

Research Assessment #5

Date: 10/10/2020

Subject: Social Capital and the Dynamics of Trust in Government

MLA Citation:

Keele, Luke. "Social Capital and the Dynamics of Trust in Government." *American Journal of Political Science*, vol. 51, no. 2, Apr. 2007, pp. 245–247, 251-252., DOI:10.1111/j.1540-5907.2007.00248.x.

Assessment:

For this week's assessment, I continued to look at Luke Keele's investigation on the connections of social capital and public trust in the government. While the first half of the article broke down the different theories and defined social capital the second half actually goes through and applies those theories to an in-depth investigation to measure annual citizen trust in the government.

To conduct his investigation Keele measured six different details and looked at the common trends that occurred to determine if there was any correlation between an increase in social capital and an increase in government trust. The six details he measure included: The Michigan Index of consumer sentiment, this index used survey items to determine the public perception of economic prosperity (Keele 246), presidential approval ratings of different administrations from 1970 to early 2000, public perceptions of crime, civic engagement in activities like volunteering, informal socializing, and participation in local political affairs. He also took into account different scandals that affected different administrations such as Watergate, Whitewater, and the House Bank Scandal. As his final measurement and his control for the investigation, Keele took into account macropartisanship, which is a measurement of the level of democrats to republicans in official positions over time (Keele 246).

While explaining the different information he studied Keele referenced the work of Robert Putnam several times. I had heard the name before in a number of lectures in my political science class but never really looked much further into who Putnam is. I plan on looking more into who he is as I continue my research.

In the first figure, Keele produced a graph comparing civic engagement and interpersonal trust to government trust. In the graph, there was a very similar relationship between interpersonal trust and government trust but not so much civic engagement to government trust. I believe this means that citizens tend to associate their own performance and ability to thrive in the country to the performance of the government. So when the government isn't performing as well and citizens begin to feel the effects of it they lose trust in themselves and the government. This also shows that any correlation between civic involvement and trust is

very minimal and almost non-existent. Towards the end of his investigation, Keele breaks down most of his findings. He found that civic involvement and social capital did not have a major affecting role in how the public trust the government but he did find that economic performance had a heavy impact on government trust. In all of his tests, he saw trends that showed when the economy was in higher performance citizens had more faith in the government to perform its duties and when the economy was in lower levels of performance like the 1990s recession people lose faith in the government to successfully carry out its duties.

In conclusion, even though social capital does not play as much of a role in government trust as I had anticipated it acts as more of a side effect of successful trust. When the government is perceived to be doing well citizens will begin to get more involved and will contribute more. However regardless of economic performance or citizen contribution it is still important for a governing body to be trusted by its citizens. Without trust built the government will not be able to complete its job in an effective manner.