost 80 percent of Americans trusted the government in Washington all or most of the time. By the 1990s just 20 to 30 percent of Americans still had confidence in their government.

For some people the reason for the drop was straightforward: The federal government had gotten too big. Politicians tried to buy voters off through new government programs, which made them popular in their districts but bloated the overall budget. Americans don't like big government, which for some is a virtual synonym for unresponsive government. The bigger government got, the more disillusioned the public became.

If the problem of declining trust is simple, so is the solution. Give more power and responsibility to the states. Conservative theorists have long argued that centralized government is inimical to both liberty and representation. Hayek (1960, 263) argues:

While it has always been characteristic of those favoring an increase in governmental powers to support maximum concentration of these powers, those mainly concerned with individual liberty have generally advocated decentralization... action by local authorities generally offers the next-best solution where private initiative cannot be relied upon to provide certain services and where some sort of collective action is therefore needed...

Conservative politicians echo the arguments of theorists and advocate devolution of power to the states. The big, bloated federal government has assumed too much power, so it is hardly surprising that people don't trust it.¹ State governments are closer to the people and should be more responsive to public opinion (Peterson, 1984, 223)—and more trusted by the public. Conservatives believe that “governments directly accountable to voters will choose to spend less than a central government where the voters' will is filtered through interest groups”

(Peterson, 1984, 217-218). Republican Presidents Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan made “new federalisms” key parts of their domestic agenda. These programs returned jurisdiction over wide ranges of policy to the states (Peterson, 1984). The Republicans’ Contract with America, which formed the basis for the party’s 1994 takeover of the Congress, also promised to send many programs back to the states. Liberals are not so enamored with state governments. They see Washington as more likely to protect the interests of minorities and the poor and to have both the means and the will to regulate the environment and business more generally.

Against this thesis is an alternative that I shall show is more plausible: People either like government—both in Washington and in their states—or they don’t. The choice between the nation’s capital and the state capital is bogus. Conservatives (and Republicans) are not more partial to states than to Washington. Indeed, the conflict over trust in government is *not* primarily ideological. It reflects a more general distrust of government.

Data and Methods

I shall test these competing claims using the Washington *Post*-Kaiser Family Foundation-Harvard University survey in late 1995, which contains a comprehensive set of questions on trust in government (Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, 1996). The *Post* survey is a national poll of 1514 respondents. It asked people the standard trust in (the federal) government question, as well as a similar query on trust in state government. Even more critically, it also asked whether respondents trust the federal or their state government “to do a better job in running things.”

I shall examine two different measures of confidence in government. The first asks people to choose whether they prefer Washington or their state governments. Here I expect to find that ideology matters a lot. The second consists of separate measures of trust in the federal and state

governments. When people not forced to choose between levels, they should not give ideological responses. Instead more general institutional preferences, faith in the larger society, confidence in the the perceived responsiveness of officials to citizens, and the responsibility of the government for economic outcomes should play larger roles in more general attitudes toward trust in government (see the more extended discussion below). I expect that the same forces that drive trust in the federal government should shape confidence in state administrations, so I shall estimate identical models for trust in Washington and confidence in state government.

Finally, I estimate regression models for trust in state government for Democratic and Republican party identifiers.² My principal rationale for doing so is to examine whether partisan identifiers are more likely to feel positively about a government controlled by their own party. Republicans should be most supportive of their state government if they live in GOP-controlled states and Democrats should have higher trust in state governments dominated by their own party.

The Models for Trust in Government

Approval of the people in power and appraisals of the responsiveness of the political system should both shape levels of trust in government. But most critical to my model is ideological self-identification. Conservatives should have less faith in the federal government and more confidence in state government, if the argument for devolution made by many Republicans holds.

When people are forced to choose between levels, ideology should be the most important factor driving their preferences. Conservatives should also be more likely to approve of state governments and to disapprove of Washington. In addition the traditional liberal-conservative scale, I also employ two other measures of ideology that seem particularly well suited to testing

support for different levels of government: whether people see the federal government as a threat to their daily lives and how often they listen to conservative talk-show host Rush Limbaugh (Blendon *et al.*, 1997, 208).³ People who see the federal government as a threat or who listen to Limbaugh regularly are more likely to favor devolution of power to the states. On the other hand, blacks are more likely to favor granting more power to Washington, since many Southern states were slow to abolish segregationist laws in the 1950s and 1960s and the contemporary movement to restrict affirmative action has stressed states rights.

Beyond ideology, both preference for the federal or state government and confidence in government more generally should depend upon approval of specific institutions of government, feelings that public officials are responsive. Other factors that might matter include faith in people more generally, how well things are going for both the individual and the country, exposure to information, and age.

Both preference for Washington and confidence in the federal government should reflect support for specific institutions of government. People who have approve of the President and the Congress should be more favorable to the federal government (Citrin and Luks, this volume; Feldman, 1983; Luks and Citrin, 1997). An ideological account suggests that positive evaluations of these institutions might lead to *less* confidence in state governments. My alternative thesis argues the contrary: A positive view of federal institutions should be associated with approval of all levels of government.

Support for government in general—and especially for the federal government—may be rooted in how responsive people think leaders are (cf. Brehm and Rahn, 1997). Beyond faith in the political system is trust in other people. As Brehm and Rahn (1997, 1008) argue, generalized

trust in others “allows people to move out of familiar relationships in which trust is based on knowledge accumulated from long experience with particular people. If outcomes in a democracy are inherently uncertain, such global trust may be necessary in order for people to support democratic arrangements” (cf. Cole, 1973, but for contrary results see Newton, in press; Orren, 1997, 85; Uslaner, 1998, ch. 7).

I also include in all models measures of how well people think that they are doing and how the country is faring. When things are going well, people give government the credit (Brehm and Rahn, 1997; Lipset and Schneider, 1983). And they are most likely to assign responsibility to the federal government. How well you are doing should be less important for any type of trust in government than how the country is faring (Kinder and Kiewiet, 1979). People who say that government actions have a strong impact on the economy may be more critical of government performance and thus have less faith in political institutions. When people see a government success story—a narrowing income gap between the rich and the poor—they are likely to be more supportive of government, especially of Washington.

We know that more highly educated and involved people are *more critical* of the Congress (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 1995, ch. 6).⁴ Do these findings apply to the political system more generally? I employ a battery of measures that test the hypothesis that the best informed people should have less confidence in government. One is education, which Hibbing and Theiss-Morse also use. Consistent with Hibbing and Thiess-Morse, I expect that people with more education should be more critical of both the federal *and* state governments. But, when forced to choose, they should be more supportive of state governments. People with less education—or who believe that politics and government are too complicated to understand—may

simply know less about state government than people with greater understanding. And fear of the unknown may lead them to favor what they follow most: the federal government. Most people get their news about politics from television, and television news follows national politics more than state affairs. So the more people watch television, the more they should favor Washington (for an alternative view, see Hetherington and Nugent, this volume).

Another indicator of knowledge is how long you have lived in a community. People who move from one neighborhood to another have weaker roots and are less likely to participate in politics (Squire *et al.*, 1987). They are more likely to view governmental institutions from the outsider—and, thus, they may be more critical of government. Additionally, the *Post* survey team developed a political knowledge scale.⁵ And, finally, I employ a question about whether people get their impressions of government from friends and family (rather than from personal experience or television). Many people form their impressions of House members from talking with their friends and family. These evaluations are overwhelmingly positive (Jacobson, 1992, ch. 5).

Might the same dynamic work more generally?

Later I argue that Democratic (Republican) people who live in Democratic (Republican) states should be more favorably disposed toward their state governments. A state government of your own party should make decisions that you like better—and, hence, you should be more likely to trust state government. For each state (except Nebraska, which has a nonpartisan legislature) I developed a measure of partisan representation in a state by adding the proportion of seats the Democrats hold in each house of the legislature and adding it to a dummy variable for partisanship control of the Governorship. The resulting index, divided by three, is a 0 to 1 scale ranging from complete Republican to total Democratic dominance.⁶ I include it in the estimates for state and

federal government trust. If the conservative argument is correct, people who live in states dominated by Democrats should be less favorably disposed to state (and perhaps the federal) government, while people from Republican states should be more favorable. Finally, there is a long-standing trend for people to lose faith in government as they age. Trust in government, unlike trust in people (Uslaner, 1998, chs. 4, 7), is the province of the young.

Who Trusts and When?

Most people (71 percent to 29 percent) have greater confidence in their state governments than in Washington.⁷ The forced choice question may lead us to the false conclusion that Americans like one level of government, but not the other. Quite the contrary. Seventy-six percent of respondents are consistent in their faith—or lack of it—in government. Fifty-eight percent express no confidence in either level, eighteen percent in both. Just seven percent of respondents like the government in Washington but not in their state, while 17 percent express solidarity only with their state administration.

So what do the models tell us about the forces that drive public support for different levels of government? The model for which level of government one prefers *is* largely driven by ideology.

In Washington We Trust?

Preferences for Washington or one's state are, as expected, largely driven by ideology. I present the estimates for which level of government people trust more in Table 1.⁸ Positive signs on the coefficients indicate preferences for the federal government.

Table 1 about here

The three most powerful predictors of which level people trust are all linked to ideology: the government threat scale, race, and political ideology. Blacks are almost 30 percent more likely to prefer the federal government to states, while conservatives and people who see government as threatening are each 20 percent more supportive of states than are liberals and those who are not afraid of centralized power. Listeners to Rush Limbaugh's talk show are eight percent more likely to favor state government. Perhaps the program converts listeners to Limbaugh's anti-Washington message. Equally (or more) likely, people listen to Limbaugh already share his views on the federal government.⁹

Preferences for different levels of government reflect people's world view. A black who never listens to Rush Limbaugh, doesn't see Washington as a threat, and identifies as a liberal has a .72 probability of preferring Washington. A white conservative who says that Washington is a threat and who regularly listens to Limbaugh has just a .31 probability of preferring the federal government.

There is limited evidence that evaluations of the state of the economy have any effect on which level of government people like. Only your own economic situation—and not the national economy—affects your preferences. And even here the impact is weak: People who say their finances are getting better like Washington more, but simple family income is not significant.

There is more support for the idea that information matters. People who pay a lot of attention to television are more likely to get news about national affairs and people who say that politics and government are too complicated should understand national affairs better than the often unheralded world of state politics. So heavy television viewers and people who say that politics is too complicated prefer the more familiar world of Washington. And so do people with

less education—and the young as well. Young people are also less likely to pay attention to state politics, which may seem more remote to their world. The more exposure you have to state government, the more likely you will be to prefer it. With limited information about either level, people will favor the more familiar one.

Other variables matter as well, but not so much. People who like the Congress also prefer the federal government. It seems reasonable to argue that this might also reflect ideology. The Republicans took control the House of Representatives in 1995 for the first time in four decades and approval of Congress is stronger for Republicans and conservatives than it is for Democrats and liberals. But there is less ideology to this linkage than one might first think. First, if there is an ideological connection, it should be for conservatives to favor smaller government closer to the people. There is no clear ideological link between support for Congress and which level of government one prefers. Second, the connection between approval of Congress and trust in the federal government is hardly new. It is one of the most time-tested variables in trust in government research (Citrin, 1974; Feldman, 1983).

Ideology matters most for which level of government people prefer. But it plays a decidedly secondary role in the more general measures of confidence in the federal or especially the state governments (see Table 2). Conservatives *are* more likely to distrust Washington, but they are no more supportive of state government than are liberals. The regression coefficient for ideology in the equation for trust in state is not significant.¹⁰

Table 2 about here

Trust in both Washington and state governments is largely driven by more general

confidence in political institutions. People who like governmental institutions like government. Confidence in the Clinton administration and in Congress were the most important determinants of trust in government. What may be surprising is that approval of the President and the Congress are almost as important for trust in state government as they are for faith in Washington. The regression coefficients are larger for both measures for trust in the federal government—by 64 percent for Presidential approval and by 25 percent for Congressional favorability. People who believe that public officials don't care what people think are alienated from both levels of government. Anger at unresponsive politicians is more important for confidence in the federal government than for the states—perhaps reflecting the view that state officials are more in touch with people's wishes. I also included a variable measuring whom people blame for the government shutdown in 1995. I expected that if there were either an institutional or an ideological effect of the shutdown on confidence, we would see that people who blamed the Republicans would be more favorable to Washington. But there was no effect on either level of government.

Personal finances and the size of the income gap between rich and poor each play a minor role for trust in the federal government. Neither is significant in the equation for state government. But when people see the government as responsible for the economy, they are more critical of *both* levels of government. Ironically, the impact is slightly stronger for trust in the state government than for faith in Washington. These results confirm Chubb's (1988) finding of a strong spillover from national economic conditions to evaluations of state politics.¹¹

Familiarity doesn't always breed contempt. The more knowledgeable have less faith in Washington, but are no more likely to have more (or less) confidence in their state government.

Length of residence in a community does not affect trust in either level of government. People who learn about the federal government from their friends and family have a slightly more positive view of Washington, but not of their states. There are few signs that close ties to government either raise or lower trust. The sole exception comes from education. As Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (1995, ch. 6) find, the more highly educated are less supportive of governmental institutions. And young people have considerably more confidence in government than their elders. Finally, people living in states dominated by Democratic office-holders are more trusting in both state and federal institutions. And trust in people does have a spillover effect on trust in government. Its effect is much stronger for state government than for Washington, perhaps because the federal government seems more remote from daily life than the states.

There are two lessons in the estimates for trust in federal and state government. First, neither is largely driven by ideology. There are only modest correlations between trust in the federal government and support for reductions in *federal* spending on the environment ($\gamma = -.244$) and on foreign aid ($\gamma = -.305$) and minuscule correlations with cutting defense, Medicare, and welfare ($\gamma = -.106, -.158, \text{ and } -.125$, respectively). And there is virtually no relationship between trust in state government and attitudes toward federal spending, regardless of the program.¹² If ideology were a key determinant of support for state governments, then we should expect stronger relationships for programs that could be transferred to the states (welfare and perhaps the environment and Medicare). But we don't.

There is a similar dynamic in more open-ended questions about *why* people don't like Washington and why they do have favorable impressions of states. Conservatives are far more likely than liberals to say that they distrust Washington because the federal government wastes

taxes, interferes too much in people's lives, and spends money on the wrong things (gamma = -.314, -.285, and -.262, respectively). But they are no more likely than liberals to dislike Washington because it doesn't reflect their values (gamma = -.076). And there are no significant differences among liberals, moderates, and conservatives across a wide range of possible reasons for *liking* state government. *Liberals* are very slightly more likely to believe that states spend money wisely, are more responsive to the public, and are less dominated by special interests than the federal government is (gamma = .046, .054, and .034, respectively). Conservatives are just a little bit more likely to say that states waste less in tax money, solve problems quickly, and better reflect people's values (gamma = -.115, -.106, and -.007, respectively).

The argument that Washington is really the problem gets little support from this analysis. Ideology plays no role at all in trust in state government. When we force a choice between levels of government, there is a strong role for the left-right spectrum. When we simply ask people how much they trust either level of government, these core values become far less important. People do prefer state government to Washington. The mean trust scores are 2.38 for the former and 2.25 on a four-point scale; 21 percent of people give higher scores to their state governments, while just eight percent are more supportive of Washington. Yet, higher trust for state government is *not* driven by ideology. Liberals are just as supportive of state governments as conservatives.¹³ And liberals, like conservatives, prefer state institutions to Washington.

Second, most people don't discriminate between Washington and their state governments. Seventy-one percent give identical trust scores on the four-point scale to the two levels of government. When people are asked whether federal government activity has made things better or worse across several policy areas, people who thought the government had a deleterious effect

were less trusting of the federal government (though often weakly so). People who believe that federal programs made violent crime worse, created more single parent families, increased the gap between the rich and the middle class, and made the air dirtier were less likely to trust the government in Washington. But they were also less likely to have faith in their state governments.¹⁴

Not surprisingly, what drives confidence in one level of government also leads to faith in the other. The correlation between support for Washington and support for the states, as measured by the predicted values from the regression estimates, is .902. Support for either level of government is not the same thing as a forced choice. The correlation between the preference measure and confidence in Washington is .408; the correlation with trust in state government is just .266.

The Partisan Connection

Do Republicans and Democrats think differently about issues of federalism? No. Both Democrats and Republicans who believe that federal action makes things worse on air pollution, the income gap between rich and poor, single parent families, and violent crime are less trusting of the federal government—and the correlations are of similar magnitude. Both Republicans and Democrats who believe that the federal government has made things worse on these policy areas are less trusting of their *state* governments as well.¹⁵

I estimate separate regression equations for trust in state government for GOP and Democratic identifiers. I present the models in Table 3; they contain almost exactly the same variables as the estimates in Table 2.¹⁶

Table 3 about here

Based upon the results so far, I expect that Republicans and Democrats would base their trust in state government on similar logics. And mostly they do. Support for Congress has big spillover effects for both Democrats and Republicans. Decreasing income gaps also make both groups of identifiers supportive of state institutions. People who see the government as responsible for the economy are more critical of state governments (especially among Republicans). And young people who identify with both parties have higher levels of trust.

Yet, there are some differences. Interpersonal trust matters more for Republicans than Democrats (though the reason is unclear). Community ties, as measured by the length of residence, is more important for Democrats. And knowledge leads Republicans to become more disaffected than it does for Democrats (cf. Uslander, 1997). The impact of the political knowledge scale is only significant for Republicans and the coefficient on education is 44 percent higher for Republicans.

Approval of President Clinton only matters for Democrats. And, more critically, the partisan composition of state governments is only significant for Democrats. Recall the logic of decentralization advocated by conservatives: Washington is too distant and out-of-touch. National politicians believe that they can expand their base by providing additional federal programs. Leaders at lower levels of government are closer to the people and will thus better reflect the public's preferences. Some voters will be liberals and they may elect Democrats to office and be happy with what they have chosen. And the Democratic model in Table 4 supports this: Democrats who live in states dominated by Democratic office-holders are more likely to trust state government. Some voters will be conservatives and will elect Republicans to office. In turn,

they should be happier with their institutions. But they are not. GOP identifiers living in states with lots of Republican office holders have no more faith in state government than their counterparts in states led by Democrats.

Context matters for Democrats. Democratic identifiers are more likely to base their decisions to trust government on policy grounds if they live in Democratic states than if they reside in states dominated by Republicans. Democrats who believe that federal policies have led to decreases in single parent families, violent crime, and the income gap like government more (data not shown). Their policy views have a bigger impact on their views of Washington than on the states. Republican confidence in both federal and state governments shows modest correlations with evaluations of policy performance—but it doesn't matter whether Republican identifiers live in states dominated by their own party or by Democrats. *If there is a partisan or ideological component to the state-federal divide, it is among Democrats.* Trust in government depends more on policy agreement and the political environment for Democrats than for Republicans.

If confidence in government were driven by an ideological aversion to big government, we should see stronger effects on policy for Republicans. Republicans (and conservatives) hold that the public has turned against Washington because the federal government has become too intrusive. Smaller units of government are said to be closer to the people—and thus more representative of a state's population. If there is, as Hayek argued, an irresistible tendency of the central government to be big government, conservatives (and Republicans) should feel most comfortable not just in smaller units, but also in states governed by their own party. After all, some electorates are liberal—Republicans disparagingly speak of the “People's Republic of Massachusetts” or, alternatively, “Taxachusetts.” But states dominated by the GOP (New

Hampshire, Idaho, and Utah) should be more hospitable to Republicans—who should express greater satisfaction with government there.

Yes, people who see the federal government as threatening are far more likely to distrust both the state and federal governments. But plenty of people other than Republicans or conservatives dislike government. And Republicans don't like state government any more if they live in GOP dominated states than if they reside in Democratic territory.¹⁷

So You Say You Want a Devolution?

There is plenty of reason to worry about trust in the federal government. It is down sharply from the 1950s. In the *Post* survey just 25 percent had confidence in the federal government. We don't know how to rebuild trust in government. Yet, there doesn't seem to be much payoff from looking for an alternative to Washington.

Washington isn't the problem. Government is the problem. People who don't like the federal government don't like their state governments either. The states are not the reservoir of good will among the American people. Yes, they are more popular than Washington—but not by a huge amount. Only 35 percent of people trust their state government—to be sure, a lot more than trust Washington, but far from a majority.

These results pose a challenge both to ideologues and to centrists. There is no support for the Republican/conservative argument that states can serve as a more popular alternative to the federal government. Neither ideology nor partisanship drives trust in state government. And ideology has modest effects on confidence in the federal government. These small effects undermine the conservative argument *and* a more centrist counterargument. Dionne (1991) and King (1997) maintain that Americans have become disenchanted with government because they

see the two major parties and their associated interest groups as being too extreme. Strong ideologues—on the left as well as the right—have attacked government as being out of touch. This leaves the center as the bastion of support for government, but even the middle has lost confidence over time as the right and left attack Washington. Nevertheless, centrists should be more supportive than stronger ideologues. There is some support for this view: *Strong liberals and strong conservatives* are more critical of the federal government than are moderates (gamma of ideological strength with trust in Washington = $-.213$). But this relationship vanishes in multivariate analyses.

Ideology doesn't seem to be the key to trust in government, either from the right or from the center. Trust seems to depend on a positive view of institutions and their incumbents. But there is still a puzzle of what drives negative views of our national institutions. There is *not* a single anti-Washington syndrome, for people who approve of the President are *not* any more likely to like Congress (gamma = $-.021$).

While the President and Congress seem to constitute different political realms, the states and the federal government don't. If you don't like Washington, you are not likely to be convinced that your state is more trustworthy. People dislike their states for mostly the same reason they don't like Washington. Some don't like other people much either and transform their general malaise to a critique of government. Governmental performance is an important force in trust. But the general impression is that lots of people simply don't like government of any type for any reason. If you don't like green eggs and ham, you won't care if they are served in a house or with a mouse.¹⁸ Shifting the locus of power won't solve the problem of trust in government.

TABLE 1

Regression Estimates for Preference for State or Federal Government

| | Coefficient | Std. Error | t Ratio |
|---|-------------|------------|---------|
| Political ideology | -.100***** | .017 | -5.741 |
| Government threat scale | -.059***** | .010 | -6.048 |
| Listen to Rush Limbaugh | -.028** | .015 | -1.828 |
| Confidence in Congress | .064***** | .017 | 3.729 |
| Personal finances better | .055** | .028 | 1.979 |
| Hours watch TV per day | .010*** | .004 | 2.421 |
| Politics and government too complicated | .034*** | .013 | 2.717 |
| Age | .003***** | .001 | 3.434 |
| Education | -.023*** | .010 | -2.446 |
| Income | .014 | .010 | 1.421 |
| Black | .264***** | .045 | 5.816 |
| Constant | .547 | .121 | 4.531 |

* p < .10 ** p < .05 *** p < .01 ***** p < .0001

R² = .156 S.E.E. = .410 F = 15.116

TABLE 2

Regression Estimates for Trust in Levels of Government

| | Trust in Federal Government | | | Trust in State Government | | |
|---|-----------------------------|------------|---------|---------------------------|-----------|---------|
| | Coefficient. | Std. Error | t Ratio | Coefficient | Std Error | t Ratio |
| Political ideology | -.064*** | .022 | -2.871 | -.013 | .026 | -.491 |
| Confidence in Clinton administration | .082**** | .020 | 4.078 | .050** | .023 | 2.174 |
| Confidence in Congress | .202**** | .022 | 9.227 | .161**** | .025 | 6.406 |
| Blame Clinton or GOP for shutdown | -.030 | .040 | -.744 | -.034 | .046 | -.739 |
| Officials don't care what people think | -.070**** | .019 | -3.803 | -.041** | .021 | 1.956 |
| Trust in people | .062** | .037 | 1.659 | .104*** | .043 | 2.445 |
| Personal finances better | .050* | .035 | 1.457 | .026 | .040 | .664 |
| Income gap narrower than 20 years ago | .038* | .025 | 1.535 | -.002 | .028 | -.060 |
| Government responsible for economy | -.111*** | .035 | -3.148 | -.142**** | .040 | -3.535 |
| Political knowledge scale | -.013** | .007 | -1.784 | .009 | .008 | 1.048 |
| Years lived in community | .001 | .001 | 1.139 | -.001 | .001 | -.549 |
| Get impression of government from friends | .107* | .065 | 1.642 | -.025 | .074 | -.336 |
| Partisan representation in state | .207** | .098 | 2.107 | .203 | .112 | 1.816 |
| Age | -.004**** | .001 | -3.466 | -.005**** | .001 | -3.961 |
| Education | -.033**** | .012 | -2.649 | -.035**** | .014 | -2.438 |
| Constant | 3.341**** | .153 | 21.881 | 3.289**** | .175 | 18.861 |

* p < .10 ** p < .05 *** p < .01 **** p < .0001

Federal Government:
State Government:

$R^2 = .210$ S.E.E. = .511 F = 15.778
 $R^2 = .110$ S.E.E. = .587 F = 7.901

TABLE 3

Regression Analysis of Trust in State Government by Party Identification

| | Democrats | | | Republicans | | |
|---|-------------|-----------|---------|-------------|-----------|---------|
| | Coefficient | Std. Err. | t Ratio | Coefficient | Std. Err. | t Ratio |
| Political ideology | .021 | .035 | .583 | -.032 | .035 | -.919 |
| Confidence in Clinton administration | .066** | .030 | 2.204 | .009 | .030 | .286 |
| Confidence in Congress | .196***** | .037 | 5.308 | .179***** | .029 | 6.198 |
| Officials don't care what people think | .043 | .030 | 1.448 | .014 | .026 | .543 |
| Interpersonal trust | .128** | .062 | 2.068 | .179***** | .051 | 3.505 |
| Personal finances better | .022 | .055 | .397 | -.132 | .049 | -2.713 |
| Government responsible for economy | -.101** | .059 | -1.717 | -.150*** | .050 | -3.027 |
| Income gap narrower than 20 years ago | .076** | .042 | 1.808 | .080** | .035 | 2.287 |
| Years lived in community | .003** | .002 | 2.039 | -.001 | .001 | -.589 |
| Political knowledge scale | .016 | .013 | 1.275 | -.014* | .011 | -1.283 |
| Get impression of government from friends | -.171 | .122 | -1.398 | .103 | .085 | 1.211 |
| Partisan representation in state | .343** | .154 | 2.238 | .012 | .142 | .083 |
| Age | -.006*** | .002 | -3.446 | -.005*** | .002 | -2.802 |
| Education | -.041** | .020 | -2.096 | -.059*** | .018 | -3.330 |
| Constant | 3.107***** | .237 | 13.094 | 3.495 | .215 | 16.293 |
| R ² | | | .131 | | | .177 |
| Adjusted R ² | | | .108 | | | .154 |
| S.E.E. | | | .610 | | | .540 |
| N | | | 535 | | | 520 |

* p < .10 ** p < .05 *** p < .01 ***** p < .0001

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NOTES

- * I am grateful for the support of the General Research Board of the Graduate School, University of Maryland--College Park for a Distinguished Faculty Fellowship in 1997-98 and for other research support over the years, and to the Everett McKinley Dirksen Center for Congressional Leadership. I am also indebted to Richard Morin of the *Washington Post* and Mario Broussard (formerly of the *Post*) for making the Trust in Government survey available to me and for explaining their scale construction and coding. And James Gimpel, John Hibbing, and Elizabeth Thiess-Morse made many valuable comments on earlier drafts. Some of the data used herein come from the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research, which is not responsible for my interpretations.
1. In both the *Washington Post* survey described below and the 1992 American National Election Study, there are moderate correlations between trust in government and the belief that the federal government is too powerful and that it wastes taxes.
 2. Partisan leaners are included with identifiers.
 3. I do not employ the threat scale as a predictor for trust in the federal government or the state government because the questions appear to be different ways of expressing the same idea. The threat scale and trust in the federal government are moderately correlated ($r = -.242$, $\gamma = -.393$)—but I am not sure what theoretical leverage one gains by saying that people who view the federal government as a threat don't trust it.
 4. This result may reflect another dynamic: The more highly educated are more likely to have postmaterialist values, which in turn lead to greater skepticism about traditional institutions

(Inglehart, 1997).

5. The scale is an additive measure of correct answers to questions about which party has the most members in the House and the Senate, whether there is a limit to the number of terms a President can serve, the length of a Senate term, whether one party is more conservative than the other and which party is more conservative, who was President when the Watergate scandal took place, and the names of the Majority Leader of the Senate, the Vice President, the Speaker of the House, and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.
6. Independents, including the Governor of Maine, were scored .5. The index ranges from .132 for Idaho to .939 for the District of Columbia (treated as a state by measuring representation on its City Council). I collected the data from Politics in America 1996 (Duncan and Lawrence, 1995).
7. Eleven percent of respondents volunteered that they trusted neither or both levels of government. I assigned missing values to these respondents.
8. The summary statistics in Table 3 below provide support for using SUR estimates. The intercorrelation among residuals for the trust in federal and state government equations is .388, strongly indicating that the two equations are not independent. There is less support for a strong relationship between the two measures of trust and preference for one level of government or the other, with correlations of residuals of .073 and -.148. Both are significant, however.

9. A regression predicting frequency of listening to the Rush Limbaugh show finds ideology and the government threat scale as two of the three strongest predictors (together with income).
10. Listening to Rush Limbaugh was not significant for either trust measure, nor was race (so I excluded both from the model).
11. Chubb examined voting returns for state legislatures for incumbent parties.
12. The gammas are -.119 for the environment, -.084 for foreign aid, -.022 for defense, .046 for Medicare, and .002 for welfare.
13. The mean scores are 2.37 for liberals, 2.38 for moderates, and 2.40 for conservatives ($F = .17$, $p < .85$, two-tailed). The correlation between ideology and trust in state government is .015.
14. The gammas for federal and state governments are: violent crime (-.418 and -.289), single parent families (-.274 and -.202), the income gap (-.306 and -.285), and the environment (-.213 and -.132).
15. While the correlations are not quite as consistent across parties for trust in the state government, they display no coherent pattern.
16. I deleted blaming Clinton or the GOP Congress for the government shutdown because of collinearity.
17. I created a dummy variable for state partisanship divided at the theoretical midpoint (.5)

on the zero-one scale. Republican identifiers living in GOP-dominated states are no more likely to trust state government than GOP identifiers in Democratic states (with means of 2.420 and 2.400, respectively, for an $F = .17$, $p < .34$, one-tailed).

18. If you don't get this allusion to Dr. Seuss, you don't have children.