

Research Assessment #4

Date: 10/5/2020

Subject: Social Capital and the Dynamics of Trust in Government

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Keele, Luke. "Social Capital and the Dynamics of Trust in Government." *American*

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Assessment:

For this week's research assessment I wanted to focus on a topic closely related to my original work proposal idea. My idea centers mostly on attempting to boost political involvement opportunities and knowledge in younger demographics on a local government scale but hopefully if my idea works out, I would love to try to spread it to a state or even Nationwide level. For the time being, however, I decided to look into what contributes to the growing distress and untrust in the public's view of the government. I came across an article by Luke Keele. In his, article Keele runs through several theories about what contributes to rising and falling levels of trust in government. Keele focuses on the U.S. government following World War II but in a broader sense, the information applies to almost all governments.

Some of the background understanding I had on the topic was that following the winning of World War II trust and belief in the U.S. government were at an all-time high. This also aided the increased optimism in younger generations at the time. This mixture of a winner's high and social optimism created one of the highest peaks in government support in U.S. history. Sadly in recent years, this trust has drastically declined and in today's current climate is nearly non-existent. My personal belief is that this decline in governmental trust is contributed to a re-emerging idea that as citizens of the United States we have no control over the proceedings of this country. Our voices have been systematically pushed out and muted and all actions made by the government are picked out by a select few. While this idea is partially valid overall I don't believe it not to be true. We as citizens do have a voice and can directly influence what happens in our country. Keele delves deeper into this idea by introducing the idea of social capital. Social capital, as Keele defines it, is a process to measure government trust through the committing of different acts like civil participation and developing social networks and relationships within our communities (Keele). While Keele believes this is one of the better ways to measure trust it does have its faults. The theory dictates that for citizens of a government to actively participate there must be a baseline of trust already developed and that the continuous participation of citizens in the government boosts trust and efficiency of the government. But if there is no baseline trust developed then those citizens who will become disenfranchised and

have a constantly negative view of the government and only become further entrenched in the practice of not contributing to the government. With this theory, there must be an initial event or circumstance that lays the foundation of trust for the citizens to hold onto or at least have other factors that contribute to the growth and development of this trust. This is where the performative development thesis comes into play. This thesis says that citizens place implied trust in those they elect to represent to successfully support the ideas and beliefs of their constituents. This is how the representative system should work but oftentimes it becomes a system of self-interest driven decisions made by politicians to protect their own wants. This also opens the door to see how citizens measure trust in the government. Citizens tend to view the government in what I like to think of as a martyr system. They associate different actions and events with individual people and allow that association to affect their view of the government as a whole. This can be seen in dozens of well-known scandals such as Watergate with Bill Nixon, the Email debacle with Hillary Clinton, and a myriad of occurrences with the current president Donald Trump. With this sort of view on how to find out if the government is trustworthy or not it will be almost impossible to find individuals who will not put their own wants and needs before those of the country which means there is almost no way to build trust.

I believe that to measure trust in the government it should be mainly focused on how the government performs according to the needs of its citizens. By not focusing on the central actions of the people involved and rather looking at the body as a whole and how they go about producing legislation that better the lives they are made to protect they will develop a stable and strong trust in the government. By boosting this trust they will be able to boost civic participation and citizens will have a better outlook and mentality of how the government can represent and take care of them.